

Dr. Asher G. Kriebel Biography

By: Ruth Kriebel Kadoich - Granddaughter

Dr. Asher G. Kriebel was born in the fourth generation of Kriebels in America on December 14, 1879 in Hereford, PA. His ancestors were Schwenkfelders who came from Silesia, Germany to escape religious persecution. Christoph Kriebel was the first known ancestor to board a ship in Nieder Harpersdorf for America. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1734 and settled in Lower Salford Twp. in Montgomery County, PA. It was after he moved to Montgomery Co. that he changed the German spelling of his name, Christoph Kriebel to the English spelling of Christopher Kriebel. (Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Family Heritage Center in Pennsburg, PA).

Dr. Kriebel was one of six boys and three girls born to Henry and Elizabeth (Griesemer) Kriebel in Hereford, Berks County, PA. All nine children carried their mother's maiden name as their middle name; hence, Asher Griesemer Kriebel. At five years of age, he started his education in a one-room school in Hereford Township and graduated from tenth grade in 1893. In the fall of 1893 he entered Perkiomen Seminary.

As a young teenager, he worked in the oil and grist mill his father owned in Hereford. They manufactured linseed oil from flax raised on farms in Upper Berks and Lehigh Counties hauled in large Conestoga wagons with four horses. The oil was sold and used in the mixture of paints. The mill was operated by water power from the Perkiomen Creek and was the last operating mill in the township. (Genealogical Record of the Schwenkfelder Family Heritage Center in Pennsburg, PA.)

In 1898 he graduated from Perkiomen Seminary in Pennsburg, PA and continued his education by entering Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, PA. He graduated from medical school in spring of 1903 and practiced medicine with his brother, Elmer, in Worcester, Montgomery County, PA for one and a half years. While serving as a medical intern, he had to rush through Philadelphia to deliver his first baby to a woman who had been under his pre-natal care for several months. He was excited to be performing his first delivery on his own. To his chagrin, when he got there he found the woman sitting on the back steps of her home holding her baby in her apron. Utterly disappointed, all he could do was send her to bed with orders to stay there. The next day, his orders unheeded, he found her on her hands and knees scrubbing the kitchen floor. He said, "It didn't hurt her one bit!"

In the fall of 1904 he established his own medical practice in Lynnville, PA. Dr. A. G. Kriebel became the sixth doctor to bring medical care to the residents of Lynnville and the surrounding area. He lived the remainder of his life in the same blue mountain stone house, on the southwest corner of Schochary Road and Holbens Valley/Kistler Valley Road, as did his five predecessors.

He married Bertha Hipple Heebner from the Montgomery County area in January 1905, and had three sons: (Torrence) Randall, (Henry) Denton and Willard. He had 11 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren. When he first moved to Lynnville, he did not like the area too well; but, it was not long into his practice that he "fell in love" with the people and the area and wouldn't have dreamed of ever practicing medicine anywhere else. His patients became like family to him and they treated him like family. "In the early years, of his practice, the only mode of transportation was horse and buggy or sleigh. He had a stable boy living in the back quarters of his home and maintained a stable of speedy road horses. He made house calls day and night in all kinds of weather over unimproved roads.

During a blizzard with 15 - 20 degree temperatures in the winter of 1905, the snow was too deep and the drifts too high to use a sleigh so he decided to ride horseback to make his house call. He was riding his horse back home after treating a patient with scarlet fever. As he rode along, he came to a place where there was just enough room between a snow drift and the fence for the horse to get through. The horse got through but he didn't. The horse went home and he had to walk the rest of the way. Needless to say, it was a thrill to get back to a warm house. That was the first and last time he rode horseback to call on his patients."

(Morning Call, January 10, 1954)

Dr. Kriebel had only acetylene lights in his house until 1926 when he bought a compressor, had his house wired and had electric lights. He told his neighbors, David and Mary Wert, if they would have their house wired he would furnish them with electricity which he did for a very nominal fee. (A Village Called Lynnville, by Viola Wert, 2005).

