

John Turner

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The Baltimore Sun, September 10, 1907, p. 2

Giant Puzzles Them

Capital Physicians Study Patient 7 Feet 8 Inches Tall

Dr. Wm. S. Thayer Interested

Discussion Whether Stature Is True Giantism or Abnormal Growth of Bones

[Special Dispatch to the Baltimore Sun]

Washington, Sept. 9 -- Unusual interest has been aroused among medical and surgical men of Washington in the case of John Turner, a giant, of 25 N street southeast, who has just been ordered discharged from the public ward of Providence Hospital. This is his last night at the institution.

Although Turner was undoubtedly the tallest man in Washington and ranked with the giants of the land he spent over four months in the public ward of the hospital without the public obtaining the slightest inkling that he was undergoing treatment. By reason of Turner's recluse sort of life few persons, even in his own neighborhood, seem to have even known of his existence.

Turner is a native of Prince George's county, Maryland, and his true height, as calculated by physicians at the hospital, is 7 feet 8 inches. His head bumps against the wall of the ordinary dwelling ceiling, and he had to stoop to pass through many of the hospital doors. Turner is only 30 years old, and the physicians do not know whether he has finished growing.

An interesting discussion has arisen among the fraternity as to whether Turner's case is one of true giantism or one of abnormal enlargement of the bones. Some physicians say it is a case of true giantism. Others declare just as firmly that it is not giantism, but acremegly. The former group is headed by Dr. Charles C. Marbury, of 1121 Fourteenth street northwest, who was in charge of the patient. The other group is headed by Dr. D. Percy Hickling, of 1403 Rhode Island avenue.

Dr. Thayer's Opinion

Included in the latter group is Dr. William S. Thayer, of 406 Cathedral street, Baltimore, a prominent professor at the Johns Hopkins Hospital. Dr. Thayer is understood to believe the case to be one of "acremegly." This case was brought to his attention by Dr. Marbury, and he became deeply interested.

The case, in spite of the fact that nothing has been made public about its existence, is well known to the leading medical and surgical men of Washington, and will be the subject of both monograph and discussion before the local medical society during its weekly sessions. Splendid X-ray photographs of the bones in Turner's body were taken while he was at Providence Hospital. Similar pictures, in addition to a number of other photographs of varying kinds, were taken by the War Department's surgeons in the Army Medical Museum, to which institution Turner was taken for observation and scientific purposes.

Many physicians contend that there is no reason why a giant should not be just as healthy and normal as a man of normal height. They contend, too, that there is no reason why a dwarf should be necessarily abnormal in its bodily functions. Others are inclined to believe that giantism has a baneful effect upon certain bodily organs and that it weakens them. Most of the neurologists believe Turner's case to be one of plain acremegly; that is, an abnormal growth of the bones after the man has attained the age of an adult. Sometimes the bones become larger from end to end, but in most cases that have been studied the enlargement generally occurs near the joints.

Subjects of Scientific Study

Giants are seldom brought within the reach of metropolitan specialists and are not often patients in hospitals where they can become the basis of systematic scientific study. This is another reason, in addition to the extraordinary features of Turner's case, that has made it particularly interesting to the physicians.

A study of the X-ray photos of Turner's hands indicates that they are unusual from an anatomical standpoint. His fingers are unusually long compared with the breadth and are abnormally large as compared with the other units of his body. The X-ray plates all show that his bones are large, but that there is not much flesh on them, comparatively speaking.

Giant Is A Marylander

Turner lived in Maryland until he was about 6 or 7 years old then came to Washington. In spite of the fact that his father is a man of only average height and his mother even smaller Turner grew rapidly. He was extremely sensitive about his stature. When he arrived at the hospital and applied for gratuitous treatment his clothing was partly tattered, but he has been such a good patient during the four months of his stay that he will wear new clothing and a pair of specially made shoes when he steps out of the hospital. Expert diagnosis developed the fact that Turner had serious ailments, both acute and chronic, one being Bright's disease.

Turner has a way of walking knock-kneed that loses about six inches of his true height. His knees bend in and create the illusion that he is not so tall. When he first entered the hospital no bed could be found that would hold him comfortably. The hospital corps improved a bed made up of two beds placed together. Turner was at first disinclined to sleep in this specially constructed bed, but was told that it was necessary. He then acquiesced, but after he became better he asked permission to sleep in an ordinary bed.

The Washington Post, December 30, 1908, p. 4

Giant Quits Hospital

Sudden Lease of Life Given to John Turner

Ambition Is To Do Nothing

Carries His Seven Feet Seven Inches With Apathetic Unconcern, and Has No Desire to Either Read or Write -- Physically Weak, Despite Bulk, Which Doctors Say, Will Hasten His Death

Recuperating suddenly from an illness which physicians believed would cause his death at any moment, John Turner, a giant in stature, who for two months lay in Providence Hospital, has been dismissed from that institution a supposedly well man.

