

**MEMOIR OF
LUTHER V.
BELL, M. D., LL. D.**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649362325

Memoir of Luther V. Bell, M. D., LL. D. by George E. Ellis

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Cover @ 2017

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GEORGE E. ELLIS

**MEMOIR OF
LUTHER V.
BELL, M. D., LL. D.**



Arthur T. Bell.

MEMOIR

OF

LUTHER V BELL, M.D., LL.D.

PREPARED BY VOTE OF

The Massachusetts Historical Society.

BY

GEORGE E. ELLIS.

REPRINTED FROM THE "PROCEEDINGS"



BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON AND SON,
5, WATER STREET.

1863.

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At a stated meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society, held February 18, 1862, after the announcement of the death of Dr. LUTHER V BELL, and remarks by Rev. Dr. ELLIS and Hon. RICHARD FROTHINGHAM, the following Resolution was unanimously adopted:—

Resolved, That the Massachusetts Historical Society have learned with deep regret the death of their esteemed and respected associate, Hon. LUTHER V BELL, while serving in the medical staff of the army of the United States; and that Rev. GEORGE E. ELLIS, D.D., be requested to prepare the customary Memoir.

CHANDLER ROBBINS,

Recording Secretary.

MEMOIR

OF

LUTHER V BELL, M.D., LL.D.

LUTHER V BELL came of an honored parentage and a worthy ancestry. His immediate family, their kindred and associates, through several generations, were of a stock, which, while winning the bread of life by labor on the soil, contributes to society the healthful and vigorous element for all intellectual, professional, and public services. His ancestor in this country was John Bell, who was born in Ireland in 1678. The family were of the designation known among us as the "Scotch-Irish." They belonged to a colony which had migrated about the year 1612 from Argyleshire, in Scotland, to the city and neighborhood of Londonderry, the capital of the county of that name in the province of Ulster. The city was of ancient origin; and, after having suffered almost to its destruction in the early distractions and revolutions of the country, it had been rebuilt by a company of adventurers from London, in the reign of James I., who prefixed the name of their own capital to the original Derry. The emigration of Scotch Protestants to that locality had been encouraged by the liberal offer of land, extending over nearly the whole of the six northern counties, made by James I. to invite settlers, after the suppression of the Roman-Catholic rebellion in those regions. The natural animosity which sprang up between the new-comers and the old proprietors, led, thirty years after the emigration, to the rebellion in the reign of Charles I.

An addition was made, near the close of the seventeenth century, to the Scotch colony in Ireland, by families who sought refuge from the sword of Claverhouse, and whose descendants united with those of the earlier emigrants in seeking a new home in our land. During the time of Cromwell, the colony enjoyed a temporary prosperity; but the memorable "siege of Derry," in 1688 and 1689, has given to history one of the most heroic of its records, as an episode in the fearful strife which followed. Some of those with whom John Bell was associated in the emigration to this country had taken part in the defence of the city. So highly did King and Parliament appreciate their prowess, as to pass an act, exempting from taxation, throughout the British dominions, all who had, during the siege, borne arms in the city. The settlers in the New-Hampshire Londonderry shared the benefit of that act down to our own war of Independence, their farms being known as "exempt farms."*

To secure for themselves, as Presbyterians, fuller civil and religious privileges than they enjoyed under English monarchical and Episcopal rule in Ireland, the thoughts of several comparatively thriving families in the North of Ireland were turned towards this country. The arrangements for effecting their purpose were made early in 1718 by an agent whom they sent to Governor Shute, of Massachusetts; and we find the settlement in progress in Londonderry, N.H., in 1719.

John Bell, the great-grandfather of the subject of this Memoir, followed in the second company of emigrants. His name is found in a record of the distribution of lands, dated in 1720; which is supposed to have been the year of his arrival. Other lands were allotted to him in 1722 and afterwards. He was born in Ballymony, near Coleraine. He brought with him his wife (Elizabeth Todd) and children,

* See History of Londonderry, N.H., by Rev. Edward L. Parker. Boston, 1851.

and the means of making what was then regarded a comfortable start for existence in a wilderness. He shared with his townsmen the responsibilities of trust and office in the settlement; and died July 18, 1743, aged sixty-four years. His name descended to his youngest child, John Bell, born in Londonderry, Aug. 15, 1730. In this American scion of an Old-World stock were found the qualities needed for the stirring times in which he was himself to live, and for transmission to a posterity, which, like his own, has been called to service in the loftiest and most arduous tasks for the public. He was the father of two governors. He received the common education of the place and time,—the training of the home, the school, the church, and the circumstances of a frontier life. He lived on the homestead as a farmer; and married, Dec. 21, 1758, Mary Ann Gilmore, of the same Scotch-Irish stock as himself. At the age of forty-five, and then the parent of eight children, he found the Revolution opening upon him, and calling on him for service which he was ready to pay. With a strong, muscular frame, exceeding six feet in stature, and a stentorian voice, having been for twenty years the champion of the village wrestling-ring, he would still, notwithstanding his age and numerous family, have entered the ranks, had he not been needed in civil office. He was town-clerk, and a member of the Committee of Safety, when he was elected a member of the Provincial Congress which met at Exeter, Dec. 21, 1775; a body which, the next year, necessarily assumed the functions of independent government. He was frequently re-elected to the same representation. In 1776, he was appointed a muster-master; and, in 1780, colonel of the eighth regiment of militia. From 1786 to 1791, he was a senator under the new Constitution of the State. Besides being a Special Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, he, of course, bore the various trusts of moderator, selectman, justice of the peace, elder of the church, guardian and administrator. His fourth son, John,

born July 20, 1765, engaged in trade; represented Londonderry in the Legislature; removed to Chester, where he spent the remainder of his life; and was successively senator, councillor, Sheriff of Rockingham County, and Governor of the State in 1828. He died in March, 1836. He was one of a family of twelve children, only three of whom outlived their parents. The mother died in 1822, aged eighty-six; the father, in 1825, aged ninety-five. The fifth son of John Bell, 2d, — Samuel, the father of our present subject, — was born Feb. 9, 1770; sharing a common-school education in the winter, and the labors of his father's farm in the summer. His strong entreaties and his own efforts obtained for him the privilege of a college course. He graduated at Dartmouth in 1793; studied law with the Hon. Samuel Dana, of Amherst, N.H.; and was admitted to the bar in 1796, rising at once to distinction. He married in November, 1797, Mehitable Bowen Dana, daughter of his law-tutor. She died in August, 1810; leaving four sons and two daughters. He practised law at Francesstown and at Amherst. Samuel Bell besides being appointed Attorney-General of the State (which office he declined), was successively a member and speaker of the House of Representatives, a member and president of the Senate, and one of the five Executive Councillors. A temporary release from public duties being necessary on account of declining health, he regained his vigor by spending portions of several years in excursions on horseback. He was appointed an Associate Justice of the Superior Court on the re-organization of the State Judiciary in 1816, and discharged his duties with eminent ability till his election as Chief Magistrate of the State in 1819. He served as Governor four years, and then declined re-election. In 1822, and again in 1828, Governor Bell was chosen to the Senate of the United States, and retired from public life in 1835. He had married a second time, in 1826, Lucy Smith, daughter of Jonathan Smith, Esq., of Amherst, and niece of his first wife;