

Nathan Smith Davis



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Nathan Davis was born in Chenango County, New York in 1817, where he lived and worked on a farm until he was 16 years old. At the age of 17 he began the study of medicine under Dr. Daniel Clark. Soon after he graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Western District of New York with a thesis on animal temperament. He later began practicing medicine in New York City.

In 1841 he was awarded the prize from the Medical Society of the State of New York for his analyses of then-recent discoveries of the physiology of the nervous system. He was later awarded a prize from the State Agricultural Society of New York for his textbook on agricultural chemistry. He was an active member of the Broome County Medical Society, and he served as secretary and librarian of the society for three consecutive years. In 1845, his report as the chairman of the Society's Committee on Correspondence relative to Medical Education and Examination led to the organization of the American Medical Association.

His first work as a teacher was lecturer and demonstrator of anatomy at his alma mater in 1848. The next year he moved to Chicago and accepted the chair of physiology and pathology at Rush Medical College. A year later he took on the additional position as chair of the practice of medicine. He remained there for ten years until, with a few colleagues, he helped to found the Chicago Medical College. It was at this new institution where he worked for more than forty years as dean and professor of principles and practice of medicine. He was also one of the prime members of the Chicago Medical Society and the Illinois State Medical Society. For twelve years he was secretary of the Chicago Medical Society, and in 1855 served as its president.

Soon after he arrived in Chicago, there occurred an epidemic of malaria. Dr. Davis found that the public drinking water was polluted by sewage. He immediately delivered a number of lectures which resulted in city sewer reconstruction and, eventually, the founding of Mercy Hospital.

In 1855 he became the editor of the *Chicago Medical Journal*, and five years later the *Chicago Medical Examiner*, remaining with these journals for twenty years.

NOTABLE FACTS: It was chiefly through his efforts that the *Journal of the American Medical Association* was established in 1883. He was the journal's first editor, and he continued in that role for six years. Northwestern's medical school has an endowed professorship called: Nathan Smith Davis Professorship in Physiology.

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