Turner's proportions, as he stretched his gigantic bulk on the hospital bed, startled visitors. What little emotion one might experience from a first glance at the man gives way to astonishment when the visitor sees the figure rise, until there towers above him 7 feet 7 inches of elongated humanity -- a giant frame beside which the ordinary man looks like a pigmy, and even the great six-footer shrinks.

Turner hails originally from Prince George county, Md., where, 31 years ago, he was born on the comfortable farm of his parents. There he spent a placid life until five years ago, when he came to Washington and became a teamster. But the fatal lack of vitality peculiar to giants pursued him, and he was compelled to enter the hospital.

Is Mentally Undeveloped

Mentally, Turner is as undeveloped as he is overdeveloped physically. He cannot read or write, and seems to have no desire to do either.

Huge as are all the proportions of Turner, his hands are abnormal, even for his giant frame. From wrist to finger tips they measure 16 inches, and across the knuckles they measure more than half a foot. If he were fashioned in proportion to his hands, he would be 10 feet tall and weigh nearly 800 pounds, say the physicians. And this great bulk of John Turner is his death warrant, although he is now regarded as in good health. The length of body of the giant, say the physicians, is in inverse ratio to his length of life, just as the dwarf has been found to be a very long-lived creature.

And so John Turner, afflicted with giantism, seems fated to die at an early date, if the opinion of physicians who have diagnosed his case can be accepted.

May Eat and Drink

Dr. Thomas Vincent and Dr. C.H. Fair have had the giant under treatment. They have watched his condition minutely, and when he left the institution his physical condition was such that he may eat and drink to his heart's content.

"When did you commence growing to your great height?" the giant was asked.

"I've been growing all my life," was his answer. "I can't remember when I was not bigger than other folks. I've never had a well day in my life," he added. "Even when a boy I was delicate, and I never have been able to do the work of an ordinary man. I never have been able to get any garments to fit me since I was 12 years old. Everything I wear has to be made to order. I just wrap my feet in cotton goods, for I can't afford to buy shoes, or the leather with which to have them made."

Turner does not come from a family large in stature.

The Evening Star, January 17, 1911, p. 20

Buried in Eight-Foot Coffin

Funeral Services Held for Giant John Turner

In an eight-foot coffin, John Turner, giant, is to rest in a grave in Congressional cemetery.

Funeral services were held this afternoon at the undertaking establishment on 11th street southeast where the body was prepared for burial. Rev. P.J. O'Connell, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul's Church, officiated.

The pallbearers were Abraham, William and Charles Penn, Edward Richards, Thomas Howell and Francis Fort.

The special casket ordered for the seven-foot-seven-inch giant arrived yesterday afternoon. It is eight feet long, two and a half feet wide and one and a half feet deep.

The size of the coffin ordered raised some doubts at the Baltimore factory as to the correctness of the dimensions, and a telegram asking for a verification was sent the undertaker here before the construction of the casket was commenced.

Mrs. J. Hoolihan and Mrs. Eva Bell, sisters of Mr. Turner, and his only surviving relatives, attended the funeral.

The Washington Post, January 17, 1911, p. 16

8-Foot Coffin Required

John Turner, Giant, to Be Buried in Enormous Casket Baltimore Firm, Startled by Order, Asks for Verification -- Funeral Services Today

Funeral services for John Turner, the giant Washington teamster, who died Sunday at the Washington Asylum Hospital, will be held this afternoon at 2 o'clock from an undertaking establishment in Eleventh street southeast.

The Rev. P.J. O'Connel, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul's Catholic Church, will have charge of the services, and the burial will be in Congressional Cemetery. Pallbearers have been selected from among the friends and associates of the dead giant. They are Abraham, William, and Charles Penn; Edward Richards, Thomas Howell, and Francis Fort.

Some trouble was anticipated in getting a casket large enough to hold the body, and the undertaker in charge of the funeral telegraphed Sunday to a factory in Baltimore ordering an enormous casket. The casket arrived yesterday afternoon.

It is 8 feet long, 2-1/2 feet wide, and 1-1/2 feet deep. The size of the coffin ordered raised some doubts at the Baltimore factory as to the correctness of the dimensions, and a telegram asking for a verification was sent the undertaker here before the construction of the casket was commenced.

The undertaker said yesterday that while the body of the giant was enormous, he experienced little difficulty in getting it in a case when he removed the remains from the hospital.

Mrs. J.I. Hoolihan and Mrs. Eva Bell, sisters of Mr. Turner, and his only surviving relatives, are in this city, and will attend the funeral.