

## DR. GEORGE V. CALHOUN

When the Civil War closed in 1865 there were numerous young men throughout the country who were eager to move westward. The great forests of the Pacific Northwest seemed to beckon to the young and vigorous. Land, lumber, the beautiful waterways and the opening of new territory offered ample opportunity for development both of the individual and the western country.

It was at this time that George V. Calhoun accepted the appointment made by President Lincoln to establish the Marine Hospital at Port Townsend.<sup>1</sup> This young man who had earned the degree of Doctor of Medicine but three years prior to his appointment hastened to take up his new duties on the Pacific Coast. He came by way of Nicaragua and San Francisco to make his home in the Territory of Washington and he remained in the Puget Sound country until his death in 1916.

George V. Calhoun was born in Hopewell, New Brunswick, October 19, 1837. He was the son of John and Mary (Brewster) Calhoun. Though the family originated in Scotland the four brothers who later made their homes in America came from the North of Ireland to pioneer in Pennsylvania. One of these young men then journeyed to Maryland<sup>2</sup> and finally removed to New Brunswick where the family home was established. It was here that John Calhoun, the father of George, was born. Mary Brewster, the mother, was also born in New Brunswick, though the Brewster family had dwelt previously in New England.

In New Brunswick the Calhoun family became interested in farming. The father, John Calhoun, however, possessed a certain love for ships and the sea. He was a shipowner and often made voyages to distant ports. It was while sailing to Bermuda that death came to him.<sup>3</sup> The message of John Calhoun's death was carried back to New Brunswick where George was receiving a rural elementary education.

The untimely death of John Calhoun in no way hindered the son's educational opportunities as George was shortly placed in Horton Academy. The rural schooling proved sufficient for the more serious work of preparing for a career in the study of medicine.

George Calhoun remained in Horton Academy until 1857. At

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<sup>1</sup> Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, September 23, 1915.

<sup>2</sup> H. K. Hines, *Pen Pictures of the World*, 779.

<sup>3</sup> Elwood Evans, *History of Oregon and Washington*, II, 239.

this time he was twenty years old and ready for Medical College. Scotland was decided upon as this new home in which George was to work for the degree in Medicine. He worked well and was graduated after five years from the University of Glasgow on May 1, 1862. Immediately the young doctor received an appointment in Scotland. This practical experience gained in the months of service made Dr. Calhoun an independent physician. It likewise gave him the opportunity to cultivate the friendship of Miss Ellen Mein whom he married in Nova Scotia in 1863.

Within the United States, Civil War continued and Dr. Calhoun now offered his services. He enlisted as assistant surgeon in the Army of the Potomac and held that title for the duration of the Civil War. In 1865, Dr. Calhoun began the work of establishing the Marine Hospital<sup>4</sup> at Port Townsend where he remained until 1875 when he entered private practice.

Seattle in 1866 was a thriving lumber town. From 1866 to 1870 Seattle grew from the village whose small frame houses dotted the margin of the bay to a town of 1107 people.<sup>5</sup>

"This growth," Mrs. Watt states in her *Story of Seattle*, "was more than an increase in population. There was an expectancy about the town as if the pioneers were standing on tiptoe peeking over the Cascades in expectation of the railroad."<sup>6</sup>

In 1870 the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad was begun and it was almost certain that Puget Sound would be the terminus. New buildings went up, strangers were seen about the streets and newcomers arrived to make Seattle their home. Many young professional men arrived who were undoubtedly as equally interested in "empire building" as their profession. Among them, in 1875, was Dr. George V. Calhoun, who was thirty-eight years old and ready for private practice.

Seattle's one hospital at this time was that of Dr. David Swinson Maynard.<sup>7</sup> This hospital had accommodated the sick since 1863. Dr. Maynard and his wife Catherine cared for many of those in need, but by 1875 there was an increasing demand for the services of professional men.

