

1844-1994



Our

Medical

Heritage

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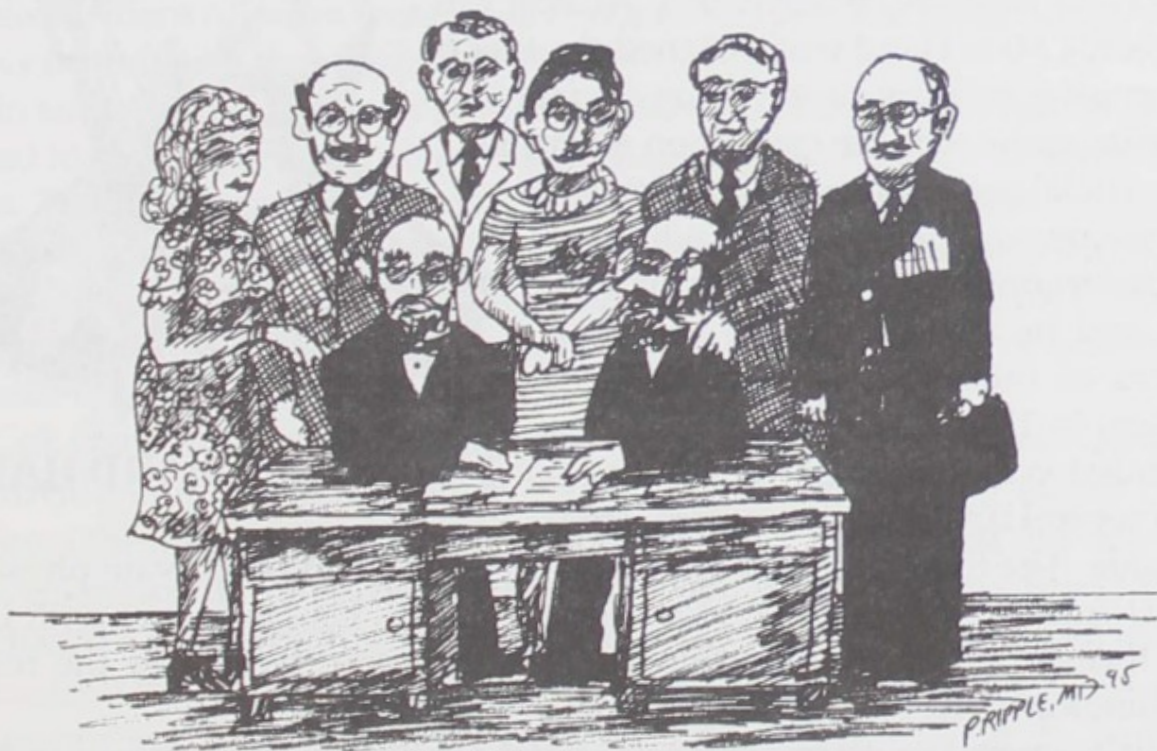


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Lancaster City & County Medical Society

Section 3

Prominent Physicians



Chapter 23

The Doctors Musser

The Musser family is a very interesting family and may have been the most prolific family in medicine in Lancaster County.

John Musser arrived in this country in 1727 from Switzerland. He bought a 318 acre tract of land in what is now the southeast quadrant of Lancaster City in 1734.

On April 24, 1744 this same John Musser purchased from John Wistar, a Germantown merchant, a tract of land in Manor Twp., on which the Musser house was later to be built. This land is directly north of the tract known as the "Indiantown" tract, the only part of the Manor that remained reserved for the Conestoga Indians after Penn's sons began selling land in the Manor. "Indiantown" is of interest as a site of much activity and excitement. Many important conferences were held there between the government and Indian chiefs of various tribes. John Musser died in 1752 and had willed this land to his son, Jacob Musser. Jacob married Mary Hershey and probably started building a house on this land between 1747-1752. After building this house, Jacob Musser died in 1755 at a very early age. He willed half of this land to his son, John (born 1748) and half to his son, Benjamin (born 1749), soon to become the noted Dr. Benjamin Musser. Benjamin ended up living in the house, while John probably eventually built on his own land. (It must be remembered that these two sons, John and Benjamin were quite young, seven and six respectively, at the time of their father's death.)

The original Dr. Benjamin Musser was a self proclaimed physician without any formal medical training or education. He had been a farmer who suddenly appeared on the census rolls about 1800 to change his occupation from farmer to physician.

In 1763 the "Paxtang Boys" massacred many of the Indians living in this area. The rest fled to Lancaster where they were put in the county jail for protection. The "Paxtang Boys" struck again, breaking into the jail and killing the remaining Indians. This massacre left the "Indiantown" land free to be purchased. John Musser purchased much of this land and sold some of it to his brother, Benjamin Musser, another grandson of the original purchaser, John Musser.



