HORSE AND BUGGY DOCTORS

After practicing internal medicine and cardiology in Bergen County for roughly 40 years, I retired in 2008 and about four years later settled in the village of Piermont which is located alongside the Hudson River in Rockland County, NY. Soon after I'd begun working in New Jersey, I befriended an older physician by the name of Stewart Alexander who grew up and later worked for decades in Park Ridge and had a long and distinguished career — in time I came to think of Stewart as being my medical mentor.

SLIDE 1: After returning from serving on General Eisenhower's staff in the army, Stewart joined his father's practice which began in 1912 when he'd replaced Park Ridge's first physician **Henry Neer.** Dr. Neer first hung up his shingle in 1865 and by the time Stewart Alexander retired, that three generation practice had existed for 117 years — and it seemed to me that they never threw anything away. Sometimes Stewart and I would pore over Neer's office records or examined his ancient equipment and we published some of our findings and even presented to this society.

Back in 1976 at the time of America's bicentennial, there was great interest in national history and, catching the spirit, I wrote my first book about medical history Its title was *Early Physicians of Northeastern Bergen County* and, perhaps because of that distinctly non-sexy title, few people even in northeastern Bergen County seemed to take notice. Incidentally, back then my book sold for about four dollars, but recently when I checked on Amazon they were offering a copy for $50 that they described as being a "collectible" — and, I confess that I was quite impressed with myself.

SLIDE 2: During the 19th century doctors like Henry Neer had to be resourceful and he also was the only dentist, pharmacist and veterinarian for miles around. As if that wasn't enough, he also served as the town's first mayor, led the church choir — and sold pianos on the side in order to feed his nine children. He'd order basic supplies from Manhattan which his wife and daughters then compounded and sometimes laced with port wine — and also he invented and patented a pill-coating machine so the homemade medicines wouldn't fall apart. In effect, Dr. Neer was his town's indispensable man and when he died nearly everyone attended the funeral; after all he'd delivered many of them. Obviously, much has changed in the medical profession since his time — and not necessarily for the better.

SLIDE 3: Many years ago I interviewed a Rockland County historian who told me about a former Piermont doctor by the name of George Leitner. I included this picture of him in my book so when I crossed the state line a dozen years ago, I sought out anyone who might have known this old timer and, as it turned out, I didn't have to go very far because living in my apartment building was a woman by the name of Ann Hickey who was born in Piermont in 1927. She told me that even before she could walk, her parents sometimes would dunk her in the filthy Hudson River — she told me, that if she could survive that, she could tolerate almost anything and since she lived to age 95 perhaps she was correct.

When I asked Ann whether she knew anything about Dr. Leitner, she held up one of her hands to show me a long scar on the palm. She explained that when she was about six she'd cut her hand badly and her father picked her up and ran down the street to Leitner's home along River Road. She needed stitches and he told the frightened little girl, "If you're very good and don't cry, I'll give you a lollipop."

Annie must have been very good that day because she got the lollipop — and she had the evidence to show me. I asked whether she knew what Dr. Leitner charged for the hand surgery and she replied that because it was at the height of the Depression her father was broke, so he went into the backyard and killed and plucked a chicken and then brought it to the doctor. I suppose that he must have been pleased to receive anything at all — after all, it wasn't chicken feed but the *whole* chicken! Later on I'll have much more to say about Dr. Leitner.

I have a friend by the name of Alice Gerard who's now in her nineties, and lives in her parent's's former home in Piermont's neighboring hamlet of Palisades. Her father Cushman Haagensen was born in North Dakota in 1900 and was the son of a country doctor. He went on to become a world famous breast surgeon at Columbia, but while training at Yale, he'd contracted tuberculosis and was prescribed the standard three year "rest cure." By the end of the second year of total inactivity, he was well enough to get out and breath healthy sea air, so he took a job as doctor on a cruise ship.

