

CHARLES FREDERICK WIESENTHAL (1726-1789)

An Appraisal of the Medical Pioneer of Baltimore

By WILLIAM TRAMMELL SNYDER

Physician and surgeon, educator and scientist, philanthropist, church founder, patriot, property owner, exposé of quackery—all of these attributes apply to Charles Frederick Wiesenthal who was born in the state of Brandenburg in 1726 and lived from 1755 to 1789 in Baltimore.

"Wiesenthal, C. F." is listed in as many indexes of Maryland history books as any Marylander of the Revolutionary era. Yet, from the way he is treated, Dr. Wiesenthal would appear to be at least four different people. He is frequently described as "the most important" or "most influential" German in Baltimore during the 18th century. But different writers have concentrated on such varied phases of his life as: his school of anatomy and his service in attempting to establish Maryland's first medical society; or, his participation in establishing the first Lutheran church in the city; or, his military activities as Surgeon Major for Maryland during the Revolution; or, his founding of a charitable society to provide legal and financial assistance to German immigrants; or, his being the object of the first "dissection riots" in Baltimore; or, his use of the public press to attack and fight medical quackery; or, his actions which seemed to establish a type of private Red Cross a century ahead of the actual establishment.

The early life of Dr. Wiesenthal has been a subject of conjecture by a number of writers. But, no factual information was available until 1950 when Dieter Cunz, then secretary of The Society for the History of the Germans in Maryland received a packet of genealogical notes from a descendant of Dr. Wiesenthal's brother.¹

From these notes we learn that Charles Frederick's father, Johann Mattheus Wiesenthal, was a barber in the city of Pasewalk in Pomerania, a Prussian province. Through a new Medical Regulation, issued in 1729, he was confirmed as a surgeon. Barber-surgeon was not an unusual professional combination in the eighteenth century. In this dual capacity, J. M. Wiesenthal was associated for several years with the Prussian regiment of the Ansbach-Bayreuth lancers. Due to this connection he was privileged to send his two sons Johann Christoph and Karl Friedrich (Charles Frederick) to the "regimental school" which was on a considerably higher level than the ordinary schools. Johann Mattheus Wiesenthal probably took part in the first and second Silesian campaigns of Frederick the Great (1740/45). He met his death some time before 1747. His widow died in Pasewalk, in October 1767.

Johann Mattheus Wiesenthal had four children: Johann Christoph (born 1724); Karl Friedrich (baptized August 12, 1726); Samuel Gottlieb (baptized September 11, 1729); Euphemia (baptized November 12, 1732). No material is available on Karl Friedrich Wiesenthal's schooling and medical training. Neither he nor his brother are mentioned in the roster of the Prussian *Collegium Medico-Chirurgicum* of Berlin, founded by Frederick the Second for the training of military surgeons. Thus it is not im-

¹ Dieter Cunz, "Genealogical Notes on Charles Frederick Wiesenthal," *Reports, SHGM*, XXVIII (1958), 82-85.

possible that Wiesenthal never completed the official medical curriculum.² However, Dr. Wiesenthal's later correspondence with his son, Andrew, and the Maryland Committee of Observation during the Revolution,³ indicates that he was fully familiar with the curriculum at the Medical College in Leyden, and its degree requirements; and that in the early 1740's he studied anatomy and surgery under his father and assisted on the staff of the Prussian military surgeons. Further, he indicates an intimate familiarity with the structure and activity of the British Surgeon-General's department. The fact that he was registered in Strasburg as a "physician" serves as evidence of his training and qualifications—even though no record of his having earned a medical degree has been found to date.

On July 4, 1747, he (Charles Frederick) married Christina Regina Talcho, the daughter of a Berlin brewer. (Excerpt of the Marriage Register of the Protestant Jerusalem Church of Berlin, *Procl. and Copul. 1747, Dom. 3, 4 and 5 p. Trin.*). Some time before 1747, Wiesenthal must have moved to Strasburg in the Uckermark. Here he practiced surgery for a number of years, probably up to the time of his emigration. The scroll of citizens of Strasburg (Uckermark) records that on October 2, 1747 the surgeon Carl Friedrich Wiesenthal, after having paid one Taler and six Groschen, became a citizen of Strasburg.⁴

Dr. Wiesenthal is believed to have lived and worked in London for a period of time between 1752 and 1755. He had gained proficiency in English before arriving in Baltimore in 1755; and during his latter years, correspondence indicates that he retained contact and acquaintance with his contemporaries in England. Whether Dr. Wiesenthal returned to Strasburg or not before emigrating to America is not known.⁵

Information about Charles Frederick Wiesenthal's personal life during his first fifteen years in Baltimore is vague. Eugene Fauntleroy Cordell, who made the first study of Wiesenthal's life in Baltimore, reported that the doctor married a woman from York, Pennsylvania shortly after his arrival in 1755; and that she bore him three daughters and a son. However, as we know that his eldest daughter came to Baltimore from Strasburg, it seems more probable that Dr. Wiesenthal sent for his wife and only living child to join him in Baltimore. We do know that a son, Andrew, was born in 1768, because much of the information we have about the doctor's thoughts and activities comes from letters written to Andrew during the 1780's. Specific information about the other daughters who may have been born in Baltimore is completely lacking.

