

The Military Hospital at the Cloister

By C. H. MARTIN

THE DEFEAT of Washington's army at Brandywine September 11, 1777, resulted in the loss of about twelve hundred in killed and wounded; in addition he had many sick. His position became more critical as the British Army moved toward Philadelphia. The care of the sick and wounded at points remote from the scene of battle or campaign resulted in the selection of the Cloister at Ephrata as one place where the commander-in-chief was certain those needing hospitalization would be tenderly cared for by the pious brethren and sisters of the Cloister. The sister's house had been erected about thirty-five years prior to the Revolution. The brother's house erected about the same time was razed about 1906. Both were very large and substantial buildings, provided spacious quarters—not to mention other buildings on these grounds—and located in an area from which those caring for the sick and wounded could draw heavily for food and other necessaries in their ministration of nursing, an area remote from temptation of gold offered by commissaries of the British Army, as compared with currency of the Continentals.

Accordingly, about five hundred of those needing hospitalization were directed toward the Cloister. The picture of their dreary march may be drawn from a few pathetic words of an eye witness—a Lancaster County soldier who stated, "Some were in wagons, some were in carts, and those who were able to walk did so. As they passed in the night we could hear the wounded cry as the wagons passed over the stones." The wagons used were farm wagons, principally, upon which straw was placed, adding but little to the ease and comfort of the wounded. On some wagons shelves were built upon which lay the wounded. What contrast with smooth rolling ambulances to-day over paved highways.

Who shall describe the pain and suffering of this stricken company as the long train crept slowly along over the approximate sixty-five miles of rough road leading from Chester to Ephrata. If I had the gift of an artist, what a theme for enduring canvas!!

At last they reached the Cloister. There appeared to be no end, witnesses said, to the long wagon train. Eventually the last one appeared.

On this hallowed ground, whose hills re-echoed the strange melodies of Conrad Beissel's music, soon were heard the morning and evening drum of the camp and the dead march of the military funeral. Yes, this is hallowed ground prompting one to quote a command of God to Moses—Remove Thy shoes from off Thy feet for the ground whereon Thou standest is holy ground.

One hundred and two years ago when efforts were made to erect a monument marking the site of the Revolutionary dead, a report was made that some Hessians were quartered here. Affidavit of Peter Shindel of Lancaster, sworn to in 1845, is informative and of great interest. It follows:

"I was at the battle of Brandywine and belonged to the left division of the American Army. After the battle and defeat of the Americans, I, with a number of my companions, fled to Marcus Hook, where we spent the night in a chairmaker's hut. During the night we heard the wagons containing the wounded Americans pass on the way to Chester—we could hear the wounded cry as the wagons passed over the stones. The next day we also went to Chester, where we saw them all—some were in wagons, some in carts, and those that were able to walk did so. From Chester they were removed as soon as possible to Ephrata, where they were carefully attended to until they died or recovered. From Chester we went up to Darby, thence to Philadelphia, and up the Schuylkill. There were no Hessians at Ephrata at all. The Hessian prisoners were kept in Lancaster—about one thousand of them had been taken at the Battle of Trenton and brought to Lancaster—I helped to take them from Lancaster to Philadelphia myself, where we put them into the old jail at the corner of Third and Market Streets."

[Signed] "PETER SHINDEL." ¹

This affidavit was made before Alderman John C. VanCamp at Lancaster, October 20, 1845.

Such a large number of sick and wounded having arrived at Ephrata required immediate attention.

Captain Albert Chapman was military commandant at Ephrata. Dr. Moses Scott of New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Drs. Yeakel and Harrison were leading surgeons. Dr. Ebenezer Smith and Dr. Reading Beatty were assistant surgeons. John

¹ See Proceedings of Lancaster County Historical Society, vol. 23, p. 150.

Scott, brother of Dr. Moses Scott, was the commissary. Dr. William Brown of Alexandria, Virginia, educated at Edinburgh, Scotland, appears to have been surgeon general in charge of the hospital. He was then about thirty years of age. Later, he practiced at Alexandria, Virginia, and is buried there. The sisterhood of Sharon devoted themselves to the care of the suffering soldiers. Sister Armella (family name Catherana Henrich) Sister Jae (family name Barbara Mayer) and Sister Zenobia, being particularly devoted in ministering to the sick and wounded.

