

## Dr. Charles Henry Nichols

(19 Oct 1820 – 16 Dec 1889)

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*The Evening Star, October 30, 1858*

### **The Insane Asylum**



Already one of the most imposing institutions of this vicinity, and indeed of the whole country, is about two-thirds built. Under the direction of the resourceful and self-reliant gentleman who has it in charge, it pushes itself forward, without noise or bustle, gradually fulfilling the grand and noble ideal of its projectors. We think that scarcely any public edifice was ever more cheaply or substantially erected, and we believe all we say when we ascribe this to the energy, judgment, and enterprise of Dr. Nichols, wisely backed and supported by the Department of the Interior, under whose principal supervision it lies. When completed, and the foundation is now digging out for the remaining third part, it will be a longer building by some sixteen feet, than the Capitol itself in its finished state. A considerable suite of rooms in the middle and largest section which has been built this summer are in a state of forward preparation for occupation. This, by the way, is well, for the existing accommodations are pressed to their uttermost by the numerous applications for admission which are steadily made. At this time the institution has sixty female and seventy-three male patients, under about

twenty attendants of all grades.

Besides the great amount of work done on the main building, and the large barn of the establishment, a substantial brick wall, coped with brick, made like all the rest on the spot, has been built, and porters' lodges set at the entrance. The great and increasing number of visitors has made these things necessary. We notice, also, that good crops of corn, vegetables and fruit have been obtained this year, and even the constituents of the little menagerie, by their healthy and thriving appearance, tell of the plenty and good treatment which prevail. At the rate that work has been pushed during the last twelve months, we should judge that by or before 1860 the whole establishment may receive its finishing touch, and then it will certainly have, a fair title to be considered as in all respects a proud monument of our country's humanity, munificence and taste.

*The Evening Star, July 22, 1876*

### **Outrageous Attack on Dr. C.H. Nichols**

About eight o'clock last night, as Dr. C.H. Nichols, superintendent of the Government Insane Asylum, was returning home with his family from a drive, he was attacked in his carriage, at Uniontown, by James Haggamacker, who seemed to be drunk, and who struck at the doctor in his seat. The doctor's wife became very much alarmed, and jumped from the carriage with one of her children, injuring herself severely by the leap, and all were considerably frightened. Officer W.T. Anderson, who was on duty on

that beat, happily came along and quick stepped. Haggamacker to the station house, where the key was turned on him until sober, when he left collateral for his appearance, which was forfeited at the Police Court this morning.

*The Evening Star, December 17, 1889*

### **The Former Superintendent of St. Elizabeth Insane Hospital**

Dr. W.W. Godding, the superintendent of the St. Elizabeth insane hospital today received the following dispatch:

"Dr. C.H. Nichols died at 11 last night. Funeral services here Thursday morning. Interment in Washington on Friday from Miss Maury's.

S.B. Lyon."

Dr. C.H. Nichols was formerly superintendent of St. Elizabeth's hospital and had many warm friends in the community who will regret to hear of his death. He was in his 69th year. Dr. Nichols had been in bad health for quite a long time and recently he went to Europe for his health, but received little or no benefit from the journey. He leaves a son, who is a lieutenant in the navy. The body, as stated, will be brought to this city for interment. The funeral will take place on Friday, but the arrangements have not yet been completed.

*The Evening Star, December 18, 1889*

### **The Late Dr. Nichols**

#### **His Life Work for the Insane and His Services in Washington**

Dr. C.H. Nichols, the superintendant of Bloomingdale asylum, who died yesterday, as stated in The Star, came of a Quaker family. He was born in Vassalboro, Me., in 1820, and received a classical education at the Friends' school in Providence, R.I. He graduated from the college of physicians and surgeons in 1842. He began his work with the insane under Dr. Amariah Brigham in the state asylum of Utica, N.Y., where he was chosen medical assistant in 1847. In 1849 he was appointed superintendent at Bloomingdale. He remained there until 1852, when he resigned, having been selected by President Fillmore to superintend the construction and take charge of the government hospital for the insane in this District. With the money appropriated--\$120,000--he purchased a site of 200 acres at St. Elizabeth. The appropriation was not large enough to erect the building, but Dr. Nicholas eked out the deficiency and made bricks out of the soil removed for the foundation of the building. Finally he had the satisfaction of completing the structure without asking for additional money from the United States Treasury. A lodge for the colored insane--said to be the first distinct provision of the kind ever made for that race--was attached to the institution. He was at the head of the institution twenty-five years, and, by means of additional appropriations, erected many additional buildings, doubled the lands, extended the accommodations and kept the treatment up with the latest methods. He served as trustee of Columbian university, president of the police board, etc. He was at the battle of Bull Run, and was nearly captured while attending to the wounded. He was on Gen. McDowell's staff.

