



HOUSE OF FAHRNEY

Part 1: From the rise to the demise of an empire

There has been a renewed abundance of interest in the bottle collecting and historical artifact community as expressed by various individuals over the years. Special attention was given to the Fahrney clan, who were associated with patent medicines among other businesses. There is just not enough information out there about a family that can be linked to so many bottles. Quite a few artifacts were left behind, especially embossed medicine bottles, and were strewn across our area as well as our country. These bottles became our connections to the past.

The Beginning

More than a century after his great grandfather, Jacob Fahrney, arrived in America, Peter Fahrney of Chicago became one of the most successful businessmen of the Toadstool Fahrneys. He commissioned a genealogist/historian to write an account of the family's history, as family members became curious. Upon doing some early research, this historian recovered some remarkable records of 18th-century immigration from Germany into America that were readily available for genealogical research and examination. These records were preserved from meticulous ship's roll documents detailing the passengers traveling to America.

Public records today reveal much about German immigration to America. Historians then used these records to narrow down Jacob's arrival through handwritten listings for two time periods, dictating strong possibilities of travel both in the 1740s as well as 1780s. These candidates were progenitors of the Anglicized Fahrney name.

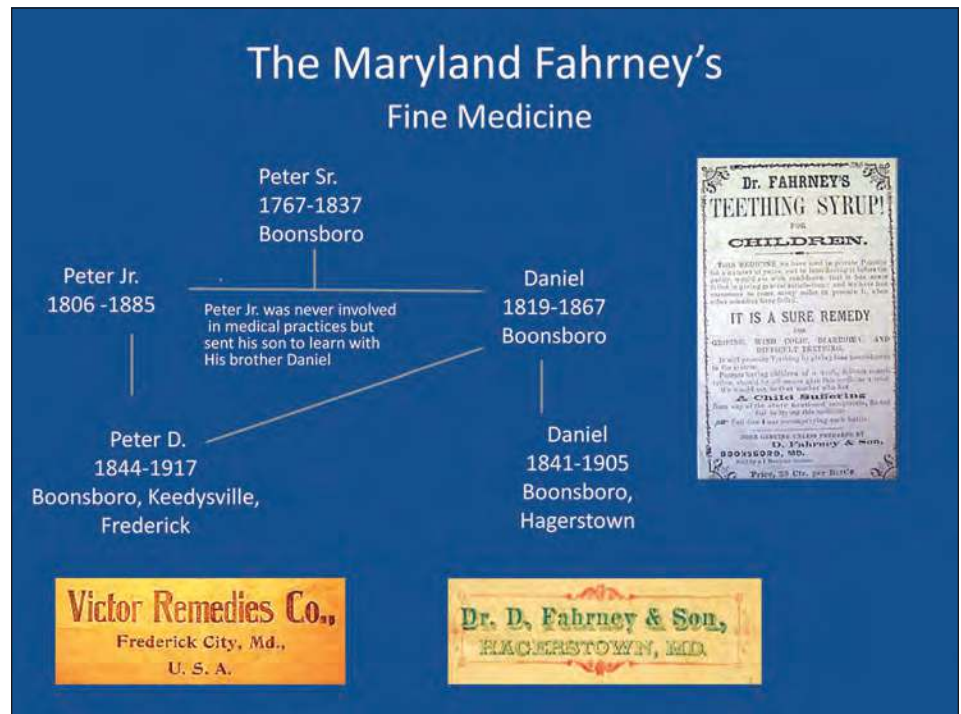


Diagram showing the Maryland Fahrney's lineage or family tree.

To present a plausible understanding of the family's beginning, it should be understood that Peter Fahrney's grandfather, Jacob, was Old Peter's father. Old Peter was an orphan who was separated from his parents at a very young age. Any prior knowledge of them was passed down to him from his adopted parents.

A text of medical recipes which is made reference of throughout his career was supposedly passed to Peter via his adopted parents. These were medicinal preparations mostly composed of Old World recipes passed from father to son. Since the Fahrneys were of Mennonite descent, it may have played a role in young Peter's memory of them. The people were settled in traditional Mennonite communities usually close together in various regions, especially in Pennsylvania.

The Early Years

The story starts in 1756 when a medical hygienist named Jacob Fahrney, Peter's

grandfather, migrates to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, from Frankfort Germany. He lives there thirteen or so years with a wife and three children. Facts are not clear whether he established himself as a prominent physician, but family records indicate that he did. Both Jacob Sr. and his wife both died in 1769. Peter, the youngest of the three children, was two years old at the time.

