

WILSON'S HERITAGE

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Dr. Joseph J. Lawrence and His Life: Former Wilsonian Developed Listerine Formula

James A. Bailey and Margaret B. Bailey

Victorian and early twentieth century medications were not regulated and some of the substances prescribed were questionable and, in some instances, even harmful to patients. However, some medications developed during this period were beneficial and remain on the market today. At the time, it was a common practice for some doctors to practice medicine and also compound medications as a druggist. Among them was Dr. Joseph Joshua Lawrence, who practiced medicine and operated a drugstore from 1858 to 1867 in Wilson. As a doctor and druggist, he developed some patented medicines which brought him great success. Eventually, he gave up his medical practice entirely to manufacture medications and published a successful medical journal.

Dr. Lawrence was born January 28, 1836, in Tarboro, Edgecombe County, North Carolina.¹ He was the son of cotton planter, Bennett Barrow Lawrence. His mother was Martha Ann Frances Knight, the daughter of Judge Jesse Cooper Knight. In 1838, his parents moved to a 359-acre plantation in Nash County just North of Rocky Mount that had been purchased by his paternal grandfather. This was where young Lawrence grew up and attended private school.²

Dr. Lawrence married Josephine Edwards in Wilson. She was the daughter of Colonel Benjamin Sheppard

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A Message from the Association President



Perry Morrison, President

Yes, we are still here! But, like everyone else we are struggling with the pandemic. Our regular winter lecture at Barton College was unable to be arranged due to the Omicron variant harassing us since the end of 2021. While it appears as if we might come up for air shortly, we are proceeding with caution.

Nevertheless, our work documenting Wilson's history continues. We present to you in our Winter Newsletter a very fine article written and researched by James A. Bailey and Margaret B. Bailey.

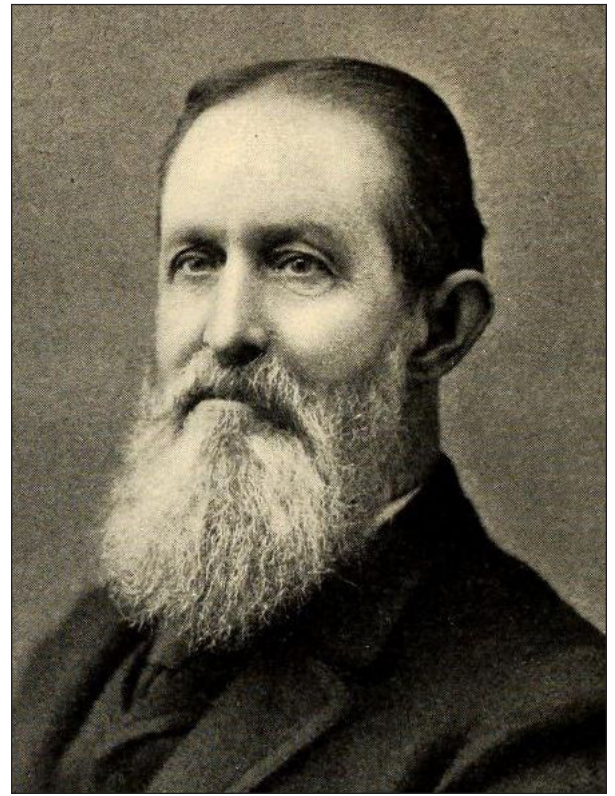
There has also been a small dedicated group preparing applications to the state to have civil rights historical markers erected in Wilson. We are waiting to see if these will be approved before erecting our next WCHA markers.

We hope to be able to gather in May for our annual meeting, but we shall see Until then, I hope you enjoy this newsletter offering.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Perry Morrison". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Edwards and Jemima Powell of Greene County.³⁻⁵ They had four children, two died during infancy. The surviving children included a son, Frank, and a daughter, Minnie.⁶⁻⁷

Lawrence attended Bethany College, West Virginia, and graduated with an Artium Magister or A. M. degree. The A. M. degree, an academic degree higher than a bachelor's degree, was equivalent to a master's in arts and sciences.⁸ In 1854, he matriculated to the Eclectic Medical Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio. After studying medicine for four years under Preceptor A. B. Noble, he graduated in 1858.⁹⁻¹¹ Upon completion of his medical studies in Ohio in 1858, he returned to North Carolina and opened a medical practice in Wilson. He advertised in the Wilson Ledger as an eclectic physician who treated chronic diseases without the use of mercury, antimony and arsenic.¹² Eclectic medicine was a branch of American medicine that utilized botanicals to formulate medications for the treatment of diseases.