All of the writings of Charles Frederick Wiesenthal, except his chronicle of the early days of Zion Church, are in the English language. While his associations with his church were intimate ones, the doctor's practice was a broad one which had not been confined to the German-speaking public. His interest in the continued growth of Baltimore was remarkable, and he is known to have traveled to Philadelphia and New York on several occasions to engage in activities of both the church and the practice of medicine. In 1771, he became a naturalized subject of Maryland. He was known

² Charles Frederick Wiesenthal did not use degree identification when signing his name to church or land documents. *Archives of Maryland*, Vol. I., in his March 12, 1776 memorandum relating to establishment of military hospitals, Wiesenthal referred to his own "experience of medical practice abroad" which may indicate a degree. A manuscript letter to Andrew in 1787 inquires about the language of Andrew's "medical disputation" and advises that C. W. Wiesenthal knows that Latin is not required in the curriculum for a medical degree at Leyden. The term "M. D." is used by Dr. Ezekiel John Dorsey when referring to C. F. Wiesenthal in the papers written by Dorsey in conjunction with work for a medical degree at Edinburgh.

³ *Archives of Maryland*, Vol. I.—Report to Committee of Observation dated March 12, 1776 relates to establishment of "flying" and "fixed" hospitals based on experiences in Prussia and England.

⁴ From the material collected by one of the descendants of Charles Frederick Wiesenthal's older brother, Mr. Karl Wiesenthal of Stuttgart. Copies of these documents are now in the archives of Zion Lutheran Church. See p. 83 of Cunz, "Genealogical Notes."

⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

to his fellow Baltimoreans as a dissenter who vehemently opposed the Established Church.

The growth of Baltimore during the period 1755 to 1770 had been greater than that of any other town in the colonies. The population increase was twentyfold. Commerce had increased in a like—or even greater—proportion; and the demand for merchandise and services was great.

Wiesenthal's practice of physic through care, provision of drugs, and surgery when necessary had earned for him a fine reputation in the growing town. On Lot 119, the parcel of property he had purchased as part of the church land acquisition, he had built a brick home and an office. These were on the east side of Gay Street, south of where Fayette was later to be cut through.

In addition to carrying on his practice, it was at this time—just prior to 1770—that Charles Frederick Wiesenthal built a "school" behind his residence to conduct lectures on medicine and anatomy. Wiesenthal was outspoken about the itinerant peddlers of nostrums and quick cures for all types of illnesses. However, he was an early believer in the art of vaccination against smallpox, and supported the work of Dr. Henry Stevens who established a Baltimore Hospital for "vaccination in the American style."⁶

SURGEON OF THE REVOLUTION

The coming of the Revolution found Americans ill equipped for military action. Medically, the colonies were especially handicapped. With their source of surgical equipment and most medicines discontinued by the termination of trade with England and with a scarcity of well trained physicians and surgeons—and only one medical school in all the revolting colonies—the situation called for tremendous contributions of energy and service by the few who were qualified to perform medical services.

Charles Frederick had become an American. He had been naturalized in Maryland—a subject of the King, but a thorough Maryland "republican." While he remained close to the Lutheran Church, he differed from his fellow Germans who preferred their native language to the exclusion of English. Many of his social contacts were with members of other professions—lawyers, agricultural scientists, William Goddard who had established Baltimore's first newspaper in 1773, and the merchants and shippers who were contributing most to the economy and growth of Baltimore. Wiesenthal was living in a bilingual world and made the best of it.

His personal influence on young people is indicated by the large number of youth from the Lutheran Church who were among the first to volunteer for military service in Maryland.

Records of the Maryland Committee of Vigilance and Safety in the *Maryland Archives*, Volumes I and II contain letters from Wiesenthal and many references to his activity at the time of conflict. He planned, recommended, and acted. He felt that the total population should participate in the great revolt to reduce, alleviate, and when possible—eliminate suffering by youth of the colony.

Toward this end, he issued what may have been the first appeal in recorded history—on either side of the Atlantic—for women and homemakers to provide materials for bandages. In the *Maryland Gazette* of March 6, 1776, the following appeal was published at his request; "Our peace, which we have hitherto enjoyed, in preference to our neighboring

⁶ The smallpox vaccination in Baltimore in colonial days is discussed in John R. Quinan, *The Medical Annals of Baltimore* (Baltimore, 1880).