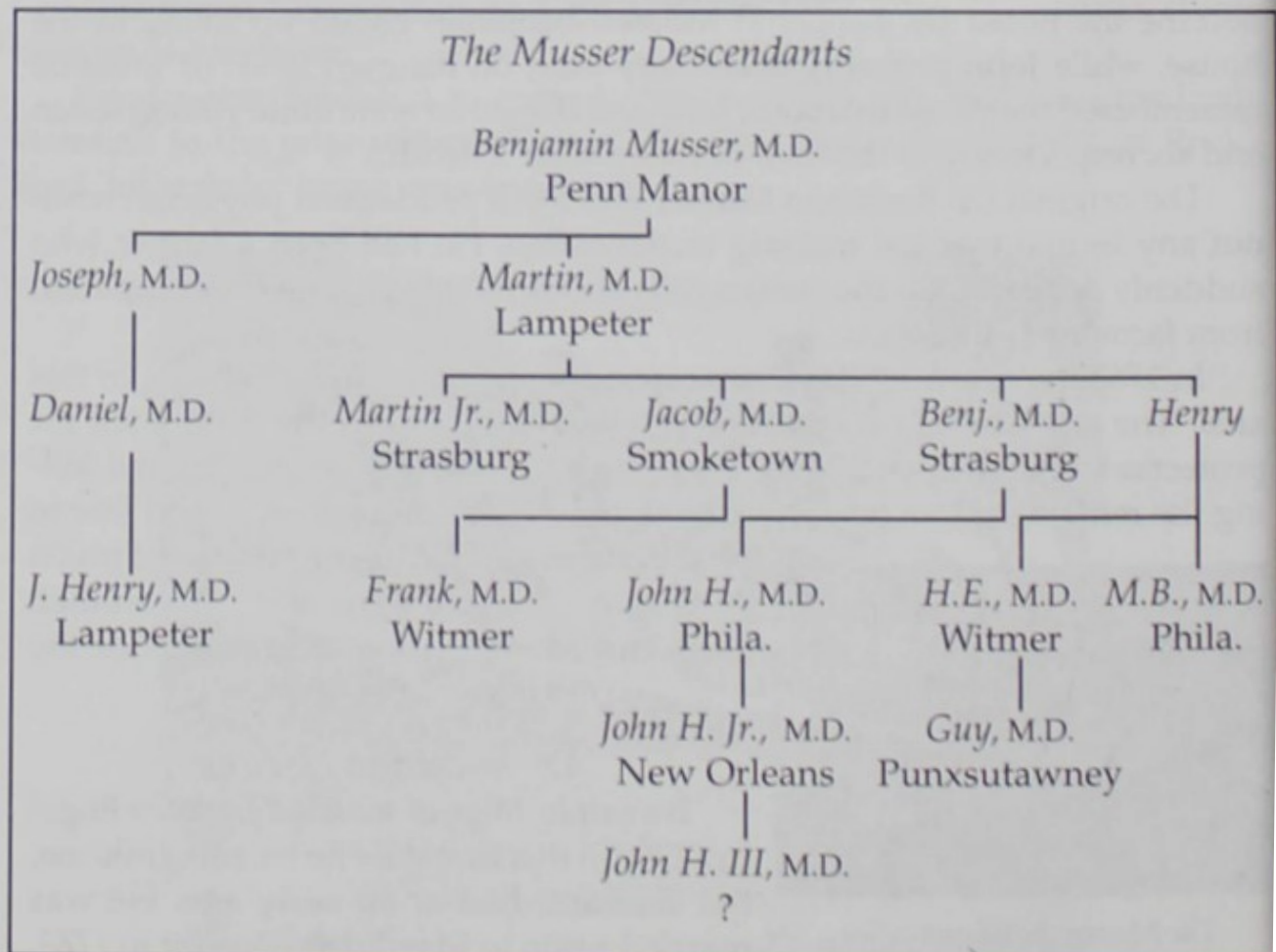
The Musser home and office

Dr. Benjamin Musser

Benjamin Musser married Barbara Engel in 1770. To this first wife he had six children, but Barbara died at an early age. He was married again to Magdalena Bossler in 1784.

To this wife he had eleven children. With eighteen children it is no wonder that Benjamin built an addition onto his small home during the first decade of the 19th century. It was during this first decade that it is believed he changed his occupation from farmer to physician. The first floor of this addition consisted of a large room, which was an office and apothecary shop, and of three small rooms which served as hospital rooms. (Did he keep patients overnight? Was this the first hospital or day surgery in Lancaster County?) The second floor would have served as additional space for Benjamin's very large family. Keeping a private hospital and apothecary shop in such a rural area (this house is near Creswell) and at such an early date was really quite unusual and innovative. The building and the addition were rooted in the Germanic tradition. A narrow winding stairway connecting the first and second floors is still present. The exterior of the house is much like the house appeared in the day of Dr. Musser. The interior has undergone many changes. Dr. Benjamin Musser died in 1820, after a successful practice, becoming well known for his treatment of ulcers and "white swellings."

