

1844-1994



*Our
Medical
Heritage*

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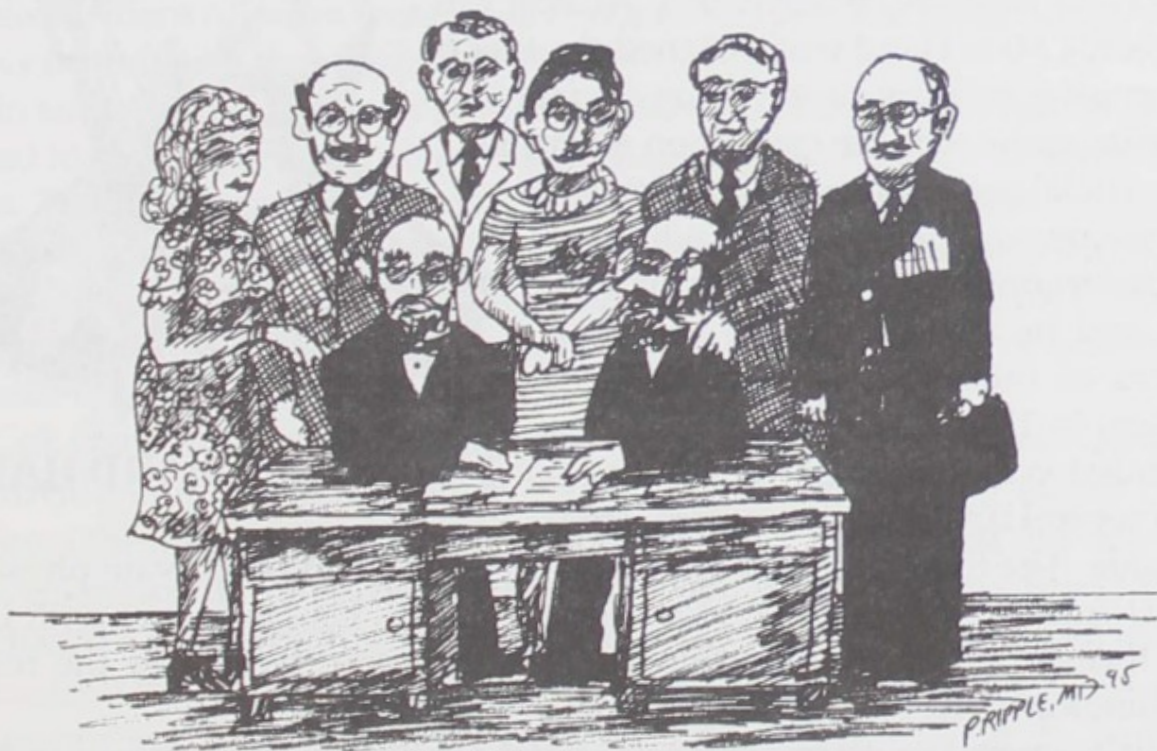


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Lancaster City & County Medical Society

Section 3

Prominent Physicians



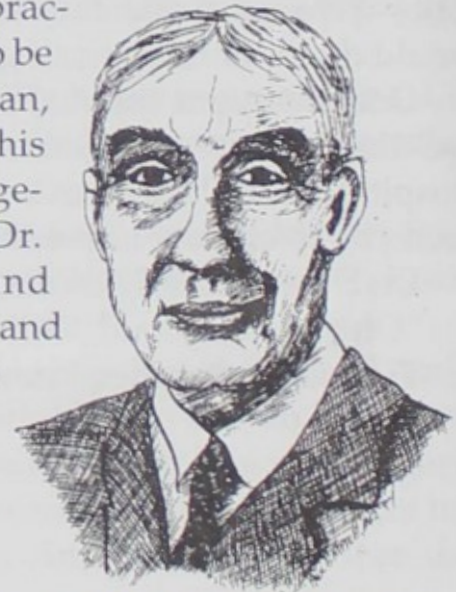
Chapter 34
Clarence R. Farmer, M.D.
A Southern Gentleman

Dr. Irene Davis said, "When I was an intern I loved it when Dr. (Clarence) Farmer was called in consultation because he was a very capable doctor. When I was assisting him with my first caesarean section, I was so excited, that after he made the incision, I pushed him out of the way and went in and took out the baby. He looked at me and said, 'Do you think you're doing this?'

"I said, 'I'm sorry.' He let me finish. He was so nice.

"He was very easy going up to a point, but he had very strict rules. If we thought anything was wrong, we called him in. Even if he didn't do anything, everything seemed all right. He never got excited. He was very calm."

Dr. Harold Stauffer sought Dr. Clarence Farmer's advice about the location in which he should practice. He says, "I asked him because he seemed to be an ideal physician, a very quiet soft spoken man, who never seemed to talk without reflecting on his answer for a long time, seemed very knowledgeable and he seemed to be a good friend. Dr. Clarence Farmer had a large obstetrical and surgical practice from all over Lancaster County and had a lot of contacts in the county. I thought he would offer good advice to me about a place to practice. He told me he thought I should go to Bareville because there were two doctors in the area getting real old and were unable to practice like they did. So I took his advice, rented a place in Bareville, and it proved to be a very happy place."



