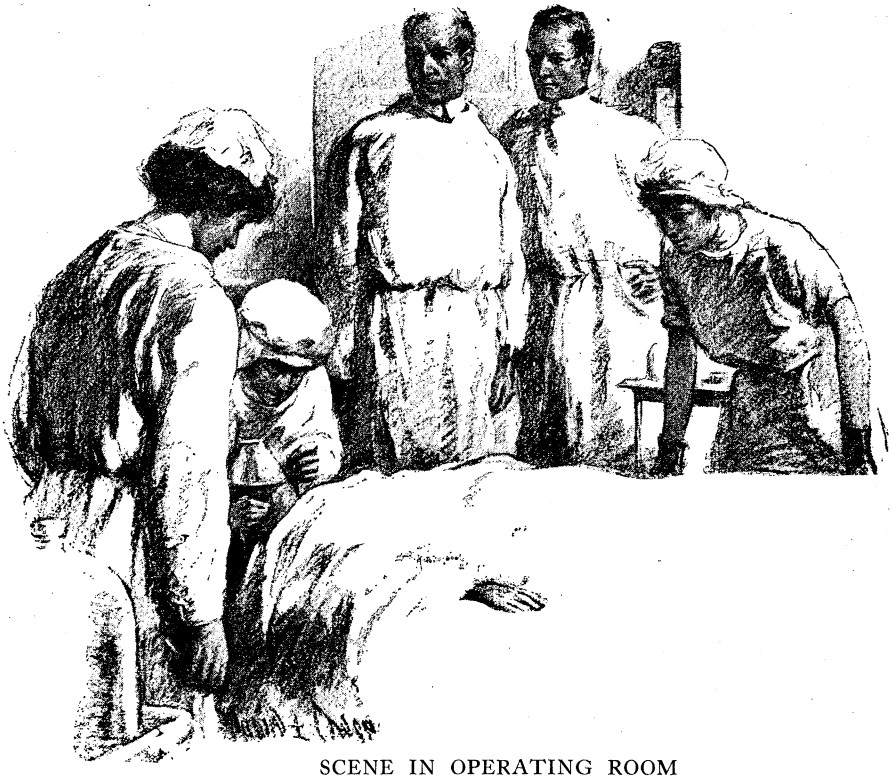
Historical Pictures

of the

Discovery of Chloroform and Percussion Powder

Press of Fairbanks Educational Series

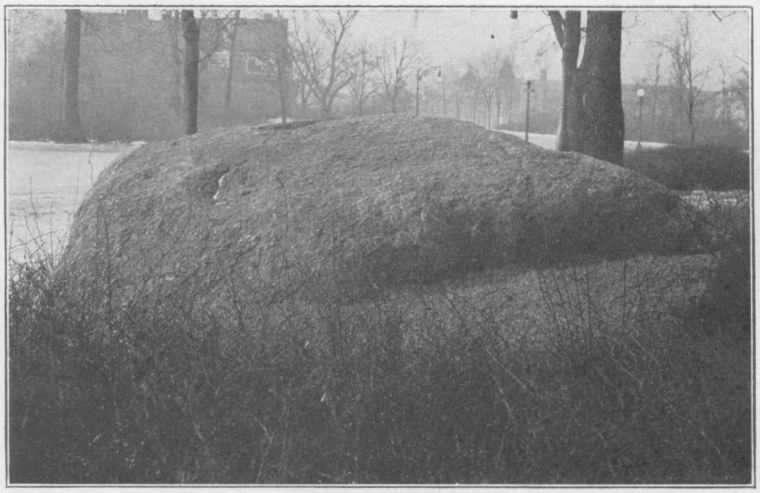


SCENE IN OPERATING ROOM

PREFACE

Introductory Note:—This Preface (Pages I to VIII) was prepared by Mr. T. S. Chamberlin. The main body of the book is the work of Miss Lina Dunn.