For the best listing of references to Wiesenthal in the *Maryland Archives* see the footnotes on pp. 142-144 in Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans* (Princeton, 1948).

colonies, is at last disturbed; and we are now called forth to our defense. The alacrity with which our brave countrymen assemble, and the determination to fight, visible in every countenance, demonstrate that if the enemy should be hearty enough to encounter them, we have reason to expect some wounds. The necessity of taking all imaginable care of those who may happen to be wounded (in their country's cause) urges us to address our humane ladies to lend their kind assistance in furnishing us with linen rags and old sheeting, etc. for bandages, etc. to be delivered to Dr. Wiesenthal or any member of the committee."⁸

Based at least in part on knowledge and experience gained in his youth in Europe, Dr. Wiesenthal outlined and recommended what appeared to be an original plan in America for hospital and medical services to the troops. He designed a plan for both base and "flying" hospitals to serve the various regiments of the American Army. Among the many assignments Charles Frederick Wiesenthal accepted during the Revolution were: surgeon to Smallwood's Maryland Brigade, appraiser of drugs confiscated from a loyalist, supervisor of distribution of drugs in Baltimore, producer of saltpeter for Maryland—in this capacity he developed and published a processing method. He directed the military hospital in Baltimore, acted as examiner of candidates for medical appointments with the Maryland forces, provided medical supplies and personnel for the Maryland Navy, advised Governor Johnson and members of the Committee of Safety and Vigilance on supplies to be procured from Caribbean suppliers, was the first surgeon to use a four-wheeled vehicle to transport injured soldiers and other patients, and on a number of occasions marched with Maryland troops—and served with them in battle.

Many of Maryland's historians and medical writers have detailed special contributions of Charles Frederick Wiesenthal to the Revolutionary War. One of the most concise of these reports was made by Walter R. Steiner to the Johns Hopkins Hospital Historical Club in 1904. About Dr. Wiesenthal, Dr. Steiner remarked, "His interest in the organization of an army medical department in Maryland and his thorough knowledge of the management of such departments in both Prussia and England caused him naturally to assume charge of medical matters in this State, at the onset of the war.

"In his plan he would have a garrison or regimental hospital when the troops are in garrison and a moving or flying hospital when the troops take the field. This latter was to be placed in the rear of the army, on the next plantation. Besides these he would erect another hospital called the fixed hospital for the treatment of the wounded in the more chronic cases. The bedding and also the sundry articles of diet for this hospital were to be furnished by a commissary, while a Physician or Surgeon-General or Director-in-Chief would have the whole supervision of it. In this hospital a medicinal shop was to be located with a proper person for preparing the medicines, under the direction of the Surgeon-General. The latter was to 'procure those medicines from time to time which become deficient (if to be had).' I have previously shown in this paper several instances of the trust and confidence the Council of Safety reposed in him. He was made a member of the Baltimore Committee of Observation in January 1775, and towards the close of that year appointed supervisor of the manufacture of saltpetre for Baltimore County. He later became examiner of candidates for places in the medical service, medical purveyor and surgeon to the First Maryland Battalion: This last office he received March 2, 1776. It was

⁸ Walter R. Steiner, "A Contribution to the History of Medicine in Maryland during the Revolution, 1775-1779," *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin* XVI (1905), No. 172.

not the place he designed for himself as he wished to become the Surgeon-General of Maryland, but then there was no choosing, so he cheerfully accepted his office. He hoped for the above title later and seemed to have acted in the capacity of this position when he merely held the office of surgeon. For he then had the care and management of the State Hospital in Baltimore. He, also, had medical supervision of the troops from this State, and the marines from the ship *Defence*; he had likewise fitted out the *Defence* with medicines, and twice furnished her with a surgeon in the absence of her own. According to Dr. Quinan's manuscript, he received his wished-for office the next year, 1777, with a salary of thirty-five shillings per day, without rations."

WIESENTHAL'S CONCEPT OF RESPONSIBILITY

Through his wartime positions Wiesenthal became more and more aware of the imposters who wished to establish themselves as physicians and surgeons. Even more important, he gained a true regard for those of his colleagues who were adequately trained to practice medicine.

In line with his high regard for experienced and capable surgeons, Charles Frederick Wiesenthal built a two-story structure behind his Gay Street home to serve as a combination school and center for his personal patients who required surgical care. The building was twenty by seventy feet, and remained standing until the early years of the twentieth century. Here, he first exposed his son, Andrew, to surgical techniques and gave lectures and demonstrations to other aspiring young physicians. Among those who availed themselves of his tutelage were Dr. George Buchanan, who later received a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and Dr. Ezekiel John Dorsey, who took his medical degree in Edinburgh.

