



*Dr. Christopher Widmer played a leading role in the establishment of York General Hospital, and was considered the father of surgery in Upper Canada. He was a member of the first Medical Licensing Board. During the years immediately following the War of 1812 he was one of the few qualified doctors in York.*



*Dr. James Miranda Barry, who became Inspector General of Hospitals in the Canadas in 1857. When she died in 1865, it was discovered that she was a woman.*

There were many dedicated and intelligent doctors and lay people who contributed much to medicine during the early years of health care in Upper Canada. A startling example was Dr. James Miranda Barry. After a busy and distinguished career throughout the world, this small, delicately built, unassuming doctor was appointed Inspector General of Hospitals in the Canadas in 1857. Dr. Barry found serious sanitary problems in the military posts at Kingston and Toronto as well as Quebec. In one instance, troops were using the urine tubs to wash in and were developing eye infections as a result.

Dr. Barry's advanced ideas about sanitation and health led to changes in sewage and drainage systems. The doctor introduced water pipes in place of the wells that froze in the winter and recommended changes in diet which provided more fresh meat in place of salt pork and boiled beef.

Widespread drunkenness among the troops was thought to stem from a lack of separate accommodations for married men and their families. The doctor suggested that a room for each family would diminish the problem of intemperance.

Dr. Barry called for libraries with a good selection of books for the soldiers.

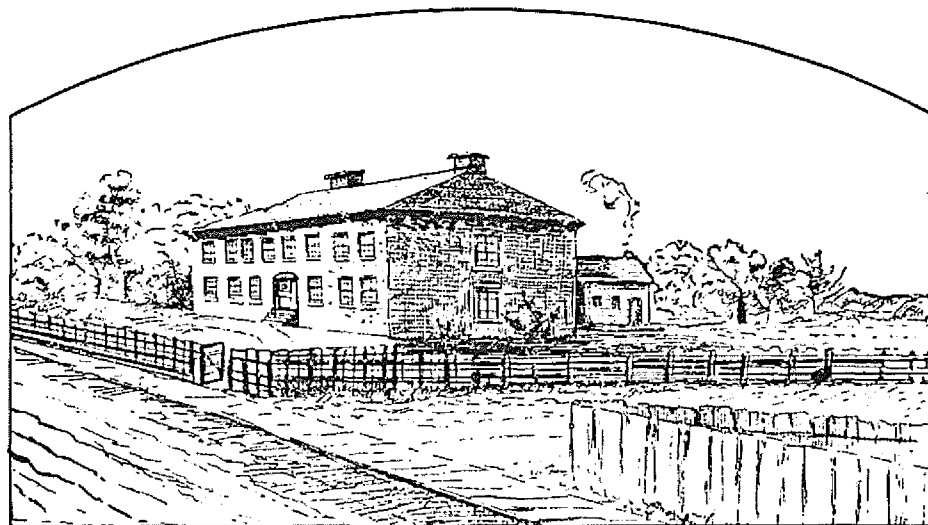
In 1859, the climate and overwork forced Dr. Barry to return to England. The doctor died in 1865, and only then was the deep secret of Dr. James Miranda Barry discovered. She was a woman!

Disguised as a young man, she had enrolled at Edinburgh University in 1809 at the age of 10. By her decision to dedicate her life to medicine, a profession that was not accessible to women in the early 19th Century, Dr. Barry had sacrificed both family life and close friendships.

By the time of her death, Dr. Barry had been joined in the health care field by such devoted women as Florence Nightingale and her nurses of the Crimean Hospitals.

Dr. Barry had not been alone in her concern about sanitation and the purity of drinking water in the mid-1800's. As a result of filthy living conditions and contamination, the colony and much of the western world had been ravaged by cholera.

In 1832, the first major cholera epidemic struck the young colony of Upper Canada. It had been preceded by outbreaks of smallpox and malaria, and, in 1829, by an epidemic of measles that left many children dead. But cholera was virulent and highly infectious, a killer like no other.



*York General Hospital, which became Toronto General Hospital in 1834, was first located on the north west corner of King and John Streets. Funded by the Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada, the two-story red brick building housed the legislature from 1825 to 1828.*