

Newnan, John ^[1]



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by Rosamond Putzel, 1991

ca. 1773–1833

John Newnan, physician, was born in Salisbury, the son of Anthony Newnan, also a physician, and his wife Mary, the daughter of Hugh Montgomery, a merchant and landowner of Wilkes County ^[2]. John was educated at the Salisbury Academy ^[3] and in 1790 went to Philadelphia for medical training. His inaugural dissertation for the degree of doctor of medicine was on the topic of general dropsy (edema); dated 8 May 1793, it was dedicated to Dr. Benjamin Rush and to the Reverend Samuel E. McCorkle ^[4], who had been president of the Salisbury Academy ^[3].

For some years Newnan practiced in Salisbury, where, on 12 Feb. 1798, he married Margaret Chambers, the daughter of Maxwell and Margaret Chambers. The Newnans had four children. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the family moved to Tennessee and settled near Nashville.

Records of Newnan's professional career are limited. He applied to teach chemistry at the newly formed University of North Carolina ^[5] in 1796; his letter was received by the trustees, who deferred consideration until their next meeting, at which it apparently was not mentioned. In 1798 Newnan organized a convention of doctors. He wrote a paper, published in 1807, describing a tracheotomy to remove a bullet and noting the subsequent recovery of the patient.

He was elected to the American Philosophical Society ^[6] in 1797 and became a corresponding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society ^[7] in 1802. In his later years he published, in *The Tennessee Administration Advocate* (1828?), an article passionately supporting John Quincy Adams and denigrating Andrew Jackson. He also was the author of *A Commentary on the Roman and Spanish Statute of Frauds and Perjuries* published in Nashville in 1829. His last known writing is an essay, purportedly on forensic medicine, challenging the will of his brother-in-law, Otho Chambers. Entitled *The Case of John Newnan and Others vs. William Chambers and Others* and printed in Nashville in 1835, it refers to "the insane OTHO CHAMBERS" and to "the illegitimate alience" of D. F. Caldwell ^[8]. The illogical intensity of the last two compositions suggests a man of unpredictable thought and action. A contemporary described Newnan as a "man of extremely erratic habits."

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