SLIDE 4: On one trip he spotted this attractive young woman and arranged to have her seated next to him at the captain's table. Alice Munro's father was a history professor at Princeton and by the end of that romantic cruise the two were engaged — and a few weeks later they married and eventually moved to Palisades. It's a charming story, but why am I telling it now?

It's because in later life, Alice Haagensen became a trustee of the library in Palisades where one of her projects was to transcribe and edit a handwritten diary that was written between 1829 and 1858 by a local farmer by the name of Nicholas Gesner (b. 1765).

She worked on the project for forty years, but by the time Alice reached age 100 she'd only transcribed 400 of the diary's 1600 pages — so her daughter, also named Alice, took over and finished the job. Ten years ago my friend published Gesner's diary in four volumes and when I asked her whether it contained anything about medical history, she suggested that I have a look for myself — so I did and found that it was chock full of fascinating material, so now I'd like to describe a few things that I learned.

SLIDE 5: In addition to details about farming, Gesner's diary described other aspects of his busy life — including teaching school, building ships and acting as a lawyer for his neighbors, writing their wills and deeds and surveying property. Sometimes he'd rant about someone who was upsetting him — and there were many — and also there were several vignettes about certain local doctors.

In those days the usual charge for a medical house call was 75 cents and country doctors were expected to continue daily visits until the patient was entirely well. Most didn't send bills for their services and had to collect for themselves and Gesner described how sometimes when the docs rode out on their daily rounds, some frugal patients, feeling that these visits had gone on long enough, would hastily dress and stand outside leaning on a broom or a hoe — so when the doctor approached on horseback, he'd pretend that he was all better, even if he wasn't.

In September of 1849 three terse entries in Nicholas Gesner's diary that described a calamity that was occurring in the neighboring village of Piermont. First he scribbled "sickly in the place" and then noted that there'd been fifteen deaths that week. Standard histories of Rockland County never mentioned this event and these days hardly anyone,

even in Piermont, seems to have known anything about it, at least until my article appeared in the journal of the Historical Society of Rockland County in 2016.

SLIDE 6: Of course from earliest times there'd been outbreaks of smallpox, yellow fever and measles, but during the mid-19th century cholera was the most deadly scourge. America's first epidemic of it began in 1832 and by the end of that year, there'd been about 3,500 deaths in New York City, equivalent to more than 100,000 victims with today's population.The *New York Evening Post* reported:" The roads, in all directions, were lined with well-filled stage coaches, livery coaches, private vehicles and equestrians, all panic-struck, fleeing the city, as we may suppose the inhabitants of Pompeii fled when the red lava showered down upon their homes."

Doctors didn't believed that cholera was contagious and most blamed it on miasmas (bad air) arising in poor neighborhoods. It was an era long before germ theory when few people bathed or washed and when privies and drinking water were drawn from polluted shallow wells, often near seeping cesspools. Dehydration and electrolyte loss could cut a healthy person down within hours and quarantine methods did no good because the disease wasn't transmitted directly from person to person or by animal vectors.

It wasn't until the 1880s that it was learned that cholera was due to a bacterial infection that spreads through water fouled by human excrement or ingested by eating unwashed vegetables or fruits or raw fish — so the culprit wasn't bad air after all but bad water — and in my town beside the Hudson River oysters had been a favorite delicacy.

In another diary entry Farmer Gesner scribbled“ Cholera in New York. Hundreds of people moved out this last week…Some vessels have stopped running. Sorrowful time.”
That year more than 100,000 city folk“ eloped” to pure country air and, no doubt, some fled north up river. And in 1849, when after a seventeen year hiatus, cholera returned more than 5,000 died in New York City and many of their bodies were buried in a mass grave on Randalls Island. Three months after leaving office, ex-President James Polk, died of cholera and two weeks later his successor Zachary Taylor declared a day of national prayer for “public fasting, humiliation and prayer.” And one year later, in 1850, President Taylor, himself, developed symptoms after eating a large bowl of unwashed cherries at the White House and died five days later (replaced by VP Millard Filmore.)