Dr. Joseph J. Lawrence

In the Spring of 1860, Dr. Lawrence established the Star of Freedom newspaper in Wilson. He was the sole proprietor and editor. Readers described it as “about the handsomest and most attractive paper ever published here.”¹³ However, after a



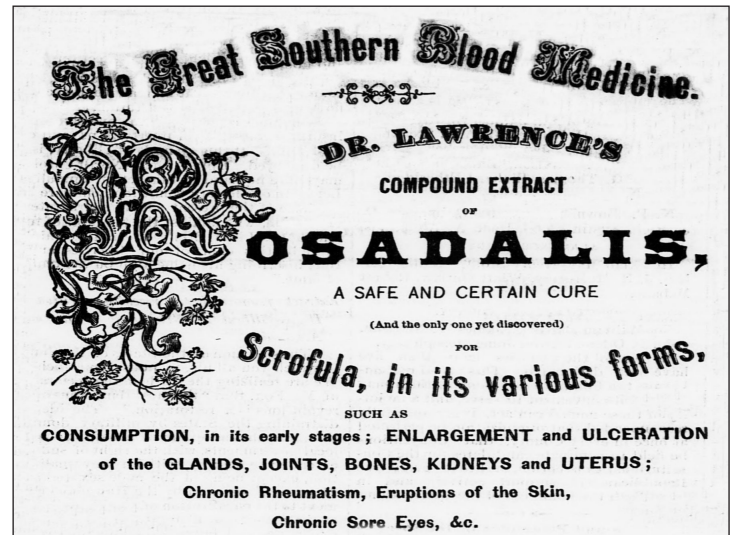
Eclectic Medical Institute

few months of publication, in September 1860, Dr. Lawrence sold it to John C. Gorman.¹⁴ Soon after Gorman purchased the Star of Freedom, Gorman partnered with Professor E. Prentiss Tucke, who owned the Wilson Ledger and the two newspapers merged. Subsequently, Dr. Lawrence and his brother-in-law, Richard Hines Blount, who was married to Josephine's sister, Sarah, purchased the Daily Rough Notes, a Goldsboro publication, from William Robinson and Sons, editors and proprietors.¹⁵⁻¹⁸ In March 1861, Lawrence was recognized as the editor of the Daily Rough's Notes, which also must have been published sporadically because a reader sent the following note to the North Carolinian newspaper. “We are pleased to see the Rough's Notes of Goldsboro in circulation again, after the attempt made to stop its wind. Dr. Lawrence, its editor, is one of our spiciest writers, and deserves success....”¹⁹ Then the following month, in April 1861, due to the Civil War, all Wilson newspapers ceased publication. One news article reported everyone connected with the newspaper from editor to printer's devil joined the war effort and publishing did not resume until after the war ended.²⁰ So, on August 12, 1861, Lawrence, among one-hundred and twenty-five men, enlisted in Goldsboro, Wayne County, North Carolina, in an Independent Company. The troops elected Richard H. Blount, Richard C. Tillery, John C. Robertson and Joseph Joshua Lawrence Captains. On September 4, 1861, the Independent Company organized as Company F, 3rd North Carolina Artillery in New Bern, North Carolina, and within a few days Company F received orders to report to Fort Macon, North Carolina. Next, on November 1, 1861, they were ordered to picket duty at Shell Point on Harker's Island, Carteret County, North Carolina.²¹⁻²³

When Dr. Lawrence enlisted, and throughout the war, military doctors with surgical skills were needed. However, since Dr. Lawrence did not have any surgical skills, he did not become a military doctor. In fact, his career in

the military was brief, only three months and eighteen days. When Company F was ordered to Fort Macon and Shell Point, the cold November climate at the military coastal encampments took their toll on Dr. Lawrence. On November 30, 1861, due to illness, he resigned from service and returned to his Wilson medical practice and also continued formulating treatments as a druggist.²⁴

