

JOHN MORGAN

1735–1789

**Second Apothecary of Pennsylvania Hospital
Director-General and Physician-in-Chief of the General Hospital of the American
Army, 1775–1777**



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The name of Dr. John Morgan is closely associated with pharmacy not only because he served as an apothecary in the Pennsylvania Hospital for a time, but indelibly so because he was preëminently instrumental in bringing about a separation of pharmacy from medicine, in the United States. He was the son of Evan Morgan, a merchant of Welsh descent who had been a friend and neighbor of Benjamin Franklin, and had also been associated with him as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Pennsylvania Hospital.

John Morgan served an apprenticeship with Dr. John Redman, and succeeded as the second apothecary at the aforementioned hospital, May 19, 1755, serving about one year. Thereafter, he concluded his studies at the College of Philadelphia, which later became part of the University of Pennsylvania. He served as surgeon and lieutenant in the French and Indian War; in 1760 he went to Europe to broaden his professional equipment and received the degree of M.D., in Edinburgh, 3 years later. While studying anatomy during the following year, in France, he submitted a treatise which procured his admission into the Royal Academy of Surgery.

It was probably while in France that he was impressed with the need of separation of the practice of pharmacy from medicine. Prior to returning to the United States in a letter to a friend he stated:

"I am now preparing for America to see whether after fourteen years' devotion to medicine I can get my living without turning apothecary or practitioner of surgery."

Soon after his return to the United States he delivered a series of lectures relating to "The Medical Schools in America," May 30-31, 1765, wherein he said:

"We must regret that the very different employment of physician, surgeon and apothecary should be promiscuously followed by any one. They certainly require very different talents.

"The business of pharmacy is essentially different from either, free from the cares of both. The apothecary is to prepare and compound medicines as the physician shall direct. Altogether engaged in this, by length of time he adds to that skill therein which he could never have arrived at were his attention distracted by great variety of other subjects.

"The wisdom of ages, approved by experience the most certain test of knowledge, has taught us the necessity and utility of appointing different persons for these different employments, and accordingly we find them prosecuted separately in every wise and polished country."

The name of John Fothergill, eminent London physician and member of the Society of Friends, is linked with the early history of this country in many ways, not alone through his commendable political and moral suasion, but as far as botany is concerned through friendly business and professional relations with John Bartram; doubtless, the strong friendship existing between him and Benjamin Franklin had an influence in shaping medicine and pharmacy, both in Great Britain and the United States.

There being scarcity of qualified pharmacists in this country the directors of the Pennsylvania Hospital conferred with Dr. John Fothergill, who at various times recommended pharmacists who had qualified in their work as apothecaries in England, for the Pennsylvania Hospital. It was at this hospital soon after its dedication that an apothecary was employed, and also a pharmaceutical laboratory was established which served in a very helpful way in preparing medicines for the Continental Army. During these years apothecaries were apprenticed and the periods of their apprenticeships were limited accordingly until the election, in 1831, of Dr. John Conrad who served faithfully until 1870. When he resigned, a permanent home was given him in the hospital with every acceptable privilege. The following few lines are taken from an extended record in the minutes of the hospital:

"From 1831 until 1870, Dr. Conrad was the apothecary of this house in the department of the sick. The list of Resident Physicians during that time includes 70 names; * * * is there one among them who ever forgot John Conrad? * * *"

About 1769, as an adjunct to the "elaboratory" a botanical garden—for the study, observation and resource—became part of the institution.

The recommendation for the former and the employment of a botanical gardner was signed by John Morgan. In August 1775 Congress appointed the latter Director-General and Physician-in-Chief of the General Hospital of the American Army. His insistence that those in the medical service be qualified to treat the sick and wounded intelligently led to the removal of influential incompetents and, indirectly, by the duplicity of those affected to his own dismissal on unjust charges. However, an investigating committee afterward honorably acquitted him, and Washington himself bore testimony to his rectitude and professional capacity.

He impressed American pharmacy and medicine by his firm conviction that the same individual should not engage in both the application and preparation of medicine. He conscientiously practiced what he advocated and did not dispense medicine after earning his degree as doctor of medicine, even though prior experience as apothecary may have qualified him in pharmacy; he gave not only educational reasons for his stand but also pointed out the dangers and difficulties that obtained in attempting both. Dr. John Morgan died October 15, 1789, aged fifty-three years.

E. G. E.