

BACK IN TIME

Another side of Doc Jacobs

By **DICK SHEARER**

John “Daddy” Jacobs is considered the most forceful of Lansdale’s Founding Fathers. He was a man of strong opinions who never feared expressing them to his fellow villagers. His friends thought him progressive and forward-thinking. His foes considered him stubborn and boorish. The weak-kneed cut him a wide path.

But there was another side to old Doc Jacobs that is worth recounting during the nation’s 150th commemoration of the Civil War.

It is the story of Captain Jenkins, Union Army surgeon, and Lucy Johnson, a freed slave from Georgia.

The tale goes like this according to an account published in *The Reporter* upon Lucy’s death in 1905:

Jacobs was assigned to the medical unit of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman’s army as it began its March to the Sea from Atlanta to Savannah in late 1864. Sherman’s scorched earth policy left nothing standing in its path including many plantations that were home to hundreds of freed slaves.

With nowhere else to go, many followed behind the army in hopes the soldiers would save them from starvation. Many died along the way. Others performed menial jobs for Sherman’s officers for which they were paid a pittance.

Lucy Johnson cooked and cared for Doc Jacobs’ tent while her husband attended to the surgeon’s horse. They performed these duties for a number of months until the war ended.

Jacobs returned to Pennsylvania and set up a medical practice in Kulpsville but he didn’t forget about Lucy and her admirable work ethic. He became her benefactor, bringing Lucy, her daughter and a grand-

son to Kulpsville where he helped get them employment. Her husband joined them later but he died days after arriving.

Within a short time after his return, Jacobs’ war experiences soured him on medicine and he gave up his practice to become a very successful banker and landowner in Lansdale.

In 1890, Jacobs’ mother, now in her eighties, was in failing health and moved in with his family at their spacious house at Fourth and Broad Sts. He needed someone to give her constant attention, so he sent for Lucy who was assigned her own room in the residence.

The elder Mrs. Jacobs survived for 10 years, a testament to the care she was given. But now Doc Jacobs had another problem on his

hands: Lucy was in her upper eighties and needed attention herself. Jacobs was not able to find a suitable charitable home that would accept her (Could her color have been the issue?), so he insisted she stay in his home and privately paid for a qualified person to attend to her.

When she died on April 1, 1905, Jacobs was touring in China but friends were aware of his wishes and purchased a special lot in the Lansdale Cemetery for the faithful servant “Daddy” brought north so many years earlier.

Today Lucy Johnson’s gravestone - placed there by Jacobs when he returned - sits on the southwest corner of the intersection in the Lansdale

Cemetery. A leafy, mature tree shades the plot from the summer sun. It’s a place of peace for a woman who endured the horrors of war.

Richard Stricker, society board member and superintendent of the Lansdale Cemetery, assisted in the research of this story.