There was a steady development in the West which called for cooperation among pioneers. Doctors became politicians, politicians were leaders—all working together to turn a wilderness into a civilized territory and at last a state.

<sup>4</sup> Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, Edmond S. Meany, Nov. 23, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> Roberta Frye Watt, *Story of Seattle*, 349.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Mason Hospital *Quarterly*, December, 1933, p. 23.

In the later Territorial Days, that period in the life of Dr. Calhoun from 1875 his first arrival in Seattle, until 1889 when Washington Territory became a proud State, he held many positions worthy of note.

During the years of 1870 and 1871 he was a member of the Territorial Legislature representing the counties of Clallam and Jefferson.<sup>8</sup> It was in 1871 that a bill was introduced by him providing for the appointment of a resident physician to be placed in charge of the insane asylum and the bill prescribed the duties.<sup>9</sup> He was also a member of the committee that worked for the advancement of education. The result was the passing of a bill which established the common school system of the Territory of Washington.<sup>10</sup>

New problems arose with the Territory's increased population and in 1871 Dr. Calhoun introduced another bill which later passed "for the preservation of game birds."<sup>11</sup>

While representing his counties in the Council he served on the committee of Federal Relations—"relative to the free navigation and improvement of Skagit River in Washington Territory."

Dr. Calhoun's interests in 1870 and 1871 were quite diversified as he was further instrumental in the passing of a bill defining the jurisdiction and practice in probate courts of the Territory and another relating to, "the justice of the peace and their jurisdiction," and, "an act for the protection of sheep in Island County."<sup>12</sup>

These legislative acts are an indication of the many interests of the Doctor—namely, medicine, land problems, politics and education. Of the four he took the most lively interest in politics and an adventurous interest in land and a serious interest in educational advancement. Politics and political workings were his hobbies. Every Republican convention of the times found Dr. Calhoun in the foreground either by word or message during the active years of his life.<sup>13</sup> This interest in politics in no way lessened Dr. Calhoun's appreciation for education. He was himself a well educated man both by schooling and constant reading. To quote the words of his son, Dr. Grant Calhoun, of Seattle—

"My father was an insatiable reader; he read everything he

8 Journal of Proceedings of the Council of the Territory of Washington at the Legislative Assembly, 1871.

9 *Ibid.*, 25.

10 *Ibid.*, 51, 173.

11 *Ibid.*, 57.

12 *Ibid.*, 220.

13 Clinton A. Snowden, *History of Washington*, V, 227-228.

could lay his hands on from medical books to fiction. He especially enjoyed writings on things political and read all the time."

In 1875, the year of Dr. Calhoun's removal to Seattle, he accepted the appointment made by Governor Ferry to become President of the Board of Regents of the Territorial University and held that appointment until 1880. His co-workers were A. H. Steele, Daniel Bagley, Allen Weir and Charles H. Larrabee.<sup>14</sup>

The Regents' report shows a determined effort on the part of the members to make the Territorial University one of high standing; making it possible for the student to attend, raising the scholastic standing and emphasizing cultural moral training.

"In accordance with the strict requirements of the Territorial law"—the regents' report read—"more than thirty pupils had been appointed to free scholarships by February ninth, 1878, and on the ninth of March following thirty of those appointed were in attendance."<sup>15</sup>

It was the aim of the Board of Regents to educate young Washingtonians at home. Thus the Regents asked the Legislature for the means of transportation for those who could not cover the distance and thus the report read,<sup>16</sup>—"Obviate the necessity of spending large sums to go abroad to get what we can as well give them here and for less price."

There was an educational ideal at work in the minds of those Regents of which Dr. Calhoun was one; it was to the effect that boys and girls of little means were often more worthy. The Regents report on this subject read:

"Your board would respectfully suggest inasmuch as the spirit of the law looks rather to the selection of pupils whose pecuniary means will not permit them obtaining an education rather than the children of parents who are able, that it be desirable to so amend the law as to provide transportation for such pupils to and from the University."