In February 1866, Dr Lawrence marketed a medicinal compound to cure syphilis. It was advertised as “the great American remedy,” Lawrence’s Anti-Syphilitic. The ingredients were listed as concentrated extracts of medicinal roots and herbs. The advertisement claimed “it would cure any case of the disease, whether in the secondary or tertiary form.”²⁵ This type of medication was classified as a nostrum from the Latin nostrum remedium, home remedy. It sold for three dollars per bottle.²⁶ Rosadalis was another treatment marketed as a patent medicine developed by Dr. Lawrence. Yet, the term “patent medicine” was a misnomer, because no patent was issued for any medications. When the medicine received a trademark issued by the Patent Office it was referred to as a patent medicine simply because the Patent Office issued the trademark. A more accurate term would have been, “proprietary medicine.”²⁷ In addition, Dr. Lawrence’s origin for the name, “Rosadalis,” is unknown and remains a mystery.



Rosadalis was advertised as a remedy for diseases of blood, liver, kidneys and a general health restorer. In later advertisements, it was marketed as a cure for scrofula, an inflammation of the lymph nodes. Also, it was marketed for rheumatism, syphilis, malaria, nervousness, and consumption. He had the support of many Wilson physicians, in fact, nine endorsed his medicine and their names were listed in his advertisements. They were: Drs. A. D. Moore, L. A. Stith, J. H. Winstead, R. G. Barham, W. A. Duggan, E. Barnes, R. W. King, W. T. Brewer and W. J. Bullock.²⁸ In addition to medical professionals’ endorsements, testimonials were also published to market patent drugs. They would often come from prominent citizens in the community who used the medicine and attested to its benefits. For example, in one advertisement, Major J. W. Dunham, the editor of the Wilson North Carolinian, said he “believed from personal experience, that Rosadalis is the finest tonic ever prepared.”²⁹ Rosadalis was advertised in Turner’s North Carolina Almanac for a dollar fifty per bottle. Dr. Lawrence had four wholesale companies distributing the medication to other druggists; they were: D. Barnes, New York City; Carr Boykin, Baltimore, Maryland; E. Willis, Wilmington, North Carolina; and J. H. Baker, Norfolk, Virginia.³⁰

Patent medicines were often manufactured from exotic plant ingredients discovered from plants in the jungles of South America or other countries. Often the ingredients were a guarded secret; however, the ingredients used in the manufacture of Rosadalis were published in the Eclectic Medical Journal. Rosadalis was compounded from four plants, Wild Turkey Pea (*Dicentra canadensis*), Queen’s Root (*Stillingia sylvatica*), Pipsisewa (*Chimaphila umbellata*), Prickly Ash Bark (*Zanthoxylum clava-herculis*), and Potassium Iodide.³¹ The remedy was so popular and in demand that in December 1867, Dr. Lawrence closed his Wilson drugstore and moved to Baltimore, Maryland, to manufacture Rosadalis full-time. His laboratory was located at 244 Baltimore Street.³²⁻³⁴ Eventually, he sold the Rosadalis formula to Clements & Company, Baltimore, Maryland for \$25,000.³⁵

In June 1869, Dr. Lawrence introduced a new treatment, “Koskoo,” to citizens suffering from various disorders and he had it trademarked. It was described as the great livor invigorator, blood purifier and renovator. By 1871, he was manufacturing three other medications, Dr. Lawrence’s Chill Killer, Dr. Lawrence’s Digestin, and Dr. Lawrence’s Woman’s Friend. Chill Killer was a medication that would cure all chills, even those caused by Malaria.



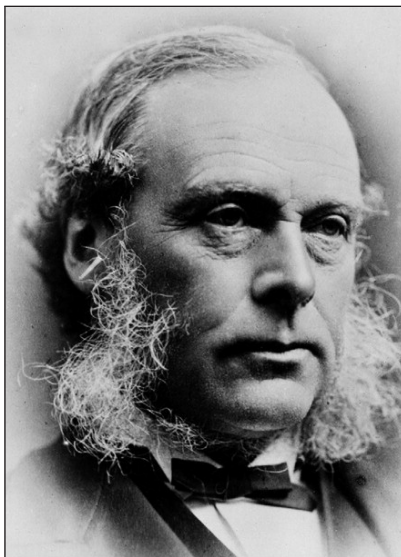
Digestin was used for indigestion also known as dyspepsia. Woman's Friend was a medication for all female diseases.³⁶ These medications were prepared and bottled in Dr Lawrence's laboratory located at No. 6 Main Street, Norfolk, Virginia, and sold for one dollar per bottle.³⁷⁻³⁸