Piermont’s devout had little sympathy for the stricken poor. They believed the pestilence was due to poverty and sin. Like with the flood and the plague of locusts, cholera seemed to be a means by which the Lord achieved moral purification and its no wonder that church services were overflowing. It was an angry God’s justice. Five years later Piermont was gripped by still another outbreak of cholera so a reporter from Nyack was sent over over to check things out and I’d like to read for you some of what he wrote in his report that was titled “The Ravages of the Cholera in Piermont.”

> *It becomes our painful duty this week to record the existence beyond a doubt of Cholera in Piermont. During the last few days, the most exaggerated rumors have been in circulation and in order to arrive at the exact truth, we made a personal visit on Wednesday among all the dwellings in the infected district. There seems to be a complete panic especially among the railroad laborers, and those*

who have no families are leaving the place with as much haste as possible. It is our opinion that the disease is not contagious, and we hope for humanity s sake, the citizens of Piermont will not shun through fear their duty, especially toward the stricken.

After the reporter's third and last visit to Piermont, he again criticized the wealthy class who in his judgment had distanced themselves from poor victims:

They never enter the cabin of the afflicted lest their garments should be soiled or their reputations in certain circles depreciated. They can scarcely pass within a hundred yards of the abode of pestilence and poverty without turning up their dainty noses…and that is one train of thought suggested by our visits through the cholera districts of Piermont."

Although the farmer's diary and the journalist's eyewitness reports employed such terms as frightful scourge, suffering poor, panic among railway workers, destitution and desertion, I couldn't find anything else in print about local cholera outbreaks for during the mid-19th. century, when Piermont was the busiest railroad terminal in the country, sanitation wasn't a high priority and unclean conditions were conducive for an outbreak of cholera. Most of the victims in Piermont were Irish railroad workers living in filth and although the contributions of civic leaders were routinely celebrated, journalists and historians preferred emphasizing triumph to tragedy.

Nicholas Gesner's diary also referenced a Dr. **Abraham Cornelison** who practiced in nearby Clarksville. He was described as being "portly" and may have weighed more than 300 pounds. According to

legend, when called to make a house call he'd first fortify himself with a shot of whiskey — so did many country doctors and alcoholism seems to have been an occupational hazard. In 1816, as a respected community leader, Dr. Cornelison had been asked to perform a rather unusual professional activity — presiding at a witch trial!
Jane Kanniff, known to the locals as "Naut", was the widow of a Scottish physician and in her later years treated neighbors with herbs and remedies she'd learned from her husband. Naut was considered to be eccentric because she lived in a rickety house with a black cat and a talking parrot as her sole companions and as a historian:

> *She was odd in dress, preferring colors of wondrous diversity, queer in fashion of arranging her hair. She was unsocial in a neighborhood where every one knew each other, and morose or erratic when forced to meet people…From her deceased husband she had gathered a smattering of medicine… and she made wondrous decoctions with which she treated such as came to her for aid, and…with most excellent results.*

Some people thought that Naut was crazy, but others said that she was a witch who was influenced by the devil. When strange things began to happen –- such as a cow suddenly not producing milk — the locals considered how they might test her — their first thought was to bind her hands and feet, and then throw her in a pond — that was a time honored diagnostic method. If Naut was a witch, she would float, and then they would burn her at the stake, and If she sank and drowned that would prove her innocence.

Others thought that was going a bit too far so they chose an alternate method of finding out if a woman was a witch — weighing her against a bible. It was believed that a witch always would weigh less than a

Holy Book. Local farmers served as the jury and Dr. Cornelison agreed to serve as an impartial judge — perhaps he wasn't entirely neutral because he might have been losing patients to the witch doctor's "wondrous decoctions."