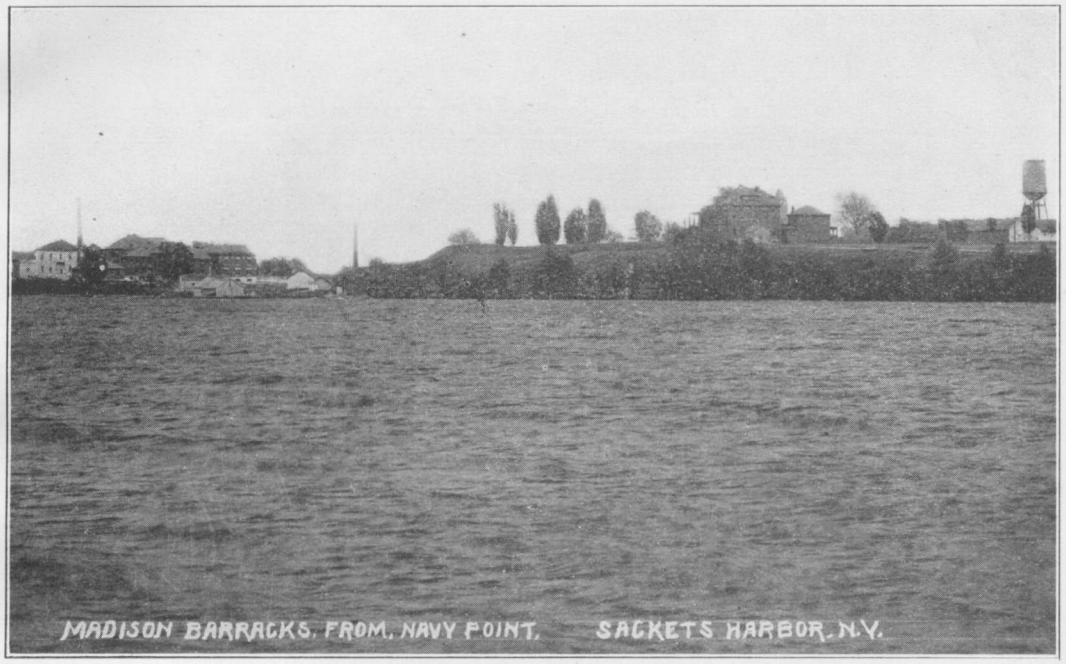
Further reference to the persons and subjects mentioned in this Preface may be found by referring to the Index.



GUTHRIE BOULDER

About seventeen years ago the doctors with the sanction of the South Park Commission in Chicago met to consider placing of a monument in one of the parks to the honor of Dr. Samuel Guthrie, discoverer of **Chloroform** and inventor of **percussion powder.**

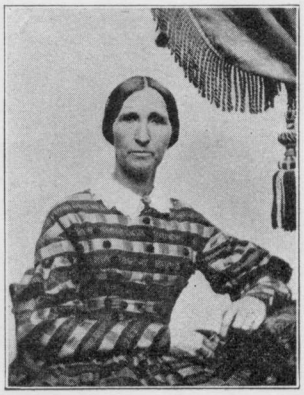
The point selected was in Grant Park where Jackson Boulevard starts. This boulder was brought from Worth, Illinois, and lay at the point cited above when for some reason not known the South Park Commission withdrew its approval and the stone was moved from this point to the entrance to Washington Park from Garfield Boulevard, where it now lies without any inscription having been placed on it.



THE OLD FORT AT SACKETT'S HARBOR

Here we are looking at one of the historic places of the war of 1812, of which we have many. **None though of greater interest to the U. S. or to the world than this one,** for it was at Sackett's Harbor in 1812 that Dr. Guthrie first saw the necessity of finding something better than flint for firing small arms, and the hot iron or torch for firing cannon, and so he started experimenting with explosives. His greatest trouble was how to keep the dampness out of his powder and it was only after eleven years, viz.: 1826, that he finally brought out percussion powder, a most powerful explosive and one that revolutionized the firing of all guns.