Among those qualified physicians who were practicing in Baltimore during the Revolution, an unofficial recognition of Wiesenthal as the leader seems to have been formed. When leading physicians of Baltimore felt the pinch of inflation in 1779, Wiesenthal was called on to frame a statement of policy about fee rates. This statement was published in the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* in 1779:

"The practitioners, of physic in this Town think it proper to inform the public that from the fluctuation of prices and unfix'd value of money they find it necessary to charge for their services in country produce, or by way of barter, or in money at such advance as will bear a proportion to the necessaries of life at time of payment. It must be confessed that the gentlemen of the Faculty in this Town have suffered more in respect to their bills since the commencement of the present war than any other class of men in the community. The equity, therefore, of the above regulation will appear self evident to every unprejudiced person. The indigent sick may nevertheless apply and they shall be attended to as usual.

(signed) Charles Wiesenthal—S. S. Cole—M. Haslett—
F. Ridgeley—John Boyd—John Beard—
W. Andrews—John Labesius"⁹

Information about the family of Dr. Wiesenthal has been difficult to secure. But, in addition to the daughter born in Europe, it is thought that three daughters and a son were born in America. A son, Andrew, was born in 1762. By the time Andrew entered his teens, he had been well schooled

⁹ Quoted by E. F. Cordell, *Medical Annals of Maryland* (Baltimore, 1903), 13-18, 652, 656, 658-60.

in languages and the arts. He had also attended a number of his father's lectures and demonstrations and received sufficient education along medical lines to be accepted in 1781 as a trainee student of Dr. Thomas Bond, a Philadelphia clinician and instructor of medicine.

While Charles Frederick was still involved in military service and general direction of the military hospital in Baltimore, he arranged that Andrew continue his medical studies in Philadelphia.

Illustrating Dr. Wiesenthal's attitude toward the importance of anatomy as basic knowledge for a surgeon, he wrote to his son, Andrew, on Christmas Day, 1781: "We received your Letters . . . in which I see your beginning to dissect yourself which pleases me and I insist that you continue to do the same manually in propria persona, and not being content with merely demonstrations after the Subject is prepared, as I want the practical part. It will lead you towards Operations and will make that part of Surgery more intelligible. I hope you will not be content with merely knowing the Situation of the Viscera, but will examine them minutely, their contents Vessels Ducts &c." . . . " I hear Doctor Shippen has a young Gentlemen who prepares the Subjects for his Demonstration I would have you cultivate a strict friendship as far as his Morals will admit of (in which particular you know my firm Opinion) and frequently make Inquiries of the Doctor himself, who I hope is often with you himself & teaches." The letter continues, "I am glad you have introduc'd yourself to Doctor Bond though he may have some Oddities, you may nevertheless rely on this that his Acquaintance will be valuable to you both his Learning and Experience are unquestionable, and he moreover is very communicative and takes a Delight in instructing young Persons and that in proportion to their Diligence and Application you will therefore visit his Lectures frequently and freely apply to him to resolve Such things as may be obscure to you, he is a good Surgeon besides and may give you Some good hints in the hospital." ¹⁰

In other correspondence with Andrew, the father urges him to " study and become skillful in surgical operations—especially lithotomy and extraction of cataract" and further urges his son " to study closely the action of drugs and to become acquainted with all new discoveries." ¹¹

Evidently, Andrew got his fill of medical training by 1782 and left Philadelphia to travel, study art, agriculture and botany between 1783 and 1786, when he returned to the study of medicine in London.

The strenuous activity during war years must have drained much of the vitality from Dr. Wiesenthal. A German scientist, Dr. John David Schoepf, who visited Baltimore in 1783, wrote: "At Baltimore, I had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Wiesenthal, a worthy fellow countryman and old German physician. He had been here since almost the first beginnning of the Town, and for his private character as well as his attainment is generally esteemed." ¹²

Yet, Dr. Wiesenthal continued his practice, and seemed to enjoy the reputation he had earned over the years. In one of his letters, he describes seeing a patient about whom he had previous correspondence with an attending physician in London: " Mr. Wolsenhome from St. Mary City was this Morning with me for my Advice he came but lately from London has formerly had my Opinion in writing concerning some nervous Symptoms deriv'd from the Gout. He has consulted several eminent Physicians in London, especially Drs. Letsome and Heberden. He show'd this letter I

¹⁰ Eugene F. Cordell, "Charles Frederick Wiesenthal, *Medicinae Practicus*, the Father of the Medical Profession in Baltimore" *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin* Nos. 112-3, 170-74 (Baltimore, 1900). Cordell published numerous letters from Wiesenthal to his son Andrew.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784* (Philadelphia, 1911), 340.

mean Heberden my Opinion in writing concerning the Complaint & Treatment which being approv'd of by the Doctor furnished some little Stoff for my Vanity."¹³

The cessation of military hostility in 1783 freed Dr. Wiesenthal of many time-consuming and burdensome tasks. However, with the return of peace, emigration to the new nation was even more accelerated. Baltimore—already one of the fastest growing communities in the nation—was strained almost beyond its facilities and capacities to accomodate new waves of immigrants.

