

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 7

Colonel Charles Patterson Stahr, M. D.

Dr. Charles P. Stahr was Division Surgeon of the 28th Division and retired as a brigadier general in 1941. He was the medical director of the Lancaster General Hospital for two decades. Dr. Stahr was the secretary of the Lancaster City & County Medical Society, and the medical director of Armstrong Cork Co., each for 36 years. He was interested in the health and welfare of the community and pioneered many advances to safeguard the health of the citizens of the City of Lancaster.

Charles P. Stahr was born in Lancaster on April 27, 1877. He was educated at Franklin & Marshall Academy, Franklin & Marshall College and received his medical degree from the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1900. He married Ruth Clark whom he met while interning at the Methodist Episcopal Hospital of Philadelphia.

Dr. Stahr returned to Lancaster to begin his medical practice and joined the medical and dental staff of the Lancaster General Hospital. In 1902 he spoke at the cornerstone laying of a new building at the hospital in the absence of Dr. Theodore B. Appel, Medical Director, who was attending a meeting of the Pennsylvania Medical Society. In 1903 the first laboratory was established at LGH with Dr. Charles Stahr in charge. As many general practitioners did in those days, he did a fair amount of surgery consisting of cholecystectomies, appendectomies, herniorrhaphies in addition to incision and drainage of abscesses, repair of lacerations and care of fractures.



DR. CHARLES P. STAHR

In 1919 he became medical director of the Lancaster General Hospital, a post which he held until 1940. At that time the medical director was the administrator of the hospital with the help of a business manager. He was general supervisor of professional and technical affairs of the hospital and was required to give his mark of approval to all requisitions of a technical nature from every department. In 1936 there were four departments: Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics and Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat.

Dr. Irene Davis said, "Dr. Stahr and three interns including myself provided artificial respiration for a 12 year old girl with polio who was unable to breathe on her own. We spared each other for three days and Dr. Stahr, Medical Director, did his share. We were hoping to tide her over until she could regain breathing herself, but this never happened and she died." This was before iron lungs (respirators) were available.

Another story told about him occurred in the receiving ward – then the name for the emergency room. Dr. Stahr was a tall, thin, erect individual who usually had a stern expression on his face, the picture of a military officer. Many of his patients held him in awe - but not so children - they loved him and he loved them. Though of grim countenance he did have a good sense of humor which was not always recognized. He was seeing a patient with a broken arm and he had reduced the fracture and asked the student nurse to get a splint. The student nurse opened the cabinet where the splints were kept and all of them fell out on the floor. While she was stooped over to pick them up, she looked up at him and burst out, "You laughed."

He was an officer of the Pennsylvania National Guard and drilled his military unit on the campus of F.& M. Academy riding his favorite horse, Roxy. He served in the Mexican border conflicts in 1916. Dr. Stahr organized the 111th Ambulance Co. of the 28th Division of the Pennsylvania National Guard in 1917 and led the local unit through some of the fiercest fighting in W.W.I. To many local doughboys, he was known as "The Skipper." When he returned with his unit, he told the townspeople, "Lancaster, here are your boys. I've brought them back to you." In 1956 the local National Guard Armory was named in his honor. Soon after being recalled to active duty as division surgeon of the 28th Division in 1941 for W.W.II, General Charles P. Stahr was retired at 65 years of age.

Always interested in community affairs, he became the first medical inspector of the Lancaster Public Schools and during his tenure introduced the first vaccination and immunization program against diphtheria for the students. For several years he also lectured on anatomy and hygiene at Franklin & Marshall College following the death in 1902 of Dr. Martin L. Herr, who had revived the Department of Anatomy, Physiology and Hygiene.

As secretary of the Lancaster City Board of Health, a position which he held for many years, he wrote Lancaster's first Pure Milk Ordinance which became a model for other Pennsylvania communities. Dairymen fought against the law which required pasteurization and testing of herds for bovine tuberculosis. The case was contested through the courts and Dr. Stahr won. He also made regulations about meat handling in the city markets and improved the sanitary conditions in restaurants. He was responsible for the construction of the filter plant ending the use of unfiltered water by city residents. This action resulted in a significant decrease in the incidence of typhoid fever in inhabitants of Lancaster.

Between 1916 and 1952, Dr. Stahr was secretary of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society. He was also a member of the American Medical Association, Pennsylvania Medical Society and the American College of Surgeons. Other posts which he held included physician to the Reading Railroad, medical director for Civil Defense, president of the Alumni Council of Franklin & Marshall College and a member of the Alumni

Athletic Council of that institution. He was deputy coroner for the city of Lancaster for more than 20 years.

During his long tenure as the medical director for Armstrong Cork Co., he instituted a plant dispensary, a visiting nurse service for employees and round-the-clock nursing service.

He was one of the first physicians to own an automobile. His first car was a Maxwell and at one time he drove a Stutz Bearcat.

Dr. Joseph Appleyard once said of Dr. Stahr, "You may not always agree with Charlie, but there's no question of where he stands." Dr. Stahr was a living example that if you want a job well done, give it to a busy man.

Seeing Eye Horse

A young Amishman named David had lost all of his central vision in each eye from a disease called Toxoplasmosis. He had 20/200 vision in each eye, not near enough to pass a driver's test. I asked him how he got around. He explained that his horse had much better vision than he did and he allowed the horse to make the decision to cross the street or highway for him.