

Horatio Robinson Storer (1830–1922)

Horatio Robinson Storer was a surgeon and anti-abortion activist in the 1800s who worked in the field of women's reproductive health and led the Physicians' Crusade Against Abortion in the US. Historians credit Storer as being one of the first physicians to distinguish gynecology, the study of diseases affecting women and their reproductive health, as a separate subject from obstetrics, the study of pregnancy and childbirth. Storer was one of the first physicians to successfully perform a Caesarian section, or the removal of the fetus through a surgical incision, followed by the removal of the woman's uterus, a procedure which would later be known as Porro's operation. Storer was also an anti-abortion activist who believed that public attitudes toward abortion were too relaxed and that the laws did not effectively punish what he deemed to be the criminal act of abortion. Historians credit Storer with leading the Physicians' Crusade Against Abortion, which they consider largely responsible for the increase in laws criminalizing abortion in the late 1800s.

Storer was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 27 February 1830 to Abby Jane Brewer and David Humphreys Storer. His father was a professor at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he taught obstetrics and medical law. Storer attended secondary school at the Boston Latin School, an elite public school, from 1841 to 1846. He then attended Harvard University as an undergraduate. While at Harvard, he was president of the Harvard Natural History Society and he spent a summer studying abroad in Russia. In 1850, he accompanied naturalist Jeffries Wyman on a scientific expedition to Nova Scotia and Labrador in Canada, after which Storer published his first book, *Observations on the Fishes of Nova Scotia and Labrador, with Descriptions of New Species*. Storer graduated from Harvard University with a bachelor of arts degree in 1850.

After completing his degree, Storer studied medicine as an apprentice to his father at Tremont Medical University in Boston, Massachusetts. He then entered Harvard Medical School, receiving his diploma in 1853. While at Harvard, he completed an apprenticeship in obstetrics studying under physician Walter Channing, who, upon Storer's graduation, provided him with a letter of introduction to gynecologist James Young Simpson, who worked in Edinburgh, Scotland, at the time. Both men were studying the uses of anesthetics for women during delivery, with Simpson previously identifying chloroform as an anesthetic to numb pain or induce unconsciousness in patients in 1847, and Channing publishing support for its use in pregnant women in 1848. In a later reflection, Storer stated that he did not think he was worthy of working with Simpson, referring to him as the head of all living gynecologists of the time. Storer traveled to Europe after graduating medical school, first visiting hospitals in Paris, France, and London, England, before arriving in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1853. Upon arriving, Simpson required Storer to prove his medical knowledge before accepting him as an apprentice, a job Storer executed until 1855. Simpson sent Storer back to the US with the golden inkwell that Storer had used to transcribe Simpson's dictations throughout his apprenticeship.

In 1855, Storer returned to Boston, and began practicing medicine and became a lecturer at Harvard University. As a lecturer, Storer taught gynecology as its own subject, separate from the field of obstetrics, in order to focus specifically on the diseases and overall healthcare specific to women. At the time, obstetrics was one of the only woman-focused healthcare options, centering only on care related to pregnancy and childbirth. Storer was one of the first physicians in the US to teach gynecology separate from obstetrics. He taught a semi-annual course at Harvard about women's diseases and healthcare to medical graduates affiliated with the American Medical Association, or the AMA. As a medical practitioner and surgeon, Storer focused mostly on women's reproductive health and diseases and, along with three other physicians, performed the majority of ovariectomies at the time in the United States and Canada. Ovariectomies are surgeries which involved the re-

removal of a woman's ovaries. In 1856, Storer joined the AMA, which had only been operating for twelve years at the time. He joined as a representative for the Boston Lying-In Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, a charity hospital dedicated to women's healthcare.

Aside from his work as a gynecologist, Storer also began advocating against abortion, or the deliberate termination of a pregnancy. In 1857, Storer helped start the movement which would later be called the Physicians' Crusade Against Abortion. In May 1857, only a year after joining the AMA, Storer created a committee to investigate what he called criminal abortions within Suffolk County in Massachusetts. The committee, led by Storer, produced an initial report detailing the county laws against criminal abortion and suggested legislation necessary to further curtail the practice. Through the report, Storer conveyed his belief that abortion in all instances was a criminal act and that the law did not go far enough to punish that alleged crime.

Initially, many physicians criticized Storer for his anti-abortion practices. Some physicians argued that the issue of abortion was too ambiguous and complex for him to take such a forceful stand upon. One anonymous critic accused him of disregarding the lives and well-being of the pregnant women implicated in abortion. Other critics were mainly concerned with Storer's proposed changes to Massachusetts law which might have illegalized some of the activities they performed as physicians. However, many medical societies and physicians around the country soon came to Storer's defense and endorsed his positions. Eventually, according to historian James Mohr, his critics relented.