Moral training was also a definite part of the Board of Regents' educational program and this dealt with the schooling of girls as beginning within the home. In 1879, the President's home at the Territorial University became the home for student girls—"where they have not only the comforts of a cultivated home, but that moral and aesthetic training so valuable in fitting them for the battle

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<sup>14</sup> Report of Regents of the Territorial University of Washington. 1879, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Report of Regents of the Territorial University of Washington. 1879, 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

of life." This was to be a part of University training,<sup>17</sup> as stated in Territorial days.

In private life, Dr. Calhoun was less dictatorial, for in molding the characters of his children he let each one in turn select the profession he or she desired to follow. Of the four sons of Dr. George Calhoun, two of them chose medicine. His influence upon his sons while quiet must have been sincere and firm.

To quote Dr. Grant Cahoun—"My father did not believe in suggesting our careers, it was left to us to do as we pleased. I chose medicine because I liked it."

The sons of Dr. George Calhoun liked medicine because of an exceedingly good influence of the father, an influence noticeable while he was in private practice in Seattle.

From 1875 until 1879 Dr. Calhoun helped to fill the vacancy made so apparent by the death of Dr. David Maynard. The need for medical aid widened as time advanced from saw mill injuries and an occasional birth to the administering of systematic care to the sick as Seattle grew from town to city. Numbers of people complicated society while poverty and misfortune were more familiar about the small city. There were charity cases now—men and women who must be cared for. In 1878 a hospital was opened by the "Sisters of Charity" in answer to this need. The small sign above the door read, "Providence Hospital."<sup>18</sup> Here provision was made by contract for the care of all charity cases and the first contract was awarded to Dr. Calhoun. The notice read as follows:

"—the proposal of G. V. Calhoun, M. D., being in conformity with said printed notice, and being the lowest legitimate proposal, it is further ordered by the Board that said G. V. Calhoun, M. D., be and is hereby awarded the contract to supply medical and surgical attendance and medicines for the county poor for one year from the 13th day of February, 1879, for the sum of one hundred and ninety-four dollars as per his proposals on his entering into a written contract with the board."<sup>19</sup>

Upon the broad roads of Seattle in the late seventies one might gaze in retrospect and see there Dr. George V. Calhoun driving his good horse Charlie. The Doctor would be making his daily calls and attending to the business of the day such as the problems of sanitation and health supervision. It was in 1877 that Seattle's first

<sup>18</sup> Clarence B. Bagley, *History of Seattle*, I, 323.

<sup>19</sup> Medical Works King County, *Beginnings, Progress and Achievement*, 33.

health officer was elected and the city's health department well established.

After four years of private practice in and about Seattle, Dr. Calhoun became interested in land near La Conner, Washington. Here he continued the practice of medicine but delved into politics and as a result became mayor of La Conner for one year. The community's welfare as well as its citizens' health claimed the Doctors' attention primarily, though he liked to take part in the affairs of state.

When Washington Territory became a State, a medical examining board was created. Among its members was the name of Dr. George V. Calhoun. This was in 1890 and he served as a member of that Board in 1890 and 1891.<sup>20</sup> The following year Dr. Calhoun was made President of the Board though he resigned on August 27, 1892.<sup>21</sup>

Laws provided under the State Constitution regulating the practice of medicine and surgery within the State were brought about through the combined efforts of the first board members and officers. The Medical Examining Board met and organized on June 17, 1890—its first duty was to list the names of all physicians and surgeons registered in the State of Washington prior to the passage of that act<sup>22</sup> and to work for the regulation of educational standards. The report read:

“—Each member has a proper sense of his responsibility and the purpose of the board is to make this law the means of raising the standard of medical education in this state to the level required by the best medical colleges.”<sup>23</sup>

The first examination was given in Walla Walla, Washington, and of the ten candidates who presented themselves for examination nine were given certificates to practice medicine. Candidates not able to make the “sixty-five percent grade” required by this examining board, were failed. Within the year, however, the number of graduate medical students aspiring to be licensed physicians in the State of Washington increased to forty-nine.<sup>24</sup> Of these candidates nine were denied the privilege of practicing medicine.