Sackett's Harbor is in Jefferson County, New York, Watertown, N. Y., is the county seat. The Historical Society of Jefferson County has as its seal, Dr. Guthrie standing beside a cannon at this old fort **and firing that first shot that like the shot that was fired at Lexington—was heard round the world.**



MRS. HARRIET GUTHRIE CHAMBERLIN

Mrs. Harriet Guthrie Chamberlin, wife of Thaddeus Stearns Chamberlin, and eldest daughter of Dr. Samuel Guthrie, was **the first human being that ever took chloroform in sickness.**

Dr. Guthrie discovered chloroform in the Spring of 1831 or the fall of 1830, the exact month not known.

Dr. James Y. Simpson of Scotland discovered its anaesthetic value in the Fall of 1847, soon after which the news reached America and Dr. Guthrie was urged to go to New York to start the manufacture of it on a large scale.

This he would have done had he been in good health. But on account of his health he declined the offer and a few months after in writing to his daughter he had this to say:

"I could have made a fortune if I had gone to New York as I was urged last Fall; by making ***sweet whisky,** which you remember taking when suffocated with charcoal you see it called chloroform and the newspapers are beginning to give me the credit of discovering it.

I made the first particle that was ever made and you are the first human being that ever used it in sickness.

"This is likely to prove the grandest discovery in medicine the world ever saw.

"By breathing it a few seconds the person falls apparently into a sweet sleep; when breasts, legs and arms may be cut away; painful labours ended and all without pain or injury." Letter is dated February 9, 1848, and signed,

Affectionately, S. GUTHRIE.

*Chloroform was first called Guthrie's Sweet Whisky.

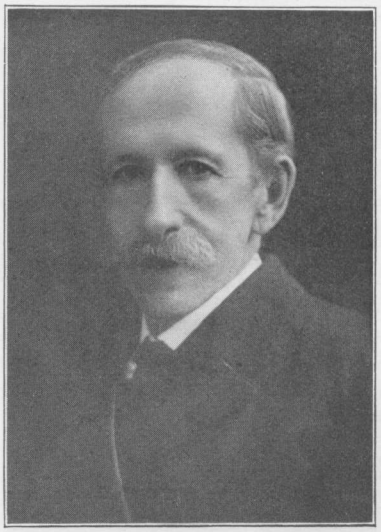
Photographed by Miss H. V. R. Field, 11 W. 121 St., New York City, N. Y.

DR. GUTHRIE'S RESIDENCE

The old homestead of Dr. Samuel Guthrie, built over 100 years ago and standing in good preservation today, as you will see by this picture. The other buildings that belonged to the homestead have long since gone to decay or have been torn down. To the left and well to the rear stood his laboratory, while on a line with the laboratory and to the right of the house was located his alcohol distillery, and still further away was his old work shop; then across the road and well to the left stood the old powder house, possibly 1,000 feet away, while directly opposite was his vineyard, the pride of Sackett's Harbor and one of the finest in the state. Here in this old laboratory was first brought out **chloroform, percussion powder and fulminate of mercury. The best and strongest alcohol** was made from his receipt and many other **discoveries saw the first light of day at this place.**

Prof. Silliman of Yale mentions having over ten bottles of samples of different kinds that he had before him and all of them from Doctor Guthrie.

Doctor Silliman in mentioning the work of Dr. Guthrie in the American Journal of Science and Arts, said: "It was little suspected that such great things were doing in a remote region on the shore of Lake Ontario."

