

# **THE WISTAR-WISTER FAMILY:**

## **A Pennsylvania Family's Contributions Toward American Cultural Development**

BY MILTON RUBINCAM

**T**HE career of the Wistars and Wisters of Philadelphia during the past two centuries has been a continuous adventure. It is a story of heroic men and gracious ladies, of philanthropists and scholars, of soldiers and authors, and of men and women with strong convictions of duty to their country and their community. Theirs is a tale of successful business enterprises, of love and war, of jaunts into far-distant corners of the earth, and of scientific achievement. During the entire course of their history in this country, great names in the annals of mankind appear in close association with the time-honored names of Wistar and Wister.

Numerous books and articles have been published about them. The memoirs and reminiscences of various members of the family form important documents concerning Philadelphia social and cultural life of the period. Genealogical and biographical reference works for the eastern Pennsylvania area abound in accounts of this prolific and versatile family. Yet, in spite of the publicity extending over a period of several generations, there has yet to appear a definitive work, either historical or genealogical, which sets the Wistar-Wister family in its proper historical perspective. No single work attempts the task of evaluating the services to our cultural development of the two branches of this noteworthy Pennsylvania house.

At the beginning of the 18th century there lived in the little town of Hilsbach (Waldhilsbach), a few miles southeast of Heidelberg, in what later became the Grand Duchy of Baden, but was then the principality of the Electoral Palatinate of the Rhine, a family by the name of Wüster. The head of the family, Hans Caspar (1671-1727), held the hereditary office of *Jäger* (hunts-

man or forester) to the Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm. His wife, Anna Catharina, presented him with eight children, namely: Caspar, born February 3, 1696; Maria Barbara, born February 26, 1700; Anna Barbara, born February 22, 1702;<sup>1</sup> Albertina, born December 26, 1703, died December 11, 1714; Maria Margaretha, born June 10, 1707; Johannes, born November 7, 1708; Johann Ludwig, born January 29, 1711; and Georg Bernhard, born September 18, 1713.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE SENIOR LINE

Caspar Wüster, the eldest child of Hans Caspar and Anna Catharina, was 21 years old when he landed in Philadelphia, September 16, 1717. He had listened to the call of adventure, and, despite the entreaties of his father, had come to America to seek his fortune. He had only one pistareen (equivalent to nine pence) in his pocket, and his rifle. He was a bright and enterprising lad, and in due time he secured steady employment with a brass button manufacturer. His employer sent him on business trips to New Jersey, and while thus engaged, he observed the sand was similar to that used in Germany for glass manufacture. In 1738 he purchased extensive pine-wooded tracts of land near Allowaystown, Salem County, N. J. He imported four experienced Belgian glass-blowers, and by 1740 his plant, known as Wistarberg, was in full operation. Caspar provided the materials for glass-making and his workmen received one-third of the profits. Other glass-makers were brought from Belgium, Germany, and Portugal in 1748.<sup>3</sup>

Early in his career, Wistar—as his name was spelled by the clerks of the period, and which form his descendants retained to distinguish them from the posterity of his brother, John Wister, who joined him in Philadelphia in 1727—became acquainted with John Bartram, as the following letter to Bartram, written by

<sup>1</sup> Anna Barbara Wüster married Georg Bauer, of Mannheim; their daughter, Anna Catharina Bauer, married Johann Heinrich Keppeler and was the ancestress of many American families.

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Moon, M.D., *The Morris Family of Philadelphia. Descendants of Anthony Morris, 1654-1721*, I (1898), 356-357.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 358-360; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XX, 432-433.

Colonel William Byrd II, of Westover, in Virginia (November 30, 1738), indicates:<sup>4</sup>

I expect every day the arrival of a little ship, with Switzers and Germans, to settle upon part of my land at Roanoke. But they have been now thirteen weeks at sea, so that I am under great apprehensions for them. They have purchased thirty-three thousand acres only, in one body; so that there are seventy-two thousand still remaining, to which your friend, *Caspar Wister*, is very welcome if he, or any of his countrymen, are so inclined.

From this extract, it is apparent that Caspar was seeking lands beyond the borders of Pennsylvania; it is not known if he took advantage of Colonel Byrd's offer.

At a court held on September 25, 26, and 27, 1740, Caspar Wistar and his brother John were naturalized as subjects of King George II; they were listed in the records as "Quakers."<sup>5</sup> The explanation commonly given for the difference in spelling the names of the two branches of the family is based upon this act of naturalization.<sup>6</sup> This is not necessarily true, however; although Wistar and Wister became the legal forms of the name, 18th century documents used them interchangeably for the Senior and the Junior Lines.

In 1726 Caspar Wistar married Catharine Jansen (Johnson), daughter of Dirck and Margaret (Millan) Jansen, of Germantown. As a result of this union, Caspar became a member of the Society of Friends, to which his bride belonged.<sup>7</sup>

Caspar Wistar's death took place on March 21, 1752. He and Catharine Jansen were the parents of three sons and four daughters, but only the eldest son, Richard, concerns us here.

<sup>4</sup> *William and Mary Quarterly*, October, 1926, 307.

<sup>5</sup> M. S. Giuseppi, editor, *Naturalizations of Foreign Protestants in the American Colonies Pursuant to Statute 13 George II, c. 7*, p. 17 (Publications of The Huguenot Society of London, XXIV, 1921).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Jackson, *America's Most Historic Highway: Market Street, Philadelphia* (1926), 82-83.

<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Wistar's maternal grandfather, Hans Millan, owned (1689) the property on which stands the mansion now known as "Wyck." It is the oldest house in Germantown, although additions and alterations have been made in the course of the centuries. Mrs. Wistar inherited the property on her father's death (1760), and when she died in 1786 it passed to her daughter, Margaret Wistar (Mrs. Reuben Haines).

