

1844-1994



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Lancaster City & County Medical Society

Section 1

The History of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society



LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA, 1844

Chapter 2

Early History of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society

On the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society, it is fitting to review some of the Society's very early history, especially that pertaining to its founding and its influence in the promotion and establishment of organized medicine in the Commonwealth and in the nation.

The illustrious history of the Society has been ably chronicled on at least five previous occasions. Dr. Henry B. Stehman, an 1877 Jefferson graduate, described in 1883 the early history of the Society and the events leading up to its formation. In 1894, Dr. J. L. Zeigler read a historical sketch of the Society on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. At the Society's 90th birthday, Dr. E. T. Prizer addressed the Society on February 7, 1934, brilliantly outlining the prolonged labor and eventual delivery of the Society. At the Centennial celebration, held at the Brunswick Hotel on May 17, 1944, Dr. C. P. Stahr, then Secretary-Treasurer of the Society, updated the last ten years. In 1976, the Society's bulletin, *Lancaster Medicine*, devoted its issue to "A History of Medicine in Lancaster County," including a review of the Society's formative years.

The following information consists of direct quotes and paraphrases from these and other publications, with a few editorial inserts and comments.

The advantages of professional medical organizations began to be universally realized in the 1820s, although a few societies date back to the eighteenth century. Being close to the centers of medical learning and possessing a good representation of able and skilled practitioners, it is not surprising that the physicians of Lancaster County would feel a necessity for banding together in such an organization.

The Lancaster *Intelligencer* carried an account of an attempt of such a formation in its issue of Feb. 24, 1823:

At a meeting of physicians in the borough of Strasburg, on the 7th inst., for the purpose of establishing a medical society in the County of Lancaster, Dr. Francis S. Burrowes was appointed chairman, and Dr. William Forman secretary. On motion it was *Resolved*, that we constitute an association to be called The Medical Society of the City and County of Lancaster, whose object it shall be to promote harmony among the members of the profession and to improve medical science.

Resolved, that Drs. Humes, Dinge, Reigy, Boulden, Handford, Davis and Forman be a committee to draft a Constitution and By-Laws for the government of the society, who

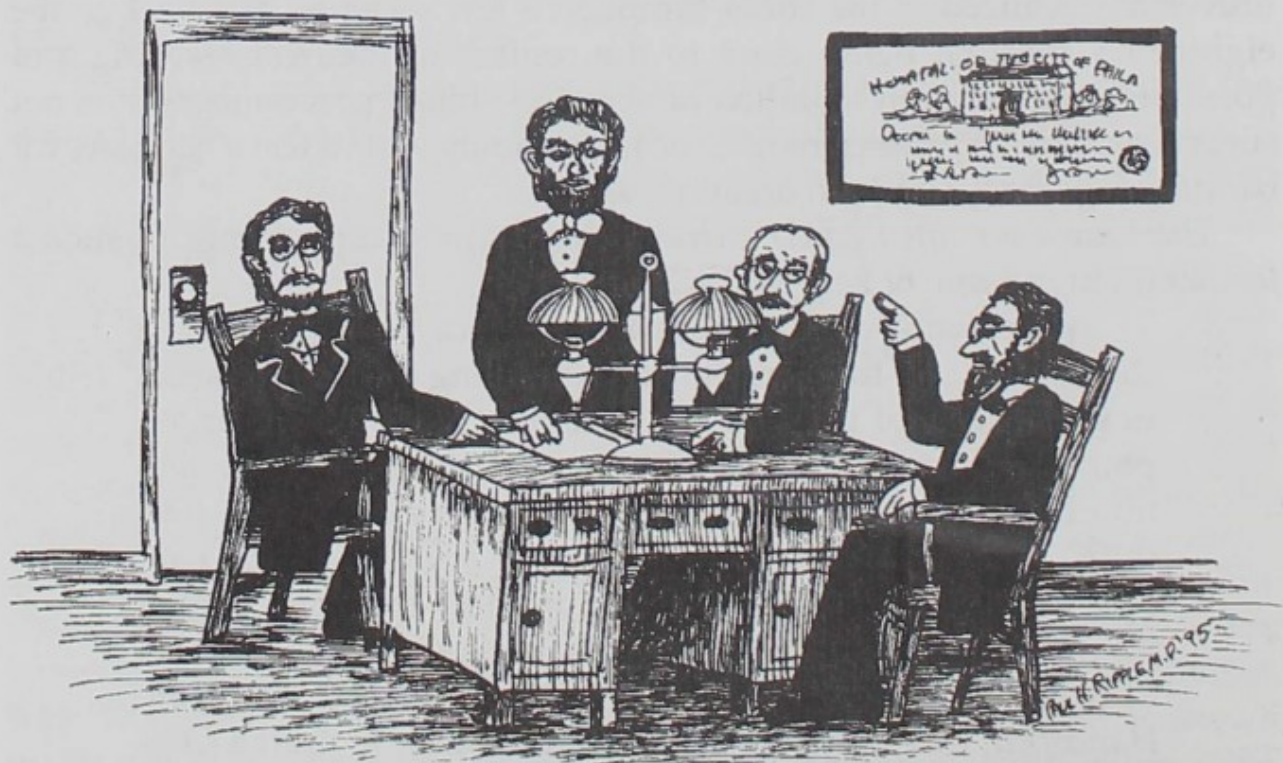
shall report at the next meeting.

