

**WILLIAM BARTON ROGERS:  
FOUNDER OF THE  
MASSACHUSETTS  
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**

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William Barton Rogers: Founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by James  
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**JAMES PHINNEY MUNROE**

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WILLIAM BARTON ROGERS,

FOUNDER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF  
TECHNOLOGY

In the usual connotation of the title the founder of the Institute of Technology was the Commonwealth itself; for the State's gift of land, together with its allotment of one-third of the so-called Morrill Land Grant to the institution, made tangible the vision of a school of applied science which had long existed in the minds of certain enthusiastic and far-seeing men. This relationship to the State is fitly recognized by the word "Massachusetts" in the name of the Institute, and by the presence of the Governor, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the Secretary of the Board of Education upon its Corporation.

Gratefully, however, as every Institute man acknowledges the early and continued favor of the Commonwealth, the true founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is, without question, its first President, William Barton Rogers, that eminent geologist who for twenty-five years used the whole force of his broad mind, of his rare foresight, of his signal executive ability, of his unusual eloquence, of his extraordinary powers of persuasion, in planning, establishing and building up the school to which he gave, at last, life itself.

Professor Rogers threw himself into the task of upbuild-

ing the Institute of Technology as few men have devoted themselves to any similar undertaking. He lived for the school alone, and inspired those about him to work with almost equal self-forgetfulness. He was zealous, indefatigable, courageous, enthusiastic, no less intellectually than morally honest. He drew around him a board of trustees having like qualities; together they created a faculty similarly inspired; and by them were sent out, from the beginning, students fired with kindred courage and intellectual integrity. Coincidentally with its very founding, therefore, appeared that "Technology Spirit" which, indefinable in words, is to-day recognized as a distinctive attribute of Institute men.

To write of Rogers, then, as its founder is to go to the very source of the Institute's success. He did much other work of importance besides that of establishing the School of Industrial Science, but this was his greatest and most enduring achievement. Therefore, in the eyes of Institute men, he is peculiarly theirs; therefore this memorial of him will lay special stress upon that side of his career. As a consequence, it will present but an imperfect impression of the life of Professor Rogers as a whole. It will dwell upon those phases of his character, thought and acts which bear especially upon the Institute of Technology, passing over entirely or with inadequate notice those many other interests which made him one of the broadest men of his generation. No permanent loss can result from such a partial view, for in the "Life and Letters"\* is to be found that well-rounded picture of President Rogers which history demands.

One hundred years ago, on the seventh day of December,

\*Edited by Mrs. Rogers with the assistance of Professor Sedgwick. Published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1896. To these two volumes the present memoir is almost wholly indebted for its facts.

1804, William Barton Rogers was born in the city of Philadelphia, at 262 North Second Street. His father, Patrick Kerr Rogers, from the north of Ireland, near Londonderry, was the eldest son of Robert Rogers, a gentleman of some estate, and his wife Sarah (Kerr) Rogers. Patrick Rogers entered a counting-house in Dublin to be trained to a mercantile life, but at the time of the rebellion of 1798 wrote articles hostile to the government, and was forced to flee to America, reaching Philadelphia in August of that year.

Although but twenty-two years of age, and a stranger except for his acquaintance with the many other Irish refugees in that city, he was within a few months appointed a tutor in the University of Pennsylvania. In the following winter he entered the Pennsylvania Hospital as a student and while still there married Hannah Blythe,—also from Londonderry, though of Scotch descent,—who had come with her sisters to Philadelphia in 1794. In February, 1802, their eldest son was born, and in May of that year Mr. Rogers received the degree of Doctor of Medicine from the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1803, Robert Rogers, the father, having died, his son was obliged to return to Ireland to settle the family estate. The property having, however, to be divided among twelve children, Dr. Patrick Rogers inherited only enough to pay off the debts which he had contracted in securing a medical education and in establishing a household. Moreover, his long absence proved disastrous to his professional success; for he had not established, before his departure to Ireland, a medical reputation sufficient to hold his patients. Therefore, to eke out his income, he started, upon his return, a medical library which, for lack of patronage, only added to his financial burdens. Thus weighed down, he deemed it wise to remove to Baltimore and to start afresh.



There, for the seven years between 1812 and 1819, he carried on a hard struggle against poverty,—a struggle painfully shared by his family and from which the sons were not to emerge for many years.

While in Philadelphia, Dr. Patrick Rogers had delivered several courses of lectures with much success, and it is clear that he felt himself better fitted, as indeed he was, for teaching than for the work of a practitioner. In 1819 this special aptitude came at last to be recognized, and he was invited to the chair of Natural Philosophy and Chemistry in the College of William and Mary—next to Harvard the oldest in the United States—at Williamsburg, Va. Agreeable as this change was, it proved disastrous to the health of all the family. So malarial was the climate that within one year Mrs. Rogers died, and within nine years Dr. Rogers himself succumbed, despite the fact that, as soon as his teaching duties would permit, the whole family every summer left Williamsburg for a more healthful locality.

Patrick Kerr and Hannah (Blythe) Rogers had seven children, of whom four survived. These four all became eminent as men of science and were known, familiarly, as the "Brothers Rogers." Interesting as it would be to follow the career of each one, it is possible simply to summarize the lives of the eldest and the two youngest, making afterwards only such fragmentary references to them as the close relationship of his brothers to William Barton Rogers may require.

The eldest son, James Blythe, was graduated in medicine, at Baltimore, in 1822, practised his profession in Maryland for a few years, and was then a manufacturing chemist and subsequently a lecturer on chemistry in Baltimore. Thence he went to Cincinnati, where he was for four years Professor of Chemistry in the Cincinnati College



*H. E. Rogers*



*James Rogers*



*Henry Rogers*

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