When roads improved and automobiles became a new mode of transportation, his life as a doctor became easier. He estimated that the mileage he covered was the same - 25,000 miles a year. Multiply that by 59 years of practice and we learn he traveled approximately 1.475 million miles to bring healing and comfort to the people in his community.

In 1958 there was a blizzard in the Lehigh Valley. The Morning Call ran an article about the "heroes of the storm" on February 23, 1958. Dr. Kriebel was one of those "heroes". The paper says, Dr. Kriebel hired his own corps of snow shovelers to get him through the drifts

so that he could make his daily house calls to the ill". His dedication, to his profession and those he cared for, was preeminent in his life regardless of any obstacles he had to face. He had a daily routine of visiting patients in their home from 8 AM to 12 noon, and had office hours in his home from 2 PM to 4 PM and 6 PM to 8 PM. However, if a patient needed him anytime day or night he opened his office to them or he would go to their home if they were too ill to come to the office.

The fact that his first baby delivery in Philadelphia didn't work as expected had little, if any, affect on the years to follow. Dr. Kriebel estimated that he delivered between 3500 to 4000 babies. In addition, he treated all types of medical needs in the community and was always glad he became a family physician instead of a specialist in a particular field. He contended that there were too many specialists and thereby lost the personal love and care a family physician could give his patient. He loved his practice and always said he would not trade his practice for the most lucrative practice in New York or any other large city. He proved that statement to be true. Upon examination of the ledger where he recorded the fees his patients paid, there were many cross-offs with the statement "Couldn't afford to pay" and many patients paid with produce from their farm or with meat when they butchered animals. He was a dedicated country doctor in every sense of the word!

Dr. Kriebel loved living in the country and enjoyed working in his yard and planting a large garden for fresh produce all summer long. He also maintained a large gold fish pond which was kept from freezing in the winter by placing a framework of plexiglass over the top of the pond and hanging a 200 watt light inside. These were his diversions from his everyday routine. He was often known to say, "I love this country and I never get tired of looking at it day in and day out". Unfortunately his dedication to his profession did not afford him any time to travel and see more of the country he loved; but, he always felt content that he saw the beauty of the entire country just by seeing the beauty of Lehigh County as he traveled about to visit his patients.

During Dr. Kriebel's practice he was actively involved in the community. In 1908 he was instrumental in the incorporation of the New Tripoli National Bank and was one of the earliest stockholders. He was a member of the Lehigh County Medical Society, the Pennsylvania Medical Society and the American Medical Association. On January 9, 1954 the Lehigh County Medical Society honored him with a 50 year testimonial plaque for his faithful, dedication to the medical profession.

The following is an article written about Dr. Asher G. Kriebel and published in the Morning Call at the time of his death, December, 1962. The writer is unknown.

The Doctor's Life

If anyone had asked him what made a good doctor a great one, the answer probably would have been slow in coming. He would have been the last to recognize he simply was being asked to recall pages from a book over which he labored so devotedly for almost 60 years. The volume, filled with the unwritten tales of a typical country doctor, now is closed. It is the story of medicine as practiced by some stalwarts through this century, of the tools and techniques that have come and gone, of a man who was ready to use them whenever he was called.

Nearly all have to do with one community, the broad territory centering about Dr. Kriebel's home and office in Lynnville. Many extend through three generations of the families that were his earliest patients. He shared their brightest and happiest moments, their anxieties and their tragedies. They knew him both as their doctor and their friend.

In these days of modern medicine, with its convenient hospitals and many skilled and exacting specialists, these sagas are increasingly rare. Not many more will be written.

Both in rural and urban areas the family doctor and his patients now have ready access to obstetricians, surgeons and gynecologists, pathologists and roentgenologists, internists and psychiatrists, dermatologists, allergists and all the rest. In his time, Dr. Kriebel was all of these and more. Sterile delivery rooms and operating rooms which he once had to improvise in rural homes, now are within minutes of even the most remote Lehigh County community.

As they became available and were needed, Dr. Kriebel used them all. He wouldn't, however, have swapped the practices or the hours of any specialist for the life he loved or the work he did so willingly and well.