

Two Famous Doctors of Southern Lancaster County

By D. F. MAGEE, Esq.

LANCASTER County probably stands at the head of the list of all Counties in the State for the fame of the notable physicians it has given to the medical profession in the past half century or more.

The name of B. Hays Agnew, probably the most famous surgeon that United States has produced, whose fame was Nation wide; of John Musser of Lancaster, Prof. at University of Pennsylvania; of the two Deavers of the Buck, Harry and John B., sons of the elder Dr. James Deaver of the Buck, all of this County, are familiar names throughout the Nation. They are famous for their discoveries in medicine and practice of surgery in most of the Eastern states.

The men above named became famous in surgery at a much later date than the subjects of this paper, and the fact that they became Professors of the University of Pennsylvania had much to do with the renown and public recognition which they gained.

The subjects of this paper, Doctor Benjamin Franklin Sides and Doctor James A. Peeples of Southern Lancaster County, did not become as well known nor so famous perhaps because both of them confined their work mainly to the section in which they were born, and knew best, and never aspired to professorships at the noted Philadelphia Hospitals: Pennsylvania University and Jefferson.

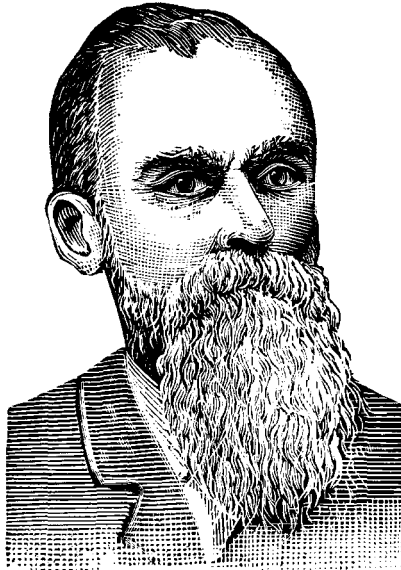
Nevertheless, within the territory in which they practiced they were fairly worshipped by those who were fortunate enough to have either of them as family physicians or in consultation; and both stood ace high with the faculty of Jefferson Medical College, their Alma Mater; also throughout the territory in which they practiced.

That territory was bounded, in the main, by the Susquehanna river on the West, the Octoraro creek on the East, the Buck ridge on the North and the Mason and Dixon line on the South. Occasionally they were called in consultation in desperate cases beyond these lines in every direction; and one of them, Sides, had quite a practice across the Susquehanna river, among the slate miners in York County.

When we think of the immense territory covered by these dimensions, in round figures more than one hundred square miles, with an average population of twenty-one hundred people, in five hundred families, we can readily realize the tremendous labor required to attend it. It is true they did not attend nearly all of

the families within this large territory for there were some four or five more physicians at times serving the same population; but the clientele of these two men were scattered all over it.

Dr. Benjamin Franklin Sides was born near Camargo, in Providence Township, September 26th, 1822. He began reading medicine with Dr. Patrick Cassidy of Lancaster in the fall of 1842; entered as a student in Jefferson Medical College in the spring of 1844, and was graduated therefrom in March, 1846.



DR. BENJAMIN F. SIDES

From that period he began his practice at Centreville in Dru-more Township, and after 1876 located near Fairfield. He bought a farm and built a home, where he lived until his death in 1901, aged seventy-nine.

He left to survive him a wife, Ellen King Sides, and two daughters: Belle, who was married to Saunders McSparran, and Sarah, who died in young womanhood some years before her father.

The other of these remarkable physicians, Dr. James A. Peeples, was born in Fulton Township, near the Maryland line, in 1841 and died March 1st, 1916; in the home where he was born and lived all his life, near Kirks Mills, at the age of seventy-five.

Like Doctor Sides, (and as was the general custom of the times in that section) he read medicine with Dr. Sides after he

became twenty-one. From that time on they were fast friends and co-workers in the profession, and began practice in 1868. Whenever either of them had specially dangerous or difficult cases in his practice, in illness or surgery, each called upon the other and depended upon each other always.



DR. JAMES A. PEEPLES

While Peeples' skill in surgery was probably not so sure and perfect as Sides' who had the advantage of four years' experience as a surgeon in the Army during the Civil War, he soon attained a wide reputation in that line. In this connection it must be borne in mind that people of that section were not taken to the hospital as is the case now, but even the most difficult operations were invariably performed in the patients' homes.

Sides' proficiency as a surgeon was attained as I have said in the army service back of the battle lines. His high courage, knowledge and skill staid with him even to his last days.

It was common knowledge that he never in all his long practice lost out in a child birth case of either the mother or child. In after years when the entire practice fell upon Peeples, all expectant mothers felt confident, sure and safe if they were only assured of Peeples for their physician; and this was especially true of the first born.

It must be borne in mind that in those days when doctors were few and far between, and there were no telephones and only horse transportation existed, families called upon the doctor only when a case became dangerous and doctors were not depended upon to keep their patients *from* sickness.