SLIDE 7: The only place that had a large enough scale that could accommodate this procedure was a local and so Naut was seated in a huge dish of the scale while on the other side a Dutch Family Bible was placed. This was no portable church-pew size book. but was a huge wood and brass bound volume. When they released the pinning, the onlookers expected to see Naut rise to the rafters under the weight of the bible, but they were disappointed because she easily outweighed the holy book — and it's a good thing they didn't put the "portly" Dr. Cornelison on the other side or else she might have flown away!

So having been exonerated, Naut was allowed to return to the companionship of her cat and parrot and she lived a long life although the whereabouts of the grave of "the wicked witch of Nyack" has never been determined. At least she didn't drown. (This was the last witch trial in New York State but the last such trial in the country was held in Salem, Massachusetts in 1878 — incidentally, that *wasn't* the famous "Salem Witch Trial" that some of you might have heard of which occurred in 1692.)

SLIDE 8: My favorite woman doctor in Rockland County was **Virginia Meriweather Davies** who was born in Huntsville, Alabama in 1862. She was descended on her mother's side from Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Virginia had limited education and at age 18, she eloped with a gambler who was addicted to opium and alcohol. In 1882 when he refused to reform, she left him and when he

threatened to shoot her if she didn't return, she wrestled the gun from him in self-defense and in the struggle it went off. A local newspaper described the event as "the most remarkable killing of the age." A jury deemed it to be justifiable homicide so now, freed from marital obligations but unable to return home because of the scandal, Virginia Meriweather moved to New York City.

SLIDE 9: She enrolled there in the Blackwell sister's medical school for women and, as she later recalled, "Most of the city's population was so hostile to the thought of women doctors that they shouted and jeered at us as we walked along the street…However, I had little time to fret over such intolerance." Upon completing the three year curriculum, Virginia continued postgraduate studies in the city and one day in 1890 the attractive young woman met a dashing artist by the name of Arthur B. Davies while were on the Staten Island ferry.

SLIDE 10: Both were 29 years old; Virginia was a free spirit and Arthur later, who would become one of America's most famous painters, fell head over heels in love with the Southern belle. He would write long letters to her about art and nature, life and beauty and the two spent evenings at the opera. Also they enjoyed picnicking along New Jersey's Palisades and decided to settle in the country where they could support themselves — how? By farming! No matter that neither had any experience in country life nor were there any books titled "Farming for Dummies."

When Virginia became pregnant, marriage plans accelerated — and although Arthur knew that his bride had previously been married, she prudently didn't reveal the reason for that dissolution until after they were safely wed. During the summer of 1891 the young marrieds learned that a company was promoting real estate in Rockland County by providing free transportation to the rural hamlet of Congers. On the

trip, they traipsed through woods and fields and later purchased a 38 acre property for $6,500, with financial support from her wealthy family, So they prepared to settle into an idyllic life in which Arthur would abandon his career in art and Virginia hers in medicine — but it was not to be.

Before long she began practicing medicine part time and came to enjoy the dual life of farmer and country doctor. The locals began calling her “Dockie Davies” and sometimes she’d deliver calves in the morning and babies at night — up to her elbows either in manure or blood. But Arthur didn’t take easily to agriculture. If he went to the barn to milk a cow, like as not he’d return with a sketch of the animal rather than a bucket of milk. At one point, Arthur asked Dockie to move back to the city with him, but she’d found her comfort zone and refused to leave.

So Arthur Davies began spending weekdays in Greenwich Village and soon moved in there with one of his models. He became one of a group of talented painters known as “The Eight” and, in addition to his own art, he became a major organizer of the famous Armory Show of 2013 that helped establish a modern art movement in this country. As a result and for the first time Americans became familiar with Europe’s avant-garde: the Impressionists, Fauvists, Cubists and the like. Among Arthur’s wealthy patrons were Lilly Bliss and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller to whom he’d often spoken of the need to establish a permanent collection of modern art in this country.
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After Arthur’s unexpected death in Italy in 1928, these friends made his dream a reality by founding the Museum of Modern Art — in effect, it was their memorial to Arthur Davies. Shortly after his sudden death, Arthur’s consort knocked on Dockie’s farmhouse door with her

teenage daughter in tow — the rascal had left them penniless and Dockie, who supposedly knew nothing about the affair nor of their daughter, provided them with some financial support.

