

Fitch, William Edwards ^[1]

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by James D. Gillespie, 1986

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William Edwards Fitch, physician and author, was born in Burlington, the son of William James Fitch, a farmer, and Mary Elizabeth King Fitch. He was a descendant of Thomas Fitch, who came to America in 1637 and settled in Norwalk, Conn. Fitch received his secondary education in the Burlington public schools, went on to earn the M.D. degree from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Baltimore in 1891, and did postgraduate work at the New York University Medical College. He then returned to North Carolina, where he established successive practices in Graham, Burlington, and Durham. On 5 Oct. 1892, in Salisbury, he married Minnie Crump; they had three children: Lucille, Elizabeth, and William Edward.

In 1897 Fitch moved to Savannah, Ga., where he continued to practice until 1904, when he moved to New York City to remain until 1916. Fitch was a specialist in metabolic diseases, medical hydrology, and dietotherapy. From 1907 to 1909 he lectured on the principles of surgery at Fordham University, and from 1907 to 1916 he was the attending gynecologist at the outpatient clinic of Presbyterian Hospital in New York City, the attending physician at Vanderbilt Clinic, and an assistant in surgical clinics at St. Luke's Hospital.

Fitch served with the military in different capacities during the Spanish-American War ^[2] and World War I ^[3]. In the former, he was acting assistant surgeon of the U.S. Public Health Service and served in the Marine Health Service (1898). On 3 July 1912 he became first lieutenant of the Medical Reserve Corps, U.S. Army, rising to captain on 16 July 1917 and to major on 25 Sept. 1917. After serving as commanding officer of the base hospitals at Fort Terry, Fort Totten, and Fort Schuyler, N.Y., Fitch became chief nutritionist and director of mess at the base hospital at Camp Jackson, S.C. Later he was an adviser to the surgeon's office at Camp Jackson. He was honorably discharged on 3 Dec. 1918.

In 1931, Fitch became medical director and consultant medical hydrologist at the Fort Lick (Ind.) Springs resort. From 1932 to 1935, he served in a similar capacity at the Crazy Hotel and Spa in Mineral Wells, Tex.

Deeply involved in medical publishing, Fitch was editor of *Gaillard's Southern Medicine* from 1900 to 1909 and editor of *Pediatrics* from 1908 to 1917. During the period 1918–19, he was coeditor and publisher of the *American Journal of Electrotherapeutics and Radiology*. He also wrote extensively about the state and local history of North Carolina. Among his books and papers are *The Battle of Alamance*, *Some Neglected History of North Carolina* ^[4], *Some Things North Carolina Did and Did First in Establishing American Independence*, *The First Founders of America*, *The Origin, Rise and Fall of the State of Franklin* ^[5], *Fitch's Medical Pocket Formulary*, *Dietotherapy* ^[6], *Great American Spas*, and *Diseases of Metabolism*.

Fitch was president of the Alamance Battleground Commission ^[7] and a member of the Society of Cincinnati ^[8], the Society of Foreign Wars, the Society of Colonial Wars, the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, the Medical Society of Greater New York, and the American, Virginia, and Indiana state medical associations.

He was a Democrat ^[9] and an Episcopalian ^[10]. During his later years he returned to Burlington and remained there until 1948, when he moved to Coral Gables, Fla., to live with a daughter until his death. Fitch was buried in the cemetery of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter, Burlington.

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