This was especially true in children's diseases, and in such cases as pneumonia, typhoid fever, infantile summer complaints, &c., &c.

When such cases became prevalent these two men were kept busy and could only get time to visit the most urgent cases.

Dr. Sides was generally credited with the discovery of the feasibility of taking out the appendix, and he performed his first operation of that kind in Little Britain Township. At that time it was said he cut out a section of the bowel and extracted material from the bowel that had caused a stoppage and inflammation.

This was the case of Sarah Shade, the wife of John Shade, painter, and occurred in the year 1890.

On inquiry and examination made at the Jefferson Medical College we do not find that Dr. Sides ever officially reported this case, but we also find that of some four or five of the earliest cases reported in the names of other doctors at the University of Pennsylvania, the same occurred just about the time of the Shade case or later, and all of them after 1890.

Therefore the writer is firmly of the opinion that Dr. Sides did discover originally in his own experience and did successfully perform it in this instance; but he did not report it, hence it cannot now be proven.

The writer hereof knew all of these parties intimately and they lived within a mile of him, and John Shade often worked for him as a painter before and after this occurrence.

The woman recovered and lived some years thereafter.

Dr. Sides' war experience in the field during the war; following the armies into battle required his giving all of his time to the prompt attention to the wounded; consequently when he returned to practice among his clients of the Southern end, owing to his proficiency he was invariably sent for and Dr. Peeples was usually his assistant in all difficult surgical cases. The young doctors who started practice seldom had the years of service as internes as is now given in our hospitals, hence they would usually locate in the County and work up a practice somewhere within their own home country. The result of this was that both in medical practice and surgical operations when such less experienced men had cases verging on the dangerous, and admitted to the family that they feared for results, and suggested calling in a consulting physician, Sides or Peeples in most instances were selected. This naturally extended their fame and simply overloaded them with work, which

compelled them to cut off much of their more distant patients in order that they might make their daily rounds.

Both of these men were of remarkably strong physical development, and when past middle life, no amount of labor in driving in an open buggy, oftentimes in a sulky, when roads were exceedingly bad, deterred them. Their hours were never less than twelve per day and they drove in all kinds of weather. It was only after they reached beyond their three score and ten years that either of them quit their practice. Dr. Peeples literally died in the harness at the age of seventy-five; he being found sitting in his buggy unconscious by the road side while making his rounds in Little Britain Township.

A prominent citizen of that section, writing for a local paper about Dr. Sides said:—

“Almost any venture that surgery may make, Sides has the confidence and courage to make; but the enthusiasm of his skill never goes beyond the boundary marked by his care.” He has the nerve to attempt anything, but over it rules the judgment that never tries too much. ‘Better any kind of a limb than no limb’, was one of his favorite expressions. He always gives the patient the benefit of the doubt and many a man had two legs or two arms, because Sides was there at the critical moment with courage enough to save the endangered member.”

Dr. Sides’ home at Fairfield was but four miles from the Peach Bottom Ferry over the Susquehanna into York County.

In his time there were a numerous colony of Welsh families living on both sides of the River, but most of them on the York County side, at West Bangor, engaged in quarrying slate at both quarries. These people became greatly attached to Sides and their simple faith in him and in his skill, was both touching and amusing as they led him about the scattered settlement to attend the injured, sick or ailing. Seeing this it was easy to comprehend the simple faith that believed, of the great physician that it was only necessary “to touch the hem of his garment to be healed.”

They tell the story of an old Welsh widow, who sitting at her cottage window one day seeing Dr. Sides drive by exclaimed, “My there goes Dr. Sides, what a pity there is not someone sick here.” This thought no doubt came to her as she thought how difficult it was to get Sides when needed and she regretted he could not be of use when he was right there at her home.

Dr. Sides was very fond of music and was himself a fine fiddler; and often when he had the time would fiddle for awhile to amuse a family or a party of friends who might be gathered for a shindig in a farm house after the day’s work was done.

Doctor Peeples’ hobby was good horses and he loved and knew a fine one when he saw it. He owned a big farm on which he lived pretty much all his life where he died.

In addition to that he owned a large tract of land with farm buildings near Rock Springs partly in Maryland and partly in Pennsylvania. He called this place "The Ranch" and he laid out a race track on the same and bred many fine horses there for some years. He would own nothing but the best he could find. He kept a fine stallion and a number of brood mares and raised and trained many young drivers.

It is of local interest to state the fact that Mrs. Peeples within a couple years past sold "The Ranch" to Mr. Samuel R. Slaymaker of this city, who bought it on account of the fine growth of cedar trees which are growing plentifully upon the barren part of it. He has dug hundreds of them up and brought them to Lancaster and planted them upon his Grand View City improvement of the McGrann farm, where they will help beautify this section of Lancaster City for all time. We may all look upon them as memorials of Dr. James A. Peeples.

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