SLIDE 11: “Doctor Davies Farm Stand” still flourishes — and so does the Museum of Modern Art. In the early years Dockie made her rounds in buggies and sleighs and she often used old-fashioned remedies from plants and herbs that shed gathered in the woods. She served on the staff at Nyack Hospital and many -timers remembered her shabby old car zipping by as Dockie sped to attend a patient — or to deliver corn or apples from her farm. For many that vision symbolized caring and community involvement — and during the 57 years that Dockie Davies practiced in Congers, she delivered more than 6,000 babies, the last just two months before she died on the farm at age 87.

SLIDE 12: I spoke earlier about Dr. **George Aloysius Leitner** who was born in Piermont in 1865. Someone who knew the shoemaker’s son, recalled that as a teenager he was mischievous, had a mop of untidy hair, and was the “cleverest” baseball player in Rockland County. Back then the area was a hotbed of amateur baseball and George was a star pitcher on the local team. Later when he was studying at Fordham he again was a star pitcher but after graduation he wasn’t able to afford medical school tuition. His father encouraged him to pursue a medical career because he believed there was no money to be made in professional baseball — in fact, the National League had started just one year earlier in 1886.

SLIDE 13: Despite his father's misgivings, during the summer of 1887 Piermont's 21 year old pitching ace signed a contract with the brand new Indianapolis Hoosiers and won his first game against the New York Giants — and here's what the *New York Times* reported:

Outplayed by the Indianapolis Team. Two new players help the home team to turn the tables on the Giants from New York. Leitner pitched one of the best games seen here this year and held the Giants down to five hits, one a home run drive by Conner which was given him by a close foul-line decision.

Leitner's baseball career went rapidly downhill after that. His record for the year was 2 and 6; the Hoosiers finished last in the eight team National League and two years later they went out of business. However, other teams hung on and although some of their names changed, they still sound familiar — the Chicago White Stockings, the Detroit Wolverines, the Philadelphia Quakers, the Boston Beaneaters, the Pittsburgh Alleghenys, the Washington Nationals — and, of course, the New York Giants.

George Leitner earned $3,000 for that single half season which was sufficient to pay for his training at Bellevue Hospital Medical College. His graduation ceremony took place on March 12, 1888 which was the first day of the famous Blizzard of '88 that inundated the northeastern United States and three weeks later the *NY Times* reported:

Several of the active members of the Nyack Baseball Club of last year have gone to various portions of the country to engage in the game

with other clubs…George Leitner, who pitched a part of the season with the Nyack club and the other part with the Indianapolis team, was graduated and became a full-fledged physician last month and has been appointed as assistant surgeon in St. Francis Hospital [NYC]. He will probably not indulge in ball playing this year." Nor did he.

SLIDE 14: After the 1887 season George Leitner returned to Piermont, married a Grand View girl and began to practice medicine just up the road from here. He became one of the founders of the nine bed Nyack Hospital which opened on January 1, 1900 and he soon headed the Department of Surgery. In 1914 the *Rockland County Times* lauded Leitner's character and wrote that "financial gain was only of secondary importance for him." In addition to medical matters, he was an active member of several civic, social and political organizations and also served as a New York State representative to the AMA.

It turned out that there was a baseball postscript. Seventeen years after his brief fling in the National League and four years after the opening of Nyack Hospital, a benefit game was played in 1904 between the local doctors and the clergymen. Naturally, Doc Leitner pitched for the medics and many of the docs placed ads in the printed program. The game raised $400 for the cash-strapped hospital — and can you guess who won? As *The Rockland County Times* reported, "The doctors were so heavy in avoirdupois and so light at the bat that the dominies won by a score of 18 to 6." Journalists just don't write like that anymore.

