

= Charles McKnight =

Charles McKnight (October 10 , 1750 ? November 16 , 1791) was an American physician during and after the American Revolutionary War . He served as a surgeon and physician in the Hospital Department of the Continental Army under General George Washington and other subordinate commanders . McKnight was one of the most respected surgeons of his day and was remembered by one colleague as " particularly distinguished as a practical surgeon ? at the time of his death (he) was without a rival in that branch of his profession . "

= = Early life = =

McKnight was born in Cranbury Township in the colonial Province of New Jersey in 1750 . His only sibling was his younger brother , Richard . His father , also named Charles McKnight , emigrated to the colonies from Ireland sometime around 1740 and was ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1742 . He became a minister of some note , and was one of the founders and trustees of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) . Reverend McKnight opposed British governance in Colonial America and was a loud voice for opposition and overthrow of the British government in New Jersey . According to Martha J. Lamb , Reverend McKnight received a severe saber cut to his head in the slashing melee that mortally wounded General Hugh Mercer at the Battle of Princeton . His church at Middletown Point was burned in 1777 and Reverend McKnight was arrested . While in custody aboard the British prison ship HMS Jersey in New York City , Rev. McKnight 's health rapidly failed , and he was released shortly before his death on January 1 , 1778 .

The younger McKnight attended schools in New Jersey and graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1771 , in the same class as James Madison , Gunning Bedford , Jr . , Henry Brackenridge , and Philip Freneau . He was one of the founders of the American Whig Society , along with Brackenridge , Madison , Samuel Stanhope Smith , Bedford , Freneau , John Beatty , John Henry of Maryland , and William Bradford . McKnight studied medicine and surgery privately with eminent Philadelphia surgeon William Shippen , but left before he completed his studies and entered the Continental Army in 1775 .

= = Continental Army surgeon = =

In late 1775 , Benjamin Church , the Director General , assigned McKnight to the Putnam House building , one of six hospitals of the army 's Hospital Department in Cambridge , Massachusetts . He remained in that division , which supported Washington 's army , until , during a period of great scarcity of medical and surgical supplies for the sick and wounded , McKnight went with other surgeons and physicians to North Castle , New York with Washington 's army when the Battle of White Plains began in October 1776 . The Continental Army lost the battle , and the British took Fort Washington and Fort Lee , which pushed Washington 's ragged army south toward New Jersey in December 1776 , which set the stage for the Battle of Trenton .

McKnight remained at North Castle until John Morgan , the Director General , ordered him and Samuel Adams , Jr . (the son of Samuel Adams of Massachusetts) to set up a new hospital near Peekskill , New York , for more than 300 sick soldiers of General William Heath 's division . Unable to find an acceptable site for a hospital , the two surgeons took over accommodations in Fishkill , New York , twenty miles north of Peekskill . Washington , however , sent convalescents to Peekskill because Morgan told him the hospital was there . Morgan was dismissed as Director General soon thereafter , in January 1777 , due to rancor with Washington over supplies and a rampant smallpox epidemic then raging its way through the army . Morgan 's management style rankled the surgeons , including McKnight , as Morgan was wrestling with Shippen , McKnight 's mentor , over control of the hospitals in New Jersey . Isaac Foster took over temporary supervision of the hospitals on the east side of the Hudson River after Morgan 's dismissal at Washington 's request .

McKnight served later as a surgeon in the Pennsylvania Battalion of the Flying Camp . On April 11 ,

1777 , He was appointed Surgeon General (also called Senior Surgeon , a subordinate position to Physician General and Director General , not to be confused with Surgeon General of the United States Army) of the Flying Hospital of the Middle Department , which moved with the army during the New York and New Jersey campaign . He served as Senior Surgeon for three years . In December 1779 , McKnight was in Morristown , New Jersey with Washington , at the encampment near Jockey Hollow , during the worst winter of the Revolutionary War .

The Hospital Department of the army was reorganized in 1780 , and McKnight was promoted to Chief Hospital Physician , the highest medical position of the Middle Department . He served there until he left the army in January 1782 . According to records , he was one of the original members of the New York State Society of the Cincinnati .

= = Later years and death = =

After the war ended , McKnight settled in New York City , where he married Mary Morin Scott , daughter of General John Morin Scott . He opened a private practice and was one of the first physicians to use a carriage to visit his patients . McKnight published only one article , the surgical removal of an ectopic pregnancy , but the piece was cited later by the Medical Society of London in its London Medical Observations and Inquiries .

On November 26 , 1784 , McKnight was appointed one of the first regents of the University of the State of New York . In 1785 , McKnight became professor of anatomy and surgery at Columbia College (now the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons) , which his father @-@ in @-@ law co @-@ founded . He also was appointed Port Physician of New York . McKnight maintained a steady surgical practice and held his professorship until his death from pneumonia , the result of an old war injury , on November 16 , 1791 at age 41 .

McKnight was interred at the corner of Wall Street and Broadway in Lower Manhattan , just beyond the gates of the historic Trinity Churchyard , next to his wife , Mary , and her father . They left four daughters and one son , John Morin Scott McKnight , who also became a physician .