DR. CLARENCE R. FARMER

Dr. Henry Wentz says of Dr. Farmer, "He was a dignified Southern gentleman with a pleasant North Carolina accent. He was a great physician and surgeon much admired by physicians and patients alike. It was a wonderful lesson to see him stay outwardly calm during an emergency. He would never seem to get rattled, but worked in a tranquil, unhurried manner to properly treat any unexpected happening."

(As told by his son, John L. Farmer, M.D.)

Clarence R. Farmer was born Nov. 4, 1886 in the little town of Elm City, N.C. a rural town in Wilson County 10 miles from the city of Wilson, at that time a big tobacco and cotton growing area. My grandfather inherited land there and had a couple of farms. After the Civil War, this land was relatively

devastated and it took a long time for the economy to recover. There were no public schools in Elm City and my father went to a private school supported by a group of the more prosperous men around the town. He went through private schools for all 12 grades until he went on to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for four years, two years of undergraduate and two years of medical school. After two years of medical school at Chapel Hill it was necessary to transfer elsewhere. (The University of North Carolina had only a two year medical school at that time.) Daddy transferred to Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia for his last two years and graduated in the class of 1909. Then he came to Lancaster to St. Joseph Hospital for a one year internship.

His roommate at Jefferson for one year had been John G. Herr from Landisville and he had visited Lancaster a few times with Dr. Herr and met some people here. He also met my mother and as a result of those contacts, he decided to intern at St. Joseph. After my father completed his year, he took a job with the railroad and was sent to the Reading office. He and my mother, Laura Wohlsen, were married in January of 1911. They lived in Reading until the following summer.

Dr. John Atlee, Sr. offered him a position. My father accepted his offer and set up his practice at 573 W. Lemon Street. He never worked in Dr. Atlee's office which was opposite the First Presbyterian Church in the second block of East Orange St. at that time.

Mother and Daddy lived at the above address where Daddy had converted the front two rooms into his office and the family lived in the rest of the house. He did not have an automobile when he started his practice. He walked to St. Joseph Hospital where Dr. Atlee did most of his work and took the trolley car to make house calls in the city. He bought his first car, a Buick roadster about one year later. Daddy never had a horse and carriage.

At that time Dr. Atlee was doing surgery in the home as well as in the hospital. He went out into the county - all over the county - and did surgery. Daddy accompanied and assisted him. Dr. Atlee had a portable operating table and a bag of instruments. He had a couple of nurses, and one went ahead and took the surgical instruments and got things ready. Dr. Horace Kinzer gave anesthesia, open drop ether, for Dr. Atlee in many cases in and around the city.

Dr. Atlee had a Pullman automobile - I think they were made over in York, Pa. He went by car wherever he was going, whenever the roads would permit. Daddy said, "One of the most inaccessible parts of the county was the southern end." They could take the trolley car to see patients in Quarryville. If the patient they were to visit lived in southern Lancaster County outside of the Quarryville area, they boarded a train which went from Columbia to Port Deposit during the day. They would get the train at Columbia and be met somewhere along the line by the family doctor and he

would drive them in a horse and carriage to their desired destination as there were no hard surfaced roads in that part of the county for many years. The family physician frequently administered the anesthesia, usually open drop ether, and provided the post-operative care to the patient. Two trains ran out of Columbia daily so their operating schedule was determined by the train schedule. Sometimes one nurse went the preceding day. The road from Quarryville to the Maryland line was the first hard surfaced road in that area. All other roads were dirt.

After Daddy finished medical school in 1909, he went to Richmond and spent some time there. Dr. Horsely at the Medical College of Virginia was a very well known surgeon. He saw Dr. Horsely perform two caesarean sections. At medical school he had never seen any caesarean sections done. When he was working with Dr. Atlee, a woman was sent into St. Joseph Hospital who could not be delivered at home. Dr. Atlee decided a caesarean section was probably indicated but he had never done one. He called Daddy and since he had seen these two operations performed in Richmond, they did the first caesarean section in Lancaster in 1911. The mother had an uneventful recovery following the delivery of a healthy baby.

Not too long after Daddy started practice, Dr. Atlee was getting all kinds of cases, obstetrical as well as surgical. Nobody in Lancaster had done any versions. Dr. Potter of Buffalo, N.Y. had advocated internal podalic version (turning the baby around inside of the uterus to bring legs and breech first) to help resolve many obstetrical difficulties. Dr. Atlee suggested that my father go to Buffalo and spend some time with Dr. Potter. Daddy went to Buffalo for a few months to observe Dr. Potter do internal podalic versions which he was doing in many of his deliveries. He had a book on this subject by Dr. Potter.

Daddy had an outlet forceps that he used for many years which was given to him by the Sisters at St. Joseph Hospital when he finished his internship. Dr. Peiffer of Philadelphia devised the aftercoming head forceps which my father also used many times.

During the first World War in 1917-18 a lot of doctors were taken into the Armed Forces, and Dr. Atlee refused to do any more surgery in the home.

My father went all over the county for consultations. A lot of times he had to see a patient in the home before the hospital was accepted by the patient and family. When the consultant came out and recommended hospitalization, the patient would go. I remember going with him to consult about patients with Dr. Hostetter in White Horse and Dr. Keylor in Leacock.

Dr. Clarence Farmer was chief of surgical services at Lancaster General Hospital from 1924-1940. He was chief of obstetrical services at the hospital from 1944 until 1952. During his long practice of medicine, he delivered over 5,000 babies. -Editor