

1844-1994



Our

Medical

Heritage

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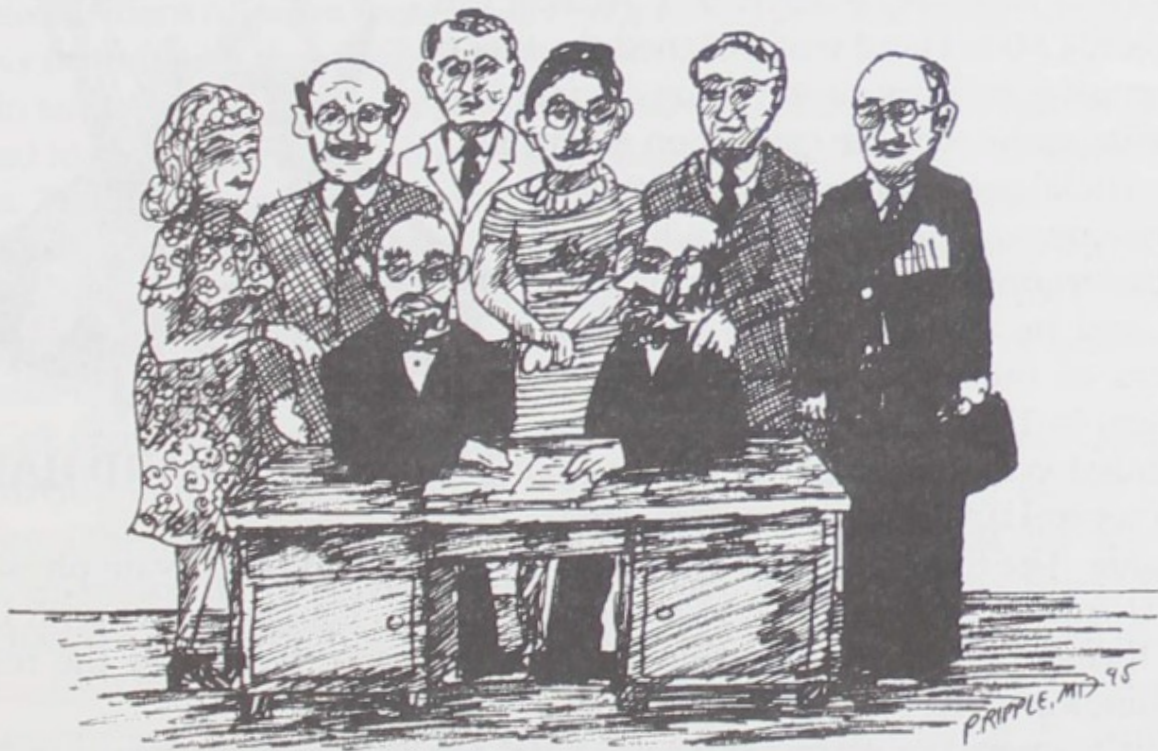


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Lancaster City & County Medical Society

Section 3

Prominent Physicians



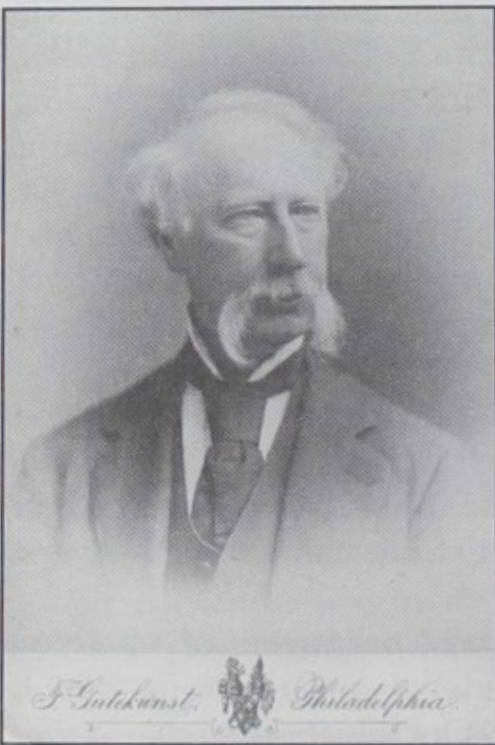
Chapter 30
D. Hayes Agnew, M.D.
Dear Old Man

On July 2, 1881, President Garfield was standing in the Ladies Waiting Room of the Baltimore & Potomac Railway Station in Washington when he was shot in the back by the mentally disturbed Charles J. Giteau.

The president was examined and transported to the White House at his request. To oversee the president's treatment, a Philadelphia physician with Lancaster County roots, Dr. D. Hayes Agnew, was summoned. He arrived in Washington on July 3, having traveled by special train in three hours from Philadelphia the fastest run ever made until that time.

Alexander Graham Bell devised an instrument to find the bullet in the president's body. With this electromagnet, the bullet was successfully located, but surgical removal was considered not feasible because of the location and infection. The decision was made to perform no surgery on the president.

As chief consultant, Dr. Agnew visited the president twice a week during his ordeal. But despite Dr. Agnew's considerable skills and national reputation as a surgeon, Garfield developed septicemia as a result of the infection from the wound and died September 19, 1881. Dr. Agnew rendered no bill for his services.



