

Dickson, John Augustus ^[1]

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by William F. Massengale, 1986

4 Nov. 1795–28 Sept. 1847

John Augustus Dickson, teacher, minister, and physician, was born in Charleston, S.C., the son of Samuel and Mary Neilson Dickson. Both parents were strict [Presbyterians](#) ^[2] of Scottish descent who had emigrated from Belfast, Ireland, before the American Revolution. Although his father was a schoolmaster by profession, young Dickson was prepared for the sophomore class at Yale by Dr. John MacKay of Charleston. He was graduated from Yale in 1814 and taught in Charleston and Columbia before attending Andover Seminary in 1820 for a year of theological study. In 1821 he returned to South Carolina and married Mary Augusta Flinn of Charleston. After a year as professor of languages at the College of Charleston, he assumed the chair of moral philosophy at the same institution.

Dickson was ordained to the ministry on 20 Mar. 1825 by the Charleston Union Presbytery but a weakness of the lungs prevented him from accepting a pastorate. His poor health soon forced him to give up both preaching and teaching and led him to study medicine with his brother, the distinguished physician, [Samuel Henry Dickson](#) ^[3]. In 1832 he retired to the highlands of western North Carolina; there he spent the rest of his life practicing medicine and engaging in the ministry and education. He lived and taught in a house he had built at the junction of Biltmore Avenue and St. Dunstan's Road in Asheville.

Dickson's Asheville College for Young Women was the first school for females in [Buncombe County](#) ^[4]. A young English girl, Elizabeth Blackwell, lived in his home and taught music in his school. She decided to study medicine and received instruction from Dickson. Later through the influence of his brother Samuel, Miss Blackwell was admitted to a medical school in Geneva, N.Y., where she received the M.D. degree in 1849; she was the first woman allowed into the medical profession in this country.

Dickson assisted Dr. [Elisha Mitchell](#) ^[5] in his efforts to determine the highest peak in the Black Mountain range. He was placed in charge of one of two barometers that Mitchell used in his measurements. The one in Dickson's charge was comparable to the one Mitchell took with him on his explorations into the mountains. As Mitchell was a careful and painstaking scientist, it is safe to assume that he called on the assistance of Dickson, whom he revered for his learning.

Surviving his first wife, who was the mother of his five children, Dickson married Louisa O'Hear of Charleston in 1839. He served the First Presbyterian Church of Asheville as an assistant minister from 1843 to 1845. He died in Asheville and was buried beneath the annex of the First Presbyterian Church.

Dickson published "The Mocking Bird," in blank verse, in *Microscope* 1 (1820); "[Notices of the Mineralogy and Geology of Parts of South and North Carolina](#)" ^[6], *American Journal of Science and Arts* 3 (1821); and *The Essentials of Religion, Briefly Considered in Ten Discourses* (1827).

References:

Asheville Citizen Times, 6 Feb. 1949.

Franklin B. Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* vol. 6 (1912). ^[7]

[Dickson Family Papers \(Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill\)](#).^[8]

Additional Resources:

Phifer, Edward W. "Certain Aspects Of Medical Practice In Ante-Bellum Burke County." *North Carolina Historical Review* 36, no. 1 (January 1959). 28-46. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/north-carolina-historical-review-1959-january/3705674> ^[9] (accessed February 7, 2014).

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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Asheville ^[16]

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