

Back In Time

DR. MOYER'S TRAGIC DEMISE

(One of an occasional series on Lansdale's early prominent citizens)

By DICK SHEARER

Lansdale's status as a railroad junction town had much to do with its growth and development in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. But this came at a cost which too often was paid in human lives.

Living in or around Lansdale was dangerous business. You could hardly go anywhere without the need to cross railroad tracks. In the 1880s, 80 or more trains steamed through town every day which increased the odds of an accident. Add to that the fact that many crossings weren't protected by gates, bells, or a watchman.

The death of Dr. S.C. Moyer, a physician who practiced for many years at his home at Main and Broad Streets where Koehler's Jewelers parking lot is now located, was typical of many that occurred along the rails.

Dr. Moyer, age 74 when he met his fate, was headed to his home in North Lansdale, around noon on Aug. 4, 1920. Widely known throughout the region, he was navigating the unguarded Hawkins Road crossing at Orvilla, Hatfield Township, unaware that the Scranton Flyer express train was bearing down on him from a blind angle.

Why Dr. Moyer didn't detect the locomotive was a matter of conjecture but he was an accomplished horseman and crossed the tracks there many times. As *The Reporter* tells it, Moyer apparently saw the train at the very last minute and tried to turn his horse to run parallel to the tracks, but it was too late.

The engine plowed into the side of the horse, throwing it 40 feet into a mile marker and killing it instantly. The buggy was demolished and Dr. Moyer was thrown out, fracturing his skull and knocking him unconscious.

The newspaper report continues: "After the accident a large crowd quickly gathered, including passengers from the express train which backed (up) to get his body, and the

scene was haunted all day by sight-seers.

"He was placed on a stretcher and brought to Lansdale where word was sent to his son, Dr. Herbert T. Moyer. Physicians worked over him in Dr. Moyer's office but failed to restore the fast-fleeting spark of life."

Dr. Samuel Clymer Moyer was born in Milford Township, Bucks County, and in 1872 – the same year Lansdale was incorporated – he graduated from Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia.

Moyer was a homeopath, a form of alternative medicine that gained popularity through the teachings of Samuel Hahnemann during the mid to late 19th century. Homeopathy was generally considered a sham by mainstream physicians, but in its time it had numerous advocates and Moyer was one of them.

As we mentioned earlier, Herbert T. Moyer followed his father into the practice and eventually took over his father's office at Main and Broad. The elder Moyer, operating under what was called the "preceptor system" trained assistants who worked under him in the days before hospital internships became the norm.

Early in the 20th century, S.C. Moyer went into semi-retirement, making house calls in rural areas. He was believed to be returning from one of these visits when fate caught up with him at Orvilla. As is often the case when man and machine collide, the locomotive won out.



DR. MOYER'S HOUSE on the southeast corner of Main and Broad Streets, was later the site of Elmer's Service Station and is now the Koehler's Jewelers' parking lot.