When Wiesenthal had arrived in Baltimore—almost three decades earlier—he had found one of the most needed institutions of service for his fellow Germans: a church where German was preached. He had been among the leaders who created and built this Lutheran congregation which became Zion Church on City Hall Plaza.

Wiesenthal's prominent rôle in the life of the German community of Baltimore has been the subject of several studies in the recent past. We are omitting here the details concerning this phase of Wiesenthals activities because these studies are still readily available. He was probably the most educated and skilled advocate of the German-American group in Baltimore. His steady and beautiful handwriting is preserved in the manuscript record of Zion Church, the *Kirchen-Archiv, oder umständliche Beschreibung und Benachrichtigung, des Anfangs der teutschen Lutherischen Gemeinde in Baltimore Town, in Baltimore County in Maryland, und dessen Fortgang*. There are few colonial churches, English, German, Swedish or French on this continent which have had as comprehensive and as intelligent a chronicler as Wiesenthal. His major contribution, however, does not lie alone in his capacity as an archivist. He was the first articulate advocate of Americanization, a fact which made him the object of vicious attacks by less educated fellow-Germans. Wiesenthal was not for a moment demanding the shedding of the German mother tongue but called for a sensible bilingualism, knowing well from his own experience in England that subsequent generations could not uphold a language which was not understood by the leading element in the country of their work and life.

In 1783, Wiesenthal initiated the first immigrant aid society in Maryland—and one of the first on this continent. Today we would call the work he envisaged simply as "social work" but when Wiesenthal called on his fellow Germans and Swiss to found the "German Society of Maryland" it was indeed a pioneer act. The earliest account of this Society records: "In the same year during which the independence of the United Provinces was recognized, the German Society was established to help needy countrymen. In Philadelphia such a Society has been in existence for some years. Baltimore—which thirty years ago consisted of but fifty houses, has now some 1800 beautifully built houses and next year will count 2000 of them—is vying with its sister city in wealth as well as in all good works. Therefor also the above mentioned Society was founded here. The inceptor of the same in Baltimore is from Berlin: a gentleman by the name of Wiesenthal who for more than thirty years has been considered the most skilled and philanthropic physician in this place. The secretary of the Society is a Mr. John Conrad Zollkoffer of St. Gallen, a cousin of the well-known clergyman by the same name in Leipzig. The membership consists of merchants, teachers, artists, and other citizens of German origin, all of the City or its vicinity. Their principal duty is to assist arriving countrymen financially and in any other respect."¹⁴

¹³ In one of the letters published by Cordell.

¹⁴ See Dieter Cunz, *The Maryland Germans* (Princeton, 1948), 98, 100, 106, 181; Klaus G. Wust,

When Andrew Wiesenthal decided to resume the study of medicine in 1786, his father hoped his son would attend the famous medical college at Edinburgh. But Mrs. Wiesenthal seemed to have an appreciation of her son's desire to live in London for a period of time; and an arrangement was worked out that Andrew Wiesenthal would live with the Dalcho family in London, while Frederick Dalcho, a nephew, would come to America and live with the Wiesenthals. Frederick Dalcho immediately showed an interest in medicine on his arrival here, and became a student of Dr. Wiesenthal in Baltimore. At the same time, Andrew Wiesenthal enrolled for study and practice at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

Meanwhile, the tremendous influx of medical imposters into the new nation continued to upset Charles Frederick Wiesenthal. The subject of "quacks" and unqualified physicians became almost an obsession with the aging physician. In commenting on the ease with which medical degrees could be secured, Wiesenthal wrote: "A diploma is indispensable and one can be obtained in some institutions without residence. Dr. Brown, the great opposer of Dr. Cullen's Doctrine, and who now resides in London and as common Report says even in the Fleet's prison where he lectures, has wrote many a young Students Thesis on which he obtained his Diploma blindfold."¹⁵

Another idea which seems to have a contemporary application, is Wiesenthal's recognition of the importance of "published studies." On a number of occasions he writes to Andrew, in detail, about cases he has treated and suggests that Andrew attempt to write and secure publication of medical observations. Typical of his statements about the importance of a young physician's gaining recognition through the publication of some studies is this extract from a letter to Andrew, dated October 14, 1787: "I have sent you various Cases in Physic and will consider of some more, and I think I will likewise send you some of my Theoretical Opinions which you may be probably able to elaborate something farther and should it be worth the Notice of some of your friends it might be perhaps worth while to have it published, for this is Truth that a great many more silly things have been published than what we should."¹⁶

Almost every issue of "The Maryland Gazette," "Griffiths Annals," and "The Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser" of the 1780's carried highly competitive advertisements by doctors. Many of these advertisements boasted about "lower costs for service"; and the news columns frequently carried letters signed by doctors attacking the ethics of their fellow physicians. Such words as "quack," "malpractice," and "butchery" frequently appeared in the public press.¹⁷

