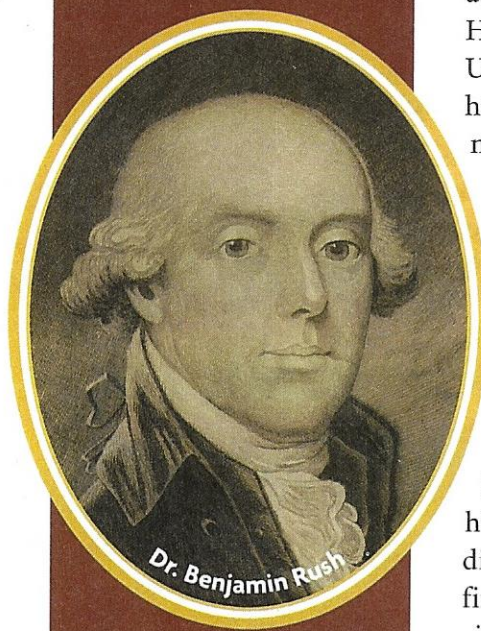


Famous Physician

by Mary Morton Cowan

In Colonial America, medicine as a profession was open only to men. Few doctors had any formal medical training. They mostly were self-taught or learned as apprentices. There were no qualifying exams or licensing procedures. Doctors were asked to make house calls only for serious illnesses. Physicians also functioned as apothecaries. They made and sold medicines, as pharmacists do today.

Young Benjamin Rush was one of the few Colonial doctors who served as an apprentice *and* obtained a medical degree. He apprenticed for five years with Dr. John Redman, Philadelphia's leading physician. He prepared medicines in Redman's apothecary shop. He visited patients in the city's Pennsylvania Hospital. It was the first public hospital in the Colonies when it opened in 1751. In 1765, Philadelphia also became home



to the first medical school in the Colonies. Rush attended lectures at the new College of Philadelphia. He then traveled to Scotland's University of Edinburgh to complete his formal education. He earned a medical degree in June 1768.

Returning home in 1769, Rush opened his own medical practice. The best way to ensure success in any trade was to have the *patronage* of someone important. Family connections or support from a religious or political group also helped. Rush did not have those things. But that didn't stop him. "I had a natural sympathy with distress of every kind," he wrote. At first, he cared for and treated the city's poor residents, supplying them with medicines from his shop. His medical practice grew to include the city's wealthier residents.

Patronage means support of a person or an institution by a benefactor.