Ingredients for some of Dr. Lawrence's medications were not readily available, but

Koskoo's ingredients were published. It was reported Dr. Lawrence made the syrup, Koskoo, from equal parts of the following: Mexicana Koskoo [Mexican Ivy], Scrofularia nodosa [Figwort], Alnus serrulata [Tag Alder], Leptandra virginica [Black Root] and Ptelia trifoliata [Wafer Ash]. The botanical name of each ingredient was listed correctly with the exception of the first ingredient, Mexicana Koskoo. The botanical name for first listed ingredient, Mexican Ivy, is *Cobaea scandens*.³⁹ No plant identified as Mexicana Koskoo was located in the literature. So, Dr. Lawrence's origin of the Koskoo name is another mystery. Perhaps the 19th century community, Koskoo, Southampton County, Virginia, was the origin of Koskoo rather than a botanical plant.

By June 1869, it was reported Dr. Lawrence was bankrupt. A Charlotte newspaper article described Dr. Lawrence as, "the Rosadalis man of Wilson, in this state, is irrepressible. After having made a fortune on Rosadalis, and having lost it on Koskoo, he disappeared from public notice, just as a meteor, flashes for a moment across the sky and then disappears in the night."⁴⁰ Then, four years later, in July 1873, Dr. Lawrence published the first edition

of *Medical Brief: Journal of Practical Medicine, Chemistry, and Pharmacy*.⁴¹ The medical journal was published monthly in Wilson, North Carolina, and was owned and edited by Dr. Lawrence.⁴²⁻⁴³ The journal was an incredible success and had a circulation of 11,000 by 1879.⁴⁴



Dr. Joseph Lister

Dr. Lawrence moved to St. Louis, Missouri, in 1873. It was reported he accepted a professorship at the American Medical College; however, no records could be located to support that he had an association with the medical school.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶ He continued to sell remedies and published his medical journal. His office was located at 100 South Main Street and his residence at Thirty-Fourth and Olive Streets was in walking distance of his office.⁴⁷ In 1876, British Surgeon, Dr. Joseph Lister, toured the United States to deliver lectures to doctors about the benefits of antiseptic surgery. While in America, Lister was invited to speak at the Medical Congress attached to the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition.⁴⁸

Dr. Lister's antiseptic method initially involved wiping an open wound with linen soaked in 5% carbolic acid (phenol) solution. Consequently, he observed a significant decrease in the post-operative infection rate. Next, he invented an instrument for spraying a fine mist of the solution and used the instrument to spray the operating instruments and surface of the patient's skin or open wound before initiating a procedure.⁴⁹⁻⁵¹ The mortality rate for major surgery before Lister's antiseptic method was about 50%. When his method was implemented, it reduced the mortality rate to about 10%.⁵²

After attending some of Dr. Lister's lectures, Dr. Lawrence decided to develop his own antiseptic formula.⁵³ He believed the solution of carbolic acid used by Dr. Lister was too strong. Therefore, Dr. Lawrence experimented with other antimicrobial chemicals in search of an alternative antiseptic formula.⁵⁴ By 1881, Dr Lawrence had formulated an antiseptic solution made from alcohol, thymol [oil of thyme], eucalyptol [eucalyptus oil] and

menthol [oils of peppermint, or other mints] which was marketed to physicians to be used as an antiseptic or mouth wash. He named the antiseptic “Listerine” in recognition of Dr. Joseph Lister.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁶



