

— HISTORY —

Physician Howard Knox made contributions

Through the medium of the World Wide Web, threadcity.com has introduced Windham and Willimantic to a worldwide audience, resulting in many requests for information about Windham residents of old, its frogs and mills.

One such inquiry came from John Richardson, a psychology lecturer at England's Brunel University regarding Windham-educated physician Dr. Howard A. Knox (1885-1949), who played an important role in the early development of psychological tests. Richardson is compiling Knox's biography, and wanted to know more about his family, and the Connecticut town where he attended high school.

Howard Andrew Knox was born in Romeo, Mich., in 1885, the son of Howard Reuben Knox, a traveling salesman, and Jennie Mahaffy Knox, the daughter of Irish immigrants. The couple divorced, and in 1894 Jennie married physician Dr. Leander Blackwell (1867-1904), and Blackwell adopted her 9-year-old son Howard Knox.

Blackwell was born in Blackwell, Mo., on Dec. 26, 1867, and was the grandson of Jeremiah Blackwell (1783-1855), a New Jersey native and founder of the town of Blackwell in 1818. Leander Blackwell had left his

hometown in 1888 to study medicine at the Missouri Medical College.

Blackwell practiced medicine in Cleveland, Ohio, for a while before taking up business opportunities in Massachusetts. He subsequently settled in Windham in 1899 with his wife and stepson, purchasing a farm from Joseph Spencer at Babcock Hill Road on the Windham-Lebanon border.

Abandoning medicine, Leander Blackwell enjoyed his new profession of gentleman farmer. His stepson, Howard Knox, graduated from Windham high school with the Class of 1903, and with his stepfather's encouragement left Windham to study medicine at Dartmouth College Hanover, N.H., where he specialized in psychiatry.

However, shortly afterwards, disaster hit the family. At 5:30 a.m. on the freezing cold morning of Jan. 15, 1904, Leander Blackwell set out with a two-horse sled loaded with milk churns and delivered them to the South Windham railroad depot on the Hartford and Providence railroad.

From there he drove back across the bridge to the Central Vermont depot, where he loaded his transport sled with several bags of grain from a box car that stood on

a side track. Blackwell then drove out from the rear of the station and crossed the tracks just as a freight train came speeding through the crossing.

The locomotive hit Blackwell's sled head on, demolishing it. The farmer-physician saw the train coming and whipped his horses, but it was too late.

One horse was cut loose from the sled and pushed to one side, and the other was thrown in front of the engine and disembowelled.

Blackwell did not fare much better. He received the full force of the collision, and his body was terribly mutilated.

The bags of grain were torn open and the contents scattered all along the track for several hundred yards. The locomotive's engineer believed Blackwell had heard his train's whistle, but mistook it for the whistle of a freight train on the adjacent road that passed about the same time.

Dr. White, Windham's medical examiner, examined Blackwell on the site, and gave permission for his remains to be taken to an



Tom Beardsley

undertaker's office in Willimantic. A *Chronicle* reporter followed Dr. White to South Windham and found that the busy railroad crossing at South Windham was unattended.

An electric bell was supposed to ring before a train reached the crossing, but it rang very faintly. Moreover, a train crossed while he was there and the bell had failed to ring.

Blackwell's stepson, Howard Knox, was informed, and he returned home from Dartmouth College to help his mother make preparations for the funeral.

After their tragic loss, the Knox family left Windham, but Blackwell's stepson went on to enjoy a prestigious military and medical career.

Dr. Knox served as an assistant surgeon in the U.S. Public Health Service between April 1912 and May 1916 and worked at the immigration station at Ellis Island, N.Y.

Here, Knox and his colleagues compiled performance tests that included the early use of ink blot shapes, which were administered to non-English speaking immigrants.

The tests were subsequently used in clinical practice and in educational, psychological, and social research. Because of

Knox's work at Ellis Island, it is nowadays taken for granted that any adequate measure of intelligence must include both verbal and performance subtests.



Lt. Howard Knox, pictured in 1908, was the post surgeon at Fort Michie on Great Gull Island, which is 12 miles from New London on Long Island Sound.

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