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Hunter H McGuire– Ignominious Legacy of a Confederate Surgeon

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Introduction: National protests in the wake of the murder of George Floyddemanded that Confederate statues be removed from public view as symbols of slavery and racism. A statue still stands in Richmond, Virginia, dedicated to a Confederate surgeon, Hunter Holmes McGuire (1835-1900). The Richmond, Virginia Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital bears his name. Dr. McGuire became a contemproary influential figure in American medicine, and served as the President of the American Medical Association; he was also a racist. A biogaphy of McGuire is hereby compiled to better understand his rise to prominence in the Confederate South.

Sources and Methods: Medical articles, commentaries and speeches authored by Dr. McGuire, bibliographies and contemporary newspaper columns.

Results: Dr. McGuire served as a surgeon in the Confederacy from 1861-1865 and in that rolewas credited for saving many lives. After the war, he became nationally and internationally known as a compassionate physician, gifted surgeon, teacher and educator. A third of his medical publications were devoted to advancing urologic care. He founded Richmond'sUniversity College of Medicine (which merged with the Medical College of Virginia in 1913) and later became president of the American Medical Association. Dr. McGuire was also a pro-slavery advocate his entire life, was a white supremacist, whose statue still sits behind the Virginia state capital building..

Conclusions: HunterMcGuire made significant contributions to American medicine, but his unrepentent racism and pro-slavery views and actions have tarnished his legacy.

Keywords: Hunter McGuire, Confederate surgeon, racism

In the wake of the murder of Geoge Floyd by a Minneapolis policeman on May 5, 2020, the nation again relived a long history of racial inequality and its historical roots in slavery. This included cries to expunge all Confederate monuments, plaques, and other tributes to supporters of the old South from public view. On September 8, 2021, the statue of Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, was removed from the Virginia State House in Richmond, where it had stood for 131 years (1). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, one hundred sixty-nine Confederate symbols were removed in 2020 alone. Another statue to a prominent Confederate soldier still stands on Capital Square in Richmond. Unlike Lee, who killed his fellow Americans in a war to defend secession and slavery, Hunter Holmes McGuire was a trained physician who used his surgical skills to render care on and off the battlefield. Despite his influence in medicine and contributions to medical education, and ascension to the Presidency of the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1893, McGuire was apro-slavery racist. This paper illustrates the difficulties in defending the actions of historical figures who, entrapped by archaic and inhumane philosophies, made contributions to the betterment of some but not to all.

SOURCES

Primary and secondary sources include medical journal papers, pamphlets, public speeches and comments authored by Dr. Hunter McGuire, biographies (including one by his son), newspaper columns and commentary, National Museum of Civil War Medicine, the Handley Regional Library, the Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society, the Valentine Museum (Richmond), and the Hunter Holmes McGuire Collection.

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RESULTS

Hunter McGuire, the physician

Hunter Holmes McGuire was born and died in the family home in Winchester, Virginia (Figure 1). His father, Hugh Holmes McGuire, (1801-1875) was a prominent surgeon who founded Winchester Medical College (later to be razed by Union troops in 1862). Young Hunter often accompanied his father on rounds or in the hospital, and as a teenager even took some medical courses. He obtained his medical training at the Winchester Medical College graduating in 1855, then continued medical studies at the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. Angry over John Brown's failed raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859, McGuire led 300 Southern medical students to Richmond where he and many others matriculated in the Medical College of Virginia. With the onset of hostilities between the North and South in 1861, McGuire enlisted as a private in the Confederate Army, but because of his medical background was quickly reassigned as a medical officer to General Thomas "Stonewall' Jackson's II Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia. McGuire became Jackson's personal physician and lifelong friend, until the General's untimely death from friendly fire during the battle of Chancellorsville in 1863.(8)

During the war, McGuire treated thousands of soldiers felled by bullets and disease. He organized the Confederate medical service, rapid transportation of the injured, standardized field hospital procedures and safe use of anesthesia, and supervised the surgical care of doctors less experienced. His own surgical skills and outcomes were second to none, and his greatest asset was his sound surgical judgment. He knew when to operate and when not to operate, when surgery was unlikely to help or make the injury worse. Such restraint was rare among Civil War surgeons. (8,9)