Based on the fact that identical phrases appear in the personal correspondence of Charles Frederick Wiesenthal, it seems to be a fair assumption that he wrote the lengthy letter about the low state of medical practice in Baltimore which appeared in the July 4, 1788 issue of "The Maryland Gazette" over the *nom de plume*, "Benevolus." Because this letter received wide circulation at the time of its printing and was reproduced in pamphlet form, it is quoted here in its entirety:

"TO THE INHABITANTS OF BALTIMORE COUNTY AND TOWN:

"At this crisis of more than necessity, I take the liberty of addressing you on a subject of great importance to society and the friends of humanity—I mean the

Zion in Baltimore 1155-1955 (Baltimore, 1955), 6-9, 14-31; by the same author, *Pioneers in Service: The German Society of Maryland 1783-1958* (Baltimore, 1958), 3-6.

¹⁵ See Cordell, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Letter published by Cordell.

¹⁷ *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, No. 21, Dec. 13, 23, 1785; Feb. 21, 1786; Dec. 5, 11, 26, 1788.

propriety and necessity of petitioning our next Assembly for a law restricting the practice of physic, and confining it in the hands of those men only, whose medical merit shall enable to pass such an examination as the law may prescribe or direct.

"The propriety of a law of this nature is happily supported by the example of the wisest nations of the earth, and triumphantly advocated by the most civilized societies of men in Europe. Their example is truly worthy of our imitation, and will, I hope, appear from the following considerations, viz. 1st It is the interest of the people. 2nd. It is a sanction and encouragement which government ought to bestow on real merit. 3rd. It is a law which the common principles of humanity call aloud for.

"In the first place, a law of the above nature would be the interest of the people, will evidently appear when we consider, that the increase of sickness in this country has and does not bear any proportion with the manufactory and importation of Doctors.

"It is a moderate estimate when I inform you, that the number of Physicians have increased ten-fold within these fifty years—and the quantity of sickness nearly the same—although the accession of inhabitants during this period has been great, yet the encreasing healthfulness of this country has rendered our bills of mortality nearly equal. It is evident that each of our Doctors, dependent on their practice, support their families and live nearly for the same amount. Let us estimate each Doctor's business to amount to 500 l. per annum. This estimate will apply both to former and present Physicians. These premises being granted, and no one can with truth deny them, what is the conclusion? It is inevitable. It is incontrovertible that society supports ten times more Doctors than are necessary, by paying ten times more for the same thing than formerly, and in justice they ought to pay—Instead of 500 l. they now pay 5000 l.—So that every society that formerly paid 500 l. to their Doctor, now pay 5000 l. and thereby sink 4500 l. more than in justice they ought.

"This evil arises from the great number of Quack Doctors that are amongst us, who escape, perhaps, from the just vengeance of their native land, and come amongst us under the cover of false names, under the sanction of some particular nostrum—conserve—or the republication of the detached opinions of authors, whose names are unknown to the common people; by these and various other arts, they impose on the indulgent unsuspecting minds of men whose situation in life ought to place them superior to such impostures.

"But these evils, I contend, may be yet prevented in a great measure, and the public much benefited in point of interest. By a law of the above nature, the practice of physic would soon be in the hands of a much less number. Their business would consequently be more extensive, and therefore, they could afford to charge much less than they do at present. It may be said that a diminution of charges would not follow consequent to the above law if left to the Physicians; if so, let the law establish the method of charges, and then no objection can arise, and no person will say but that such a law would be to the interest of the people, and benefit the Physician.

"Secondly, That it is a sanction which government ought to bestow on men of real abilities, is clearly evinced from the very nature and intention of Physicians, which is the happiness of mankind—When a law has the advantage of the public, and that of an individual, blended in its nature, there can be no objection to it from any friend to humanity; and in the present case, the public and individuals interest encircles each other in the fondest embrace, and this union cannot be separated, without destroying a portion of their mutual happiness. In the possession of a law of this nature, with what pleasure does the fond parent follow his son through all the various difficulties and expences of a college education? With what indefatigable care does he search after the best school or seminary of learning. No experience is spared, no toil too great to accomplish his son in literature. At length, he beholds the aspiring youth crowned with academic laurels as a public testimony of his abilities. This gives the last polish to his education. Here commences another severe trial. Here opens another source of trouble and expence—I mean his medical education. But all difficulties vanish before that conscious confidence which is placed in the patronage that government affords to medical merit. Regardless now, both father and son, of all obstacles, each go on in the noble work

until time and study ripens him to the maturity of a Physician. Then government as a handmaid to his virtues and guardian of abilities, breathes her smiles of approbation upon him. Now this bud of science begins to blossom, and diffuse its fragrance around, and produce fruit to society, fully compensating for the care and protection which government afforded him.

