

1844-1994



Our

Medical

Heritage

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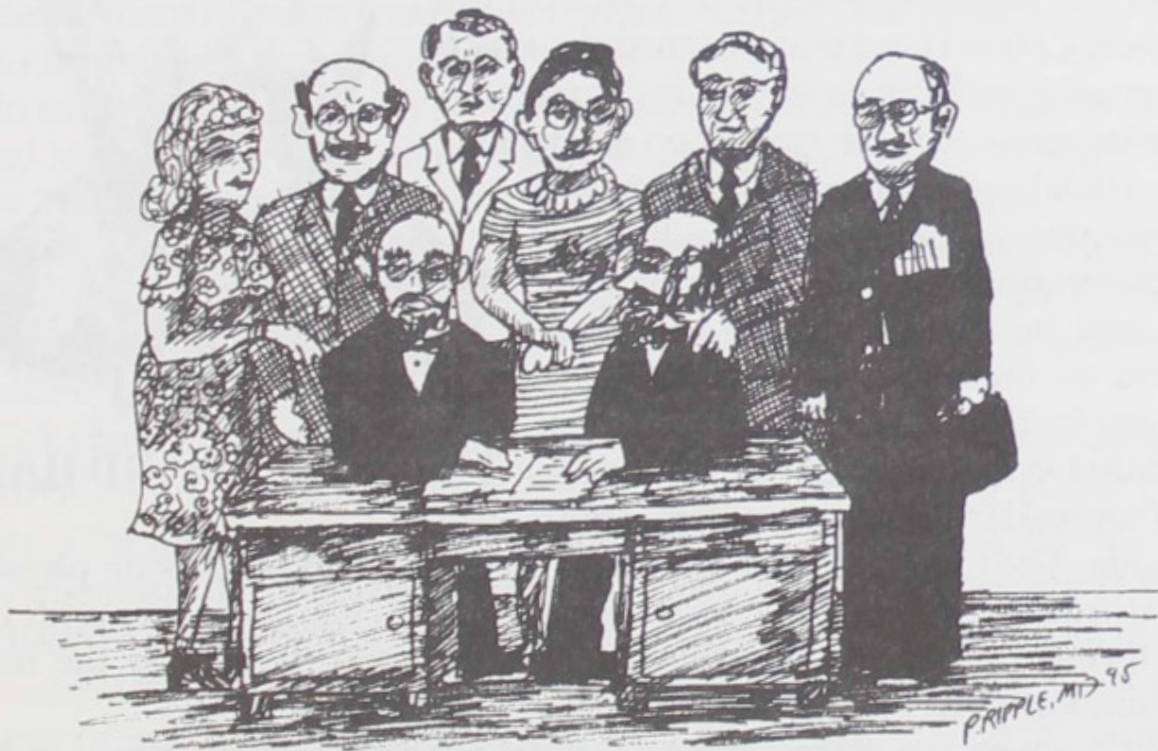


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Lancaster City & County Medical Society

Section 3

Prominent Physicians



Chapter 26
Henry Carpenter, M.D.
Personal Physician To President Buchanan

A gracious, dignified, grey-haired lady walked into my office one day in 1960. As she sat down in a chair by my desk she said, "I act like a physician's granddaughter, don't I?"

"Was your grandfather a doctor?" I inquired.

She replied, "My grandfather was Dr. Carpenter who was a well known physician in Lancaster - and he was personal physician to President Buchanan.

"When the President was ill or in need of medical care, my grandfather would go to Washington and stay until he had recovered.."

As a child, I had done many things with my grandfather, so I unthinkingly asked, "Did your grandfather ever take you along?"

There was complete silence and we progressed to discuss her medical problems.

When I told my wife about this encounter she said, "Do you realize that if she went to Washington with her grandfather when James Buchanan was President of the United States she would be over 100 years old?"

This new patient had great respect and praise for her grandfather who was also the personal physician to Thaddeus Stevens, Lancaster's representative to Congress - a lawyer and staunch abolitionist.

James Buchanan went to Washington and stayed at the National Hotel in preparation for his inauguration. Many of the guests became ill. The hotel had been infested with rats, and the management had used arsenic to poison the rats. The hotel guests used water from a cistern in which dead, poisoned rats were found. The water contained arsenic and poisoned the guests.