McGuire's most significant medical contribution during the war was an agreement that all medical personnel captured during battle be allowed to return to their respective commands to care for their wounded. This became known as the Winchester Accord.(10) For the remainder of the war, captured doctors, nurses and aides were immediately released, saving an untold number of lives. The National Museum of Civil War Medicine (Frederick, Maryland) wrote "Thanks to Dr. Hunter McGuire's idea…the safety of medical personnel drastically improved. With the safety and quick release of doctors, assistants, and nurses ensured, care of the wounded progressed. It could be argued (that) Dr. McGuire revolutionized American battlefield medicine by humanizing the battlefield and giving injured men a better chance to receive the care they needed to survive" (11). The Winchester Accord was incorporated into the First Geneva Convention, which set the rules of conduct of armed conflict for the international wars that followed. The Boston Medical Journal said in his 1900 obituary that he had "humanized" war.

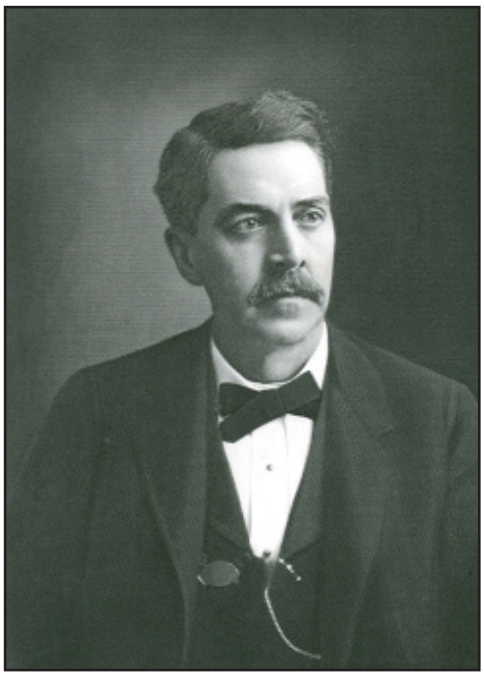

Figure 1. Hunter Holmes McGuire (1835-1900) (National Museum of Civil War Medicine)(Public Domain)

Figure 2. Dr. McGuire (far right) with a group of doctors, nurses, and nursing students at St. Luke's school of nursing, Richmond, Virgina (c.1886; note all are white. Blacks were excluded from attending nursing schools until the late 1890s) (Virginia Historical Society) (Public Domain))

McGuire was present at Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox and thereafter settled in Richmond building a large practice which included some reports of charity care and voluntary teaching at the Medical College of Virginia.(8) In 1883, he founded St. Luke's Hospital for the Sick, a private hospital in Richmond near the capital building. There were no trained nurses, so he employed five Black women with nursing experience who did the bulk of the work. In 1886, he established a school of nursing, the first in the South. The students were white, since formal nursing schools for Blacks did not exist until the late 1890s (Figure 2) (9) He was an advocate of medical meetings and presented numerous papers on his cases and results. He was one of the first surgeons to adopt Lister's methods of antiseptic surgery and taught it to his students. Although he did general and gynecological surgery, he was especially interested in diseases of the bladder and prostate. (12) Of 60 medical papers published during his life, 28 involved urology. He advocated for the use of the recently invented cystoscope for the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the bladder. He performed many suprapubic cystotomies to remove large bladder calculi and preferred to crush stones using a lithotrite given to him by Sir Henry Thompson (1820-1904).

McGuire's special interest was the surgical treatment of the enlarged prostate; "It has fallen to my lot in the last few years to meet with a number of cases of hypertrophy of the prostate gland which produced obstruction to the passage of urine" he wrote "Micturition is frequent and difficult, perhaps impossible without the aid of a catheter… and the general health suffers greatly". Endoscopic methods at the time were painful, caused considerable bleeding and were usually unsuccessful. Dr. McGuire resorted to open prostatectomy using a suprapubic, or perineal, approach, but he was unable to remove all the obstructing (median lobe) adenoma. This caused re-obstruction, forcing the patient back to the 'catheter life'. After failed attempts to enucleate the gland, he created a new type of diversion called an artificial urethra (cutaneous-vesicostomy), kept open with a silver plug. The patient simply removed the plug to void using his abdominal muscles and replaced it to remain continent (13).