Richard Wistar inherited Wistarberg, his father's glass foundry in New Jersey, but in 1769 he transferred it to Philadelphia, setting it up at his residence on High (now Market) Street near Third.<sup>8</sup> Following in his father's footsteps, he became a successful business man, and amassed a fortune. His freedom from financial anxiety enabled him to devote much time to philanthropic enterprises. He was much concerned with the unsatisfactory conditions in the local prison; he was described by Roberts Vaux as "a benevolent and independent citizen . . . who, before the Revolutionary War, was in the practice of causing wholesome soup, prepared at his own dwelling, to be conveyed to the prisoners and distributed among them."<sup>9</sup> His charitable work was responsible for the organization of The Philadelphia Society for Assisting Distressed Prisoners in 1776; it is not known if he was actually a member of this group, but there is no doubt that his action directly stimulated a number of people to study the deplorable penological conditions that then existed. Wistar died in 1781, aged 54. His wife was named Sarah Wyatt.

Richard Wistar's interest in improving the lot of the so-called "distressed" prisoners was inherited by four of his six sons, Bartholomew, Richard, Caspar, and Thomas, and by the last-named to a marked degree. Eleven years after the founding of the society for assisting the prisoners, a reorganization took place, and on May 8, 1787, The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons was formed, with 37 charter members, including Dr. Benjamin Rush, Tench Coxe, Zachariah Poulson, John Kaighn, Thomas Wistar, Caleb Lownes, Rev. Dr. William White, Dr. William Shippen, and Benjamin Wynkoop. Dr. White, who was the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania, was chosen the first President. No more members were admitted until August 13, 1787, when 94 candidates were elected, among them Dr. Caspar Wistar, Thomas's brother; Rev. Dr. Ashbel Green, celebrated Presbyterian divine; His Excellency Benjamin

<sup>8</sup> Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison. A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937, Formerly The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons* (1937), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Roberts Vaux, *Notices of the Original and Successive Efforts to Improve the Discipline of the Prison at Philadelphia, and to Reform the Criminal Code of Pennsylvania; With a Few Observations on the Penitentiary System* (1826), 8.

Franklin, President of Pennsylvania; and Colonel Samuel Miles, distinguished Revolutionary War hero whose wife belonged to the Junior Line of Wister.<sup>10</sup> Two other brothers of Thomas Wistar joined the Society, namely, Bartholomew, in October, 1788, and Richard, in January, 1791.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Wistar was elected one of the Society's two Secretaries in 1790, one of the two Vice-Presidents in 1806, and on the death of Bishop White in July, 1836, the second President of the organization. He died in 1851, aged 87. His wife, Mary, daughter of Richard and Elizabeth Waln, of Walnford, N. J., whom he had married in 1766, was as distinguished in the Society's work as her husband. She was one of the founders of the Society of Women Friends which sought to visit and alleviate the sufferings of female prisoners in the Arch Street Prison.<sup>12</sup> One of their daughters, Margaret, was the wife of Roberts Vaux, a leading figure in Pennsylvania penological history, and their son, Richard Vaux, served as President of the Board of Inspectors of the Eastern Penitentiary for forty years.<sup>13</sup>

Of the later generations of the family interested in prison reforms, Dr. Caspar Wistar II was attending physician in the Eastern State Penitentiary and editor of the *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* in 1847-48;<sup>14</sup> Bartholomew Wistar II, actively engaged in studying the serious problem of juvenile delinquency, had much to do with the establishment (1828) of the Philadelphia House of Refuge for Juvenile Offenders, the purpose of which was to separate youthful prisoners from their more hardened companions in crime in order to devote full attention to their rehabilitation and to make them useful citizens of society;<sup>15</sup> and Edward Morris Wistar, twelfth President of the Pennsylvania Prison Society (1917-26), who labored earnestly for the education of the American Indians, the distribution of relief to the destitute Negroes of South Carolina, and, in collaboration with

<sup>10</sup> Teeters, *op. cit.*, 94, and facsimile of the first page of the minutes of the Pennsylvania Prison Society between pages 92 and 93.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, 249.

<sup>13</sup> With such a record, it is small wonder that Teeters states (p. 117) that "Probably the most illustrious name associated with continuous penal reform in Pennsylvania is that of Wistar!"

<sup>14</sup> Teeters, *ibid.*, 159.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-163.

Clara Barton, the first President of the American Red Cross, the relief of the persecuted Armenians.<sup>16</sup>