At the annual AMA meeting in 1857, Storer took his advocacy efforts to a national scale by urging the AMA and its members to support him and his campaign against abortion. The AMA appointed Storer to chair the Committee on Criminal Abortion, consisting of some of what they suggested were the most prominent anti-abortion activists and physicians during that time. The AMA tasked the committee with drafting a formal position paper on abortion that the AMA could adopt as its official stance. Storer authored the committee's report, which the AMA adopted in 1859. After the North-American Medico-Chirurgical Review published the committee's report in 1859, the publishing group J.B. Lippincott & Co. published the report as a book, titled *On Criminal Abortion in America*, in 1860.

In *On Criminal Abortion in America*, Storer and his committee asserted that abortion was a criminal and immoral act in the vast majority of cases, except in rare instances when the life of the pregnant woman was at stake and could not be saved by any other medical intervention. Storer aimed to sway public opinion against abortion, push for increased legal restrictions, and place regular physicians on a higher professional and moral level than other medical practitioners. He came to that conclusion by arguing that life must begin at conception rather than at quickening, or the point at which the pregnant woman can first detect fetal movements. He argued that the fetus could not be considered dead before quickening and therefore must be considered alive, and that abortion was murder because it involved willingly terminating a life in its early stages of existence. Storer asserted that existing abortion laws at the state and national levels made it impossible for the majority of people who performed or received an abortion to be convicted of any crime, since the laws only punished those who performed or received an abortion after quickening. According to Storer, it was rare for medical professionals to perform abortions at such a late stage in pregnancy. He concluded that it was physicians' duties to generally suppress the practice of abortion wherever they could.

The AMA adopted Storer's conclusions drawn within *On Criminal Abortion in America*, shortly after its publication, which remained official AMA policy until 1967. Physicians in the nineteenth century sought to institutionalize medical practice and to establish their professional status in the medical field. According to historian Charles R. King, many physicians also intended to establish their higher intellectual and moral authority over other medical professionals such as midwives and abortion practitioners, whom physicians often saw as irregular practitioners at the time. The Physicians' Crusade Against Abortion, led largely by Storer, was a part of a larger push for professionalization, according to King. King identified the AMA's adoption of Storer's *On Criminal Abortion in America* as reflective of a shift from what was a professional campaign by physicians against abortion practitioners to a moral campaign against abortions. Also, according to political scientist James Morone, the AMA adopted Storer's position as a way to establish physicians as a leading authority on women's healthcare over midwives, who were almost always women at the

time. Storer later claimed that he condemned women who provided medical care, asserting the practice would remove women from what he called their proper and God-given sphere.

Particularly, Storer advocated for legislation that would recognize the rights of what he called the unborn child, meaning, the fetus, thereby placing more responsibility and criminal liability on women who chose to have an abortion. Previous legislation had placed legal responsibility primarily on the physician for performing the criminal abortion. Advocating for a shift in legislation also served to boost physicians' moral credibility, as observed by historian Ryan Johnson. The Physicians' Crusade Against Abortion, which Storer largely led, coincided with an increase in legislation criminalizing abortion and penalizing abortion practitioners throughout the nineteenth century. In 1860, after the AMA adopted Storer's position in *On Criminal Abortion in America* as official policy, Connecticut passed a law making abortion a felony and holding both the woman and the physician responsible for the criminalized act. According to author Frederick Dyer, the Connecticut law set the standard for subsequent legislation restricting abortion access in states across the United States.

According to historian Janet Farrell Brodie, after the AMA adopted his position, Storer persuaded the AMA to sponsor a writing contest with a cash prize going to whomever wrote a short essay detailing the criminality and perceived evils associated with abortion, designed for physicians to circulate to their female patients. After the AMA agreed to sponsor the contest, Storer submitted an anonymous essay, titled "The Criminality and Physical Evils of Forced Abortion." In 1865, the AMA named Storer as the winner of the contest, though Brodie noted that Storer's father, the chairman of the AMA at the time, was also one of four judges who determined the winner. The AMA published that essay as a pamphlet in 1866 with the revised title, *Why Not? A Book for Every Woman*, which circulated widely among the American public.

Whereas Storer focused on his personal scientific perspective of abortion in *On Criminal Abortion in America*, he used *Why Not? A Book for Every Woman* to make a more emotional appeal to the American public. In the pamphlet, Storer argued that abortion is, in all cases, a crime against the life of the unborn child, against the life of the pregnant woman, against natural instincts, and against morality and the greater public interest. Storer gave a strong rebuke to what he saw as the lenient anti-abortion laws of the time period and criticized those who supported the practice of abortion. He also simplistically appealed to fact by noting that physicians could detect fetal sounds prior to the point of quickening as evidence of fetal life. Storer argued that abortion was so dangerous that the public should consider any woman who requested, permitted, or performed an abortion to be insane. After mentioning that married women were more likely to seek an abortion, he asserted that married women had a moral obligation to reproduce, stating that the American Civil War, which ended in 1865, had caused devastating population losses. In his pamphlet, Storer blamed every social vice including ignorance, lust, selfishness, loose morals, and insanity for the continued practice of abortion among many women.