McGuire held important posts in American medicine and surgery, including president of the American Surgical Association in 1887 and the AMA from 1893-1894. He emphasized that observation alone was inadequate to make advances in medical science. "We need the help of the biologist, the pathologist, the chemist," he wrote in 1887, "and that of every known science and art; indeed, there is no calling which demands wider and more comprehensive information." (14). He was acutely aware that science was necessary

for the surgeon "to save human life and lessen human suffering". His view of surgery was much broader than what was common in the 19th century and would usher in many changes to the 20th century (15). He founded a new medical school, the University College of Medicine, which later became part of Virginia Commonwealth University (16). In 1893, McGuire was elected president of the American Medical Association. In his inaugural address, he emphasized improved medical education and called for a national board of health. "Gentlemen, we must...strive through observation, and knowledge of the needs and demands of all sections of the country, for the things that are necessary not only for the preservation of health, but also for the highest conditions of physical and mental development". (17) McGuire was calling for doctors to preserve the good health and well-being of all citizens, North and South.

McGuire died after a stroke in 1900 at age 65. His friend, Dr. William Osler was one of his pallbearers. "To his funeral," wrote WL Peple in a subsequent homage, "the people flocked to do honor to his memory; men, women, and children, from every walk of life, and old comrades clad in gray."(18)

Hunter McGuire, the ignoble past.

McGuire's contributions to many in the classroom, in the battlefield and the civilian hospital are overshadowed by his legacy as one of the South's more published post-bellum racists. After the Civil War, many books were written, mostly in the North, where the South was villified. McGuire vehemently refuted such claims, and defended the aims and reputations of the leaders of the Confederacy. As chairman of the history committee of the Confederate Veterans of Virginia, he compiled a list of books to be banned, books that taught slavery was the main cause of the war. He wrote; "The South fighting for the money value of the negro! What a cheap and wicked falsehood. I intend to vindicate the South from the oft-repeated charge that we were the aggressors in bringing on the war. This will be my last labor of love for the dear Southern people." (7). McGuire asserted the South did not fight just to preserve the slave-dependent plantation economy. They were Virginians fighting to preserve their state's rights and 'way of life'.

In 1893, as president of the American Medical Association, McGuire co-authored an open letter outrageously titled "Sexual Crimes among the Southern Negroes" he which he cloaked his deep-seated racism with the loosest interpretation of Darwinian conjecture. "It is the frightful suvival of the fittest."(6) In an example of mid-19th century editorial oversight, McGuire was allowed to publish his suggestion that castration for Black men, but not for white men, be a penalty for convicted sexual crimes.

McGuire wrote an introduction to a 1901 racist book, *The Old Plantation; How We lived in the Great House and Cabin Before the War*, by James B. Avirett. The book was written to counter Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which figured prominently in exposing the ante-bellum American reader to the cruelties and immorality of slavery. McGuire's racism was further hardened by ignorance and stupidity writing that " the institution (of slavery) had knit the hearts of the two races together too tenderly, in the happy life of the old plantation. The negro of the South today knows, that when in trouble his best friend is his old master...; and if left alone by those who understand neither race in the South, he would reflect this knowledge in all the relations of life and the race problem of the South would be solved – not in the penalties of odious lynch law, but in the displacement of the fiendish crimes which lead up to it".(5)

Since the Charleston Church shooting of 2015, more than 140 Confederate memorials have been removed from public land.(19) In July, 2022, Circuit Court Judge David Eugene Cheek Sr. ruled that Richmond would be allowed to removed the monument to its "last-standing Confederate statue", that of General A.P. Hill. Behind the capital building itself, however, still sits the statue of Hunter McGuire. Erected in 1904, the bronze sculpture rests on a granite base with the inscription, "To Hunter Holmes McGuire, M.D., LL.D. President of the American Medical and the American Surgical Associations, Founder of the University College of Medicine. Medical Director, Jackson's Corps Army of Northern Virginia; An eminent civil and military surgeon and beloved physician; An able teacher and vigorous writer; A useful citizen and broad humanitarian; Gifted in mind and generous in heart, This monument is erected by his many friends"(Figure 3).(2)

A 2020 criticism of McGuire was by the Richmond Times-Dispatch Pulitzer prize winning columinist, Michael Paul Williams. "Dr. Hunter Holmes McGuire's racism does not merit honor. Remove his name from Richmond spaces." He deplored the statue's presence, citing McGuire's "unrepentent racism as a pusher of eugenics pseudoscience and Lost Cause propaganda..."(3). McGuire's published works, as president of national organizations, bordered on being a "lynching apologist". "In 1899, McGuire was at the forefront of not only purging textbooks with any mention of slavery as the cause of the Civil War but also railed against 'suffrage for the blacks.' "(3)

