

Eulogy for Paul H. Ripple, M.D.

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February 21, 2020

Sadly, in the first month of 2020, we lost two of our most distinguished physicians of Lancaster County. Henry Wentz died on January 5th, at the age of 98, and Paul died less than three weeks later, on January 23rd, at age 97.

They were the oldest members of the G.R.U.M.P.S., a group of retired physicians that gathers together for breakfast on the last Thursday of every month, at the Oregon Dairy. In the last few years, both Henry and Paul depended on one of us to bring them to our breakfast.

He took pride in his heritage. His ancestors came to Lancaster in 1730, and he was a past regent to the Lancaster County chapter of the Pennsylvania Society of the Sons of the Revolution, in which he wrote an essay entitled, "Revolutionary Lancaster".

Paul loved his hometown and enjoyed sharing stories about growing up in Lancaster. He had an appreciation for the arts and a passion for history. Paul wrote a book, *I Remember Lancaster*, and it is a gem. He describes what it was like growing up on Wheatland Avenue in the 1920s and '30s. Among those stories, he recounts the different neighborhood gangs that would challenge each other in football and baseball. But on occasion, there were scuffles as well.

His leadership talents showed early in his life and he took pride in his involvement with the boy scouts. While in high school, he reached the rank of eagle, along with his dear friends Harvy Lehman and Felix Heald. They ended up in medical school together, where they were cadaver partners.

Few people had cars. His father owned a Buick and his grandfather, a Franklin. Since most of the public roads were poor, they tended to use the toll roads. His father would pay 10 cents to cross the bridge to Columbia. The trip to Philadelphia took forever so at Christmas time, when they would go see the real Santa Claus at Wannamaker's department store, they would use the train. He remembers how he was so impressed with the large christmas tree, with lights that would change with the organ music.

He said that health care centered around the family doctor, who took care of almost any illness a person might experience in a lifetime. The two hospitals were basically St. Joseph's and Lancaster General. Lancaster General had two

medical and surgical ward services: one for women and one for men. Private rooms were only for those who could afford it, but the wealthy avoided the hospital as much as they could.

He went through the Lancaster school system and graduated from McCaskey high school in 1940. It was the war and Uncle Sam needed doctors so he went through the accelerated pre-med program at Franklin & Marshall, then medical school at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating five years later in 1945, followed by an internship at Lancaster General.

I might add, on the first floor stairwell of the hospital's downtown pavilion, there is a 1946 photo of a handsome intern doing a laceration repair in the emergency department. That's Paul.

After serving in the U.S. Air Force in Texas, he completed an ophthalmology residency at Washington University in St. Louis. He returned to Lancaster in 1951 to establish and develop a very successful and active practice. Paul was the chair of the department of ophthalmology for 25 years and helped to shape the speciality in Lancaster.

He was dedicated to teaching. He acquired an adjunct faculty position at the University of Pennsylvania and would go to Philadelphia one day a month to help supervise Dr. Scheie's residents, who were entering missionary work to be able to perform cataract surgery under third-world conditions.

In 1947, Paul married his sweetheart, Carolyn Wohlsen, who everyone called 'Cass'. They had three children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Much of the family life took place in their beautiful farm house in Neffsville.

One of the wonderful family traditions was to produce the annual, unique and creative Christmas cards. The first was the manger scene; Paul, Cass, Ned and David were dressed as shepherds, and Carol was Mary, as they hovered over the manger in the barn, surrounded by sheep. More recently, you may have been a recipient of one of Paul's tricky Christmas greetings, with a message that you had to decipher.

He was involved in many organizations, both inside and outside of medicine. He invariably rose to leadership roles, including president of the Lancaster City and County Medical Society, and president of various civic organizations, including the Sertoma Club.

As a sertoman, he played an important leadership role for the addition of the amphitheater at Long's Park. Back in the Sixties, when Lancaster was

undergoing renewal, he was given much credit for saving the Ellicott house from demolition. It is one of Lancaster's most historic buildings.

He was a familiar contributor to the 'Letters to the Editor' section of the Lancaster Newspapers, to help us better appreciate Lancaster's past and to read his views on contemporary issues affecting the Lancaster community.

He was often at the center of making good things happen. While on the board of the medical society, he co-founded and served as the first president of the Edward Hand Medical Heritage Foundation, with a mission to preserve and make accessible Lancaster's rich medical heritage.

He had a talent for art and his drawings were used by many medical and civic organizations, appearing in articles, journals and books. This includes the many illustrations in Henry Wentz's book, *Patients are a Virtue*, and the 1995 medical society's book, *Our Medical Heritage*, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the society. There is an amazing collection of caricatures of the various specialities adorning the walls of the medical staff office at the General hospital. There are also many more pen and ink drawings of well known historic buildings of downtown Lancaster that have been donated to LancasterHistory.

Paul constantly sought fellowship, which explains to a large extent why he was forever present. You always knew he was there. He was tall, with a wonderful demeanor and jovial countenance. But more than anything, it was his booming voice. He especially enjoyed the fellowship of his Hamilton Club friends and, up until the last couple of years of his life, enjoyed playing bridge and poker with Bob Groff, Boyer Veitch, Cal Levis, Roy Deck, Bill Sheaffer and others. Competitive by nature, he was determined to win. He was also a member of the Lancaster Pirates, the Tucquan Club and the Quarryville Groundhogs. These were social gatherings of like-minded men, who enjoyed good conversation, good food and a drink or two.

He liked to tell jokes and his friend, Wally Otto, says he heard hundreds of them. But when Wally told me a few, I did not fully appreciate their humor. I could only offer a courteous chuckle... Maybe some of you will remember a true occurrence when "Jimmy Simpson had an encounter with the wealthy woman, who greeted him at the door when he was soliciting money for his Rohrstown band. She feigned deafness and the rest, I leave to your imagination..." or "Why does the flamingo stand on only one foot?" or "Why, when you see geese flying overhead in a 'V' form, do they appear to have one leg longer than

the other?” . If you heard Paul tell them, his own hearty laughter about what he thought was funny, would be enough to help you appreciate their intended effect.

He and Cass wanted to see the world and they loved to travel. Besides China, Africa and Europe, he wanted me to know that one of their most memorable trips was when they, along with friends, managed the Mediterranean, aboard a luxurious, tall ship and visited many of the Greek Isles.

His friends would tell me how much he appreciated life with an almost constant display of gratitude. He would say, “I was very lucky”. Most importantly, he loved his children and his grandchildren. It was a very big deal when they came to visit.

One person told me he was sunshine and roses and he never complained, despite his disabilities. His good nature was contagious. What made Paul such pleasant company was his active mind and his curiosity. He had an insatiable interest in the world around him and was constantly learning. He would have a comment about almost everything. Besides, Paul seemed to always have a project.

He was my ‘eye doctor’ for many years and I felt honored to be his family doctor in the last years of his life. He had a determination to live and to live his life fully, up until the very end. He told me how grateful he was to Laurie and his other caretakers and , if it weren’t for them, he would have had to be in an extended care facility. He had an indomitable spirit and a special kindness that drew you to him.

We will miss this wonderful doctor, community servant, special friend and devoted husband and father.