

SIGHT TO THE BLIND

A recent newspaper posting discovered by www.ancestry.com through their partnership with the www.newspapers.com site contains an article originally posted in the Pennsylvania Gazette, published in Philadelphia on Thu, Mar. 4, 1762.

Doctor S T O R K acquaints the PUBLIC,

TH A T he is to continue in Philadelphia till the Beginning of April next: Such as stand in Need of his Assistance, may apply to him, at his Lodgings, at Mrs. Child's, near the new Meeting-house, in Arch-street.

We the Subscribers are induced, not only in Gratitude to Doctor Stork, but likewise for the Benefit of our Fellow Sufferers, to communicate to the Public the Recovery of our Sights from Blindness.

I John Conrad, of Upper-Dublin, Philadelphia County, do certify, That having lost my Sight seven Years ago, was restored to it again by Dr. Stork, although I am in my 8th Year; also my Wife, aged 78, recovered her Sight, by the Doctor's Assistance.

I Martin Forster, at Point-no-Point, near Philadelphia, do certify, That my Daughter was born blind, and continued in that State for eleven Years, till lately restored to Sight by Doctor Stork.

I Nicholas Oblinger certify, That my Wife, after 16 Years Blindness, recovered her Sight by Dr. Stork's Assistance, so that she can read and write; as also my Son Christian, being born blind, in his 18th Year was brought to Sight by the same Gentleman. Duncmenston Township, Northampton County, December 15, 1761.

This is to certify, That I Thomas Roberts, of Hopewell, near Trenton, being deprived of Sight these two Years, was restored to it again by Doctor Stork.

I Hyam Bon, of Lancaster, think myself in Duty bound, for the Benefit of the Public, and in Gratitude to Dr. Stork, to declare, in this public Manner, That after seven Years Blindness, I was restored to Sight again by Dr. Stork, being able to read and write. Witness my Hand,

HYAM BON. ¶

[The Pennsylvania Gazette (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) Thu, Mar 4, 1762 Page 3]

The purpose of the article is to inform the public that a Doctor Stork will be available to offer his assistance to those in need of it in Philadelphia until the beginning of April, 1763. What follows are statements from four former patients who testify to the fact that Dr. Stork has successfully restored sight to themselves or family members who previously suffered from years of blindness.

Did you perhaps notice your own ancestor? The third testimony is from none other than Nicholas Oblinger, the elder son of Claus Oblinger!!

Here in black-and-white we have first-hand personal information from Nicholas about his family. He testifies that his wife, Elizabeth, and his son, Christian, were both relieved of their blindness in 1761, ten years after having moved from Lower Salford, Montgomery County to a sparsely inhabited frontier area near the Blue Mountain Gap. Yet they probably were able to travel to Philadelphia for this medical treatment — the removal of cataracts.

Confirming that this Dr. Stork was not a quack, here is an abstract written by several surgeons who set out to discover the earliest cataract surgeons in English-speaking areas of America. They found that this Dr. Stork from England practiced from Annapolis to Boston between 1761 and 1764.

“We tried to identify the earliest cataract surgeons in the English-speaking areas of America. In 1751, couching was performed on the Caribbean island of Montserrat by John Morphy. William Stork of England, who couched cataracts, practiced in Jamaica in 1760 and then in cities from Annapolis to Boston between 1761 and 1764. Frederick William Jericho of Germany, upon completion of his training at Utrecht, published his 1767 treatise on his preferred surgical technique of extracapsular cataract extraction. Jericho had practiced in the Leeward Islands by 1776 and then in cities from Charleston to Boston between 1783 and 1785. The French surgeon Lewis Leprilete was the first to advertise cataract extraction in the United States in 1782 and probably passed on the skill to his protégé, Nathaniel Miller of Massachusetts. Leprilete was also the first to publicize Benjamin Franklin's invention of bifocals. These pioneers exposed American doctors and the public to cataract surgery. Shortly after their arrival, evidence emerges of other surgeons performing these procedures in America.”

[Abstract: “HISTORY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY. The first cataract surgeons in Anglo-America.” by Christopher T. Leffler, MD, MPH, Stephen G. Schwartz, MD, MBA, Andrzej Grzybowski, MD, PhD, and Puneet S. Braich, MD, MPH; *Survey of Ophthalmology*, Vol. 60, No. 1 – January 2015, p. 86; [https://www.surveyophthalmol.com/article/S0039-6257\(14\)00175-1/abstract](https://www.surveyophthalmol.com/article/S0039-6257(14)00175-1/abstract)]

The only other source of direct information about Nicholas and his family is the article on this site entitled “Behind the Blue Mountains.” This contains an actual letter that Nicholas wrote in March 1752, shortly into their second year after their move north. It is necessary to read Nicholas’ letter to understand the impact of this current find about cataracts. The fact that both Elizabeth and Christian suffered loss of sight for many years explains why the family was having such very difficult and depressing times after their move north.

Nicholas states that his wife had been blind for sixteen years, implying from 1744, and his son, Christian, since his birth 18 years earlier, implying he had been born in 1743. Prior to this find, we had no reliable proof that Christian existed! He had been referred to as Christel in Nicholas’ letter, but nothing else. This newspaper article from 1762 explains the infirmity and depression of both Nicholas’ wife and son. How things must have changed after their sight was restored!