



From Pulling Teeth to Pulling Legs: How Dentist-Anesthetist Samuel J. Hayes Was Mistaken for President Rutherford B. Hayes



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ABSTRACT

Newspaper editor AH Beitch recorded an anecdote in which a group of barbers gave complimentary treatment to dentist-anesthetist SJ Hayes, whom they had mistaken for US President Rutherford B. Hayes.

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Born on October 4, 1822 in Delaware, Ohio, United States President Rutherford Birchard Hayes (Fig. 1, right) lived a multi-faceted life as a lawyer, a military leader, and a politician.¹ A graduate of Harvard Law School and a staunch abolitionist, Hayes started practicing as an Ohio attorney in 1845. Soon after, he married Lucy Birchard and together they raised three sons. He served as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War, then as an Ohio congressman and then governor, and ultimately as the 19th President of the United States, after winning the election of 1876.² Forced to end Reconstruction during his presidency, Hayes supported civil rights, civil service reform, and temperance. A lifelong advocate for education, President Hayes insisted at his inauguration that, “Universal suffrage should rest upon universal education.”¹ He died from an apparent heart attack on January 17, 1893.

Much like his aforementioned cousin, Professor Samuel J. Hayes, D.D.S., M.S.A. (Fig. 1, left) lived a multi-faceted life. Born on June 22, 1833 near Johnstown, Pennsylvania, he pursued careers as a preacher, teacher, principal, dentist-anesthetist, newspaper editor, founder of Chicago’s “Post-Graduate School of Anaesthesia,” and

manufacturer of the bubble-through anesthetic vaporizer which he patented in 1882.^{3,4} Hayes was instrumental in defining anesthetic mixtures as requiring air or oxygen. He often used his proprietary journal, *The Dental and Surgical Microcosm*, to educate others about safe anesthetic practice. Hayes created multiple iterations of his vaporizer over his lifetime and shared his knowledge with both medical and dental doctor-anesthetists. Like President Rutherford Hayes, his apocryphal “cousin,” Professor Samuel Hayes highly valued education and temperance.⁴ Long exposures to his proprietary chloroform mixtures may have contributed to Dr. Hayes’ slow, painful death from liver cancer on June 10, 1897.³

On page 12 of the September 18, 1908 issue of *The Pittsburg Press*, the newspaper’s managing editor recalled the following anecdote⁵ about the “Cousins” Hayes:

Not President Hayes

During his presidency, Rutherford B. Hayes was expected in Pittsburg[h] on private business. The trip was to be purely unofficial and the day of his arrival was unknown. His cousin, the late Dr. Samuel J. Hayes, lived in Pittsburg, on Penn avenue at that time. One evening, the doctor stepped into the barbershop of one of the large downtown hotels, and asked for a haircut. After the work was partly done, he noticed that the barber seemed to be excited. The fellow soon stopped