Under the skill of these faithful physicians and surgeons, and the good care given by the sisters and brothers, a majority of their patients recovered and again joined the army. Many of the wounded died. For many the strain of the journey to Ephrata was too great. The total number of deaths approached two hundred—the exact number is not known. Camp fever, baffling the skill of the physicians, caused the death of many. The loving hands of those attending could do no more than ease the pain and smooth and soften the passing through the valley of the shadow of death.

Captain John McMeyer McDonald, a brave officer from Virginia, died the morning after the arrival at Ephrata. He was buried with military honors at Mt. Zion. A letter of J. W. Scott, son of Dr. Moses Scott, surgeon, dated November 10, 1845, addressed to Hon. Joseph Konigmacher, makes some detailed reference to Captain McDonald as follows:

“New Brunswick, N. J., Nov. 10, 1845.

“Hon. Joseph Konigmacher—

“Dear sir—

“You ask me for all the intelligence I have in relation to Captain McDonald. Of course, all my knowledge of him is derived from my father. From him I have often heard of that gallant and intrepid soldier. He was a volunteer from Virginia and commanded a company like himself, high spirited and brave. The greater part of this company were from New Jersey, and voluntarily enrolled themselves.

“The Battle of Brandywine gave a most glorious death to most of them—sixteen survivors bore off the body of their wounded commander, defending it and themselves with an obstinate valor much more resembling the fiction of romance than the narrative

of history. The day after their arrival at Ephrata, McMeyer McDonald died of his wounds. His own soldiers buried him a little distance from the burial place where the monument is now placed. The last survivor of this gallant company died about three years ago. He was ninety-one years of age.

“My sister desires me to inform you that she does not remember the names of the officers who died and were buried at Ephrata. She mentions also that a part of the time that my father directed the hospital there, Dr. Reading Beatty and Dr. Ebenezer Smith were two of his assistants. John Scott, my father’s brother, was the Commissary. More she does not remember, except that the kindness, fidelity and attention of Father Miller were the theme of much conversation and ardent gratitude. I am with the highest respect and esteem,

“Your obedient servant

[Signed] “J. W. Scott.”

For some time the dead were given separate and military burials at Mt. Zion, later the deaths became too numerous to permit of military burial for each one, bodies were then laid to rest in trenches without formal ceremony. No known record of the names of the other soldiers who died at the military hospital there exists—but their memories are immortal.

For many years the only marker indicating the burial site of these honored dead was a pine board about six feet long and six inches wide, placed over the entrance to the burial ground, bearing the inscription, **HIER RUHEN DIE GEBEINE VON VIEL SOLDATEN** (Here rest the remains of many soldiers).

A renewed spirit of patriotism aroused interest in marking this site, and resulted in opening a subscription book, May 20, 1844. By circulation it received the names of many from Lancaster, Reading, Philadelphia, and elsewhere. In January, 1845, this group applied for incorporation. The charter was approved and signed February 24, 1845, by Hon. Francis R. Shunk, Governor. It designated several Ephrata men as directors. Periodic meetings were held, resulting in the laying of a cornerstone of a proposed monument, September 11, 1845. This was done with solemn and impressive ceremonies with thousands present. Governor Shunk laid the cornerstone.

At 10 A. M., the Governor reviewed the soldiery, and later the military formed around the site of the proposed monument. His Excellency addressed the large assemblage in English on the nature of the ceremony and object of the monument. He then read a list of papers about to be deposited in the cornerstone, then turned and addressed the company in German, later the military formed and received the Governor, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, the Treasurer of the State, the President of the Society, the clergy and others. Morning ceremonies were closed with the benediction by the Rev. Peter Wolle, of Lititz. The whole body then moved toward an adjacent grove where a rostrum had been erected, with the military formed on the outside. The Rev. Mr. Buchanan opened the meeting with prayer. The President of the day, Colonel Scott, of New Jersey, then made an eloquent address and introduced Mr. Joseph R. Chandler who delivered the oration.

