

1844-1994



Our

Medical

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Lancaster City & County Medical Society

Section 1

The History of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society



LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA, 1844

Chapter 1

Lancaster Medicine In Colonial Days

For the purposes of our discussion, we will consider that area which now comprises Lancaster County, regardless of the geographical boundaries of the county at the time under discussion. Prior to the early 1700s, the only medical care available to residents of this county was that provided by Indian folklore and the home remedies brought to this country by the pioneer settlers. The honors for the first physician to settle and practice in this county have been shaded in dispute, inasmuch as Dr. Henry Zimmerman, whose name was later Anglicized to Carpenter, came to this section of Pennsylvania in 1698. However, there is no evidence that he practiced in Lancaster County at this time. He returned to Europe for his family, and brought them back with him in 1706, but settled first in Germantown and did not move back to Lancaster County until 1717.

In the meantime, two Mennonite brothers, Francis and Hans Heinrich Neff, fled to Alsace from their native Switzerland because of religious persecution, from where they emigrated to America. Both Francis and Hans settled near Lancaster sometime prior to 1715. Hans was a physician who Anglicized his name to Dr. John Henry Neff, and settled on the Conestoga River a few miles from Lancaster, having been ceded his land by a special grant from William Penn. Though he probably did not practice medicine exclusively, as he built and operated a mill, he became known as the "Old Doctor," and apparently was quite popular in the area. He later owned the property known as Hardwicke, located near the site of the present water works and the big Amtrack railroad bridge. When the boundaries of Manheim Township were defined in 1729, one of the lines was defined as "thence down the creek (Conestoga) to the Old Doctor's Ford." Thus it would appear that Dr. John Henry Neff must receive the honors of being the first trained practitioner of medicine in Lancaster County.

Little appears to be written about Francis Neff, though an inventory of his worldly goods filed and recorded by his executors on October 15, 1739, refers to him as "Dr. Francis Neff," as did an inventory of his debts. The inventory appears to be largely household goods and furnishings, with no items which might indicate that he was a practicing physician.

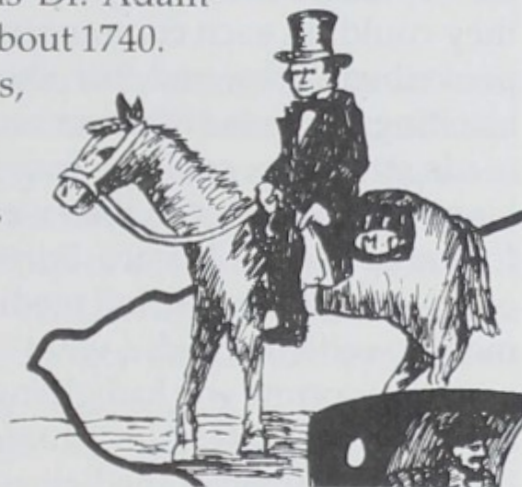
In 1717, Dr. Henry Carpenter (Zimmerman) relocated from Germantown to West Earl Township. He bought a farm and combined active farming with the practice of medicine for the rest of his life. Five successive generations bore the name of Henry Carpenter. His son Dr. Henry inherited the homestead, and also practiced medicine in this vicinity during his lifetime. The third generation Henry succeeded to the homestead. The fourth generation Henry, born in 1773, was the father of Henry Carpenter, M.D., who was born

in Lancaster in 1819. It was this fifth generation Henry who was instrumental in the organization of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society in 1844.

The patriarch of the family, the first Dr. Henry, established a large botanical garden, introducing to Lancaster County a "fine assortment of rare and costly plants which were exotic in this section of the country." One of the fourth generation descendants, Dr. John Carpenter, born in 1770, broke the succession of Henry's who succeeded to the homestead by inheriting the farm, carrying on both farming and the practice of medicine, and caring for the botanical garden in the tradition of his historic great grandfather.

An early physician in colonial days was Dr. Adam Simon Kuhn. Dr. Kuhn arrived in Lancaster about 1740.

