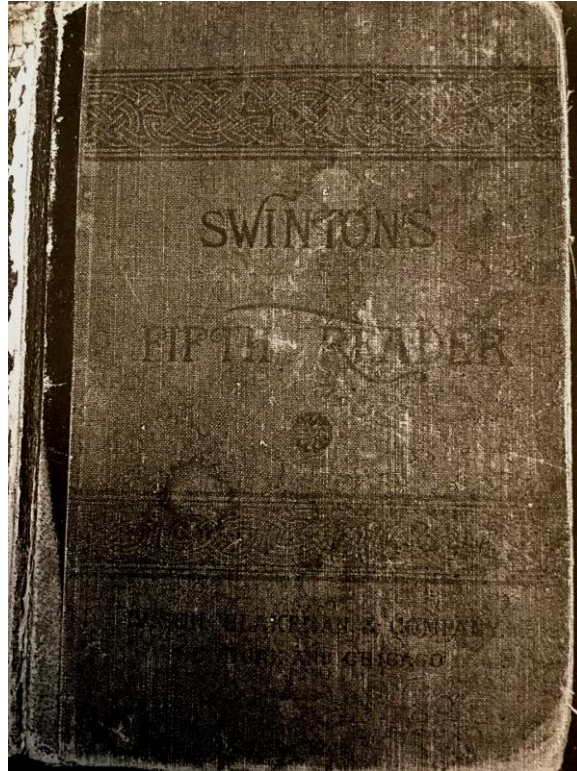


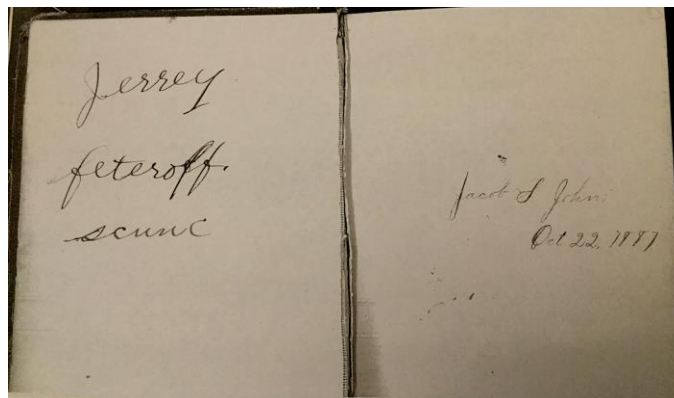
THE SIGNATURE

By Chris Sanders

I love old books. I like the way they look, the way they feel, what they say and how they say it. Surprisingly, there are many of these treasures still around, especially in antique shops. Always on the lookout for the next “find,” I consider it a bonus when there is the name of a former owner written inside, for my never-ending curiosity wants to know “who owned this book,” “where has it been,” and “what can it tell me.”



Discovering such a book recently entitled, “Swinton’s Fifth Reader and Speaker,” I could not believe the plethora of information that could be gleaned from the simple signature within—“Jacob S. John,” dated Oct. 22, 1887. The script was rather small, crisp and clear, nothing fancy and no flourishes, but boy the trail those few letters led me down was amazing. Jacob S. John was twelve years old when he signed this book.



Where to start? Well, the name, of course, and I did have additional help from another signature in big black not-so-neat-letters of a “Jerrey Feteroff,” also owner of the book at one time, who was kind enough to mention that he lived in Mainville. Thank you, Jerrey! Another identifying clue! Mainville is not far from Catawissa, PA, so I knew my guy was local, more local than I thought as it turned out.



J. S. John M.D.

A quick Google search immediately popped up a “DOCTOR Jacob S. John,” from Bloomsburg, PA, and a picture of the doctor himself was staring back at me! Wow, that was easy! The very distinguished, even handsome gentleman with a slight smile was a youngish looking fella, dressed in a suit and vest, and a crisp white shirt. His hair was short, parted and combed to the left. A nice trim mustache completed the picture. Even better was his signature on the studio picture in precise, clear letters—one and the same as the Jacob S. John in the book, especially the distinct little curl on his “S.”

His impressive monument, which befitted an M.D., gave even more facts. Dr. John was born February 15, 1875 and died August 11, 1957; and his wife, Mae Appleman Evans was born October 25, 1876 and died December 29, 1969. Their daughter, Eleanor Mae John, bless her heart, was born December 24, 1904, but lived only one day. She died on Christmas Day, December 25, 1904. Can you imagine the sad, sad Christmas Dr. John and his wife experienced that day and probably every Christmas thereafter, a painful reminder of their little daughter?