Resolved, that this meeting adjourn to convene at the house of Mr. John Whiteside (Fountain Inn), in the City of Lancaster, on Monday, the 15th of March next, at 2 o'clock P.M., when and where the physicians of Lancaster and adjoining counties are respectfully invited to attend.

A subsequent item in the *Intelligencer* of March 23, 1828, states that such a meeting was indeed held. At this time, Dr. Samuel Humes, Jr. was appointed chairman, and Dr. N. L. Boulden, secretary.

The chairman reaffirmed the purposes of the proposed organization, and several resolutions were adopted, reaffirming the proposed name, and forming a new committee for preparing a Constitution and By-Laws, this time comprising Drs. Muhlenberg, Carpenter, and Atlee, of the city, and Drs. Boulden, Burrowes and Forman from the county. The reconstituted committee was to report at the next meeting, on the 19th of April at the same place, at which time all the city and county physicians (no mention was made of surrounding counties) were again invited to attend.

The committee indeed did its work, but there is no evidence that it ever reported; the organization failed, and records of any further meetings have not been found. However, there is a newspaper record of March 3, 1826, which details a "meeting of gentlemen of the Medical Faculty and a number of gentlemen from Lancaster", listing Dr. Samuel Humes, President, and Dr. Frederick A. Muhlenberg, Vice President. The listing of these officers presumes some sort of organization, but its relationship to the 1823 group is unclear. The



purpose of this meeting, which was held at the home of Samuel C. Slaymaker, was to honor "our fellow citizen John Eberle, M.D., Professor of Materia Medica in the Jefferson Medical School of Philadelphia." According to the account, the meeting consisted of the drinking of 13 toasts offered by the assembled guests (none, however, to Dr. Eberle), followed by a toast by the president to "our reverend guests." Things got a bit out of hand at this point, as evidenced by 18 subsequent extemporaneous "volunteer toasts", to everybody and everything from American Medicine to "Peace on earth and good will toward men." This made a total of 32 toasts. As Jack W. W. Loose, who discovered this news item, remarked, "I imagine most of the medical fraternity were fairly well anesthetized!"

Following the complete collapse of the 1823 organizational attempts, the Lancaster medical community was forced to wait 21 years until the situation was felt ripe for another attempt.

Years later (1883) Dr. John L. Atlee remarked in an address to the AMA in Cleveland, that "so great was the jealousy existing between (the physicians of this period) that for more than twenty years after my graduation it was impossible to form a medical society in my native city and county, because there were so many aspirants for the honors."