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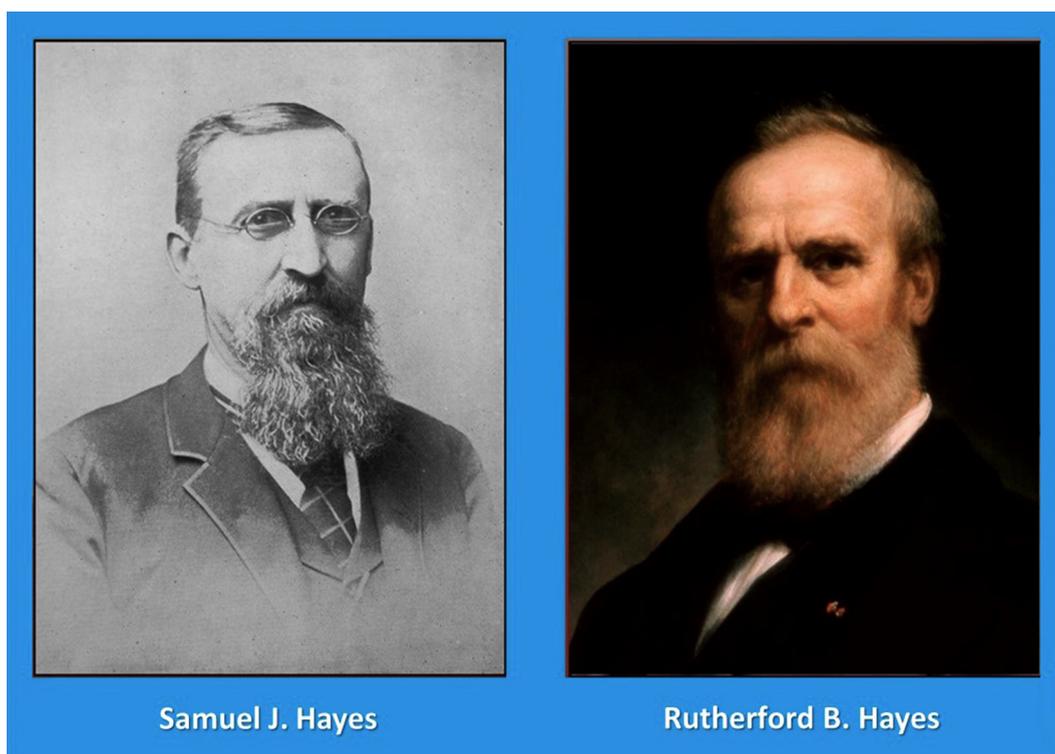


Fig. 1. The “cousins” Hayes who lived multifaceted lives as leaders in their respective fields. Professor Samuel J. Hayes, D.D.S., M.S.A. (1833–1897, left) was portrayed in 1892 by John C. Bragdon. A decorated Union general and the 19th United States President, Rutherford B. Hayes, LL.B. (1822–1893, right) was painted in 1884 by Daniel Huntington.

and walked to the back of the room where some other barbers were. It was rather late and the doctor was the only patron in the shop at the time. The barber was much excited and at times did not lower his voice enough, for the doctor heard, “He must be the President. He compares in every point with this picture.”

Finally the head barber came forward and inquired obsequiously, “Pardon me, but is your name Hayes?”

Then, the doctor who loved a joke, answered truthfully, with a grave face, “Yes, but don’t tell anyone.”

That was enough. His shoes were shined, his hair shampooed, his beard trimmed and a hundred and one kindred acts performed. With difficulty did he make them accept the price of the haircut he had asked for. When he left the shop every man their [sic] would have sworn it was the President.

The author of this anecdote was the newspaper’s managing editor, Albert Henry Beitch (1874–1911). Like the “Cousins” Hayes, Beitch was another multi-faceted man; he was trained as an attorney, like R.B. Hayes,^{1,5} and then worked as an editor, like S.J. Hayes.^{3,5} Born and educated in New Brighton, Beitch studied business in Beaver Falls and managed to report news for newspapers in both of those Pennsylvania towns. He pursued legal studies and passed the bar in Armstrong County. In Pittsburgh, he advanced from reporter to city editor for *The Pittsburg [sic] Daily News*. When that paper was absorbed into *The Pittsburg [sic] Press*, Beitch became city editor and managing editor of “*The Press*.” A beloved and congenial editor, “Al” Beitch soldiered on, even though he had been “seized by a rheumatic affliction of the heart,” which wasted him away until he had become “a shadow of his former self.”⁵ A celebrated optimist, Beitch loved

using his newspaper’s editorial columns to record “with a chuckle amusing incidents of the misty past” — as he did above concerning the “Cousins” Hayes.^{5,6} Although Editor S.J. Hayes had represented his own newspaper, the *Connellsville Tribune*, before other western Pennsylvanian editors by 1877,⁷ he likely had commiserated with Editor Beitch during Pittsburgh’s typesetters’ strike of 1891, which affected both newspapers and journals.^{8,9} How fortunate for today’s readers that editor AH Beitch recorded his conversation with fellow editor S.J. Hayes about the day that the latter was mistaken by barbers for U.S. President R. B. Hayes.

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