"But on the contrary, when without this law, how different is the scene? How tragic the event! A parent has no encouragement to give his son a liberal education. The son feels no stimulus to become eminent in his profession, while they see and daily experience, that the Physician and the Quack are upon a level, and the same in the eye of our laws. The latter has evidently the advantage over the former, in point of interest, because the one feels the obligations of morality, while the other's very profession consists in deception and falsehood. Reason and religion are placed at defiance by them as inconsistent with their calling, and every principle of morality shifted in their hearts, when it clashes with their interest—the fate of a box of pills, or conserve, or the credit and authenticity of their published opinions of themselves, and the sovereign effects of their nostrums. When neither the feelings of shame, the reproaches of conscience, nor the dread of corporal punishment, form any bar to a man's actions and intentions, the public has reason to conclude, that nothing but the want of opportunity would prevent such men from committing crimes of a darker complexion than imposing on the public a conserve as a sovereign cure of consumptions, a disease which the best and most wise Physicians on earth, have despaired of treating with even tolerable success or certainty—or than embezzling the property of others, and then abandoning his country, and thereby involving a number of respectable mechanics *in* disappointment, poverty, and distress. But of this the public may be informed in due time.

"These, my fellow-citizens, are serious truths, and demand your vigilance and care to avoid the imposition. This mournful example of human depravity, in the first instance, is now before your eyes—an object of pity and abhorrence—a creature, on whom nature has placed her mark in characters which a different name cannot efface, and no change of climate obliterate. There are professional strokes of characters, by which a man may be as clearly distinguished from others, as by the blackest feature of the human face—Pompous and vain, without abilities—arrogant, without reputation to support it—malicious, without power to inflict a wound—he will die the natural death of his brethren, and be interred with his kindred mass of Quacks, where annihilation will be considered a favour, and oblivion a mercy—where the solitary emotion of pity is excluded, and where the perishable fragment of an undiscovered, despised conserve, can have no admittance to administer comfort to the wretched remains of a blasted reputation.

"Thirdly and lastly. That humanity calls for a law of this nature, no one will dispute, who acknowledges that Quacks, in medicine, are an evil to society—and in proof of their being an evil, I appeal to the mournful experience of all societies of people that have been infested with them. The very nature and essence of a Quack, in medicine, is deception. His object is to dispose of nostrums, the composition of which he keeps a secret, and imposes it on the public as possessing superior and sovereign medicinal powers. Time and experience has ever proved the extent of their abilities, and demonstrated them impostors. But notwithstanding this truth, there are numbers of people, who from want of education, from habit, and the peculiarity of their disease, are induced to apply to men of this class, and perhaps discard a Physician of abilities, who in all probability would have rendered him a useful member of society. The probable consequence is, that his disease either terminates in death, or his constitution so much injured that it is scarce worth possessing. But one consequence is invariable, which is, that the poor patient is obliged to pay twice as much as a Physician would have charged him. Seeing this to be the case, it is the business of those who are sensible of the evil to prevent it, if possible. It is the triumph of humanity and benevolence in civilized society, to make such laws as will protect the weak from oppression, and ignorant from the imposition of this nature. Providence in her wise economy over human nature, in blessing some of us with greater mental endowments than others, seems from this circumstance, to have intended that the superior should govern the inferior, and made the former the guardians and protectors of the latter. This being admitted, I can with safety conclude, that the voice of God, the voice of reason, the voice of humanity, and the

voice of thousands, ready to expire, call aloud for law to regulate the practice of physic.

July 2, 1788.

BENEVOLUS."¹⁸

Wiesenthal's literary style was certainly both tedious and detailed. But, despite the wordiness, the cogent thoughts merit recognition.

It should be pointed out that up to this time—July, 1788—only one state medical association had been formed in America. Even this one seemed to have as its primary—if not only—purpose, the establishment of minimum fees to be charged for services.

Publication of the "Benevolus" letter in the newspaper, and subsequently in pamphlet form, temporarily changed the tenor of disputes among physicians from attacks directed toward individuals to a furor over the questionable desirability of establishing legal restrictions on the right to practice medicine. On September 12, 1788, Dr. Wiesenthal wrote to Andrew—still a student in London: "To rescue the Dignity of Physic from that horrid State into which it is plungd within these few years and most especially since my Sickness will require a Herculean Labour, and it will fall in some Misure to your Lot to undertake the laborious Task."¹⁹

