



## Daniel Drake

(1785-1852)

(Drake is a private medical ward on second floor.)

Drake was born in the north-eastern state of New Jersey. He did not remain an easterner for long, however; for soon after celebrating his second birthday, his family joined in the migration to the West, travelling almost 400 miles overland in covered wagons to invest in the fertile and relatively cheap farmland of Kentucky.

Until his fifteenth year, Drake lived in a log cabin in Kentucky, receiving his early education from itinerant teachers who travelled about offering classes in the three "r's."

At that point in his life, Drake's family decided that their son should study to become a doctor. And, although a family of limited means, arrangements were made for him to study with a doctor in Cincinnati, Dr. William Goforth.

### \$400 Education

Dr. Drake later wrote about this turning point in his life in a letter to his daughter: "At last . . . father announced . . . that I was to go down before the setting in of winter. I was to live in the Doctor's family, and he [father] was to pay \$400, provided I remained, as it was expected I would, four years, by which time, I was to be transmuted into a doctor, as I should then be 19!"

Drake was the first student of medicine in Cincinnati. At the end of his training with Dr. Goforth, the doctor gave his student a "diploma" which read: "I do certify, that Mr. Daniel Drake has pursued under my direction, for four years, the

## Daniel Drake, M.D.

# A Pioneering Physician of the West

study of Physic, Surgery, and Midwifery. From his good Abilities and marked Attention to the Prosecution of his studies, I am fully convinced, that he is well qualified to practice in the above branches of his Profession."

During the next ten years, Drake maintained a practice and continued his medical education at the University of Pennsylvania. He received his M.D. degree from that university in 1816.

### Botanical Interest

It was also during this time, that Drake began to write. One of the early pieces, a pamphlet entitled *Notices Concerning Cincinnati*, contained a botanical section, which, it has been noted, "contains the earliest listing of the indigenous plants." This was so well received, that Drake decided to follow it with a book. The book, *Natural and Statistical View, or Picture of Cincinnati and the Miami Country* gained renown for Drake both here and abroad.

In 1817 Dr. Drake embarked on his career as an educator. He accepted the Chair of Materia Medica and Medical Botany at the Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, and thus became the first professor of these subjects west of the Allegheny Mountains.



In his writings, Dr. Drake often drew reference to the log cabin in which he spent his boyhood days in Kentucky.

The next year Dr. Drake returned to Cincinnati, and devoted himself to a series of botanical lectures in that city. Medical lectures followed, and with such success that the doctor was encouraged to pursue his dream of establishing a college, medical school, and hospital. In 1819 the Medical College of Ohio was incorporated. Dr. Drake was made lecturer on the institutes and practice of medicine.

While at Ohio, Dr. Drake was instrumental in having the Ohio General Assembly charter the Commercial Hospital and Lunatic Asylum. One writer recalls: "This was the first hospital in the Mississippi Valley established for teaching purposes, staffed only by the professors of a medical school." Drake felt this to be an important part of a medical education and once declared: "The laboratory is not more necessary for the study of chemistry or a garden of plants for the study of botany, than a hospital for the study of practical medicine and surgery. . . ."

Unfortunately, at this point misunderstandings arose at the medical college, which resulted in Dr. Drake's resignation. He returned to Lexington and there joined again the faculty at Transylvania University, later being elected to the position of dean of the faculty.

### Founded Journal

Then it was back to Cincinnati, where, in 1827, Dr. Drake founded and for several years edited *The Western Medical and Physical Journal, Original and Eclectic*. The periodical had a life span of thirty years.

The first western doctor to be called to a professorship in an eastern school, Dr. Drake accepted in 1830 the Chair of the Theory and Practice of Medicine in the Jefferson Medical College

at Philadelphia. This was followed by a move back to Cincinnati and then the acceptance of a professorship of clinical medicine and pathological anatomy (a position created especially for Dr. Drake) at the Louisville Medical Institute. He remained in Louisville for ten years.

Between teaching sessions, Dr. Drake travelled extensively through lower Canada, the lake region, the Mississippi Valley and the southern states, with the purpose of gathering information about the diseases of the inhabitants of those areas.

### Author of a Classic

In 1850 the first of his two-volume classic of medical geography was published: *A Systematic Treatise, Historical, Etiological, and Practical on the Principal Diseases of the Interior Valley of North America, as they appear in the Caucasian, African, Indian, and Esquimaux Varieties of its Population*.

### President Denied

Dr. Drake's reputation had grown to rather handsome proportions by this time, and patients from great distances would write consulting him. It has been noted that "in 1841, Abraham Lincoln wrote to Drake describing an illness at length and asking for an opinion particularly with reference to treatment." It is interesting to also note that "Dr. Drake 'refused to give either without personal examination.'"

### Saw Needs of Blind

During this Kentucky period, Dr. Drake was also instrumental in encouraging the establishment of a school for the blind in that state.