Although another Lancaster native physician and naval surgeon, Dr. Jonathan Foltz, had been caring for him, President Buchanan became much alarmed and called Dr. Henry Carpenter, his personal physician, from Lancaster. Dr. Carpenter spent one week in Washington with the President-elect until he recovered.

After his return to private life at Wheatland, James Buchanan requested a house call from his personal physician on August 10, 1861. He wrote,

Wheatland 10 August 61

My Dear Sir:

The swelling in my right foot and leg I think increased and my left foot begins slightly to swell. I should be glad if you could call sometime today or tomorrow in daylight and examine them.

Your friend very respectfully,
James Buchanan

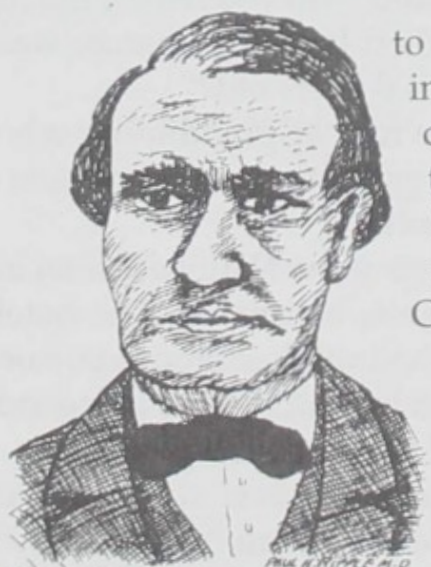
Dr. S. Kendrick Eshleman, a cousin of the current owner of the letter who died recently, is a psychiatrist and a member of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society. Dr. Eshleman has given us the following information about the letter, and about Dr. Henry Carpenter.

"The Dr. Carpenter to whom the letter was addressed was Dr. Henry Carpenter, the great-grandfather of the current owner of the letter, Mr. E. E. Eshleman, Jr. of Sebring, Florida, formerly of Lancaster County. He still has the four poster bed in which Dr. Carpenter was born.

"Mr. Eshleman noted that Buchanan's note must have been hand carried if he expected Dr. Carpenter to see him that afternoon while it was still daylight!

"Of historical note, Dr. Carpenter was James Buchanan's personal physician and the letter was written a few months after Buchanan's term as President of the United States had ended. He had returned to live at Wheatland in Lancaster and the Civil War had started only about 4 months before.

"Dr. Carpenter had a large medical practice in Lancaster and was a charter member of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society."



**DR. HENRY CARPENTER
(ZIMMERMAN)**

The first Dr. Henry Zimmerman (later Anglicized to Carpenter) came to this section of Pennsylvania in 1698. There is no evidence that he practiced medicine in Lancaster County at that time. He returned to Europe for his family and brought them with him in 1706, but settled in Germantown and did not move to West Earl Township in Lancaster County until 1717. He bought a farm and combined active farming with the practice of medicine the rest of his life.

Boys in five successive generations of Carpenters were given the name of Henry. His son, Dr. Henry inherited the homestead and 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. (our subject). The fifth generation Henry was born in Lancaster in 1819.

He received his elementary education at the select schools of the city and later attended Lancaster Academy. He read medicine with Dr. Samuel Humes of Lancaster and graduated from Pennsylvania Medical College, Philadelphia in 1841 and succeeded to the large practice of his preceptor. Dr. Humes was a charter member and the first president of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society. He was also a charter member and the first president of the Pennsylvania Medical Society.

Henry Carpenter, M.D. was one of the founders of the Lancaster City &

County Medical Society in 1844 and was its secretary from the beginning and became its president in 1855. He was, also, secretary and vice-president of the Pa. Medical Society.

Dr. Carpenter had many other interests. He was president of the Select branch of the City Councils for nearly 20 years and an active member of the school board for 30, a director of the Lancaster Gas Co. and the Lancaster Insurance Co. for many years. He was a director of the Conestoga Steam Mills Co. and one of the originators of the Conestoga Turnpike Co. Dr. Carpenter also was a director of the Lancaster & Quarryville Narrow Gauge Railroad.

He was called into active service twice during the Civil War by the surgeon-general of the state and alleviated the sufferings of the sick and wounded after the battles of the Second Bull Run and Antietam.

(Dr. Henry S. Wentz is grateful to Dr. S. Kendrick Eshleman for his major contribution to this article.)