

**W. F. Bynum (ed.) and Helen Bynum (ed.), Dictionary Of Medical Biography [Five Volumes, cost \$749.95] (Greenwood Publishing Group, December 2006):1616 pages.**

**Patton wrote the four pieces below:**

<http://www.greenwood.com/catalog/GR2877.aspx>

Easmon, John Farrell (b.Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 June 1856; d.Cape Coast, Gold Coast, 9 June 1900--Medicine, Bacteriology)

Easmon was born of a Nova Scotian settler family in Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. His maternal grandfather, John McCormack, an Irishman from a well-known medical family, became wealthy in the Sierra Leone Crown Colony. Easmon inherited £400 from McCormack's estate, and in 1876 he departed Freetown for medical study in University College on Gower Street, London. He earned the M.R.C.S. (1879), and later the L.M. and L.K.Q.C. P., Ireland (no date given), and M.D. at Brussels (no date nor university given) with distinction. Upon his return to Freetown as a medical practitioner, he was recruited into the Colonial Medical Service as assistant colonial surgeon in the Gold Coast in 1880 at a standard salary of £400 per annum with increments and the right to private practice. In spite of intra-professional conflicts, his medical achievements prompted promotions to higher posts than ever achieved by any other African doctor in the locally organized Colonial Medical Service (CMS) in nineteenth century Sub-Saharan Africa. (Query response: CMS was still centralized through Colonial Office in the nineteenth century, but without a dual roster until the establishment of the West African Medical Staff in 1902.)

Easmon headed the Medical Department of the Gold Coast and made

his most important contribution medical knowledge in 1884. Being the first to describe 'Black Water Fever', which became later known as hemoglobinuric fever. Easmon wrote the first clinical analysis of the symptoms of the disease in English in his 1884 brochure. The importance of his publication requires review. In his times, hemoglobinuric fever was the least-defined complication of falciparum malaria and the most severe in West Africa. Although rare for the indigenous people due to their genetic adaptations to malaria, Europeans suffered high mortalities rising to fifty percent of all European residents in West Africa. Recognized by the medical establishment as only a unique fever in 1864, Easmon's findings revealed its most significant symptoms as severe anemia and massive levels hemoglobin in the urine. The Gold Coast governor sent the report to the Colonial Office in 1888, which resulted in the recommendation from the Colonial Office that the report be forwarded to medical officers elsewhere in the colonial empire as part of more general systematic efforts to reduce mortality. In Tropical Medicine (1913 second edition), belatedly, the authors Castellani and Chambers cited Easmon as responsible for the first use of the term 'blackwater fever'. This was the first time he had been publically acknowledged for his medical contribution.

Easmon became Chief Medical Officer of the medical establishment in the Gold Coast in 1893. The European population had increased significantly and Easmon served as private physician to many colonial families. The nature of his practice can be evidenced in part by the survival of his 'Private Prescription Book (1894-1896)'. During this

time, Easmon treated a number of patients from the Basel Mission, who played a role in African education. Another group of patients came from well-known Ghanaian families who played a role in the development of Gold Coast-Ghana: Bannermans, Musgraves, Vanderpuyes, Thomas Hutton Mills (prosecutor), Peter Awooner-Renner (defense lawyer). Typical of the times, his treatments included morphine derivatives and alcohol.

Easmon died at Cape Coast at the early age of forty-three. Although he lived for only a short time, he received many honors. After being awarded the MRC in 1879 at London and for a distinguished academic career, he took six gold and silver medals, and at Brussels, he took the M.D. with Distinction. Easmon was offered a position first as House Surgeon at St. George's Hospital in London by his cousin Senior Surgeon Sir William McCormick, president of the Royal College of Surgeons, and surgeon to Queen Victoria, but Easmon declined the first such appointment ever offered to a West African and returned to Sierra Leon instead.

#### Bibliography

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