Not much is known about his brother and sister. Being orphans, they were all placed into good Christian homes. Peter was indentured into a tanner's family there. He worked until he fulfilled his indenture in learning the tanning trade. Once he learned the business, Peter moved west to near Chambersberg, Pennsylvania, and established his own business. In 1791, he married Eve Durnbaugh and they started a family together. Their union produced four children. Eve died in 1803, leaving Peter to care for them.



In the Medicine Chest

By John Panella and Joe Widman



PHOTOS (clockwise from upper left):

A later example of a Dr. Fahrney's bottle embossed PREPARED BY / DR. PETER FAHRNEY & SONS CO. / CHICAGO ILL. U.S.A.

Reverse of Chicago bottle, embossed: THE RELIABLE / OLD-TIME PREPARATION / FOR HOME USE

History of the House of Fahrney, 112th Anniversary, 1780 - 1892, booklet cover.

Dr. Peter Fahrney crate with bottles.





This event influenced him to move south, to where Eve's family resided in Washington County, Maryland. They owned a large parcel of land there in a town called San Mar near Boonsboro, where Eve's parents could assist in raising the children. Peter purchased 42 acres of land from them on June 20, 1803. It contained a spring, which he intended to use to establish another tannery.

Shortly afterward, he was affected by another event that changed his life. He was thrown from his horse, which resulted in a crippling injury that led to extreme curvature of the spine, restricting his physical abilities and leaving him unable to perform the rigorous duties of running a tannery. Being a short man, he took on the appearance of a hunchback. It is assumed that during his rehabilitation he began preparing for a career in medicine. Like his father, Peter also became a physician. He developed a successful medical practice and concocted a blood medicine which became popular.

Peter was not as revolutionary a bottle man as Thomas Dyott, but did start practicing medicine around the same time that Dyott introduced his famous line of Dr. Robertson's Patent Medicines. The doctors of Peter's day primarily had riding practices. They traveled from village to village, patient to patient, by horseback on footpaths.

Peter's injury severely affected his back so that he couldn't ride. He walked beside his horse, which carried all his medicines and equipment. His practice took him into three states: Maryland, Virginia and what is now West Virginia. Sometimes his wife or a servant would accompany him to help administer the various medicines and ointments he produced in his lab from the wild herbs he collected.

Peter had re-married in 1805 to Ann Sartorius. He had seven more children

with her. Two of his sons followed in his footsteps and practiced medicine with him.

Business Development and Expansion

Peter Sr.'s oldest son, Jacob, was the first to follow his father in the medical field in 1822, starting another practice near Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. He became a popular physician because the public knew he had access to his father's medicinal preparations, and is also given credit for developing a liquid form of the Blood Medicine. The original Blood Medicine was a herbal mixture that was brewed into a tea after purchase.

Jacob formulated it (adding alcohol as a "preservative") to develop a new, more modern version, with a longer shelf life. The patients did not complain that this herbal tea was converted into a herbal alcoholic preparation at all. The nostrum had a new awakening and increased clientele, as the alcohol only added to the favorability and instant acceptability of this new "more therapeutic" nostrum. Boozy was better during this era, and the public rejoiced.

Jacob's older sister, Ann, married practicing physician Ullrich Burkholder in Franklin County and two of their offspring, John and David, became part of the Waynesboro practice.

When Peter died in 1837 his youngest son, Daniel, who had been working with him in the original Boonsboro practice, succeeded him there. It was John Burkholder who went to Boonsboro to help the 18-year-old son transition into the new responsibilities of a practicing physician, teaching him the ins and outs of the Fahrney pharmacopeia of famous medicines with great curative properties. Jacob Sr. died in 1848.

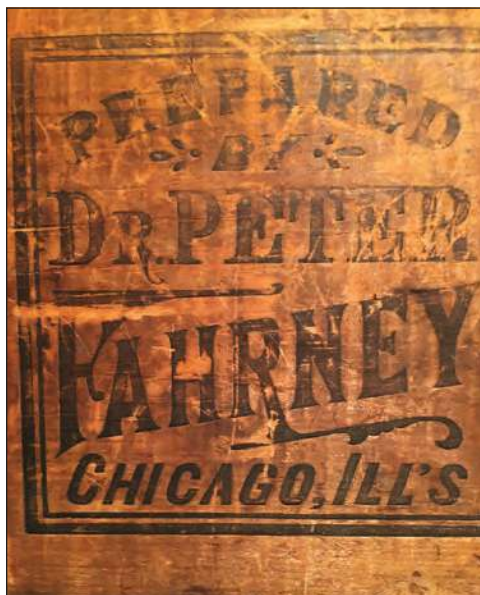
During that time, his oldest son, Jacob Jr., had expanded the practice to Philadelphia. John Burkholder, who was working with Jacob Sr. and was knowledgeable of the operation and many other aspects of the business, assisted. It's not clear what David was doing at this time.

