

Pfohl, Samuel Frederick ^[1]

Pfohl, Samuel Frederick

by John Thom Spach, 1994

29 May 1871–18 Jan. 1961

Samuel Frederick Pfohl, the beloved and highly venerated "Doctor Fred" of [Salem](#) ^[2], was a practicing physician who continually served the citizens of [Winston-Salem](#) ^[3] and [Forsyth County](#) ^[4] for sixty-three of his eighty-nine years. Born the fourth of six children to Christian Thomas and Margaret Siewers Pfohl, he was a direct descendant of two of Salem's pioneer [Moravian](#) ^[5] families. His mother taught at [Salem Academy and Salem College](#) ^[6] from 1859 to 1865. Baptized when he was three months old, he confirmed his Christian faith on 14 Nov. 1886, at age fifteen, and joined the Home Moravian Church. Pfohl began his education at Salem Boys School, where he was a serious, scholarly student. For a brief period he worked as a carpenter, but with the encouragement of his close friend and cousin, Dr. Nathaniel Siewers, he entered the medical school of the [University of Pennsylvania](#) ^[7], from which he was graduated in 1893 at age twenty-two. Believing that his medical knowledge was inadequate, he remained at the university for another year and received two diplomas. Although an internship was not required in those days, he served on the staff of the Boston Emergency Hospital for three years to gain clinical experience. Then, at the request of Dr. Siewers, he returned to Salem to begin practicing in September 1897.

Pfohl's services as a physician in North Carolina date from the horse-and-buggy days, and he frequently operated by lantern light with his patients on kitchen tables. He delivered hundreds of babies for the families of the then two towns, Winston and Salem, and there came to be an uncountable number of male citizens of the consolidated city who bore the name of Frederick Pfohl in his honor and for the affection their parents felt for this gentle, unselfish man. Since opening his first office in his parents' house, Pfohl always worked out of his home. After building his residence on South Main Street in Salem in 1913, he opened his office there in order to spend as much time as possible with his family.

On 14 Jan. 1903 he married Rose Hoffman Haas at the home of her relatives in Washington, D.C. A native of Woodstock, Va., she was an attractive, red-haired nurse at the [University of Maryland](#) ^[8] when she brought a patient from Baltimore to the Twin City Hospital of Brookstown Avenue in Winston for treatment and there met the quiet, skillful doctor for the first time. They had three children: William Frederick, Richard Haas, and Virginia.

When Dr. Pfohl was inclined to enter military service at the time of [World War I](#) ^[9], townspeople persuaded him to remain at his practice in Salem. He always answered the call where he was needed most, as when he gave up his surgical practice, his first professional love, to become a general practitioner. He was a member of the City Memorial Hospital staff from the day it opened in 1914. Pfohl was one of the first members of the Forsyth County Medical Association, as well as a member of state and national associations. For a number of years he served as a county physician, and from 1917 to 1957 he was the physician for Salem Academy and Salem College; he was also a trustee at both institutions. It is believed that he brought the first electrocardiograph machine to Winston-Salem following his return to the University of Pennsylvania for advanced training in 1931. Although a general practitioner, Pfohl did a great deal of work in cardiology, and he practiced in obstetrics until he was in his fifties.

Stories of his generosity are numerous and consistent with his character. He often paid for the medicine that he prescribed for hospital charity patients. He is known to have taken blankets from his home and given them to needy patients. He always made low charges and never sent bills or used collectors. A modest, reticent man, Pfohl shunned publicity and this led a newspaper reporter to observe: "Though he was a man of few words, he conveyed love, understanding, and selflessness in service which can be described, not as a profession, but as a ministry." He read and studied to keep abreast of the latest information and techniques, which caused one intern to tell a relative that he was ashamed because he knew Dr. Pfohl spent more time in study than he did. A reluctant conversationalist, Pfohl was asked by a Salem medical student why he did not talk more; reportedly he replied: "What I don't say, I don't have to take back." His unique sense of humor, when it did reveal itself by spoken word, often delighted and surprised his patients. He once informed a charming, but talkative female patient that he had declined her offer to be his blood donor during an illness because he was afraid that if he received her blood, he would start talking and never stop!

The one certain way to make this quiet man speak was to mention Roan Mountain; then his love for nature and especially trees revealed itself in knowledgeable, enthusiastic words. The native rhododendron gardens at the summit of the western North Carolina mountain had been the object of many family excursions throughout the days of horseback and the early Ford automobile. It was not unusual for Salem students to find Pfohl on campus standing in silent admiration before a tree whose majestic fall or spring beauty had caught his eye.

Despite failing health, he continued his practice until a month before his death, when he was admitted to City Memorial Hospital. He died only a few hours after the medical staff of the hospital adopted a resolution honoring him for more than sixty years of service to the community. Pfohl was buried in the Moravian graveyard, God's Acre, of the Home Church on

20 January. His portrait, painted by George Lynch in 1972, was hung in the Craig Conference Room of the Forsyth County Memorial Hospital.

Bernard J. Pfohl, Dr. Pfohl's older brother, was the band director at the Home Moravian Church for more than fifty years and advanced the Easter Band from about a half dozen to over four hundred instruments. [John Kenneth Pfohl](#) ^[10], Pfohl's younger brother, was a Moravian bishop of the Southern Province and devoted a lifetime to the promotion of religion. After fifty-four years of marriage, Rose Haas Pfohl died on 21 Feb. 1957. William Frederick Pfohl, Dr. Pfohl's eldest son, died on 30 Sept. 1949; and Richard Haas Pfohl died on 5 May 1971. Surviving him were his daughter Virginia and three grandchildren.

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