

Dr. James I. Hale was one of the most influential physicians and civic leaders in Southern Illinois, devoting more than forty years to medical and surgical practice centered in Anna, Union County. Rising literally from frontier beginnings, he built a regional reputation as a specialist surgeon, hospital founder, and medical organizer whose influence extended well beyond Union County into Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri.

Born on April 16, 1844, in a log cabin located on what would later become the site of the city of Anna, Dr. Hale's life paralleled the growth of the community itself. Orphaned at an early age, he largely educated himself while being an apprentice to a farmer, wheelwright, and cabinetmaker. By the time he reached adulthood, he had not only learned trades essential to frontier life but had also developed a strong intellectual curiosity and self-discipline that would define his career.

In 1862, during the Civil War, he enlisted as a private in Company C of the 109th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. He was soon detailed to hospital duty, an assignment that proved pivotal. While tending wounded soldiers, he gained access to medical texts and firsthand clinical experience. It was during this service that he made the decision to pursue medicine — a decision that would shape healthcare in Southern Illinois for decades.

After the war, Dr. Hale studied medicine under Dr. S. S. Condon and later attended the Chicago Medical College during the sessions of 1868–69 and again in 1873–74. He graduated in 1874 and returned to Anna, where he established what would become a lifelong practice. Over time, he specialized in surgery, chronic diseases, and diseases of women, limiting much of his work to consultation cases. Following the opening of his hospital and sanatorium, he performed 262 major surgical operations after 1905 alone — an extraordinary number for the era — and earned recognition as one of the leading surgeons of his region.

Beyond his personal practice, Dr. Hale was a true institution builder. He was the prime mover in organizing the Southern Illinois Medical Association and served that organization as secretary, vice president, and president. He also belonged to the American Medical Association, the Illinois State Medical Society, and the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States. In 1900, he erected a

modern brick hospital in Anna with fifty rooms and capacity for about thirty patients, later expanding it to a three-story structure with an elevator and modern conveniences. In 1905, he opened a public sanatorium, which treated approximately 1,900 resident patients within its early years — a remarkable contribution to regional healthcare.

Dr. Hale's service extended well beyond medicine. He was commissioned a major and surgeon in the Illinois National Guard's Eleventh Regiment from 1877 to 1882, served eight years as a local pension examiner, and held multiple public offices, including Anna city councilman, Union County coroner, and alderman. He helped establish Union Academy and co-founded the Union County News, later known as The Talk. He also played a visible role in Anna's physical development by financing and constructing several brick business buildings.

Economically, he was equally engaged. Dr. Hale owned a 235-acre farm in Union County with tenant houses and fruit production, held stock in the First National Bank, and invested in lumber and fruit-packaging enterprises — all while keeping his primary focus on medicine.

In his personal life, Dr. Hale married Mary J. Wilson in 1865. They raised three children, two of whom followed their father into the medical profession, including Dr. John A. Hale. He was deeply involved in fraternal organizations, serving in leadership roles within the Masonic order, the Royal Arch, Knights Templar, Odd Fellows, and Knights and Ladies of Honor. A devoted Presbyterian, he served as an elder and supported numerous charitable and religious causes. Politically, he aligned himself with the Prohibition movement, reflecting his strong moral convictions.

Dr. James I. Hale's life tells the story of Southern Illinois itself — from log cabins and frontier hardships to organized institutions, modern medicine, and civic leadership. As a physician, hospital founder, medical leader, and builder of community life, he helped professionalize healthcare while shaping the educational, economic, and social fabric of Anna and Union County. His career stands as a benchmark of late-19th and early-20th-century Midwestern medical leadership — and as a legacy worth remembering and sharing.