

[about the document: Dr. Joseph D. Harris wrote this brief essay as a part of his application to be hired/commissioned as a surgeon in the Union Army. It was written in 1864]

A Sketch of Autobiography

I am an American by birth, the English language is therefore my mother tongue. My education is English and French or better American and French. I have resided in Haiti, West Indies.

In the West Indies it is necessary to know something of fever. I made it a study. But no Medical Colleges are established there and [cut extra phrase] generally those who are destined to become physicians go to France. I returned to America.

Dr. M.L. Brooks of Cleveland, Ohio was my preceptor. He was in charge of the Marine Hospital at that place wherein I enjoyed many advantages.

The Medical Department of the Western Reserve College or Cleveland College is established in that city and I was instructed in Chemistry by Professor Cassells, a celebrated chemist. Dr. Kirkland was the Professor Emeritus of the Theory and Practice of Medicine and Dr. Cushing was the Professor of Surgery. From all these gentlemen I have letters of high recommendation. I went to Iowa. While there I attended the lectures of the Professors at "The Medical Department of Iowa University" whose ideas of medicine are more modern than those of Western Reserve College and consequently more correct. I took my diploma there.

From thence I came to Washington City, D.C. I had letters of high recommendation taken to Senators Harlan and Grimes and to Representative Wilson. Not willing just then to enter the service for three years without knowing whether it would be agreeable, I asked the position of Acting Assistant Surgeon and I was offered a place as such at either Fort Monroe or Portsmouth. I preferred the latter. The contract is dated June 23, 1864. Immediately at my arrival at Balfour Hospital in Portsmouth, I was assigned to a ward in which there were about one hundred patients. Soon afterward, I was placed in charge of an additional ward nearly as large as the first. When I quit there to come here I was in charge of three wards.

In a testimonial of my services the patients and attendants have purchased Gross Surgery to be presented me as you will see by my accompanying papers. A letter from D. O. Warner, a most excellent gentleman and an Associate Surgeon is also submitted herewith.

J. D Harris