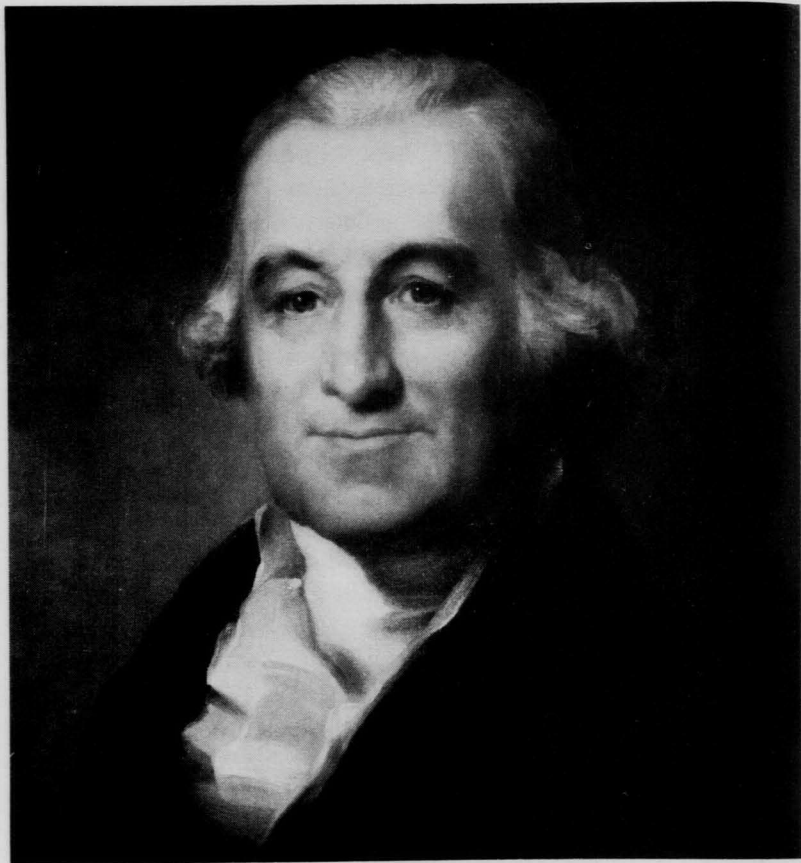
To return to the family of Richard and Sarah (Wyatt) Wistar, we find that their fifth son, Caspar, was born in Philadelphia, September 13, 1761. Early in life he became interested in the study of medicine, which he pursued under Dr. John Redman and later under Dr. John Jones, a surgeon who had left New York as a result of that city's occupation by the British Army during the Revolutionary War. In 1782, Caspar presented himself for the degree of Bachelor of Medicine in the University of Pennsylvania, and acquitted himself with distinction and honor.<sup>17</sup> His higher education in his chosen profession was obtained at the great medical schools of London and Edinburgh. In the latter capital he attained singular honors, being elected President of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh for two terms and President of the Society "for the further investigation of natural history." In June, 1786, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Medicine by the University of Edinburgh, his dissertation being entitled, *De Animo demisso*, dedicated to Dr. Franklin and Dr. Cullen.<sup>18</sup>

On his return to Philadelphia in January, 1787, he engaged in the practice of medicine in his native city and was appointed to the position of physician to the Philadelphia Dispensary, a recently established charitable institution. His career is too well known to be discussed in detail; we will confine ourselves here to a brief summary. Dr. Wistar was a Fellow of the College of Physicians (elected in 1788), Professor of Chemistry in the College of Philadelphia (appointed in 1789), Physician to the Pennsylvania Hospital, Adjunct Professor of Anatomy, Midwifery, and Surgery, University of Pennsylvania (1792), Professor of Anatomy (1808), and President of the American Philosophical Society, elected in 1815, in succession to Thomas Jefferson, who

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 378-379; Clara Barton, *The Red Cross in Peace and War* (1912), 334, 335, 345, 356. For eight months Wistar traveled on horseback in the interior of Armenia, visiting most of the towns, and purchasing and distributing grain for seed and food.

<sup>17</sup> Hon. William Tilghman, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *An Eulogium in Commemoration of Doctor Wistar . . .* (1818), 12-14.

<sup>18</sup> *List of the Graduates in Medicine in the University of Edinburgh from MDCCV to MDCCCLXVI* (1867), 18.



CASPAR WISTAR, M.D.

*Portrait by Thomas Sully.*

Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society  
Photograph by Frick Art Reference Library

had resigned. During the yellow fever epidemic in 1793, he labored valiantly in the cause, was stricken with the disease, and very nearly lost his life. He was, for a time, much esteemed by Dr. Rush, but as the epidemic progressed, radical differences changed a feeling of friendship to one of outright enmity.<sup>19</sup>

It was in anatomy that he achieved his greatest fame. "In many departments of science he was conspicuous, but here pre-emi-

<sup>19</sup> *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, edited by L. H. Butterfield (1951), 645, 735-36, etc.

ment," observed Chief Justice Tilghman, one of his eulogists.<sup>20</sup> He was the first anatomist to demonstrate that the posterior portion of the ethmoid bone (one of the eight bones which collectively form the cranial box, and enters into the formation of the cranium, the orbits, and the nose) was attached to the triangular bone.<sup>20a</sup> In 1818, in the *Transactions* of the American Philosophical Society, he published a paper on the "Observations on those Processes of the Ethmoid Bone, which originally form the Sphenoidal Sinuses" (New Series, I, 371-374). His major work, *A System of Anatomy for the Use of Students of Medicine*, published by Thomas Dobson at the Stone House, No. 41, South Second Street (volume I, 1811; volume II, 1814), was the first American textbook on anatomy. The ninth edition was published in 1846.

Dr. Wistar was one of the earliest advocates of vaccination, recently discovered by Dr. Jenner. In 1809 he proposed the formation of a society for circulating the benefit of vaccination. With the support of many public-spirited citizens, he succeeded in having about 11,000 persons vaccinated in the course of the next few years, and the City of Philadelphia passed a law providing for the gratuitous vaccination of persons too poor to pay for medical services.<sup>21</sup>

He was distinguished in other fields of science besides his chosen profession. In 1799 he published in the *Transactions* of the American Philosophical Society a short article on "Experiments in Evaporation." He was well versed in chemistry, botany, mineralogy, and history, and could carry on conversations easily in German and Latin.

Wistar counted among his friends Baron Alexander von Humboldt, the eminent German naturalist and traveler; the Abbé José Francisco Correa de Serra, priest, scholar, naturalist, and, from 1816 to 1820, Portuguese Minister to the United States; and Dr. Anthony Fothergill, British traveler and savant.<sup>22</sup> He was on terms of the closest friendship with Thomas Jefferson; this is made clear by the Wistar papers in the collections of the American

<sup>20</sup> Tilghman, *op. cit.*, 22.

<sup>20a</sup> *The Encyclopedia Americana*, Victory Edition (1945), XXIX, 429.

<sup>21</sup> Tilghman, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Wistar to Jefferson, June 29, 1813 (Jefferson Papers, MSS. Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.); Wistar to Secretary of State James Madison, May 29, 1804 (Madison Papers, Library of Congress), etc.



