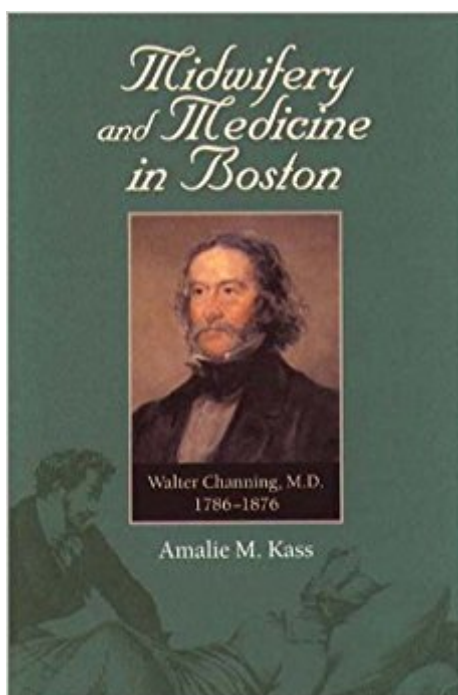


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Midwifery And Medicine In Boston: Walter Channing, M.D., 1786-1876



Synopsis

A prominent obstetrician, professor of midwifery and medical jurisprudence, and dean of the faculty at Harvard Medical College, Dr. Walter Channing (1786-1876) was a central figure in Boston's medical community for more than fifty years. He was also an important presence in the lives of countless women who relied on him to provide safe pregnancy and childbirth, care for postpartum disorders, and treat gynecological problems. Known for his medical expertise as well as his compassion and concern, Channing was highly regarded by colleagues and patients alike. This well-crafted biography rescues the remarkable but overlooked physician from obscurity. Channing's private and professional experiences mirror dramatic changes in antebellum Boston, and Amalie M. Kass provides both a rich picture of a multi-faceted man and a vivid depiction of his city's rapidly changing social, political, and economic landscape. She examines Channing's obstetrical practice and charts his many other distinguished pursuits-lecturer to hundreds of young men in "the art of midwifery," consultant to doctors throughout New England, staff physician for nearly two decades at Boston's only general hospital, and editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery*. In addition, Channing was a major force in gaining acceptance for the use of anesthesia in childbirth, played an instrumental role in founding the Boston Lying-In Hospital as a refuge for women who would otherwise lack decent obstetrical care, and was an active champion for the social reform movements of his day. Kass's account also reveals the complexities and contradictions in Channing's life story. A cheerful and witty personality made him a favorite among his circle of friends and colleagues in Boston's cultural and intellectual elite, yet his outward sociability masked an almost unbearable inner sadness caused by family tragedies and disappointments. In a biography as distinctive as the unique man it portrays, Kass provides illuminating perspectives on medicine, society, and women's reproductive lives in nineteenth-century America.

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Customer Reviews

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Awarded Honorable Mention for the 2003 Boston Authors Club Julia Ward Howe Prize for the best book published by a New England author.

This book is everything I hoped it would be, very informative about the 1800's medical profession onward.. I love the way its written..

Anyone with an interest in history, medicine, women's studies, or childbirth (mothers, fathers, doctors, etc) should read this book. Kass does an outstanding job of synthesizing the perils of one man who was standing on the cusp of medicine as we know it today. Walter Channing was a prominent physician in Boston during the 19th century who was a pioneer in the use of anaesthesia during childbirth. I found this book interesting not only because Kass brought an influential (and often forgotten) figure into the limelight, but also because she tied together threads of the social world in Boston and in medicine. Once you finish this book, you almost feel as though you understand what life was like and how difficult it was to provide "high quality" care to patients, particularly women in the 19th century. This book would be an excellent addition to any course in the history of medicine, but I would also highly recommend it to the lay reader as well as it is accessible to a broad audience.

As a reader who is not well versed in medicine or in American history (don't tell my mother!) I found this to be thoroughly enjoyable and a fast read. Walter Channing lived a rich and long life, and Kass wonderfully captures the medical, social, family and spiritual life of this man and 19th century America. Channing was one of the great men (and belonged to one of the great families) of early Boston, and his accomplishments and efforts to improve the lives of women and newborns were great. And yet here is also a wonderful story (often sad though sometimes with touching humor) of a

very real and inspiring person. I have read a number of biographies recently--Gallileo's Daughter, A Clearing in the Distance (Frederick Law Olmsted) and this belongs in that group of compelling and thoroughly researched stories.

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