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Thistle on the Delaware: Edinburgh Medical Education and Philadelphia Practice, 1800–1825

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SUMMARY

Contemporary observers as well as later historians have attested to the impact of the Edinburgh University model of medical education on Philadelphia medicine brought about by the founding of the University of Pennsylvania medical school. This article seeks to examine that impact in

more detail by first, clarifying what that model was, and second, examining Philadelphia medical practitioners in the early nineteenth century to see how they were affected by the presence of the medical school.

The 'Edinburgh model' was a two-tiered system of medical education: hundreds of students per year attended lectures, but only 20 per cent actually graduated. When the University of Pennsylvania faculty transplanted the course of study, they also transplanted this system: only 38 per cent of the students attending lectures graduated. The faculty did not, however, transplant the Edinburgh guild system which effectively required all legal Edinburgh practitioners to attend the University. The result was that University of Pennsylvania graduates and auditors, however prominent, did not succeed in dominating Philadelphia practice. Instead, evidence from city directories and manuscript sources shows that the self-styled 'Physicians', as well as 'Cuppers and Bleeders', 'Midwives', and 'Nurses' continued to flourish, even as the University grew in prestige and student numbers.

Keywords: [Edinburgh](#), [Philadelphia](#), [university medical school](#), [medical education](#), [physician](#), [midwife](#), [cupper and bleeder](#), [nurses](#), [quacks](#)

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