Philosophical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Library of Congress. Through Wistar's interest, Jefferson was able to secure some specimens of fossilized remains found in the Highlands of New York which were probably bones "of the Mammoth, or of an Animal of equal size."<sup>23</sup> They were also engaged in examining fossilized remains found near the falls of the Ohio, and in the summer of 1808, at President Jefferson's invitation, Dr. Wistar journeyed to Washington to examine them. The result of his investigations was embodied in a paper entitled, "An Account of Two Heads found in the Morass, called the Big Bone Lick, and presented to the Society by Mr. Jefferson" (*Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, I, 1818, 375-380).

For many years Dr. Wistar held meetings at his home every Saturday night where scientists, travelers, authors, and citizens gathered to discuss topics of current interest or the latest scientific discoveries. These gatherings were known as the Wistar Parties, and after his death, which took place on January 22, 1818, they were continued by some of his associates, including Chief Justice Tilghman and Peter S. Du Ponceau, who formed the Wistar Association, which is still in existence.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Wistar was twice married. His first wife, whom he married in 1788, was Isabella, daughter of Christopher Marshall, Jr., of Philadelphia, but his happiness with his young wife was short-lived, for she died childless two years later. In 1798 he married Elizabeth Mifflin, niece of Governor Mifflin of Pennsylvania. They had two sons and a daughter, Dr. Richard Mifflin Wistar, who died unmarried; Dr. Mifflin Wistar, who married but left no issue; and Elizabeth Wistar, who died in 1834, aged 18 years.

One of the finest tributes ever paid to the memory of Dr. Caspar Wistar was in a letter penned to his widow on January 31, 1818, by the Abbé Correa de Serra, who wrote: "My Letter . . . is not to condole with you in a complimentary way but to assure you that the sentiment I entertain for the memory of Dr. Wistar

<sup>23</sup> Wistar to Jefferson, December 8, 1800 (Jefferson Papers, vol. 108, Library of Congress).

<sup>24</sup> See Hampton L. Carson, *The Centenary of the Wistar Party. An Historical Address delivered in the Hall of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, May 4, 1918.*

will always render your family sacred and dear to my heart and make me solicitous of every occasion of being serviceable or useful to you all."<sup>25</sup>



GENERAL ISAAC J. WISTAR

Courtesy Historical Society of Pennsylvania

We shall consider briefly only one other distinguished member of the Senior Line of the Wistar-Wister Family, namely, Isaac Jones Wistar, who was born in Philadelphia in 1827, and who died at Claymont, Del., September 18, 1905. He was one of the ten children of Caspar Wistar, M.D. (1801-67), and his wife,

<sup>25</sup> Martin I. J. Griffin, "Sketch of the Abbé Joseph Francis Correa de Serra, A.D. 1750-1824," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, XIV (1903), 286-289. The year was incorrectly printed as 1812, but in a reprint of this article in *The American Catholic Historical Researcher*, XXII (1905), 39, it is given correctly as 1818.

Lydia Jones, of New Jersey, and a grandson of Thomas and Mary (Waln) Wistar. He was a grandnephew, therefore, of the celebrated Dr. Caspar Wistar.

Isaac J. Wistar was an adventurer and a soldier of fortune from his youth. He worked as a drygoods store clerk, farmer, laborer, gold miner, and free trapper for the Hudson's Bay Company; he worked on a canal boat and studied law in San Francisco, being admitted to the bar in 1853. During the Civil War he served as Colonel of the 71st Pennsylvania Regiment, fought at Gettysburg, and was commissioned Brigadier-General for his gallant services at Antietam, where he had been left for dead. After the war, he became President of the Union Canal Company, the Academy of Natural Sciences (1891-94), the State Board of Charities, and the American Philosophical Society (1901-03). As in the cases of his ancestors, he was interested in penology, served as a Member of the Board of Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary and was appointed by Governor Pennypacker a delegate from Pennsylvania to the prison congress to be held at Louisville, Ky., October 3-8, 1903, but he was forced to decline the honor because of a severe illness.<sup>26</sup>

General Wistar's greatest contribution to the cause of humanity was his establishment, in March, 1892, of The Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, a part of the University of Pennsylvania, which was named in honor of his great-uncle, Dr. Caspar Wistar. On May 21, 1894, the Institute was formally opened. The charter drawn up by General Wistar presented a five-point program, namely: (1) Preservation and free exhibition of the Wistar Museum, which was transferred by the University to the Institute; (2) Extension of the museum to include all objects and preparations useful in advanced biological studies and that bear upon the physical development of man; (3) establishment of a system of lectures on biological subjects for post-graduates or advanced students only, undergraduate teaching being prohibited; (4) establishment of a published periodical or otherwise, of the Institute's scientific proceedings and contributions; and (5) the

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker, *The Autobiography of a Pennsylvanian* (1915), 441.

setting up by the Institute of other work for the increase of original scientific knowledge of biological or kindred subjects.<sup>27</sup>

The Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, known throughout the scientific world as a leader in scholarly progress, stands as a permanent monument to the memory of a great Pennsylvania family.<sup>28</sup>

### THE JUNIOR LINE

Turning now to the history of the Junior Line of the Wistar-Wister Family, we find that Johannes Wüster, the younger brother of Caspar Wistar, the immigrant, remained at home in Hilsbach until after their father's death, which took place in January, 1727. Shortly thereafter, John Wister, as he became known in America, heeded his brother's call and joined him in Philadelphia.

John was a man of force and energy, purchased an extensive lot at what is now 325 Market Street, Philadelphia, became a wine-merchant, and amassed a fortune. On February 9, 1731, he married Salome Zimmerman, of Lancaster County, Pa., but of their four children, only a daughter, Salome (Mrs. William Chancellor), survived childhood.