There were to be no more children.

Okay, Dr. John definitely had my interest now, especially since I knew what he looked like. The story I was to find out, had many twists and turns with surprises at every corner. Just what a good mystery should have, right?

Let’s start from the beginning—the VERY beginning. Luckily the CCH&G Society has many books of family histories, “The John Family History,” being one of them, so I didn’t have to go far. The big green book explained that the Johns, who converted to the Quaker faith, came from Armstrong County in Wales, and it was the custom to take their father’s given name. So when Samuel John came to America in 1809, he took his father’s first name for his last name. (I always thought “John” was an unusual last name.)

Samuel and others settled in Chester County (near Philadelphia), on a part of land called “the Welch Tract,” which was controlled by William Penn. Fast forwarding, his grandson Isaac John ventured out from the family and became the first white settler in the Catawissa area. There he raised a large family amid the wilderness in a log cabin which they accessed through a door in the roof, and persevered in spite of being driven out twice by Indians and the loss of money in Continental currency after the Revolution. He died in 1844 at the age of 94 (yep, 94!) and is buried at the Catawissa Quaker burying ground. Next generations are Abraham, Stacey (thus our

Doctor's middle name), and Jonas Wesley, all from Main Township. J. Wesley is Dr. John's father who married Catherine Brown, daughter of Jacob and Catherine H. Brown, on December 25, 1862 (Christmas), per the family history book, "Descendants of James Brown" found at the Society. So, as you can see, Dr. John's family is deeply rooted in Columbia County.

The doctor had four sisters and three brothers, however, only one brother, Ralph, and one sister, Bessie, had a child each to carry on this line. Ida and David were unmarried. Daisy married Dr. Lorenzo Zimmerman, an ENT specialist in Mt. Carmel, Sarah Grace married Charles William Langfield of Hemlock, a mail clerk for the railroad.

Ralph Robbins John, Bloomsburg attorney, married on November 10, 1896, Sallie Schweppenhiser, daughter of Eleazor and Dorothy nee Waters, from Lightstreet. Ralph and Anna had one daughter. They lived at 254 East Street, Bloomsburg, PA, where a florist shop used to be. It is now "Creative Dog." I call it the yellow house, which is beside the First Columbia Bank, and I have passed it thousands of times, always wondering who lived in the once beautiful old brick house!

I was really surprised to find that their daughter, Dorothy Catherine, married Harold Phillips Dillon. I thought, "Dillon," "flowers," I wonder? Sure enough I found her spouse was a florist who owned Dillon Flowers from 1961-2007, a descendant of John Lloyd Dillon, the son of the Irish immigrants, who started Dillon Florist in 1875. Small world!

Bessie was married and divorced and had a son Earl Francis. Earl went to Dickinson Seminary in Williamsport, PA and afterwards was employed at the bank of Hughesville, PA, later at the Farmers National Bank of Bloomsburg. The 1930 census shows he is a "lumber merchant," being employed at the firm of Creasy and Wells—read on and you'll see how he got that job!

Earl married Anna Creasy on May 21, 1914. Her father, Samuel Clifton Creasy, who lived at 60 E. Fifth Street, Bloomsburg, was engaged in the lumber business and among the leading wealthy men of the county. His credentials are way too long to mention here, but it seemed he was involved in EVERY aspect of the Bloomsburg area. How does one person do so much, I thought!

On July 23, 1884, Mr. Creasy married Mary, daughter of E. C. Wells of Bloomsburg (Creasy's business became "Creasy and Wells"). All in the family! Mrs. Creasy traced her ancestry through the Revolution period to the Mayflower.

Anna, the Creasy's daughter, and Earl John's wife, graduated from Bloomsburg State Normal School, class of 1903, attended the Women's College and the Peabody Conservatory of music in Baltimore, taking special lessons on the harp. Afterward she taught harp lessons. She was president of the Ivy Club.

Earl and Anna lived at 146 West Third Street, Bloomsburg, PA. They had one daughter, Kathryn, who was called "Kit" and "Brownie" according to the Bloomsburg High School 1932 yearbook. Like her grandfather, she seems to have been involved in "everything mentionable" at the school, too numerous to mention! Her picture shows a pretty, smiling young girl.