The Board of which Dr. Calhoun was President included in its report—

“The intention is to make the examinations as practicable

20 First Annual Report, State Medical Examining Board of Washington, 1892.

21 Second Annual Report, *op. cit.*, 1893, Preface.

22 First Annual Report, *op. cit.*, 1892, 6.

23 *Ibid.*, 6.

24 *Ibid.*, 6.

as possible and the questions are so framed. The sole object is to give the applicant an opportunity to prove that he possesses sufficient knowledge of medicine and surgery to be a safe practitioner."<sup>25</sup>

During the early years of Washington's statehood, Dr. Calhoun became engaged in public activities. Prior to his resignation from the State Medical Examining Board in 1892, he was appointed president of the State Board of Trade which he held from 1891 until 1893.

In 1892 the State of Washington was entitled to the first presidential vote. This rare privilege was given to Dr. Calhoun as messenger of the electors who cast the vote in favor of Benjamin Harrison.<sup>26</sup>

At this time the Doctor gave a great portion of his time to the interest of public affairs. Not only was he active in politics, he was at once exceedingly proud of the State of Washington and her development. The following year, 1893, he became the State's Executive Commissioner for the World's Columbian Exposition. At the same time Dr. Calhoun became intensely interested in State politics. The election of Governor Ferry was due in part to his efforts as he engrossed his thoughts in the State's affairs and lacked but two votes himself necessary to be elected Lieutenant Governor. In 1892, however, he failed<sup>27</sup> to obtain the nomination for Governor.

Politics, both within the State and those affecting the Federal Government were of vital importance to Dr. George Calhoun. Dr. Grant Calhoun spoke of his father in this regard—

"My father loved politics and read everything about elections. He also had very definite opinions as to the evils of party nominations by direct primaries."

While living in La Conner, Dr. Calhoun continued his general medical practice. Going about the country in making his calls he now had time to enjoy his favored sport—that of riding. The Doctor was known to ride anything in the way of a horse. He once said to a neighbor who had taken advantage of this fact:

"I don't mind riding your horses for you, but I object to breaking them all in."

Recognized as a man of great educational ability, Dr. Calhoun took part in many phases of his State's development. During these

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, November 23, 1915, "Living Pioneers," Edmond S. Meany.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



years little mention was made of Mrs. Calhoun though she was the first woman to be called to jury service in Seattle and a charter member of the First Presbyterian Church.<sup>28</sup> Mrs. Calhoun's life work plainly lay along ways other than political unless one called the government of a smaller world and of little people politics. This was Mrs. Calhoun's world because she was the mother of nine children. There were in the family four sons, Grant and Arthur P., both of whom became physicians, Scott and William as well as five girls, Nellie, Maggie, Laura, Annie and the late Alice Calhoun.

In May of 1898, Ellen Mein Calhoun died.<sup>29</sup>

The latter years of Dr. George Calhoun's life were spent in Coupeville, Whidby Island, where near a large glacial boulder locally known as "Rock of Ages" his cottage stood. This elderly gentleman whose white beard reached his chest could be seen there at one time, a man in his late seventies. Perhaps he would have been reading history, a story or something to do with politics of the day.

At the age of seventy-eight years Dr. Calhoun died in September, 1916.

The little town of Seattle on Puget Sound the home of his children now had reached maturity. Where once frame houses and tree-tops were seen about the Bay, now stood tall buildings reaching higher toward the sky.

From 1837 until 1916, during the years of this man's life, the State of Washington was made and in the making Dr. George V. Calhoun served.

CHRISTINE A. NEERGAARD

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<sup>28</sup> Cornelius H. Hanford, *Seattle and Environs*, III, 612-614.

<sup>29</sup> *Seattle Daily Times*, May 11, 1898.