After his first wife's death Wister married (November 10, 1737) Anna Catharina Rübenkam, who was born at Wanfried, Hessen-Rheinfels, Germany, February 25, 1709. Her father, Johann Philipp Rübenkam, had an interesting career. On both sides of the family he was descended from Reformed clergymen; his maternal great-grandfather, Johannes Crollius (1599-1662) was Court Preacher to Landgrave Hermann of Hessen-Rotenburg and Metropolitan of Hersfeld, and his great-uncle, Dr. Johannes Laurentius Crollius (1641-1709), Rector of the University of Heidelberg and later of the University of Marburg, was a distinguished theologian. Some years after his graduation from the University of Marburg, Johann Philipp Rübenkam became Pastor of Wanfried, but in time he forsook the faith of his Calvinist ancestors to embrace the more liberal Pietism, was expelled from his church in 1717, and died in exile in 1725 at Berleburg, in the countship of Sayn-Wittgenstein-Berleburg. His widow, Margaretha Catharina,

<sup>27</sup> *Twentieth Anniversary of the Organization of the Advisory Board of The Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology* (1925), 28-30.

<sup>28</sup> See Gen. Wistar's *Autobiography*, published in two volumes in 1914 by the Institute.

brought their family to America soon thereafter; she died in Bristol Township, Philadelphia County, in 1727. Mrs. Wister was the second of her four daughters.<sup>29</sup>

John Wister and Anna Catharina Rübenkam had five children, of whom Daniel, Catharine, and William survived to maturity.

John Wister and his brother Caspar were among the 33 founders of the Fellowship Fire Company, the second oldest fire company in Philadelphia (1738).

Mr. Wister's benefactions included all sorts of odd characters. He was especially friendly with the hermits of the Wissahickon, and gave his financial support to Conrad Matthäi, among others. At the latter's death, Wister bore entirely the expenses of the venerable old man's funeral, which took place on September 1, 1748. He sent money to relatives in Germany, ordered bread to be baked every Saturday and distributed to the poor people who came to his door for it, and with his brother Caspar was one of the original contributors to the Pennsylvania Hospital.

In 1744 Mr. Wister erected at Germantown a 2½ story mansion then called "Wister's Big House" but subsequently "Grumblethorpe," because, we are assured by a descendant, whenever the family met there was discord. It was the first country seat created by a wealthy Philadelphia gentleman and was located six miles from the city. The stone used in its construction was quarried at Cedar Hill, near the eastern end of Brighthurst Street close to the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, in Germantown, and the lumber was furnished from the oak trees hewn in Wister's Woods. This mansion is one of the most historic houses in Germantown, and a few years ago was acquired by the Grumblethorpe Committee under the auspices of the Germantown Historical Society and the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks; these groups are restoring the old house to its original grandeur.

Wister counted among his friends the Moravian Apostle, Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, and two chairs presented by the latter to the family are still among the prized heirlooms of the descendants of John Wister and Anna Catharina Rübenkam.

<sup>29</sup> For the history of the Rübenkam family, see the author's articles in *The American Genealogist*, January, 1939, 172-177, and April, 1945, 225-234, *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, October, 1938, 107-114; and *Genealogy and History* for March 7, 1940 (Item No. 365), September 15, 1940 (Item 1788), and March, 1949 (Item 13424).

Catharine Wister, John's only daughter, had a romance that was nearly nipped in the bud. She fell in love with a young soldier of Welsh origin named Samuel Miles, who had seen active service in the French and Indian War and had successfully raised himself from a private to the rank of captain in His Majesty's Service.<sup>30</sup> On his return to Philadelphia Captain Miles sought to win the hand of the fair Miss Wister, but her father, apparently of the opinion that the young officer did not measure up to the financial and social standards established for his son-in-law, refused his consent. But the young couple were married on February 16, 1761, without the paternal blessing. Eventually, Mr. Wister forgave his daughter and backed his son-in-law in the wine and rum trade. He never had occasion to regret his daughter's choice, for Samuel Miles became a member of the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly (1772), Colonel of the Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment attached to the famous Flying Camp (1776), Auditor of Public Accounts and Deputy-Quartermaster-General for Pennsylvania (1778), Judge of the High Court of Errors and Appeals (1783), Captain of the First City Troop (1786), a famous local military organization which accepts only men of prominent families (a circumstance that must have pleased old Mr. Wister!), member of the Council of Censors (1787) and of the Common Council of Philadelphia (1788), and, finally, Mayor of Philadelphia (1790).

John Wister's later life was not free from romance. In 1770 his second wife, Anna Catharina Rübenkam, died.<sup>31</sup> He was not long inconsolable; for a number of years he had known a nun in the Seventh Day Baptist cloister at Ephrata, Sister Anastasia (born Anna Thoman, from Bubendorf, Switzerland), who was a composer of hymns. A great deal of mystery surrounds the courtship of the worldly Mr. Wister and the modest nun of Ephrata, but the fact remains that on August 7, 1771, they were married in the German Reformed Church at 4th and Race Streets, Philadelphia.<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Wister died in 1778, and her husband, widowed for the third time, did not remarry.

<sup>30</sup> Autobiography of Col. Samuel Miles in *The American Historical Record*, II, 51-52.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob Cox Parsons, editor, *Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer, 1765-1798* (1893), 21: "My wife and self attended the burial of John Wister's wife in Friends' burial ground."

<sup>32</sup> Article on the Wister family, *The Germantown Courier*, August 18, 1938.

William Wister, John's younger son by his second wife, was a man of considerable financial importance, and in 1773, two years prior to the outbreak of the Revolution, he and his brother-in-law, Samuel Miles, and Owen Jones were requested by the Provincial Legislature to endorse their currency. Samples of this money are still extant.<sup>33</sup>

The Revolutionary War was a period of stress and strain for the family. Old John Wister remained at his town house in Philadelphia, leaving his country mansion, Grumblethorpe, in the care of a German female servant, Justina. During the Battle of Germantown (October 4, 1777), the British General James Agnew was carried wounded to the Wister house, where he died; the stains of blood that flowed from his side may be seen today on the floor where he was laid.