Now we finally move on to Dr. John himself. What a varied and busy life HE led! The “Brown Book” pointed out that surgeons don’t usually perform operations “until the vim and dare of youth has gone.” But this was not the case with Dr. John. Early in his professional career the hospital was just established and from the beginning “he wielded the scalpel in performing the difficult operations. He possessed an inborn talent for surgery.” “As an operator he is deliberate. He decided wisely and promptly. He has acquired great skill in the use of the knife.”

When a young man he was elected a member of the town council. Per numerous obituaries in area newspapers, large headlines of The Morning Press dated August 23, 1937, announced “Dr. J. S. John, Hospital Chief, Succumbs at 64, Prominent Surgeon, Physician Died at Home after Short Illness.” Dr. J. Stacey John passed away from the effects of diabetes and heart attack. The night before he died he remarked to the nurse taking care of him, “We’ve worked together, Mary, on many cases, but this is our last one.” The obit continued on to say that Dr. John attended the schools of Main Township (where he read the little blue textbook which I now have), and the Bloomsburg State Teachers College and in 1896 was graduated from Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia. He immediately came to Bloomsburg to practice and for many years served as president of the Bloomsburg Hospital and as president of physicians and surgical staff of the institution. He won many distinctions in the field of surgery.

He was a member of the Internal Clinical Congress of Surgeons of North America, of the American Medical Association, the Bloomsburg Kiwanis Club and Caldwell Consistory.

He was a Director of the Farmers National Bank of Bloomsburg for years and later, Vice President. He was likewise one of the town’s property owners.

The Benton Argus dated August 18, 1937 stated in bold type, “Fitting Tribute Paid Dr. John. Community Does Him Final Honors as Remains are Interred in Last Resting Place.” The article stated that his was “one of the largest funerals witnessed in many years” on Saturday afternoon at two o’clock at his late home. The article goes on to say hundreds had visited the home earlier as the body lay in state amid “one of the most beautiful displays of flowers ever to mark a Bloomsburg funeral.” The home was filled for the services and scores stood outside.

The last to view the body were the scores of under-graduates and graduate nurses of the Bloomsburg Hospital. They later acted as flower bearers, and then walked two by two, following the hearse to the cemetery.

Assembled within the house were the members of the Columbia County Medical Society, the executive committee of the Bloomsburg Hospital, the members of the Hospital Staff, the directors of the Farmers National Bank, and the trustees of the First Methodist Church of Bloomsburg of which Dr. John was a member.

Just to give you an idea of the hours Dr. John kept in his practice day in and day out is the following taken from the 1928 Walsh’s Bloomsburg phone directory: J. S. John (Mae) physician and surgeon, 214 W. Main St. h same office, office hours 7-9 a.m., 1-3 and 7-8 p.m., phone 200.” When did the poor man have time for anything?

A quick trip to the Columbia County Court House showed that Dr. John bought this house at 214 W. Main Street, Bloomsburg, PA, in 1900. He and his wife Mae lived there all their married lives. Having driven past that house a zillion times, I always wondered who lived in that pretty brick house with the big white pillars. It is now "Marie's Salon" and yes, I will forever look at that house and imagine the goings on there.

Speaking of Mae Evans John, she was equally interesting and was an active involved person in her own right. On June 26, 1902, Dr. John married Miss Mae, the "cultured and refined" daughter of Peter and Samantha Evans. Per the Society's copy of "The Descendants of James Brown," Peter Evans "was a prominent businessman of Columbia County, he having been one of the founders, and up to the time of his death a director, of the Farmers National Bank of Bloomsburg, PA." Samantha White Evans traced her ancestors back to the Revolution where according to Rootsweb, "the family was torn apart by the Revolution, some of the family siding with the Tories and the other half siding with the patriots."

Peter and Samantha née White had four children who survived to adulthood: William White, Mae Appleman, Harry Issacher, and Wailand Peter. William White was the Columbia County School Superintendent as shown on the 1910 and 1920 census, and the W. W. Evans School on Perry Street outside Bloomsburg was named in his honor! Okay this is the BEST part...brother Wailand had a daughter, Eleanor, who...are you ready?...married George J. Keller, the famous Bloomsburg College art professor who decided to follow his childhood ambition becoming a lion tamer! (We have the book on George Keller at the Society.)

