

John S Rock

1825-1866

*Teacher, Doctor, Dentist,
Abolitionist, Lawyer*



John S. Rock was born to free parents in Salem, New Jersey. Education was very important to the Rock family. By the age of nineteen, John was sufficiently educated and was able to go to work as a teacher. While working as a teacher, he studied medicine under two white physicians.

In 1848 he applied to medical school and was rejected because of his race. Rock turned his interest to dentistry and apprenticed with a white dentist in Philadelphia. In 1853 he moved to Boston and set up a dentistry and medical practice. Most of Rock's patients were fugitive slaves passing through Boston on their way to Canada and freedom.

When Rock became ill his doctors advised him to cut back on his work. He gave up his medical and dental practices and began to study law. In 1861 he was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar. As a lawyer Rock advocated for the rights of African Americans.

In 1865, John S. Rock became the first black attorney admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court. He died before he was able to argue a case before the court.