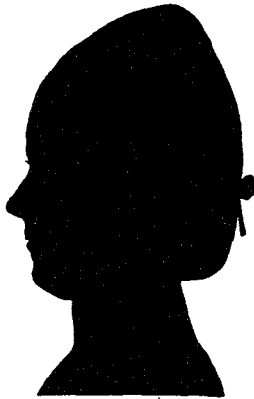
When the British advanced on Philadelphia, Daniel Wister, John's elder son, packed up his family and took them to North Wales (Gwynedd), on the Wissahickon, to stay with friends named Foulke. His family consisted at that time of his wife, Lowry Jones (whom he had married in 1760 by Friends' ceremony),<sup>34</sup> and five children, Sarah (Sally), Elizabeth, Hannah, Susannah, and John. At later dates two other sons, Charles Jones and William Wynne Wister, were born.

The eldest child, Sally Wister, was a bright and vivacious girl of 16 years who, during the period of her residence on the Foulke farm, kept a diary that is an important document bearing on conditions behind the American lines from September 25, 1777, to June 20, 1778. Its pages teem with amusing incidents likely to attract the attention of a young girl. Three future governors were among those mentioned by Sally: General William Smallwood of Maryland, Colonel James Wood of Virginia, and Major Aaron Ogden of New Jersey. The book describes in some detail Sally's flirtations with the handsome young officers who appeared periodically at North Wales, and for a time she appeared to have won the heart of gallant Major William Truman Stoddard. Her

<sup>33</sup> *Jones Wister's Reminiscences* (1920), 8. Photographs of the currency bearing William Wister's signature are reproduced on pp. 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> She was a daughter of Owen Jones, formerly Provincial Treasurer of Pennsylvania and a descendant of the celebrated Welsh physician and Quaker pamphleteer, Dr. Thomas Wynne, who had accompanied William Penn to America on the ship *Welcome* in 1682.

coquettish description of the Major's bashfulness and her method of finally drawing him within her web is a clever piece of writing. The Journal was published in 1902 under the editorship of Albert Cook Myers.



SALLY WISTER

*From "Sally Wister's Journal," edited by Albert Cook Myers.*

After the departure of the British from Philadelphia, the Wisters returned to Grumblethorpe and took up the threads of their daily life where they had been dropped.

John Wister, the patriarch of the Junior Line, continued to live in retirement and breathed his last on January 31, 1789.<sup>35</sup>

In 1801 William Wister died and was succeeded in his business by his brother Daniel's sons, John and Charles J., who conducted the firm until 1819, when they dissolved it and retired, John to his mansion, Vernon, between Germantown Avenue and Greene Street, and Charles to the historic home, Grumblethorpe.

By his wife, Elizabeth Harvey, of Bordentown, N. J., John Wister II had numerous children, of whom the eldest son, William, married Sarah Logan Fisher, a direct descendant of the celebrated friend and associate of William Penn, James Logan. Their sons, William Rotch, John, Langhorne, Jones, Francis, and Rod-

<sup>35</sup> From Jacob Hiltzheimer's diary (Parsons, *op. cit.*, 149): February 2, 1789—"Very cold. In the afternoon called for Mr. Barge, when we proceeded to the burial of John Wister at Friends' ground, just back of his yard. He was eighty-one years old, came from near Haidelberg, Germany, sixty years ago, as he told me this day one week ago, at which time I spent above an hour at his house, talking about our own country."



man, were notable as the founders of the game of cricket in America. In 1840 William Rotch Wister observed some English residents of Germantown playing their national game. Impressed with the possibilities of the sport, he taught it to his brothers and other interested youths of his community. Under his leadership, the Germantown Cricket Club was organized (1854). In 1855, a rival outfit, the Young America Club, was established, and some vigorously fought contests between the two teams took place. The Germantown Club's first field was William Wister's pasture at his estate, Belfield.<sup>36</sup> Of the contributions made by the brothers Wister to American sports, George M. Newhall, in his obituary of Jones Wister, wrote: "Looking back over the history of our game in America, it would seem that the spirit of cricket brooding over this country, selected these six sturdy Wister boys to inaugurate this great sport among us, which they did, maintaining the 'Institution' from that day to this, when the last of the band leaves their heritage to us. They saw the first of American cricket. We do well to honor their memory, for theirs was a good work, and the world is better for it."<sup>37</sup>

During the Civil War the Wister brothers served their country well, William Rotch and Francis becoming colonels, and Langhorne Wister becoming brigadier-general, the same rank to which his distant cousin, Isaac J. Wistar, was raised.

Colonel William Rotch Wister, who was a lawyer by profession, took a prominent part in Germantown affairs. He was "a distinct type of a gentleman of the old school, and possessed that gracious bearing and courtliness of manner which are rare virtues indeed in these busy times."<sup>38</sup> He made one of those matrimonial alliances that have characterized the posterity of John and Anna Catharina (Rübenkam) Wister for two centuries. His wife, Mary R. Eustis, was a granddaughter of the eminent Unitarian clergyman, Reverend William Ellery Channing. Of their four children, Mary Channing and Frances Anne have continued the family's record of devoted service to the community.

<sup>36</sup> George M. Newhall, "The Cricket Grounds of Germantown and a Plea for the Game," *Papers of the Site and Relic Society*, 171-172.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in *Jones Wister's Reminiscences*, 458-459.

<sup>38</sup> John W. Jordan, LL.D., *Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography*, II (1914), 633.