Dr. Nichols was married in 1860 to Miss Ellen Maury, daughter of John Maury, who was at one time mayor of Washington. Mrs. Nichols died a few years afterward, leaving one son, Lieut. Maury Nichols, who is attached to the engineers' corps at Willet's Point, L.I. In 1872 Dr. Nichols married Miss Sarah Lathrop, the daughter of a college professor at Pittsfield, Mass.

Dr. Nichols returned to the Bloomingdale asylum in 1877, when the office of superintendent was created for him. He succeeded the unfortunate Dr. David Tilden Brown, who hanged himself recently in Illinois. Dr. Nichols was a contributor to the American Journal of Insanity and other periodicals. For

many years he was the president of the association of American superintendents of institutions for the insane and an honorary member of the medico-psychological association of Great Britain. He received the honorary degree of M.A. from Union college and LL.D. from Columbian university. He was a member of the New York medical society and the academy of medicine.

*The Evening Star, April 28, 1971*

### **Nichols Avenue SE Will Get Name Change Honoring King**

The D.C. City Council voted yesterday to rename Nichols Avenue SE in honor of slain civil rights leader, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Councils action, which takes effect May 6, came after an April 2 public hearing at which most persons testifying supported the name change.

Councilman Stanley Anderson, who represents Anacostia, called the renaming a small but important step in focusing attention on the plight of Southeast Washington. Dr. Charles H. Nichols, after whom the street is now named, helped found St. Elizabeths Hospital.

Dr. King, who won the Nobel peace prize and was head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn., in April, 1968.

### *History of the Medical Society of D.C., 1811-1909*

Born Oct. 19, 1820, Vassalboro, Me. M.D., 1843, Univ. Penn. A.M., 1851, Union College, Schenectady, N.Y. LL.D., 1879, Columbian. Acting Asst. Surg., U.S.A. Supt. of St. Elizabeth Asylum, D.C., 1852-77, then became Superintendent of Bloomingdale Asylum, New York. Name dropped; reelected Jan. 7, 1867. Died Dec. 16, 1889. Educated in schools in Maine and at Providence, R.I. In 1847 became connected with the State Insane Asylum, Utica, N.Y.; in 1849 Physician to Bloomingdale Asylum. In 1852, at the suggestion of Miss Dorothea Dix, was appointed by President Fillmore to superintend the construction and management of St. Elizabeth Asylum, Washington. For many years was President of Association of Amer. Superintendents of Insane Asylums; Honorary member British Med.-Psychol. Association. See Atkinson's Phys. and Surg., 1878, p. 69d; Appleton's Biog., 1888, IV, p. 512; Med. Record, N.Y., 1889, XXXVI, p. 687; Amer. Jour. Insanity, 1888-9; XLV, p. 446.

*Forman, Stephen M., A Guide to Civil War Washington, Washington, DC: Elliott & Clark Publishing, 1995.*

Nichols was the son-in-law of John Maury, a former mayor of Washington, and the superintendent of the government insane asylum (St. Elizabeths). During the Civil War, he acted as a volunteer surgeon at the asylum's army hospital and he was present as one of General McDowell's staff at the Battle of First Manassas. At the trial for the conspirators in the Lincoln assassination, he testified in defense of Lewis Powell. In 1877, he accepted the position of medical superintendent of the Bloomingdale Asylum in New York City. Nichols was one of the foremost experts in what is now called forensic psychiatry, and he supplied testimony for the defense in the trial of Charles Guiteau, who assassinated President James Garfield.