

## *Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles*

Carroll's Yesteryears  
03 March 1991

Letter offers glimpse of medical training  
by Joe Getty

Over the past two years, the Historical Society has been working on a new book about the history of the medical profession in Carroll County. The manuscript was researched and written by Dr. Theodore E. Woodward, M.D., a Carroll County native who is the son and grandson of two Westminster physicians. "Carroll County Physicians of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" will be released later this month and provides biographies of the academically trained physicians in each of our communities.

Much of the research for this publication was undertaken in the library of the Historical Society of Carroll County. The genealogical reference materials and nineteenth century newspapers provided a wealth of information about previous doctors who served Carroll County. The Historical Society also administers a manuscript collection that contains materials about the history of medicine in our county. An appendix to the book prepared by our curator, Jay Graybeal, describes the resources in the manuscript collection.

Research of this type can be stimulating and rewarding, and it is exciting when you find a reference that provides a first-hand view of nineteenth century medical practices. One of the finds on this project was a letter in our manuscript collection written on October 27, 1853, by Dr. John F. Buffington (1828-1896) while he was a student at the Jefferson Medical College in Baltimore. Buffington and his son, Dr. John A. Buffington (1862-1902) provided medical services to the New Windsor community during the late nineteenth century.

In his letter, Dr. Buffington attempts to provide his friend in Taneytown, John McKellip, with an idea of his studies and experiences in the dissecting laboratory at medical school. An excerpt from this personal letter provides us with a unique perspective about a Carroll Countian's medical education in the 1850s:

How d'yr do old fellow? How is Taneytown? The Ladies? The people in general & particular? Thriving I S'psoe, like "huckleberries" in a snowstorm. Your communication came to hand just 18 days after it had been dated, but was even at that late day fresh and welcome I am under obligation to you for so kindly performing my request and trust I shall some day be able to do you an equal favor. But John, "I'm yon" in Baltimore undergoing a process of chiseling which is intended, how it will succeed I do not know, to make a d-o-c-t-o-r out of me. Well I tell you, It will take a very great and skillful operation that will ever make anything out of my poor self. But I find I'm not much more ignorant than some others I meet with occasionally, but with these I never like to compare myself I prefer always to compare my abilities with those I know to be greater – This induces me to renewed exertion and cultivate a degree of modesty which is always

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desirable...This kind of colleging is different from the other kind I was used to. The studies are different, the manner of conducting things all quite new to me. Fellows are all sociable – even kind to one another, but then some board here and some board there and you may never meet them save in the lecture room – and never know any more of them than that they have a straight-nose, a high dickey, a prominent moustache and looked as if they didn't care if it snowed in harvest...But I must not close my letter without saying something of the Infirmary and the Surgical operations performed in presence of the class. Two students have keeled over while looking at the process and some have nearly done the same and rally I'm not much surprised for some operations not to be described here were such as to cause any one to feel sympathy for the sufferers, Even if the sight of the deformed sores and the bloody openings made by the surgeon's instrument did not shock his nervous system. To visit as we do, the Infirmary, and witness the operations performed, must have a salutary effect on thinking minds. Every time I see them I determine anew to make every exertion to prepare myself well, that I may be able, when called upon to relieve promptly and effectually my suffering fellow creatures. The Infirmary preaches to me more effectually than the pulpit. The preacher says we are poor afflicted mortals, there I see it. He says we fade as the flower, there one day is a sufferer, a few days after I look, his bed is empty – no one need tell me the story, I know it at once, he hand of death, more skillful than the physician had soothed his sores and his pains. But the beauty of beauties is the dissecting room. I procured my tickets as soon as I could after I came into the city, for it burned in my pockets, and this brought me on for an early dissection. The consequence was that two subjects were brought in during that warm weather and I was assigned a part in the play. It was entirely too hot, the bodies soon began to decompose and consequently a most offensive odor. But the work had to be done, and early too, as it would "spile" so I worked hard at it every leisure moment, and now I have done at it what I could under the circumstances. Had it come in on the first of this week when it was cold I could have kept a long time & would have worked at it at least a month but when dead beings begin to come to life again, as one did though not mine, it is high time that they be conveyed from the "Preparation Room." At first I disliked very much the thought of commencing while it was so warm, but my nerves and stomach and my poor nose, endured it all with admirable good grace, and now I can go into the room without the least feelings of delicacy. I'll bet a hoss I can look at anything at which anyone else can, provided it be a proper object, without blanching a cheek. But what is nicest, it saturates my clothes completely, with odor, and when (I) get down into the parlor or at the table I am not so agreeable to the delicate nasal organs of the Ladies.

Dan Reaver I judge is (in) Taneytown, give him my regards. Give my respects to my Preceptor and tell him I am Succeeding at least tolerably. As to books, I have as many here as I can conveniently consult and more than I can master. Give my regards to all the young Ladies & c, but especially, John, remember me with the sincerest respect to your other and better half and consider me as ever

Your true best friend  
Buffington

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The Historical Society of Carroll County will sponsor a “Medical Heritage of Carroll County” dinner on Thursday, April 4. Dr. Theodore Woodward will present a program about Carroll County doctors and the experiences of researching his book. For information call the Historical society at 848-6494.

*Photo credit: Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County*

*Photo caption: Dr. John A. Buffington, right, and druggist Louis Dielman served New Windsor at the turn of the century.*