Mary Channing Wister was born in Germantown, March 30, 1870. As a young woman she became interested in philanthropic and church work, organized the Young People's Guild of Christian Life and participated actively in affairs relating to the Evening Home for Boys in Philadelphia. At the age of 26 she became a member of the Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Church of Germantown. In 1893, with Miss Cornelia Frothingham, she founded the Civic Club of Philadelphia, of which she was elected the first Treasurer. "Such was her devotion to the work that she became the very soul of the club," observes one writer, "filling almost every position on the board, was twice its president, and for twenty years was its inspiration and leader, giving not only of her time, means and capacity to the work, but her very best thoughtful and constant and untiring striving for its success."<sup>39</sup>

Mrs. Wister—she had married her cousin, Owen Wister, the author, in 1898—was much concerned with reforms in the municipal government. In 1912 she was engaged with the Philadelphia Civil Service Commission in its examinations for teachers, assistant teachers, and principal for the Board of Recreation. So great was the respect in which she was held that her opinion and advice were sought by the members of the Commission. She was appointed a member of the Board of Education of Philadelphia on January 1, 1898, a rare honor, for up to that time very few women had been chosen members of that organization. She was also chairman of the Civic Betterment Committee of the State Federation of Pennsylvania Women. Her death at Saunderstown, R. I., on August 24, 1913, was a distinct loss to Philadelphia. In her honor the Zachary Taylor School in Philadelphia was renamed the Mary Channing Wister School. The finest tribute of all was that expressed by former Governor Martin G. Brumbaugh, who declared: "Her work for our schools was so unselfish, so altruistic, so splendidly progressive that it is entirely fair to say that she was a great leader of educational thought and accomplishment."<sup>40</sup>

Mrs. Wister's sister, Miss Frances A. Wister, was born November 26, 1874, and, like Mary Channing, early identified herself with matters of municipal importance. For many years she served as President of the Civic Club of Philadelphia. In 1900 she was

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 1475.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 1476.

one of the founders of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Her special interest is the preservation of historic shrines in Philadelphia. She was Vice-President of the Independence Hall Association at its formation in 1940, and as President of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks she has exerted considerable influence in saving and restoring to their original condition a number of houses where events shaping the history of her native city took place. In December, 1936, she was honored with the Fifth Annual Gimbel Award as the most outstanding Philadelphia woman for the year 1936. It was a deserved tribute to a distinguished daughter of the House of Wister.

We have one more branch of the family to trace. Charles Jones Wister, son of Daniel and Lowry (Jones) Wister, and grandson of the founder of the Junior Line, was a man of considerable versatility. He traveled extensively in the interests of his uncle William's business, frequently riding into the sparsely settled western part of Pennsylvania and even down into the Virginia area. In 1801 he attended lectures in chemistry delivered at the University of Pennsylvania by Professor James Woodhouse, and also courses in anatomy by his famous relative, Dr. Caspar Wistar. Although not a professional scientist, he was learned in mineralogy, botany, chemistry, and meteorology. He counted among his friends a German apothecary of repute, Dr. Adam Seybert, and a celebrated mineralogist, Professor Parker Cleveland, of Bowdoin College, Maine, whose course of lectures at Philadelphia in 1814 he attended. Wister supplied Professor Cleveland with much information for his book on mineralogy and received the latter's public acknowledgment of his assistance.

Wister kept daily weather reports and as a voluntary observer sent them in monthly to the Surgeon General's Office of the War Department, which then maintained a weather service. These were not the "first weather records in America" as reported in *The Germantown Courier* for September 22, 1938. The first known climatological reports were made by Dr. Charles Lining of Charleston, S. C., who made instrumental observations in 1738,<sup>41</sup> while the first known reports kept in Pennsylvania were those of John Bartram, the botanist, in 1748. The Division of Agriculture De-

<sup>41</sup> *List of Climatological Records in The National Archives*, March, 1942, Special List No. 1, p. 121.

partment Archives of the National Archives contains four weather reports signed by Charles J. Wister, Jr., which indicates that these observations were made by the son, not the father. They are the oldest weather reports for the Germantown area in the files of the National Archives, and are dated July, August, October, and December, 1843.

Charles J. Wister, Sr., was much interested in the progress of the Germantown Academy, of which he was a trustee and with which his family has been intimately identified for generations. In November, 1822, he presented \$150 worth of chemicals and chemical apparatus to the institution, as well as a set of "five-foot maps of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America."<sup>42</sup> He also donated a mineralogical collection.<sup>43</sup> His varied interests were exemplified in the types of societies of which he was a member or officer: the Philadelphia Library Company, Library Company of Germantown, the Linnaean Society of Philadelphia (which had for its purpose the encouragement and cultivation of the natural sciences), the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, the Academy of Natural Sciences, of Philadelphia, and the American Philosophical Society.<sup>44</sup> He was twice married, having issue by both wives. Two sons by his second wife, Sarah Whitesides, attained distinction.

The elder, Dr. Caspar Wister (1818-88), was, like his cousin, General Isaac Jones Wistar, an adventurer and soldier-of-fortune. As a youth he enlisted in the army of the Republic of Texas, fought against the Mexicans, was promoted to first sergeant, and wrote letters to his family graphically describing his adventures. "After travelling 250 miles, 100 of them through a country inhabited by Comanches," he wrote, after the enemy had been driven from San Antonio, "without a vestige, a house or any object to give notice that the white race had ever trodden this wilderness, it was a singular feeling to find myself riding down the streets of a city, dating its birth anterior to that of Philadelphia, and built entirely of stone—its palaces and churches, its missions and ca-

<sup>42</sup> *A History of the Germantown Academy* (1910), 163.

<sup>43</sup> Horace Mather Lippincott, *A History of the Germantown Academy, 1876- to 1936* (1935), 10.

<sup>44</sup> See Charles J. Wister, Jr., *The Labour of a Long Life: A Memoir of Charles J. Wister* (2 vols., 1866).

thedrals, immense in extent, grand in conception, all sinking in confused masses of earth from which they originally sprang. A few more visits from a Texas army and the hand of time will be spared the work of crumbling their monuments."

