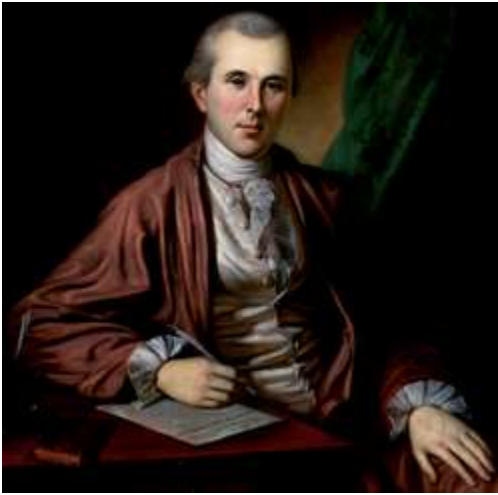


Benjamin Rush: Patriot and Physician



Benjamin Rush (January 4, 1746–April 19, 1813) was a Founding Father, signer of the Declaration of Independence, physician, and influential Pennsylvania patriot. A delegate to the Continental Congress, Rush strongly supported American independence and served as Surgeon General of the Middle Department of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

A prominent figure of the American Enlightenment, Rush championed education, public health, prison reform, and the abolition of slavery. He taught medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and helped advance the emerging medical profession.

Rush was also a pioneer in the study of mental illness and is regarded as a founder of American psychiatry. In addition, he founded Dickinson College.

His life exemplified patriotic service through medicine, education, public leadership, and reform, making Benjamin Rush a notable figure in the founding and development of the United States.

He was also known for creating Dr. Rush's Bilious Pills, which were a combination of calomel, chlorine, and jalap (an herbal laxative). These pills were fondly referred to at the time as "thunderbolts" or "thunderclappers."



Benjamin Rush advised Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to include a supply of "thunderclappers" in their medical provisions for the expedition following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Rush believed constipation was "often a sign of approaching disease" and recommended taking one or more of the pills as a preventive measure. He similarly advised using the pills to address a loss of appetite, which he considered a warning sign of impending illness.

Following Rush's recommendations, the expedition carried approximately 600 of these pills. Because mercury does not readily decompose, traces of the medication have survived in expedition-era latrine pits nearly two centuries later. This evidence has helped researchers identify the location a number of the expedition's campsites.

Dr. Rush's Bilious Pills were gradually phased out and disappeared by the mid-20th century (around the 1940s to 1960s) as modern medical science recognized the severe dangers of heavy metal toxicity.

After dying of typhus fever, he was buried (in Section N67) along with his wife Julia in the Christ Church Burial Ground in Philadelphia, not far from where Benjamin Franklin is buried. At the site, a small plaque honoring Benjamin Rush has been placed. However, the box marker is next to the plaque on the right, with inscriptions on the top. The inscription reads,

In memory of
Benjamin Rush MD
he died on the 19th of April
in the year of our Lord 1813
Aged 68 years
Well done good and faithful servant
enter thou into the joy of the Lord