In 1865, Storer delivered a lecture to the AMA called "On the Origins of Insanity in Women," in which he argued that in women, the uterus and ovaries could either cause or amplify symptoms of insanity, and that ovariectomy, the removal of a woman's ovaries, was a potential treatment option for insanity in women. At the time, gynecologists typically performed ovariectomies on women with diseases such as ovarian cysts or tumors, but the idea that the ovaries and menstruation caused a variety of behavioral changes in women, including insanity, was popular among physicians in the nineteenth century, as observed by historian John Studd. The Gynecological Society of Boston later published "On the Origins of Insanity in Women" as *The Causation, Course, and Treatment of Reflex Insanity in Women* in 1871. However, performing ovariectomies on women in order to cure their perceived insanity did not popularize among physicians until the late nineteenth century, according to Studd. By the end of the nineteenth century, physicians largely criticized the practice of removing healthy ovaries to treat non-gynecological diseases, disproving the ideas behind such procedures.

In 1865, Storer was appointed the Chair of Obstetrics and Medical Jurisprudence at Berkshire Medical College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He held that position until the school closed in 1869. From 1866 to 1868, Storer studied at Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, obtaining a law degree in 1868, enabling him to teach courses on medical law.

Throughout the 1860s, Storer continued to publish articles about his views on abortion and reproductive health. In 1867, Storer published a companion book to *Why Not?* for men, entitled *Is It I? A Book for Every Man*. It covered topics such as sexual health and disease, the proposed advantages of marriage, men's innate desire for companionship, and ideas of moral purity. In 1868, he published *Criminal Abortion: Its Nature, Its Evidence, and Its Law* as a companion to *On Criminal Abortion in America*. That book focused more on the legal aspects of abortion, the inadequacies that Storer saw in then current abortion laws, and Storer's suggestions for their improvement. Storer continued to advocate for criminalization of abortion within the AMA for the rest of his career.

While Storer continued to advocate against abortion, he continued treating patients. In 1868, Storer became one of the first physicians to perform what would later be known as Porro's operation, which was a Caesarian section followed by the removal of a woman's uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes, all of which are structures of the female reproductive system. Storer performed a Caesarian section on one of his patients, a woman who had a large tumor blocking her birth canal. A Caesarian section involves the use of surgery to deliver an infant when vaginal delivery would put the woman or infant at risk. When Storer's patient began to bleed severely, he performed an emergency hysterectomy, or the removal of the woman's uterus after delivering the infant. The infant survived the procedure, but the woman died three days later. Though Storer performed the procedure several years before Italian physician Eduardo Porro, who performed it in 1876, Storer's hysterectomy was an emergency decision and his patient ultimately did not survive. However, Porro planned the procedure in advance and successfully executed the operation. Because Porro was the first surgeon to plan and successfully execute such an operation and because both the woman and infant survived, the procedure came to be known as Porro's operation.

In 1869, Storer was one of the founders of the Gynecological Society of Boston, which focused on diseases that affected women. Storer also worked as the editor of the society's journal, the *Journal of the Gynecological Society of Boston*, for the four years of the journal's existence. Storer frequently published his anti-abortion views in the journal and published articles by other physicians on the subject of criminal abortion, as well. Throughout the rest of his life, Storer continued to involve himself in the anti-abortion movement he heavily supported and publicized. Throughout the late nineteenth century, almost every state across the US adopted anti-abortion legislation recognizing the rights of fetuses and penalizing women who chose to have an abortion, a movement which historians attribute to Storer's Physicians' Crusade Against Abortion. Between 1860 and 1880, states and territories adopted over forty anti-abortion statutes supporting Storer's idea that abortion at any stage of pregnancy was a crime and that the government should restrict women's access to abortions. In the 1880s, Storer converted from Episcopalianism to Catholicism because of the church's strict stance against abortion.

Storer was married three times, to sisters Emily Elvira Gilmore and Augusta Caroline Gilmore and to Frances Sophia Mackenzie, and had five children. In 1872, Storer nearly died after contracting sepsis, a bacterial infection that spreads throughout the blood. When his health recovered, he retired from practicing medicine and moved to Europe, where he studied topics such as sanitation and history in southern Italy from 1872 to 1877. Storer returned to Newport, Rhode Island, in 1877, and lived there for the rest of his life. There, Storer became a collector of rare coins, medallions, and tokens having to do with the medical professions, and he published several papers on the significance of those token collections to the history of medicine. Storer lived until 1922, becoming Harvard's oldest living graduate at the time.

Storer died on 18 September 1922 in Newport, Rhode Island.

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