Early In 1844, Dr. Ely Parry issued an invitation to the city physicians to meet in his home on January 14, with an eye toward the consideration of the formation of a society. Twelve physicians attended: Drs. F. A. and H. Muhlenberg, A. M. & P. Cassidy, Leonard, J. L. & W. L. Atlee, Cameron, Landis, Parry, Carpenter, and Humes. Dr. Humes was selected chairman and Dr. W. L. Atlee secretary. Two resolutions were adopted; the first to form a society, and the second calling all "medical gentlemen" to meet in the City Lyceum of Franklin College, which at that time was at 109 North Lime Street, at 11 A.M. on February 14, 1844, for the purpose of "organizing a city and county medical society." The invitation, signed by Drs. Humes and W. L. Atlee, was R.S.V.P., expressly requesting a reply by those who could not attend.

This time it stuck, with Dr. Samuel Humes, president; Drs. Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg and Samuel Duffield, vice-presidents; and Dr. Washington L. Atlee, corresponding secretary. David R. Porter, then Governor of the Commonwealth, issued a charter to the infant organization, whose charter membership totaled 43 physicians.

Early events of the society included publication of a fee schedule and the selection of medical journals to be purchased by the society (at first rejected because of lack of funds). At the meeting of April 11, the first paper was presented to the society: a report of a successful "ovaritomy" by Dr. Washington L. Atlee.

Dr. Stehman, in his 1883 retrospect, had the following to say about the early struggles to organize and stabilize the Society.

"The history of this society is the record of a struggle, the rehearsal of the

combined efforts of a comparatively few members of the profession to elevate its standard, advance medical science, and promote good fellowship. Unfortunately, personal jealousies and selfish interests have at times jeopardized its life, and though these combined influences never succeeded in stamping out its existence, they nevertheless at times have seriously crippled its influence for good. Its members have met with varied success; some have ever been in the front ranks bearing the standard of the profession, while others either lagged behind or tarnished its fair name and dragged its vestments into the mire of human depravity. In a word, some have succeeded brilliantly while others have failed ignominiously; many have added lustre and dignity to the profession, while some few have brought shame upon themselves and reproach from their associates."

Dissension, dissatisfaction and jealousy continued after Dr. Stehman's observations. In 1890. Dr. Alexander Craig of Columbia and Dr. Jacob L. Ziegler of Mount Joy, who were not pleased with the way the city physicians were running the City and County Society, organized a society called the College of Surgeons and Physicians of Columbia, as well as a Pathological Society in 1892. These rival societies, however, did little to promote scientific medicine, becoming mere social clubs which drifted into oblivion.

It wasn't long before the fledgling society would play an important role in the formation of a State Medical Society. At the April 11, 1848 meeting, Dr. John L. Atlee reported receiving a communication from the Chester County Medical Society, enlisting his aid in the widespread promotion of the interests of the profession and efforts to influence the proliferation of medical education. As a consequence, a meeting was held in Lancaster, convened by Dr. George Kerfoot. The group elected Dr. John P. Heister of Berks County temporary chairman, then promptly passed the historic resolution "that this convention now proceed in the organization of a State Medical Society." The newly-formed state society elected Lancaster's Dr. Samuel Humes as president, by that time an experienced hand at medical organization. Vice presidents were Dr. Thomas Wood of Lycoming County and Dr. John Heister of Berks County. Secretaries were Drs. Alfred Stile of Philadelphia and G. F. Dimock of Susquehanna County.

In 1849, Lancastrians Dr. George Kerfoot and Dr. John L. Atlee were delegates to a meeting of the National Medical Society in New York, and played an important role in the formation of the American Medical Association.

Six members of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society have served as president of the Pennsylvania Medical Society: Samuel Humes (1848), John L. Atlee (1857), Jacob L. Ziegler (1881), Alexander Craig (1890), Theodore B. Appel (1909), and Frank G. Hartman (1921).

Lancaster has provided two presidents of the American Medical Association: Dr. John L. Atlee in 1882 and Dr. James Z. Appel in 1965.