The first medical organization to which Dr. Agnew belonged was the Lancaster City and County Medical Society. In fact, Dr. Agnew was present on the morning of February 14, 1844, at a meeting to organize

the Medical Society. Twenty three physicians had met in an upper room on the third floor of the Krampf's Building at Queen & Orange streets in Lancaster for this momentous occasion.

David Hayes Agnew was born on November 24, 1818 in Nobleville (the name was changed to Christiana in 1847) in the house now owned by Dr. Herbert Tindall. He was the son of a physician, Dr. Robert Agnew, and Agnes Noble Agnew. From his birth it seems he was destined to be a physician.

He studied medicine under his father and entered the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1836 where the training consisted only of didactic lectures.

After graduation he returned to Nobleville to assist his father. In 1841 he married Margaret C. Irwin, whose father was Samuel Irwin, the owner of the

Pleasant Garden Iron Works. At the urging of his wife, who did not like the name, David, he changed his name to D. Hayes Agnew.

Since his wife's family owned and operated a large iron foundry in Pleasant Garden, Chester County and others in Baltimore and Bellefonte, Dr. Agnew was urged to become active in the business when his father-in-law died. In order to represent his wife's interest, he became a partner in the firm of Irwin & Agnew. When this business failed in three years, he resumed his medical practice from 1846-1848 in Cochranville.

When he returned to medicine he was determined to make the practice of surgery his life's work. As a result of his interest in anatomy and surgery, he moved to Philadelphia in 1848.

One of the chief factors in the success achieved by Dr. Agnew was the Philadelphia School of Anatomy, a major institution of its time. Dr. Agnew became its owner and teacher in 1852, and held this responsibility for 10 years. This acquisition provided an outlet for his real talent, teaching.

In 1854 Dr. Agnew established the Philadelphia School of Operative Surgery where he demonstrated all of the known operative procedures on cadavers. Students flocked to him from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School and Jefferson Medical College.

In the same year he was elected a surgeon to the Philadelphia Hospital, which gave him his first opportunity to teach clinical surgery. He always regarded this step as one of the most important of his professional life. He said, "One might as well attempt to be a gardener without a garden as a surgeon without a hospital."

By the late 1860s he was probably the most popular teacher at the University, and by 1861 he was considered one of the foremost surgeons of Philadelphia.

His habit at the clinic was to precede his operation with a brief statement of the case history, a few remarks about the diagnosis and prognosis, and his reasons for choosing a particular operative method. He said little during the surgery, but afterwards explained what he had done and observed.

Dr. Agnew had begun practicing medicine eight years before anesthesia became available, and his voice trembled whenever he told his students about the suffering he had seen in surgery of that era.

During the Civil War, Dr. Agnew had many opportunities to advance in military surgery. After the battle of Gettysburg, he went to the battlefield and performed services there. At Gettysburg he had charge of the case of General Hancock who was Garfield's opponent in the election of 1880, so that both candidates for the presidency in that year had been or would become his patients.

He received his first appointment to the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania in 1863 and became professor of surgery in 1871. Mrs. John Rhea Barton, widow of an esteemed Pennsylvania surgeon who was born in Lan-

caster County, endowed the Barton Professorship of Surgery with a gift of \$50,000 to the University of Pennsylvania. This was the first endowed medical professorship, and Dr. Agnew was its first recipient.

Dr. Agnew met the British surgeon, Dr. Joseph Lister when he visited Philadelphia in 1876, almost ten years after he had begun to publicize anti-septic surgery. At first it consisted of spraying carbolic acid.

The Eakins picture of Dr. Agnew gives emphasis to asepsis as it depicts the surgeon wearing a clean gown. This painting was presented to Dr. Agnew by the graduating class of 1889 at the same commencement exercises during which Sir William Osler gave his famous address, *Aequanimitas*.



*Birthplace of D. Hayes Agnew
in Christiana*

Dr. Agnew wrote and lectured profusely, but the great literary work of his life was "The Principles and Practice of Surgery" which he wrote in three volumes, bearing the dates 1878, 1881 and 1883.

Dr. Agnew, later in his career, was epitomized with the title of "Dear Old Man" by the younger Dr. Gross. He had overcome early setbacks to become one of our nation's most celebrated surgeons

and teachers. He was skilled in surgery in ophthalmology, gynecology, urology, and orthopedics, in addition to abdominal surgery; he even did some brain surgery, mainly for hematomas.

In his practice he went to the homes of patients to operate if it was necessary. Dr. Agnew would make as many as 10-15 calls in different parts of the city of Philadelphia, in addition to his office and hospital work and teaching. He operated in villages in Delaware and would occasionally go to distant parts of Pennsylvania.

At one point, he received a telegram summoning him to the northern part of the state. In response, he ate a hurried breakfast, took a train and with close connections at Harrisburg and an eight mile drive over rough roads, he arrived at his destination by late afternoon. An operation was required, which he performed at once while a meal was being prepared for him.

After surgery, he looked at his watch and decided to forgo the meal in order to make a train that would get him to Philadelphia in time for his office hours and lectures in the morning. Such great stamina was his trademark until his death in 1892.

And no one could better exemplify the superb quality of imperturbability than the "Dear Old Man." He died with the knowledge that he was well beloved, the "Dear Old Man" of his profession.