The Henkel family settled in New Market, Virginia in 1790. Generations of fathers and sons studied medicine. Over the course of their careers, these Shenandoah Valley physicians ministered to their community, tended to their countrymen on the battlefield, and testified in the nation's courts of law.

The letters of the Henkel family richly document the daily life of men in medicine in the nineteenth century, and reveal the challenges of the profession as well as the rewards and responsibilities. These missives convey the concerns and characters of the authors, vividly illustrating the writers' personalities, and their experiences as physicians.

**THE HENKEL FAMILY TREE**

Grandson of a Lutheran preacher, son of a doctor, and third generation New Market citizen, Samuel Godfrey Henkel came from an extended family of medical professionals, which included two of his brothers. Samuel's sons Caspar Coiner and Haller Hippocrates also became physicians as did a cousin, Abram Shultz Miller.

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**CONFRONTED BY WAR**

Members of the Henkel family were not slave owners. However, when the American Civil War erupted, the men took up arms on the side of the Confederacy to fight against what they perceived as the imposition of the northern will on their affairs. In 1863, Caspar Coiner Henkel joined the 2nd Regiment, 7th Brigade of the Virginia Militia serving as an assistant surgeon. Many of Caspar's contemporaries volunteered; their hopes, fears, and fates are reflected in letters.

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**MEDICINE & THE COURT**

On a Tuesday evening in January 1883, in the Virginia Hotel in Staunton, Virginia a man was shot. The victim, Mr. Burner, still alive, summoned Haller Henkel to give him aid. Unfortunately, the gunshot wound was fatal. As the attending physician to the murdered man, Haller provided forensic evidence during the trial of the accused, who was convicted of murder.

Haller's letters reveal his concerns about the legal obligations he would inevitably be drawn into, having treated the victim. The young doctor understood that his practice and his reputation was at stake if his performance during the trial was not satisfactory.
The Henkel family of physicians was called upon for everything from common complaints to medical emergencies. As well as treating illnesses and injuries, the doctors also undertook public health activities to prevent the spread of infectious disease.

Father, brothers, and cousins kept up an active correspondence that detailed their efforts to quell outbreaks of smallpox, heal broken bones, and treat hernias.

RIGHT: Letter to Caspar C. Henkel from his father Samuel G. Henkel dated January 8, 1857. Samuel reported on the death of Mr. Ruffner, the tavern keeper in Luray, who had contracted smallpox less than a month before. Samuel vaccinated nearly everyone in town to try to prevent an epidemic. The absence of smallpox as a topic in subsequent correspondence suggests that the efforts of the Henkel family helped suppress a widespread outbreak of the disease.

LEFT: Letter to Caspar C. Henkel from his father Samuel G. Henkel dated February 14, 1857, concerning the treatment of a ruptured hernia. The Henkel family practice fitted John Rupert with a truss to remedy his hernia. The truss slipped while he was chopping wood and "his bowels came down." Mr. Rupert sent for Dr. Sommers, whose treatment did not alleviate the discomfort. Schultz was then called. Before he could render care, Mr. Rupert reconstituted his bowels, leading to Schultz's observation that "it seems rather hard that a patient must pay two doctors and do the work himself."

BELOW: Letter to Caspar C. Henkel from his second cousin Abram Schultz Miller dated October 23, 1854. Concerning the attitude and medical expertise of Dr. Sommers and Dr. Rice, Schultz, a physician working with the Henkel practice, derided the competition and apparent airs of the competition in their seemingly pointless racing about town. Schultz expressed grave concerns about the professional abilities of Dr. Sommers after one of his patients died, writing that "he did not gain any reputation by that proceeding."

THE DOCTOR.
All sickness and life, you say you can cure,
By your all healing pow'r and skill.
You relieve the sick, and we're quite sure,
For if you can't cure, you can kill.

Doctors on Call in New Market

Medical Rivalries

Henkel Physicians

Shenandoah County

Samuel was a well-respected physician with a successful family practice who served many people living in the area. In 1854, when two doctors new to town set up shop, the Henkel physicians defended their business and described their feelings and reactions in letters.

LEFT: The Doctor, ca. 1860. Fannie Coiner, from Augusta County, Virginia, anonymously sent this cartoon to her cousin Caspar.

Below: Letter to Caspar C. Henkel from his second cousin Abram Schelze Miller dated October 23, 1854. Concerning the attitude and medical expertise of Dr. Sommers and Dr. Rice, Schultz, a physician working with the Henkel practice, derided the competition and apparent airs of the competition in their seemingly pointless racing about town. Schultz expressed grave concerns about the professional abilities of Dr. Sommers after one of his patients died, writing that "he did not gain any reputation by that proceeding."

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Smith's Creek in New Market, Virginia