He willed his house to his son, Benjamin, Jr. who apparently died in the 1830s. The records are not complete from 1830 to 1856 when Freys bought the house and land from Isaiah Witmer. In 1948 it was sold to Dr. Herman Rannels; in 1955 it was sold to Oliver Antes and in 1976 it was sold to H. H. Haverstick, the present owners.



Dr. Benjamin Musser had two sons, five grandsons, five great grandsons, two great-great grandsons and one great-great-great grandson who obtained medical degrees and became physicians. Three of them practiced in Lampeter, two in Strasburg, two in Witmer, one in Smoketown and two in Philadelphia as well as some in other locations. There may be additional physicians in the family that are not known.

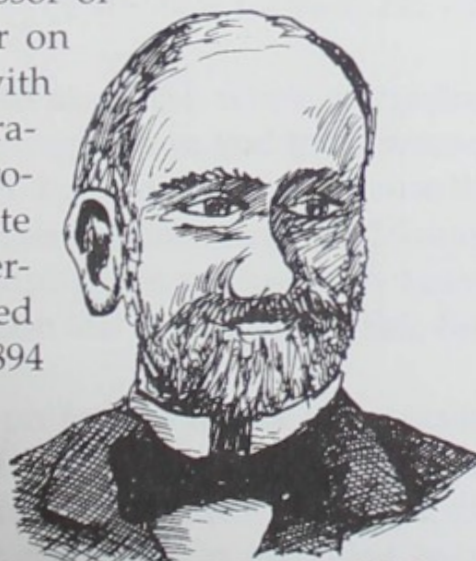
In Longenecker's cemetery lie the remains of nine physicians with the surname of Musser.

This story is told about Dr. Benjamin Musser (I am not certain which Dr. Benjamin Musser) before hospitals and anesthesia were available. Two physicians failed to reduce a fractured leg of a patient. The veteran was called in. He summoned several stalwart men to his assistance and directed them to hold the patient in such a way that struggle would be impossible. Then bracing himself with one foot against the wall, the doctor seized the patient by the ankle and gave the leg a sudden jerk, applying all of his strength to the effort. The desired end was attained. The agony can better be imagined than told.

Dr. John Herr Musser

One of the best known physicians from southern Lancaster County was Dr. John H. Musser. Dr. Benjamin Musser, a grandson of the original Dr. Benjamin Musser practiced medicine in Strasburg on Main Street next to the old bank building, according to Dr. William Tinney. A son, John Herr Musser, was born to Benjamin and Naomi Musser in 1856. His maternal grandfather was Bishop John Herr of the Mennonite church. He obtained his early education in Strasburg schools and attended Millersville State Normal School. He studied medicine under his father and graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1877.

Dr. John H. Musser taught at his Alma Mater and became Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine in 1889 and Professor of Clinical Medicine ten years later. His paper on "Cholecystostomy" written in collaboration with Dr. W. W. Keen in 1884 was a plea for early operation in biliary obstruction at a time when this procedure was rarely performed. Dr. Musser wrote over 200 articles in the medical literature covering a wide range of topics. In response to repeated requests, he published his *Medical Diagnosis* in 1894 which passed through five editions. He moved his office to the central part of Philadelphia in 1894 and devoted his attention exclusively to internal medicine. During the last ten years of his life, he devoted his time to



DR. JOHN H. MUSSER

consultations. As a result of his reputation as a diagnostician, his opinions were sought by his professional colleagues in distant cities.

Dr. John Musser was concerned about the living conditions of his patients and the effects of their hygienic and social conditions upon their health. As a result, he inaugurated and remained the directing head of the Social Service Department of the University of Pennsylvania Hospital, which was the first of its kind in the city.

He was President of the American Medical Association in 1903-04 and the recipient of an honorary degree from Franklin & Marshall College in 1908. The first indication that his health was impaired was revealed in a slight attack of angina pectoris in 1910. Immediately following a meeting with his class at the University, he was overcome with a severe attack of angina and he died four days later on April 3, 1912.

In 1879 he married Agnes Gardner Harper and they had three daughters and a son, who followed in his father's footsteps. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1908 and became professor of medicine at Tulane University School of Medicine. In 1938 the *Strasburg News* had an article that John Herr Musser III had started his freshman year in University of Pennsylvania Medical School.