During the late 19th century Moses Hasbrouck probably was the most well respected Rockland doctor and his colleagues elected him president of the county medical society. In 1850 he attended a state medical meeting and was so impressed by what he'd heard there that he reported this back to his colleagues: *In one sense nature cures all diseases and in slight derangements does her work best when undisturbed, yet in another sense, medicines cure and in many cases are necessary to save life. I hold it, therefore, proper and highly important that as conservators of the health and lives of our fellow creatures, we entertain this faith in medicine and practice upon it.*

Those were fine words, but the well-intentioned Dr. Hasbrouck was a captive of his own time and chose to treat severe cases of pneumonia with vigorous bleeding —(just like George Washington's doctors did to treat his so-called "croup" by nearly exsanguinating him.) Contrast that with the gentle technique of Dr. James Paradise of Closter who during the 1920s gained a reputation as "The Pneumonia Doctor."

That's because most anyone who came in with a cough he diagnosed with "pneumonia" and he claimed good success in curing them. How? Just place a basin of boiling water under the bed! That's all. It was less extreme and certainly less expensive than vigorous bleeding and, after all, Dr. Paradise claimed was just as effective.

It reminds me of a caveat made in 1860 by Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "If the whole *materia medica*, as is now used, could be sun k to the bottom of the sea, it would be all the better for mankind. — and all the worse for the fishes."

SLIDE 15: About a dozen years ago I learned of a California woman whose mother had discovered a trove of some four hundred so-called

“courtship letters” that were written between 1898 and 1908 by her grandfather Dr. Clarence Dingman to his girl friend Louise who was living with her parents in Minneapolis — and a century later their granddaughter found and published the letters in two volumes.
In 1904 Clarence Dingman (1881-1971) took over his ailing father’s practice which had begun in Spring Valley in 1876. Office hours were held three times a day in the home office and the rest of the day (and night) was for house calls. There were few telephones and the customary way of summoning the doctor was to rap on his door.

Dr. Dingman’s early career saw the advent of the automobile, but frequent flat tires, breakdowns and treacherous roads made traditional conveyances more reliable in bad weather – and often that meant either a horse drawn sleigh or snowshoes. In this photo from 1905 Dr. Dingman was making his rounds on horseback and I like to imagine that as he rode along he might have been composing his next letter to Louise. His love letters also contained vignettes that depicted the stress of a country doctor but all wasn’t gloomy. Indeed sometimes the love-sick doctor described moments of exhilaration about the beauty of nature and I’d like to read a few short selections that show that this doctor was blessed with a romantic soul.

> *January 4, 1905: A real blizzard is in progress without…I had the pleasure of contending with the elements the whole afternoon and I was very glad to reach home again. Had it not been for the storm I would now be on the road for Pearl River where a pneumonia patient is awaiting. But the storm is too severe and as they have plenty of medicine and advice already, I will wait until tomorrow.*
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> *September 20, 1907: It seems to me that the [best] life to live is in the country…unhampered by the demands and restrictions of*

our crowded civilization. It emphasizes all the more forcibly that the farther one gets away from nature, the harder it is to live a true life.

March 7, 1908: Most of my work is out in the country and that means long drives over rough roads. Yesterday I sat in a wagon all day long until ten last night – probably thirty-five miles in all. It was fearfully muddy and I was a sight… Until today when it has snowed and rained, the weather has been splendid for some time….

This is indeed God's country…Snow clad hills in every direction. …The world is so beautiful and it is so wonderful to live… and the possibilities are so great.

March 30, 1908: We sometimes think that our problems are overwhelming and are going to be too much for us, but what are they compared to the trials of so many? It makes me feel like thirty cents, after I've been feeling blue and discouraged and have wondered if it were any use to try any longer, to find some poor chap contending with a brave face against odds compared with which my troubles are like those of a spoiled child crying for candy. Sometimes, I have to tell myself not to care about results but to go ahead and do the best I can.