After this Mr. John Beck, principal of Lititz Academy, spoke for a considerable time in German. His address was fervent, eloquent and stirring, and his appeal to the spirit of the dead and to one venerable man present were touching in the highest degree. The venerable man was Jacob Angus then eighty years of age—a resident of the Cloister who had participated in the Battle of Brandywine and recalled distinctly bringing the wounded soldiers from the scene of the battle to Ephrata, in ambulances and wagons with shelves on each side. A historical address by Geo. W. McElroy, Esq., Lancaster, at 3 P. M., closed the afternoon program. Among those present was Miss Hannah Scott of New Brunswick, New Jersey, who as a girl of twelve years was at Ephrata with her father, in 1777-78. She had very distinct memories of many events that took place at the Cloister during those years. Although the cornerstone was laid in 1845, decades passed before a monument was erected. In 1855, a supplement to the charter formed the Ephrata Monument Association. This was signed by the Hon. James Pollock, governor. This group and their successors continued efforts to secure an appropriate marking of the cemetery in tribute to the patriots resting there. Several times, in the 1890's, parades were held at Ephrata on Patriot's day, September 11, with some exercises at the cemetery.

Finally, May 1, 1902, a day not to be forgotten in the history of Ephrata and the Cloister, the fine monument permanently

marking the sacred site was unveiled with Governor William A. Stone addressing the vast assemblage, estimated upwards of fifteen thousand, gathered to pay reverence to the honored dead.

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES

The wagons bearing the wounded and sick began to arrive the third day after the battle. Soon both kammers (cells) and the Saal were filled as the long wagon train continued arriving. In less than a week Kedar and Zion were filled with hundreds of suffering patriots. The halls and corridors which a short time prior re-echoed the sweet music of the choirs, alternating with the fervent prayers of the mystics, were now filled with the groans of the sick and moans of the dying. To make matters worse a malignant fever, a type of typhus, broke out.

Dr. James Tilton, who visited the hospital late in 1777, stated that not an orderly, or nurse, escaped an attack of the deadly fever, and but few surgeons escaped its attack. Doctor Tilton further stated that Dr. James Harrison, a fine fellow distinguished for his devotion to relieve the suffering, died; that when Doctor Harrison was stricken he was removed to one of the smaller houses within bounds of the community, where he was cared for by Brother Joannes Anguas, a widower. Notwithstanding the care and attention bestowed upon him Doctor Harrison soon passed away. Brother Anguas was stricken. An entry in a diary which forty-five to fifty years ago was in the possession of Mr. Julius Sachse, noted historian, reads: "1778 March ye 4 departed this life Brother James Auguas." Through years of research Mr. Sachse found a record of a partial list of members of the Society who died during the occupation of Kedar and Zion for hospital purposes, including:

Brother Martin Funk, the younger, Oct. 5, 1777

“ Johann Bentz

Sister Maragretha

Brother Johannes Koch

“ Casper Walter, the younger.

1778

Sister Anna Maria Huber Jan. 19th

Widow Gertraut Melinger Feb. 3

Henrich Miller who kept the tavern, Jan. 12th

[Mr. Miller married Susanna Margaretha Henckel. He contracted the camp fever while ministering to the needs of the suffering soldiers. See Pa. German Soc. Proceedings, vol. 20, 1909, page 408, also Henckel Family Record, Jan., 1929, page 161. Mr. Miller was ancestor of the late Pierce Leshner and Mrs. John Evans Sr.]

Brother Adam Kimmel, Jan. 27

“ Joannes Angues Mar. 4

To this list must be added John Bear and wife who voluntarily entered the hospital and nursed the sick. John Bear was a Mennonite preacher. Both he and his wife caught the infection and died; Mrs. Bear dying March 20, 1778, and the Reverend Bear April 15, 1778.

For fear of the continued infection two of the buildings used for hospital purposes were later burned.

One grand figure stands out in bright relief during the dark days of the military hospital, that of Peter Miller. As brother Jaebez he was Prior of the Community that contributed so greatly to the relief of the stricken patriots. He was later honored with membership in the American Philosophical Society.

Older folks of Lancaster recall Captain W. D. Stauffer, mayor of the City, 1874 to 1877, and co-proprietor of a hat store at corner of North Queen and Grant streets. He was born at Martindale, near Ephrata. His grandmother, Sarah DeShung Stauffer, was a member of the Baptist Church and Society at Ephrata. She frequently told the grandchildren about the soldiers of the Revolutionary War and of her having knit stockings for them, and attending to the sick and wounded soldiers.

Some few years ago a Masonic Charm was found at the Cloister grounds. It is slightly different than the design of those currently used. Some of those nursed at Ephrata were troops from Virginia and members of the Masonic Order. Mr. Brunner, of Reinholds, told the writer of obtaining this insigne a few years ago and having given it to the museum of the Order at Philadelphia.