

## Dr. Bernhardus Van Leer

Abstract from History of Chester County, Pennsylvania (p. 752)

(Transcription by Chad G. Nichols)

VAN LEER, DR. BERNHARDUS, the centenarian, was the son of the Hon. John George and Mary Von Loehr, the original ancestors of the Vanleer family in Pennsylvania, who emigrated from Germany to this country about the year 1697. Dr. Van Leer was born about the year 1686, in or near Isenburg, in Rhenish Prussia, and came hither with his parents when but eleven years of age.

The family settled, soon after their arrival in Pennsylvania, in Marple township, Chester (now Delaware) Co., where the father died in 1748, leaving a wife, Rebecca. Bernhard remained a few years with his father, assisting him on the farm, and then returned to Germany to prosecute his studies. Such was the usage in those days, when colleges and universities were almost unknown in our country, though Germany then, as well as now, was renowned for her universities. That young Van Leer availed himself, with ardor and success, of the opportunities thus afforded him is manifest from the volumes which he left behind him—both manuscript and printed—in the Latin, French, and German, as well as English, languages. Under these favorable circumstances he appears to have prosecuted his classical and professional studies through the protracted period of seven years. He then returned to his adopted country and to his parental home, where he entered upon the practice of his profession as a physician. Shortly after engaging in professional life he was united in marriage, Feb. 25, 1734, with Mary Branson, the daughter of William Branson, a wealthy merchant of Philadelphia. The practice of Dr. Van Leer was conducted principally in his office. This was partly owing to the difficulties then existing in passing from one part of the country to another. Roads, except between some main points, were few, and most of them were but the pathways of the Indians through the forest. Streams were to be forded, and the location of the farmer's clearing to be guessed at. All these difficulties were enhanced by the sparseness of the population, rendering the distance to be traversed from settlement to settlement very considerable. His reputation has come down to us as that of a practitioner whose skill was tested widely and long, and who possessed in an eminent degree the confidence of those who resorted to him. But the duties of a medical man can never be performed to their fullest extent in the office. The physician must qualify himself for his duties at the bedside of the diseased, and can only discharge his responsibilities by personal visitation and searching inquiries in the sick-room. There was one feature, however, in Dr. Van Leer's practice in reference to himself that is worthy of special regard. He was through life a striking example of temperance, not only in the use of vinous and spirituous liquors, but also in diet generally. He abstained entirely from the use of all intoxicating liquors.

His daughter stated that her father in his hundredth year rode with her on horseback to his farm in Chester Valley, a distance of thirty miles, in one day, and returned on the following day without complaining of fatigue.

This vigor of constitution he retained to his one hundred and second year, when he received some injuries which caused his death, Jan. 26, 1790, having attained to the patriarchal age of one hundred and four years. His remains repose in the cemetery at Middletown, Delaware Co. Upon his tomb is this inscription:

“Here lieth the body of Bernhard Vanleer, M.D., Physiccian in Physick, Who departed this Life January the 26<sup>th</sup>, 1790, Aged 104 years. Friends weep not for me, | For all your tears are vain; | Prepare to meet the Lord, | That we may meet again.”

By his first wife, Mary Branson, Dr. Van Ler had George, b. 1735, d. April 22, 1807, m. Elizabeth Roberts; Thomas, d. 1754; Branson; William, d. 1764, unmarried; Benjamin, and Samuel. He married a second wife, Christiana —, who died May 29, 1815, aged 88 years, 7 months. By her he had several other children, to one of whom, Mary, wife of Moses Moore, he devised the Blue Ball tavern and 180 acres of land in Tredyffrin. To his son Bernhard he gave the homestead. The latter was born Sept. 21, 1770, and died Feb. 9, 1814.

Samuel Van Leer, one of the older sons, became the owner of the site of the old Reading Furnace (see p. 347), in what is now Warwick township. His wife was Hannah, daughter of Isaac and Elizabeth Wayne, and sister of Gen. Anthony Wayne.