Mae John died in Bloomsburg Hospital at age 93, per her obituary in The Morning Press dated December 30, 1969. She had been a patient since July.

She was a graduate of Bloomsburg High School and the Bloomsburg Normal School, class of 1896. She was long interested in the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Fort McClure Chapter and was in the DAR Lineage Book. She also furnished awards for the highest history marks in area schools through the DAR.

A member of Wesley United Methodist Church, she was also a member of the Bloomsburg Hospital Auxiliary and WCTU and the last surviving member of her immediate family. Four nieces are listed as survivors. Let's say they were very lucky! Read on!

I thought the surprises were over, but nope! There was one more to come—Mae John's will. At the Columbia County Court House I first viewed Dr. John's will which was so short if wasn't funny—everything went to Mae. But Mae's will on the other hand was another story. It was ten pages long and page after page of bequests. Her nieces, daughters of her brother William (all of Mae's other siblings were deceased) were: Eleanor Keller, Frances Parker, Esther McFadden, and Mary Cobb. Each niece got one-fourth of the Evans Farm property in Montour, and \$5000 each. The grandnieces and grandnephews got \$1000 each.

Niece Mary got Mae's solitaire engagement ring, all the antique furniture, including the mahogany sofa in the living room and colonial twin bedroom suite, three hooked rugs in a bedroom and a Turkish rug in the front hall. Niece Mary got the Weber grand piano. Niece

Eleanor got the platinum diamond girdle ring. Niece Frances got eight oriental rugs, being five Sarouk and three Kermanshaw rugs. Niece Esther got any cut glass she desired, the Sheraton mahogany bedroom suite, all dishes not otherwise bequeathed and all cooking utensils, all the dining room furniture, all the curtains and drapes, all other rugs not specifically bequeathed. All other jewelry not specifically bequeathed was to be equally divided between nieces Frances and Esther.

All the nieces received equally to dispose of as they saw fit all the remaining furniture, bric-a-brac, household goods and furnishing, table and bed linens, cut glass, bedding and silverware, clocks and all articles of personal use (except those items specifically bequeathed to others).

Also Mae left \$500 to her friend Mrs. Frank Rehm and \$1000 to her brother-in-law Wilson (who actually passed away before her).

Mae gave and bequeathed to the Bloomsburg Hospital "the oil painting of my beloved husband, Dr. J. S. John, who served as President of that institution and devoted so much of his time and effort towards its success. I express the hope that the Hospital will display this painting in a fitting and proper location in that institution."

She gives \$10,000 to the Bloomsburg Hospital to be known as the "Dr. J. S. John and Mae E. John Hospital Memorial Fund." Mae give \$10,000 to the Methodist Church of Bloomsburg, which she later revokes in her Codicil dated July 31, 1962 because she had given "valuable common stock" to the Trustees of that church in 1962.

\$500 was given to the Girard Trust Corn Exchange Bank of Philadelphia "for the protection and preservation of the monuments erected on my cemetery lot in Rosemont Cemetery, Bloomsburg, PA.

The remainder of Mae's estate was put in trust with the Girard Trust Corn Exchange Bank of Philadelphia to manage and invest with the next income arising to her nieces. Then upon the death of her nieces, the balance was to be held in perpetual trust by the Methodist Church of Bloomsburg, for general church use, the endowment fund, the Methodist Home for the Aged in Tyrone, PA, and the Methodist Home for Children, at Mechanicsburg, PA, the fund to be known as the "Dr. J. S. John and Mae E. John Memorial Fund."

The "Distribution Account" of Mae's estate shows that she owned seven rental properties worth \$94,000; one-third interest in the "Evans Farm," Montour Township; one-half interest in the wooded lot known as "Evans Farm Wooded Lot," worth \$8806.67; bonds worth \$15,101.08; stocks worth \$124,331.02; miscellaneous \$6501.55; real estate worth \$158,506.67; cash in residence \$327.50; and balance in checking account at United Penn Bank, \$39,560.29. Total \$344,237.11! Not too shabby in 1962 dollars for a farm boy from Main Township and his wife!

Now when I pass Maria's Salon at 214 W. Main Street in Bloomsburg, I don't have to wonder "who lived in that beautiful old house?" Because of a small signature in a Fifth Grade reading book, I know "the rest of the story" as Paul Harvey, the commentator, used to say. Boy, what a story! Did I tell you I love old books?!