

Scruggs, Lawson Andrew ^[1]

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Scruggs, Lawson Andrew

by Elizabeth Reid Murray, 1994

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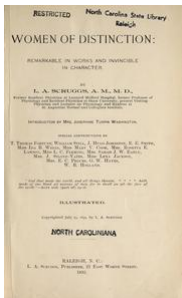
15 Jan. 1857–1914



"Women of distinction remarkable in works and invincible in character by L.A. Scruggs ; introd. by Mrs. Josephine Turpin Washington ; special contributions by T. Thomas Fortune

Lawson Andrew Scruggs, physician, pharmacist, and one of the first three black doctors licensed by the state of North Carolina[et al.]. 1893. Available from Open Library. was born to slave parents in Bedford County, Va. His early education was a scant few months in the common schools of his Virginia neighborhood immediately after the [Civil War](#) ^[5]. While engaged in farming during the day, he studied at night to acquire a rudimentary education, continuing these efforts when later employed in construction work for the [Atlantic](#) ^[6] and [Mississippi Railroad](#) ^[7] and for the [Western Union Telegraph Company](#) ^[8]. In October 1877 he enrolled at the Richmond Institute, a Baptist Home Mission Society school, and in May 1882 he was graduated second in his class. A book Scruggs published in 1893 was dedicated in part to "Charles J. Pickford, the author's early friend and benefactor." An introductory sketch of Scruggs's own life to that date was written by another benefactor and teacher at Richmond, [Mrs. Josephine Turpin Washington](#) ^[9].

Entering [Shaw University](#) ^[10] in [Raleigh](#) ^[11] in the fall of 1882, Scruggs completed the literary course as valedictorian of his graduating class. While working towards his A.B. degree he simultaneously pursued medical courses in the [Leonard Medical School](#) ^[12] at [Shaw](#) ^[13]. The faculty was composed of white physicians practicing in Raleigh. One of the six recipients of M.D. degrees in Leonard's first graduating class in 1886, Scruggs was again valedictorian and received the class prize in surgery. In the same year three of the graduates (including Scruggs) took their examinations before the [State Board of Medical Examiners](#) ^[14], becoming the first black doctors licensed by the state.



Written with a conscious sense of racial pride, a black physician presents biographical sketches of accomplished black women.

" Available from Open Library.

^[14]Also in the year of his graduation and licensing, Scruggs was appointed resident physician at [Leonard Hospital](#) ^[15] as well as lecturer in physiology, hygiene, and chemistry in the college department at Shaw, the first black to hold these positions. Four years later, in March 1890, he resigned to devote full time to private practice. Soon, however, he accepted appointment as visiting physician and lecturer in physiology and hygiene at St. Augustine's Normal and Collegiate Institute (now [St. Augustine's College](#) ^[16]). Again, he was the first black to occupy these chairs. When in October 1886 St. Agnes Hospital for Negroes opened in a building adjacent to St. Augustine's, Scruggs was its first attending physician and lecturer.

In 1887 he was one of the four cofounders of the [Old North State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Society](#) ^[17]. Later a Raleigh chapter of the state organization was named the L. A. Scruggs Medical Society.

As a result of Scruggs's work in the 1890s, Raleigh's health superintendent, [Dr. James McKee](#) ^[18], attributed to Scruggs "very much of the credit for the remarkable reduction of the death rate of the colored people in this community." In the early 1900s Scruggs left Raleigh to run a hospital in the Southern Pines–Pinehurst area of [Moore County](#) ^[19], returning to Raleigh about 1913, only a few months before his death.

Meanwhile, when Shaw University instituted the [Leonard School of Pharmacy](#) ^[19] in 1891, Scruggs was designated a registered pharmacist and was licensed by the [State Board of Pharmacy](#) ^[20]. For a time he was the pharmacist at the Capital City Pharmacy, at 403 Fayetteville Street, owned by two Negro brothers, J. H. and Thomas H. Love, Jr. The pharmacy was later known as Love's Drug Store.

Scruggs was also active in civic and literary pursuits. As president of the Hesperian Literary and Social Club of Raleigh, he established a



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c.1899. "Shaw University, Raleigh, N.C. - pharmacy building."

reading room and library in the 1890s. For several years he was North Carolina correspondent for the *National Baptist*, published in Philadelphia. Among his published articles was a response to a piece by Thomas Nelson Page appearing in the *North American Review* that was considered derogatory to blacks. In 1893 Scroggs edited a volume entitled *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character*, to which some fifteen writers contributed biographical sketches. It was dedicated in part to his first wife, who had died during preparation of the manuscript and whose biography is included among its sketches. Affiliated with the Grand Foundation, United Order of True Reformers, he was medical director of its Raleigh division.

Politically Scroggs was a Republican. In an address to the Republican State Convention in Raleigh in 1896, he opposed a racially inflammatory speech by Daniel L. Russell, who became the party's successful gubernatorial candidate. Later, after the Democrats returned to office, a Negro State Council adopted a resolution urging blacks to emigrate from the state in case the Democrats made their stay in North Carolina "intolerable." Scroggs, believing the wording to be too strong and counterproductive, resigned from the council when it refused to modify the resolution.

Widowed twice, Scroggs was married three times. He met his first wife, Lucie Johnson (14 Oct. 1864–28 Nov. 1892), while both were students at Shaw University. They were married on 22 Feb. 1888 in New York, where she and her sister taught at a school for young girls, both black and white, and where she was correspondent for the *Richmond Planet* and other journals. They had two children, a son Leonard and a daughter Goldie. While in New York Lucie Scroggs wrote an elementary school textbook, *Grammar-Land*, and a drama, *Farmer Fox*, later performed in Raleigh. She was the organizer and first president of the Ladies' Pansy Literary Club at the Second (Blount Street) Baptist Church, Raleigh. Some years after her death, Scroggs married his second wife Clara (ca. 1875–11 Jan. 1903). The couple lived at 21 East Worth Street, where the doctor also maintained his office until he relocated in Pinehurst. His third marriage, to Phoebe B. Turner (born ca. 1857), took place at her home in Raleigh on 7 Sept. 1905. Surviving him by many years, his widow continued to live in Raleigh until the late 1930s. His daughter married and moved to St. Louis, where several grandchildren were living in the 1970s.

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Additional Resources:

DocSouth, Scroggs Biography: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/scruggs/bio.html>

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