He was extremely active in community affairs, being an outspoken and respected politician, a justice, a prime mover for the establishment of parochial schools, and an active member of Trinity Lutheran Church. He purchased a tract of 15 acres in Lancaster along East King Street, and laid out a town which he called "Adamstown," which began where East King Street intersected with what was Middle Street (now Howard Avenue).



Also active in this area in those Pre-Revolutionary days was Dr. Abraham Neff, son of John Henry Neff, who was practicing in Lancaster in 1758. His office was on Orange Street above Lime. He seemed to have an enormous practice among the farmers.

Dr. Thomas Whiteside practiced in Little Britain in 1750. He later became a prominent Revolutionary figure, being involved in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown, and later Monmouth and Princeton during the New Jersey campaign.

In 1751 Dr. Heronomus Bruback was a resident of Leacock. Dr. Samuel Boude practiced in Lancaster in 1758, and in addition ran a drug store. He was the father of General Boude of Revolutionary fame. His wife, Mary, was a daughter of Samuel Bethel, who laid out Bethelstown. There are records of a Dr. John Leidy in Warwick in 1758, and Dr. Robert Thompson in Lancaster in 1751. Dr. Thompson apparently was a prominent physician, a large land owner, and a justice for many years.

There is a record of at least one "physician" in Lancaster County during this period who departed the county under less than optimum conditions. Court records for August 5, 1736 reveal the following: "At a court of General Quarter Sessions, Dr. William Smith, a vagabond and a beggar, being convicted before the court of being an impostor, it is the judgment of the court that he receive in the County of Lancaster, 10 lashes and be conducted from constable to constable and be whipped with ten lashes in the most public

places till he comes to the boundary of the county at Octoraro, then be dismissed." The account does not provide any details as to the activities of the bogus physician.

George L. Heiges, who was a prominent Lancaster pharmacist and historian, painted a picture of medical care in Lancaster County during this period in a paper published by the Lancaster County Historical Society in 1946. "For many years after the first settlement in present Lancaster County, there were few physicians and no apothecaries in this area, and the treatment of disease and the preparation of medicines were in the hands of those who had little or no training for such serious work, but who nevertheless did the best they could. In each community, there were persons who gathered, sold and prescribed herbs, and then there were other persons who did cupping and bleeding, while in every community could be found a midwife. In every cross-roads store, too, could be found substances from the mineral and vegetable kingdoms which even then were popular household remedies: Glauber Salt, Cream of Tartar, Mustard, Sulphur and Castor Oil. The missionary-preachers of those days also carried medicines with them and, as they rode from settlement to settlement, did what they could to alleviate physical distress along with their prime work of giving spiritual solace and help. Especially was this true of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg who brought with him to America a book of formulae of medicines which had proven to be efficacious; and the many entries in his journals concerning the ills of those to whom he ministered indicate that he really knew a great deal about the human body and its ills."

There is a record of only two apothecaries in Lancaster prior to the Revolutionary War, so that those physicians who set up practice here in the early days were either their own pharmacists or procured their medicines from Philadelphia apothecaries.

All the evidence seems to indicate that ministering to the sick in the Pre-Revolutionary days fell to the community individual most fitted by training, education or experience to dispense such services. This may have been an academically trained physician, which would be the most unusual circumstance (only 5% of colonial physicians in 1776 held university degrees of any kind); a physician trained by apprenticeship or preceptorship (by "reading medicine" with a recognized practitioner); a pharmacist; a clergyman; or any one of a host of other individuals who either by necessity, accident or design had acquired enough information to convince the populace to entrust their health problems, symptoms, illnesses and even their lives to them. The chief difference between a physician and an apothecary in this era seems to be that a physician charged for services and dispensed medicine gratis; while the apothecary sold medicine and dispensed free medical advice. Physicians were not licensed in Pennsylvania until near the end of the nineteenth century. That some criteria, be they ever so vague, must have existed, is shown by the fate of the impostor "Dr. Smith," whose Lancaster County career came to such an ignominious end.