In 1843 Wister returned to Germantown, commenced the study of medicine, and was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with the M.D. degree. He took an active part in matters relating to medical progress in the Philadelphia area, served in the Civil War as an army assistant surgeon, was a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Treasurer of the International Medical Congress (1876), and President of the Philadelphia Sparring and Fencing Club.<sup>45</sup>

Dr. Wister's second wife, Annis Lee Furness, was a daughter of Rev. William Henry Furness, a leader in the anti-slavery movement, and sister of William H. Furness, Jr., a prominent portrait painter, and of Horace Howard Furness, the Shakespearean authority. Mrs. Wister was noteworthy in her own right. She translated into English numerous German works, such as Marlitt's *The Countess Gisela* (1869), Volkhausen's *Why Did He Not Die* (1871), Von Auer's *It Is the Fashion* (1872), and Lewald's *Hulda: or, The Deliverer* (1874).

Charles J. Wister, Jr., son of Charles J. and Sarah (Whitesides) Wister, was the "Grand Old Man" of Germantown. He was a mine of information on the history of his home, Grumblethorpe (where he died on January 31, 1910, aged 88), his family, and his community. He was President of the Board of Trustees of the Germantown Academy, and has been thus described by an alumnus of that venerable institution:

Hundreds of boys during the period of Mr. Wister's interest in the Academy recall his weekly visit to wind the clocks. He was a picturesque figure, a gentleman of the old school, and usually wore red mittens in winter, which made a sensation among the boys. He was a musician, writer and artist, and he took delight in placing mathematical problems on the blackboard at the school with an invitation to the boys to solve them.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See *A Sketch of the Life of Caspar Wister, M.D.*, by his brother-in-law, Dr. W. S. W. Ruschenberger (1890).

<sup>46</sup> Lippincott, *op. cit.*, 72. Mr. Wister was succeeded as President of the Board of Trustees of the Academy by his nephew, Alexander W. Wister, son of his elder half-brother, William Wynne Wister II.

He was an honorary member of the Board of Managers of the Germantown Hospital, a member of the Germantown Horticultural Society, and President of the Site and Relic Society.

Dr. Owen Jones Wister, youngest son of Charles J. and Sarah (Whitesides) Wister, married, 1859, Sarah Butler, daughter of Pierce Butler (a descendant of Sir Richard Butler, 5th Bart., of Cloughgrenan, M.P. for County Carlow, 1729-61), by his wife, the famous English actress, Fanny Kemble, through whom this branch of the family derives descent from an eminent family of actors and a collateral relationship with the immortal Mrs. Siddons.

The only son of Dr. Owen J. and Sarah (Butler) Wister, was Owen Wister, who was born at Grumblethorpe, Germantown, July 14, 1860. His contributions to recent literary history are too familiar to relate in detail. An early residence in Wyoming, whither he went to build up his health, cultivated in him a genuine love for all things western that remained with him until the day of his death. In addition to his best-known work, *The Virginian*, which was published in 1902, his books include: *The Dragon of Wantley: His Tail* (1892), his first novel; *Red Men and White* (1896); *Lin McLean* (1898); *The Pentecost of Calamity* (1915); *Neighbors Henceforth* (1922), and *When West Was West* (1928). He was a biographer of considerable merit, these works consisting of: *U. S. Grant, A Biography* (1900); *Oliver Wendell Holmes* (in the American Men of Letters Series, 1902); and *Seven Ages of Washington*. In 1930 he published *Roosevelt, The Story of a Friendship*, in which he allowed himself to be more autobiographical than in any previous work. This book deals with his warm and intimate friendship with Theodore Roosevelt from the time they met at Harvard University until the late President's death in 1919. Mr. Wister was not interested solely in literature; he took a forthright stand on political issues of the day. As an editorial in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* for July 22, 1938, put it, "there was never any doubt as to his position after he had had his say. As a knight of the pen, as eager to defend what he thought right as to attack what he thought wrong, he never allowed his weapon to rust. It was kept bright and sharp to the last." The Washington (D. C.) *Evening Star* for the same date observed: "He was a personality in his own distinctive right—a patriotic citizen who cultivated a passionate devotion to his country; a controver-

sialist skilled in law and history and in the methodology of argument; a lover of music and art; a good and kindly friend to those in need; above all, a colorful, engaging, marvelously attractive individual." He died at North Kingston, R. I., July 21, 1938.

In our survey of the Wistar-Wister family, we are most impressed by its versatility and its determination to advance knowledge of every description. The books and monographs and articles which the family has authored, whether an anatomical treatise by Dr. Caspar Wistar of the Senior Line or a literary masterpiece by Owen Wister of the Junior Line, an autobiography of an adventurer in the Far West by General Isaac Jones Wistar of the Senior Line, or a chatty book of reminiscences by Jones Wister of the Junior Line, all have their place in the realm of American scholarship and lore. The family has proved its sturdiness by surviving pestilences such as the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, and hard-fought campaigns in the Texan Republic and the Civil War. The family's patriotism is intense, and, perhaps most characteristic of all, it is a great humanitarian family that has actively interested itself in such diverse but worthy causes as penal reform and assistance to the starving Armenians. The family has never lacked members who have fought hard and victoriously for the civic welfare and improvement of their fellow citizens. Above all, it is an intensely human family, given as much to fun and pleasure as to serious investigations of scientific subjects; its members loved to tell stories of the famous people with whom they came in contact, as witness the charming diary of Sally Wister and the many anecdotes related to Charles J. Wister, Sr. and Jr. The Wistars and the Wisters have earned for themselves a secure place in American historical annals.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> One of the family's most interesting matrimonial alliances was formed in 1900 when Miss Susan Tilghman Toland, a direct descendant of John and Anna Catharina (Rübenkam) Wister, married Don Ludovico Lante della Rovere, of Rome, Italy, thus uniting the great Philadelphia family with a princely scion of the mighty House that gave two Popes (Sixtus IV and Julius II) to the Holy See and a reigning dynasty to the former Duchy of Urbino.