

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### THE EDWARD HAND MEDICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

To the Editor,

I wish to inform your readers about one of the great hidden medical treasures of our community, and to utilize this forum to solicit their support.

In 1982, a group of individuals from the Lancaster City and County Medical Society headed by Drs. Paul Ripple and Samuel Hauck along with several others from the allied health professions and business community interested in preserving Lancaster County's rich medical heritage gathered together to establish the Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation. The mission of the foundation is to preserve Lancaster's medical heritage through the collection of artifacts and memorabilia and to make them accessible to the public through exhibits, a museum, and the World Wide-Web.

The Foundation has a board of 18 members as well as representatives from its four partners including Lancaster General Health Foundation, the Rock Ford Foundation, LancasterHistory.org and the Lancaster County Housing and Rehabilitation Authority.

The name Edward Hand was chosen because of the indelible imprint of Dr. Hand on both Lancaster County's very early medical history and its political history. Born in Ireland in 1744, he received his medical education at Trinity College in Dublin and served as a Surgeon's Mate with the Irish Royal Regiment. He arrived in America in 1767 and was assigned to Fort Pitt as a British military officer, but resigned his commission in 1774 to join the American cause. He took up residence in Lancaster, married Catherine Ewing of Lancaster's gentry class, and became a leading anti-English activist. With the onset of the revolution, he was called upon to serve in the Continental Army as a lieutenant colonel and commanded the heroic Pennsylvania Riflemen who fought in the early battles in New England. He rose to the rank of major general and served as Washington's adjutant general. Following the war, he was active in local and national politics, served in the Continental Congress, was a signatory of Pennsylvania's state constitution, and served as a burgess of Lancaster. He established a successful medical practice and played a leading role in the creation of the 1799 Lancaster County Almshouse and Hospital. (Dr. Hand's great-granddaughter, Katherine Brian Rogers, married Lancaster

physician Dr. John Light Atlee.<sup>1</sup> His father, also Dr. John Atlee, was elected president of the Pennsylvania Medical Society in 1857 and president of the American Medical Association in 1882.)

Dr. Hand's untimely death in 1802 was due to a gastrointestinal illness described as "cholera morbus" or a cholera-like illness. A paper published on our website by Alison Mann, "What Really Caused the Death of General Edward Hand?" suggested that he may well have died from the toxic effects of a self-prescribed medicinal such as calomel, which was commonly used as a purgative to cleanse the gastrointestinal tract of harmful substances.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to the generosity of the medical community and Lancaster County Hospitals, the Foundation has accumulated more than 11,000 artifacts and memorabilia and has established a museum and warehouse at the Burle Business Park. It has also developed a student internship program, created a website populated with historical papers (many written by members of Lancaster's medical and allied health professional community), and – with a special two-year grant from Lancaster General Health – created a fabulous virtual museum that makes its many artifacts accessible to Lancaster's residents and, indeed, to the world via the web: [www.edwardhandmedicalheritage.org](http://www.edwardhandmedicalheritage.org).

We are also pleased to provide an annual spring lecture on a topic relevant to Lancaster County's medical history, which is now integrated into LancasterHistory.org's monthly colloquial series.

Ms. Susan Wiley serves as a very part-time administrative director, but if the Foundation is to flourish, it needs a full-time director and at least a part-time curator, as well as a larger space that will both accommodate its growing collection and be more accessible to the public.

We encourage readers of this journal to support the Foundation's vibrant work. We are a 501c3 organization and would be grateful for monetary gifts made payable to the Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation and mailed to Myke Rogers, Treasurer, 304 Church St., Lancaster, PA 17602.

**Nikitas J. Zervanos, M.D.**

*President, Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation*

<sup>1</sup>Ellis, Franklin and Evans, Samuel, *History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia, PA, Everts & Peck, 1883, pp. 44-45

<sup>2</sup>Mann, Alison, "What Really Caused the Death of General Edward Hand," [EdwardHandMedicalHeritage.org](http://EdwardHandMedicalHeritage.org), Lancaster PA, Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation, 2013