Dr. Lawrence was friends with Jordan W. Lambert who worked at Mellier Drug Company, St. Louis, Missouri, and John R. Peacock, a druggist. They formed a partnership and marketed Dr. Lawrence’s Listerine treatment. Dr. Lawrence also formulated another medication, Lithiated Hydrangea, a compound of fresh hydrangea and benzo-salicylate of lithium for kidney disease and it was marketed as well during the partnership.⁵⁷ Peacock and Lawrence ultimately sold their interest in the partnership with Lambert and the company eventually became Lambert Pharmaceutical Company, St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Lawrence continued to receive a ten percent royalty for each bottle of Listerine and Lithiated Hydrangea sold by the company. Over the years this royalty yielded millions of dollars in profits. Listerine was initially only sold to physicians and later, after a national advertising campaign, it was distributed in drugstores. Listerine was sold as a cure for “halitosis,” a medical term for bad breath derived from the Latin term, “halitus,” meaning to exhale or breathe.⁵⁸⁻⁵⁹ By 1885, there were approximately 5,000 proprietary medications on the market and the American public was spending about \$22,000,000 annually on them. Manufacturers were spending approximately \$10,000,000 to advertise these products.⁶⁰

On Thursday, April 28, 1886, Dr. Lawrence travelled from St Louis to North Carolina to visit his ailing father.⁶¹ A few days later, in May 1886, his father, 75-year-old, Captain Bennett Barrow Lawrence, died at his home in Nash County near Rocky Mount and Lawrence returned to Missouri.⁶²

By 1896, the monthly journal, Medical Brief, had 38,000 subscribers. Dr. Lawrence’s favorite motto regarding the journal was, “Multum in Parvo,” which means putting a lot of information into few words or a small space. Dr Lawrence employed agents in Europe to increase the journal’s circulation.⁶³ A year later, the journal had added over 10,000 foreign subscribers to its readership.⁶⁴

The following year after his father died, Dr. Lawrence returned to North Carolina to settle a lawsuit with his brother-in-law, Marcellus J. Edwards. Edwards claimed Dr. Lawrence borrowed \$5,000 from him in 1869, to manufacture medicines, but the loan was never repaid. Dr. Lawrence paid Edwards a \$7,500 settlement to resolve the suit.⁶⁵⁻⁶⁶ After thirty-five years as publisher and editor, Dr. Lawrence sold the medical Journal, Medical Brief, to Henry R. Strong, a publisher in St. Louis, before relocating to New York.⁶⁷ He built a residence in New York City and purchased a lot for \$180,000 in Manhattan. Construction began on January 10, 1901, on his five-story \$200,000 residence. His home was located at the northeast corner of Eighty-Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue. A reception hall and dining room were located on the first floor. Dr. Lawrence’s study and library were on the second floor, bedrooms were on the third floor and a ballroom was located on the fifth floor. It was in a neighborhood of millionaires, and a modest home compared to Andrew Carnegie’s residence a block away.⁶⁸



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On April 3, 1900, Dr. Lawrence; his wife, Josephine; and son, Frank, were in St. Louis at the home of Minnie Siegrist, Dr. and Mrs. Lawrence’s daughter. when Minnie died from complications of inflammatory rheumatism. Minnie and her husband, Henry Ashley Siegrist, had an eight-year- old daughter, Vera. Minnie and Henry were separated, so Vera was living with her grandparents when her mother died.⁶⁹

In 1903, Dr. Lawrence campaigned and promoted St. Louis for the location of the 1904 World's Fair. When St. Louis was the chosen location, he was selected to serve on the Board of Directors for the Louisiana Purchase Exposition also known as the 1904 World's Fair.⁷⁰ Two year later, Dr. Lawrence's only son, forty-two-year-old Frank, died at his father's residence in New York. He died from complications of pneumonia. Frank was a graduate of St. Louis Law School and had been the president of the Rio Chemical Company for the past ten years. Frank never married.⁷¹ At the age of seventy-three, Dr. Joseph Joshua Lawrence, millionaire, died of paralysis on March 14, 1909, in Manhattan, New York. His obituary made no mention of his Listerine discovery. His wife, Josephine, died December 2, 1921. Both are interred at Bellefontaine Cemetery, Saint Louis, Missouri.⁷² The value of Dr. Lawrence's estate was estimated to have been between from \$7 to \$11 million. Vera Siegrist, his granddaughter, inherited the Lawrence fortune.⁷³



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SAVE THE DATE
Annual Meeting
May 19, 2022

The Spring annual meeting time
is to be announced by email as we
may hold a Zoom meeting.

Wilson County Historical Association
P.O. Box 2046
Wilson, NC 27894-2046

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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