Those inspirational words were written more than a century ago, and I like to think that some may still apply. Moreover, although the horse and buggy docs didn't have many effective tools or treatments available, like Dr. Dingman wrote, at least many of them did there best.

SLIDE 16: At about the same time young Dr. Joseph Moenig, opened an office near the railroad station in Park Ridge, NJ and

began making walking rounds at night carrying a lantern. By 1903 he could afford to buy a horse and wagon for $80 and one night Dr. Moenig was called from bed by a ringing doorbell. A gentleman there asked him to drive out to his house. The doc hitched up the horse and buggy and they took off. When they arrived at the man's home, he asked "What do I owe you?" Doc Moenig said, my visits are one dollar, but where is the patient? The gentleman replied, "Oh no one is ill. The liveryman wanted two dollars to drive me home and I knew that you'd charge less."
In 1911 Moenig bought a Ford Model T for $500, but in the winter the roadster was jacked up and drained and the well-rested horse was harnessed and ready to go. Perhaps it was experiences like what I've just described that made him have second thoughts about practicing medicine — I say that because Dr. Moenig retired at age 43 and, thereafter, must have slept very well — because he lived to age 95.

I've focused on these early practitioners because for me they symbolized a time when medical care was delivered with a personal touch — and also it was a time when often there was close connection between doctors and their communities.

And finally, I'd like to describe one last horse-and-buggy doc whose name will be unfamiliar but whose story appeals to me because of a certain defining characteristic. At the onset of the 20th century there was a young girl by the name of Florence Ripley Mastin (1886-1968) who grew up in Piermont.

SLIDE 17: After graduating from Barnard College, she went on to become a high school teacher in Brooklyn where one of her

students was the novelist Bernard Malamud. She also became a renowned poet and In 1978 the Historical Society of Rockland County published a tiny booklet of two dozen poems that she'd written when in her eighties. They were delightful sketches of Piermont locals whom she remembered from her childhood — the cast included Miss Dunlap, her stern schoolteacher Miss Addie and "Hickey" the villages's only policeman who wore a derby hat and walked "in an aura of glory." (He'd become Ann Hickey's father-in-law.) Also there were the postmaster and the dentist but best of all — there was a poem about her uncle Dr. Charles Mastin.

SLIDE 18: I'm going to close by reading Ripley Mastin's tribute to her uncle — but first I have to prepare myself (doffs a white beard.)

Dear Dr. Mastin
Driving on the River Road,
Hurrying through Piermont
In your horse and buggy
And waving to my brother and me.
You came to our house
When we were sick,
I remember your noble height
And your beautiful strong hands
Marked with the valleys of darkness
And the mounts of morning,
Scarred by storm
And gentled by twilight…
I remember your bending down
Listening to my breathing

And how your long, white beard
Tickled my chest. (I just love that!)

I mentioned earlier that I'd first learned about Dr. Leitner nearly a half century ago and then, starting about a dozen years ago when I moved to Piermont, as sometimes I'd drive by Doc's former home and magine him pitching at the Polo Grounds — or I'd recall him sewing up little Annie Hickey's bleeding hand.

SLIDE 19: Well just about a month ago as, once again, I drove past, I remembered that back in 2012 I'd spoken about him at our local library — so I stopped in and asked whether they might be interested in my giving an encore? I was told that I'd have to contact the events chairman Alexis Starke so I e-mailed her and she answered that we should talk — but, as it turned out, Alexis was extremely busy that week. That's because the very same day that I was recalling Dr. Leitner, she was moving with her family to an old Victorian house a few blocks from the library.

Can you guess precisely to where? To Dr. Leitner's former home office where he'd lived until his death in 1937. Serendipity! I asked Alexis whether she'd ever heard of George Leitner and she replied no, but she did know that two later day surgeons had once lived in this very same house. So by now, Alexis has learned a great deal about the doctor who once *slept* in her bedroom and I like to imagine that somewhere high above, Ann Hickey is smiling and once again holding up her scarred hand. I'd say that was an amazing coincidence — wouldn't you?