Figure 3. Statue of Hunter H McGuire, Capital Square, Richmond, VA. According to one biographer, ""There he sits, calm, dignified, reserved; just as he sat listening to the tales of suffering of his people—counselling, advising, always helping, giving."(18) (Photo, the Historical Marker Database, HMdb.org)

McGuire's decendents, Alice McGuire Massie, William Reed McGuire, and Hunter Holmes McGuire III, published a column voicing their support to remove the statue. "History will judge McGuire," they hoped "(as) a surgeon, based on his complete life and contributions. The family understands that statues and buildings honoring Confederate leaders have caused pain to fellow Americans and we support removal of the McGuire memorial."(4)

McGuire was recognized nationally and internationally for his significant contributions to the delivery of medical care on the battle field, and advances in surgery, anesthesia, and medical education. To his white contemporaries, he was a gifted surgeon, teacher, humanitarian, and a Virginian but born, bred and wrapped in the privileged culture of the slave-based economy of the 19th century American South. The largest federal medical facility in Richmond, Virginia, with 400 beds and occupying 1 million square feet, is still named after Hunter H McGuire.

CONCLUSIONS:

Hunter McGuire's medical achievements were initially lauded by 19th century colleagues while ignoring or down-playing his racist attitudes.(8,9) McGuire campaigned against the suffrage of Black Americans, espoused the genetic and moral inferiority of Blacks, and advocated castration for sexual crimes, while ignoring the lack of due process and a fair trial to many may wrongfully accused of such crimes.(9)

Hunter McGuire may have been a compassionate physician, gifted surgeon, coveted teacher to southern whites, and to those who called him "a generous 'humanitarian', yet he was a Southerner, who clung to the archaic values of the old South. As the former mayor of New Orleans said in 2017, "The Confederacy was on the wrong side of history and humanity. It sought to tear apart our nation and subjugate our fellow Americans to slavery. This is history we should never forget and one that we should never again put on a pedestal to be revered." (20) "Civil War figures aren't one-dimensional," wrote another journalist. "Many 'great' individuals can be faulted for beliefs or acts in their past, but should such 'vices' disqualify historical figures from favorable commemoration?" (21) Personal flaws in an individual's past, judged by today's values, may outweigh and/or diminish their significant contributions. A racist like McGuire put in a leadership position, especially one in a nationally preeminent surgical and medical organization, has the potential to cause much damage. McGuire's

case illustrates that conflict, weighing their significant contributions to the betterment of some while potentially harming others through the ignorance, fear-mongering, and sterotyping bias that underlies racism in many forms.

There is no evidence that McGuire owned slaves but he remained a pro-slavery advocate his entire life and lamented the freedom and enfranchisement of former slaves. The McGuire statue was erected to honor his contributions to medicine and not to remind the world of his unrepentant racist beliefs. The monument still stands as "a reminder of a long-since-past Richmond …"(22) And it may stay for some time since the recently elected Governor of Virginia not only appointed a historian who defends the statue, but believes "we must not overlook or excuse the sins of our past but we must resist the movement to cleanse our history ". (23) Still, the effects of racism that began with the very founding of the American colonies still holds an insidious grip.

The taking of the Hippocratic oath is a 2000 year old tradition and McGuire may have sworn to uphold its tenets upon graduation from the pre-Flexnerian medical schools of the 1850s. The oath has many principles including a moral dedication to cultural equanimity, that of delivering medical care regardless of a patient's social or ecnomic standing. "ἐς οἰκίας δὲ ὁκόσας ἂν ἐσίω," Hippocrates was said to write in the 5th century BCE, "ἐσελεύσομαι ἐπ᾽ ὠφελείῃ... ἐλευθέρων τε καὶ δούλων." (Gk: "Into whatsoever house I enter, I will enter to help the sick...whether they be free men or slaves"). (24) McGuire's ultimate place in history, like that of his Confederate contemporaries, may be relegated to the darker chapters of the American past. His significance now may have been ironically limited by the yolk of racism he so vigorously defended. Unable to uphold the provisions of the Hippocratic oath, McGuire was willing to do good for some, but not for all.

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