

Lemuel Hopkins

1760 - 1801

Lemuel Hopkins, physician and popular satirist, was born in Waterbury on June 19, 1750, the son of a well-to-do farmer of sturdy Colonial stock. His father made him work the fields as a boy but also provided him with a sound primary education. A tendency to tuberculosis early turned Lemuel's attention to medicine and he studied first under Dr. Jared Potter of Wallingford, and later, under Dr. Seth Bird of Litchfield, in which town, about 1776, he began to practice. For a brief time he served in the Continental Army as a surgeon. By 1784, Yale recognized his reputation and outstanding traits and conferred on him an honorary masters degree. At about this time, Hopkins moved to Hartford staying with his friend Joel Barlow, until he could establish a home there.

Hopkins became one of the most eminent practitioners in the state. He displayed a keen mind, and unusual memory, and an outspoken distaste for quackery. Further, he was ungainly in appearance, eccentric in manner, and decidedly original in his methods. The family tendency toward consumption focused his attention on the disease; and as he became a recognized authority on the subject, he was in great demand as a consultant. His regime of treatment of diseases was in advance of the time, especially his recommendation of fresh air, wholesome food, and exercise for tuberculosis as well as for other fevers. Many students came to him for instruction. He was made an honorary member of the Massachusetts Medical Society and one of the founders of the Connecticut Medical Society.

Equally notable were Hopkins' satirical contributions to the Hartford Wits, a literary group that cultivated satiric essays and poetry after the Revolution. They held great influence in the political affairs of the country from about 1786 to 1807. With John Trumbull, Joel Barlow, and David Humphreys he wrote "The Anarchiad, a Poem, on the Restoration of Chaos and Substantial Night," mocking the



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anarchistic tendencies of the day and advocating an efficient federal constitution. After Trumbull, Hopkins was considered by some to be the most eminent satirist of his day. He published nothing under his own name.

When Hopkins died April 14, 1801, he was in the midst of his productive life. His death was brought on by a cough, side pains, and a fever. Oddly enough, he didn't follow his own advice and fell victim to, it is said, an improper remedy which he was led to try upon himself because of his dread of pulmonary disease.