

August 9: Birthdate of one of Williamsburg's more unusual and not very fortunate characters, whose story is long and colorful. Dr. Roswell Smith **Hillman** (1815-1896), physician, m. (1) 1839 Ruth S. White (1816-1879).

Trained early as a cobbler, Roswell was always interested in medicine and studied it "on the side." Already having begun a practice in Searsville by the middle 1840s, he left his wife and two children here about that time to attend a medical college in Cincinnati, and received his diploma in May 1848.

On 6/22/1852, the Northampton Gazette reported that on June 6, Ruth had deserted Dr. Hillman and their three young children by "eloping" with a Jack Vining, formerly of Hatfield, who had been living in the Hillman household and who, with an unnamed brother, was "considerably notorious in 'spiritual rapping' operations in Williamsburg." Ruth Hillman was soon afterward seen in Vining's company in Deerfield and Greenfield, dressed as a man and passing as his servant. The Gazette of 9/21/1852 reported that the two had returned to Williamsburg, Ruth still dressed as a man; that they had lived in Rutland, VT during the intervening months; that Vining had eluded efforts to capture him here; and that Dr. Hillman had "applied for a divorce."

A week later on 9/28, the Gazette carried a one-paragraph story of Ruth's appearance before a judge in Northampton "on a charge of dressing in male attire." She was discharged on paying costs of \$11.33 and a \$50 surety "to keep the peace and be of good behavior."

Roswell and Ruth were apparently reconciled rather than divorced after the Vining affair, and lived together until her death. The census of 1860 found them in Skinnerville (where he owned a sizable farm on the south side of the river, opposite his home) with a household consisting of son William (James William), dau. Louisa, Ruth's mother Eunice White, 63 (who died the following

year); servant Julia Carpenter, 40, and mill operative Charles Bodman, 20.

The 1860-61 Gere history of Wmsb. had this to say about Dr. Hillman: "Roswell S. Hillman, botanic physician; a native of Williamsburg, commenced practice in Haydenville in 1853, where he still continues. Dr. Hillman has attained a highly respectable position as a practitioner, and has a numerous class of patrons, scattered over a wide range of country."

In 1866 he gave up his successful but very strenuous medical practice and moved to Manchester, NJ to raise fruits and vegetables and recover his badly strained health. There he encountered a long series of the financial reversals that often plague farmers, and he lost most of his considerable savings.

Ruth's death in 1879 was the final blow; it hit him very hard. Her inscription on Roswell's gravestone in Williamsburg says she was buried in Manchester (as was their daughter Louisa Hillman Cowing, the year before her mother).

During his stay in NJ, Roswell regaled his MA relatives with remarkable letters, many of them written partly or wholly in rhymed verse, chronicling the ups and downs of his life there with humor and ingenuity. Many of those letters are reproduced in "Ancestral Chronological Record of the Hillman Family, 1550-1905," compiled by Roswell's grandson Harry W. Hillman (The Walsh Press, Schenectady, NY, 1905), of which I obtained a photocopy from RSH descendant Rev. Charles G. Hankins of Whiting, NJ.

The census of 1880 found Roswell, a widower, living temporarily in the household of his brother Jerome in Wmsb. He then lived with his son for a while in Northampton, and m. (2) 1888 in N'hamp., as her 2nd husband, nurse Hattie E. Guilford (1839-1892), b. Ashfield, d/o Manley & Louisa (Amsden) Guilford and sister of Fanny Guilford Clary of the Clary Farm, later and now again called the Snow Farm, in Searsville). It may have been

soon afterward that they moved back to Searsville for a time, and sometime during the 1880s Dr. Hillman resumed his medical practice. When Hattie's estate was probated in 1892, her place of residence was listed as Northampton, and Roswell is known to have spent his last few years living once again at his son's home there.