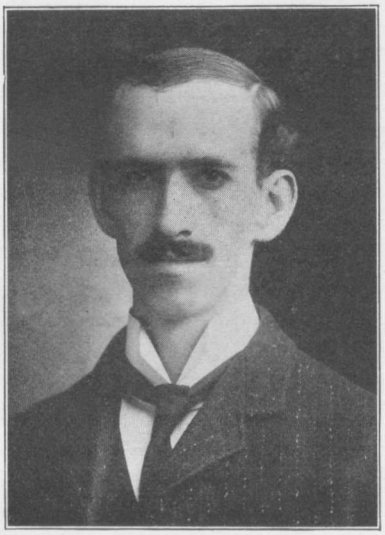


T. S. CHAMBERLIN

Grandson of Dr. Samuel Guthrie, comes the nearest of any of the family looking like him, was the way Mr. Chamberlin's mother used to express herself when some one who had never seen the doctor would ask as to his looks, there being no picture of the doctor in existence. The doctor only had one taken and that was a daguerrotype.

We all know how perfectly horrible some of these old daguerrotypes were and this one must have been of that kind. He was so thoroughly disgusted with it that he destroyed it and said if he was as d—— hombly as that he did not want his descendants to see it, and now his descendants would give the world for that picture, hombly as it was.

Well, when this picture of Mr. Chamberlin was taken it was shown to Mrs. Eviline Dunn, granddaughter of Doctor Guthrie, **who exclaimed, Dr. Guthrie!** and then in giving her reason for saying this, she said the picture was a perfect likeness of the doctor and could not have been bettered if the doctor had sat for it himself—a better evidence as to the above fact you could not obtain, as Mrs. Dunn was twenty-four years old when the doctor died. So now persons looking at this face may be assured that they are looking at an exact photograph of the doctor.



E. C. CHAMBERLIN

Son of T. S. Chamberlin and great grandson of Dr. Samuel Guthrie, was born August 27, 1875, and has always taken a great interest in chemistry, and although working as a salesman for the Standard Oil Co. of Indiana, he spends a good many of his evenings and spare time in the study of chemistry, and although there have been very many books written on chemistry since Dr. Guthrie's time, Mr. Chamberlin has been surprised to find how up-to-date a good many of the articles are that are contained in the Doctor's books, but that is easily explained for the Doctor kept right up with the procession in his buying of new books.

In the buying of the best of books the doctor was an easy mark to book men as his splendid and large library shows.

DIED

At the residence of his son-in-law, Mr. Francis Burt, near Sacket's Harbor (N. Y.), on Thursday evening, Oct. 19, 1848,

DR. SAMUEL GUTHRIE, aged 66

The deceased was endowed with intellectual powers of a high order, and was a devoted student of nature. He was eminent in his profession, while engaged in its practice, but for many years previous to his death, had been occupied with other pursuits. Being the original inventor of the percussion powder, and the only manufacturer of the article in the United States, much of his time has been employed in superintending its preparation—and while thus occupied he had on several occasions narrowly escaped with his life, receiving severe injuries from which he never entirely recovered.

The honor of first procuring chloroform is shared by him in common with Souberian of France and Leibig of Germany. These three chemists without any concert of action of knowledge of each other produced it about the same time. The question of absolute priority has not been conclusively established, but a Committee of the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh awarded to the deceased the credit of having first published an account of its therapeutical effects as a diffusable stimulous in 1832.

The love of natural science was predominent in his mind, and he eagerly perused whatever had reference to facts and demonstrations as a basis, entertaining at the same time a feeling bordering on disgust for mere assumptions, conjectures and speculations. Chemistry was his favorite study, and he is chiefly known to the scientific world through his contributions to *Stillman's Journal* and the *Scientific American*, while in connection with chloroform his name is familiar in both hemispheres.

His reading was varied and extensive, embracing nearly every deparment of knowledge and literature, except works of fiction, for which he had no taste. He was a constant and attentive reader of the medical periodicals of the day, and took a lively interest in everything pertaining to the progress or improvement of medical science. He had suffered severely from bodily infirmities for years, but his mental vigor continued to the last, and many who knew him can bear testimony to the kindness of his disposition and the generosity of his nature.

—*Sacket's Harbor Observer.*