Charles Frederick Wiesenthal called a meeting of the physicians of Baltimore for November 27, 1788. Records do not indicate either who were invited, or who attended the meeting, or where it took place. However, on the following day, November 28, Dr. Wiesenthal wrote to Andrew: "We are just about procuring a Medical Regulation in a little more earnest than heretofore, it nevertheless meets with some underhand jealousy and what amazes me it comes from Doct. B..... we have had 3 meetings he has had allway written Invitations and each Time evaded it. The reason we only guess at. Last Nights meeting it was proposed for the Sake of Order and to have jointly more Weight to organize ourselves into a Society under Rules. I was unanimously nominated President and Mr. Frederick for Clark, so that he has now an office." The "Mr. Frederick" referred to was Frederick Dalcho, Wiesenthal's nephew and student. Press reports on this meeting indicate that the plan was to embrace the entire state of Maryland, and the proposals were very similar to those embodied in the Charter of The Medical and Chirurgical Faculty, adopted eleven years later. Several additional organizational meetings were held in December, 1788. Dr. Elijah Hall, of Frederick County, prepared a draft of proposed legislation to be submitted to the 1789 session of the Maryland General Assembly, but organizational steps seem to have been dropped when a mob was incited to march on "the medical school" and forcibly remove the body of a convicted murderer which had been turned over to "the school" for anatomical studies and dissection purposes. This was referred to as "The Baltimore Dissection Mob," and took place on December 27, 1788.

In a letter to Andrew, late in the year 1788, Dr. Wiesenthal makes no reference to the riot, but he does refer to his increasing infirmity and the enmity that some "colleagues" hold toward him. The tone of his comments appears defensive, as he explains: "I for my part am allready discarded and laid up like an old Man of Warship. Although the Shafts of Jealousy are still continued to be let off against me as if they dreaded my returning to my usual Strength again nay I veryly believe, they will hate my very Memory ten Years after my having returned to Dust, and be afraid and Jalous of me (horrid indeed!) if I reflect that at all Times I have acted up to the Dignity of the Profession, have disdained all mean

¹⁸ *Maryland Gazette*, July 2, 1788. Excerpts have been frequently reproduced but this is the first reprint of the complete text.

¹⁹ As published by Cordell.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Empyrial Methods, because I had no Occasion I think that I ought to be respected as a father and Supporter of the Profession and be treated friendly."²¹

The abusive personal attacks levied against Dr. Wiesenthal as a result of his initiative in attempts to establish standards for those who practiced medicine and the action in "The Dissection Mob," which seemed to be aimed directly at Dr. Wiesenthal, combined to break his spirit and will to live. He remained virtually out of circulation for several months until his death on June 1, 1789.

An obituary in the June 2, 1789 issue of the *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* reads: "The shaft he so often warded from others has pierced him at last. Yesterday morning about half past seven o'clock departed this life Dr. Charles Frederick Wiesenthal, in the 63d year of his age after having practiced in this town for 34 years. If the strictest attention in his profession which humanity could excite & that success which might be expected from superior medical abilities improved in an uncommon measure by reason & observation deserve to be remembered, the tears of gratitude must flow in sorrowful profusion. HE IS GONE! & the pain of reflection is the more heightened because it is at the time when he was in daily expectation of the return of an absent & only son whose virtues & abilities are beloved & admired by all who know him."²²

Charles Frederick Wiesenthal was a pioneer who participated in the earliest life and growth of Baltimore. His contributions to religious, cultural and charitable organizations are still in the city in the forms of Zion Church of Baltimore, the German Society of Maryland, and the medical and historical libraries. His precepts and activities on behalf of the new nation, during and after the Revolution, and his attempts to create an attitude of cooperative, constructive service among qualified medical practioners still warrant emulation. Yet, his final resting place in Baltimore is unmarked, and probably unknown.²³ No descendants can be located who might possess more family papers, relics, or memoirs which may shed additional light on the man, his actions, and his thoughts.*

²¹ Cordell, *Annals* quotes report from *Griffith's Annals* about Patrick Cassiday, murderer, whose body was forcibly taken from Wiesenthal's school: "At the entrance of Chester River, on May 17 (1788), at night, Capt. John De Corse of the packet was murdered by two ruffians he had taken on board there as passengers. The vessel was brought back to the Middle Branch (of the Patapsco) and abandoned. Patrick Cassiday, who had forfeited his pardon for former offenses by remaining in the State, was, with one John Webb, another convict, arrested, and they were executed some time after." The dissection riot took place at Dr. Wiesenthal's School, situated on Fayette Street east of Gay. The School was a substantial brick building about 72 by 120 feet, which was located behind Dr. Wiesenthal's residence.

²² *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, June 2, 1789.

²³ Francis W. Pramschufer, former president of The German Society of Maryland, made an extensive search for the grave of Charles Frederick Wiesenthal in 1961, prior to delivering an address at Gwynn Oak Park on "German Day." Mr. Pramschufer located a Wiesenthal plot in London Park Cemetery, Lot No. 169, Section 5, north half, contains three marked Wiesenthal graves dated from 1897 to 1921, and several unmarked graves. Cemetery records do not confirm that Charles Frederick Wiesenthal is in one of the unmarked graves.

* This study could not have been completed without the generous and painstaking assistance of John B. Calder in assisting with the research, and recording on tape many hours of relevant historical background materials which were used as sources.