

## **Fisher, Edward Carrington** <sup>[1]</sup>

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**16 Nov. 1809–12 Jan. 1890**

Edward Carrington Fisher, physician and hospital administrator, was a native of Richmond, Va., and one of ten children born to Ann Ambler and George Fisher. His aunt, Mary Willis Ambler, was the wife of [Chief Justice John Marshall](#) <sup>[2]</sup>. From 1824 to 1828 he attended Hampden-Sydney College and was graduated with the A.B. and M.D. degrees. He also studied medicine at the University of Maryland in 1831. Fisher practiced in Richmond and Staunton, Va., until 1849, when he was appointed assistant physician to the superintendent of the Western Lunatic Asylum in Staunton. The superintendent of the psychiatric hospital, Dr. Francis T. Stribling, was the adviser to the legislative commission establishing the North Carolina Asylum for the Insane in Raleigh, and Virginia officials charged that he had hired Fisher for "the admitted purpose of qualifying him to fill an office in a similar institution in a neighboring state." An investigating committee of the Virginia psychiatric hospital's trustees found no reason for censure of Fisher's appointment, and he served for eighteen months.

On 1 Oct. 1853, upon Stribling's recommendation, Fisher was appointed superintendent of construction and medical superintendent of the North Carolina Asylum for the Insane at a yearly salary of \$1,200. He succeeded Dr. [Edmund Strudwick](#) <sup>[3]</sup>, of Hillsborough, who had served as interim superintendent in overseeing the construction of the hospital. The hospital, designed by the noted New York architect [Alexander Jackson Davis](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, was among the most modern in the nation and was equipped with its own gas lighting and steam heating plants. During its construction, Fisher traveled as far as Boston to compare and inspect other hospitals. To obtain additional insights on the details of constructing, equipping, and staffing the hospital, he visited and frequently corresponded with [Dorothea Dix](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, the country's leading proponent for the improved care for people with mental illnesses and the original instigator for the North Carolina psychiatric hospital.

Upon his arrival in 1853, Fisher found the hospital in a financially unstable condition. It was due to his efforts that an \$80,000 bond was raised to complete and furnish the psychiatric hospital, and that legislation was enacted providing the psychiatric hospital with a steady income from county land and poll taxes. The hospital admitted its first patient under Fisher in February 1856; by the outbreak of the Civil War there were 195 patients. In recognition of his work at the hospital, Fisher was elected to membership in the [North Carolina Medical Society](#) <sup>[6]</sup> in 1857.

During the Civil War the psychiatric hospital continued to operate under Fisher's guidance, although it faced many "difficulties and embarrassments" because Raleigh merchants refused to honor state-issued money. Upon the federal occupation of Raleigh the psychiatric hospital suffered a serious loss in the destruction of the wall that enclosed the psychiatric hospital grounds, forcing the patients to be kept indoors. Fisher, however, applied to Union Major General John M. Schofield, who repaired the damage and—along with General Jacob D. Cox and General Thomas H. Ruger—kept the psychiatric hospital supplied with provisions.

In April 1865, Fisher's contract as superintendent was renewed for seven years by the provisional state government. But the [Reconstruction](#) <sup>[7]</sup> legislature of 1868 declared Fisher's office vacant, and he "resigned" to be replaced by Dr. [Eugene Grissom](#) <sup>[8]</sup>. Returning to Virginia, Fisher became an assistant physician at the Western Lunatic Asylum in Staunton in 1871. He served at this institution until his death, except for the period from 1881 to 1884 when Virginia Reconstruction politics caused his removal. At the time of his death, Fisher was assistant superintendent of the psychiatric hospital.

Fisher and his wife, Lavinia Page Fisher, had six children: George, Charles, Eliza, Ann, John Page, and Edward Carrington. Fisher was a Democrat and an Episcopalian. He died in Staunton, but his funeral service was held at St. James Episcopal Church in Richmond where he was buried in Hollywood Cemetery.

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