The patent medicine enterprise was growing in leaps and bounds, and production capacity needed to grow with it. Expansion was imminent. The pontiled bottle era produced no embossed specimens. The patent medicine was put up in label-only containers. In 1856, Peter began in Waynesboro. Medicine production continued to expand at a good rate. The earliest embossed specimens show up right around 1870.

Daniel decided to groom his son Daniel to practice in Boonsboro. As you can see at this point in the history, names are a source of confusion to us researchers. The name Peter, as well as Daniel, repeats so much that research becomes garbled here. We are trying our best to straighten this out.

At about the same time Daniel went to his brother Peter, who was otherwise uninvolved in medicine business, to ask that his son, Peter, come practice medicine with him and his son Daniel. Peter was thirteen and Daniel was eight. It seems the "Old Dr. Peter connection" is something that both practices desired to substantiate to demonstrate a long line of family medicine practice.

John Burkholder, a longer living contemporary of Daniel Sr., was mentioned as being instrumental in the success of the whole operation during these transitional times. After Daniel died his brother in law, John Burkholder, helped his sister-in-law Amy transition the loose ends created by her husband Daniel's death.



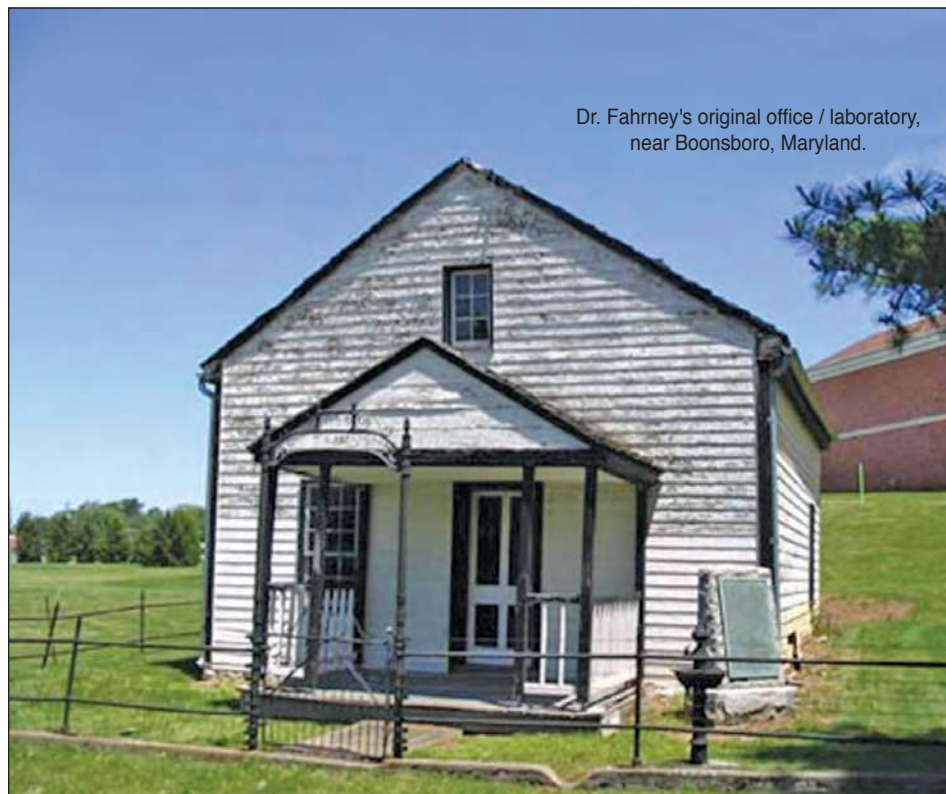
An early wooden PREPARED BY DR. PETER FAHRNEY CHICAGO, ILL'S crate.

John was interested in teaching the cousins the various aspects of the two practices. It is likely that Jacob Jr. returned to Waynesboro sometime before Daniel's Sr.'s death in 1867.

The family name and Fahrney patent medicines were cruising to wide acceptability on a grand scale, and the business was really taking off. Both Peter and Daniel, the next generation of cousins, went on to receive eclectic degrees in medicine from the same college in Philadelphia. Peter, from Waynesboro, also received a degree from there.

From here we move on from this installment of Medicine Chest, anxious to pick up next month with Part 2 of the House of Fahrney article. We will further explore the spin-off business venture, Victor's Remedy Company, and things will sure get interesting.

Editor's note: We would like to extend a special recognition to Phil Edmonds and his forty-plus years of research in assisting with the writing of this article.



Dr. Fahrney's original office / laboratory, near Boonsboro, Maryland.



Scarce DRS. D. FAHRNEY & SON / PREPARATION FOR / CLEANSING THE BLOOD / BOONSBORO, M.D. bottle.