



FOUNDING FEMALES Female Qualifying Ancestor Index

Female Ancestor Number: 247

Name: Deshler, Mary (LeFevre)

Dates: (24 Aug 1715 - 26 Feb 1774)

Colonial Society: PA

Date added to ROA: 7-2-2025

Service: Healer, creator of Deshler's Salve

Authority: Brandt, Susan H., *Women Healers: Gender, Authority & Medicine in Early Philadelphia*, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2022, pp. 53-54; Ward, Townsend. "The Germantown Road and Its Associations (Continued)." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1882), pp. 142-143.

Biography:

Mary LeFevre was of French Huguenot descent, born in Paradise Township, Lancaster County, to Isaac LeFevre and Catherine Feree. She was also the granddaughter of the town's founder Marie Warenbuer Feree, an original settler of present-day Lancaster County. Mary married David Deshler in 1739 in a civil ceremony administered by the Justice of the Peace. Despite her strong (French Protestant) Huguenot roots, Mary and David both converted to Quakerism and became members of the Friends Meeting House on Race Street in Philadelphia.

David was a German-born naturalized citizen, who arrived in Philadelphia in about 1730 to join his uncles Caspar Wistar and John Wister—his mother's siblings—who were successful Philadelphia merchants. Upon arrival he worked in his uncle John's shop selling hardware and goods imported from East India. It was here he earned the reputation as "*honest David Deschler*." In 1765, David was one of the merchants tasked with organizing the "*Resolution of Non-Importation Made by the Citizens of Philadelphia*" in opposition of the first British Stamp Act, which was signed by many of his fellow merchants, both men and women.

Mary and David were both skilled healers who shared their knowledge with their dear neighbor Elizabeth Paschall. Mary gave Paschall the details for a cure for something called "felons" (an infected fingertip) which utilized ground earthworms. Such remedies were critical given that before the discovery of antibiotics, generalized infections could quickly turn catastrophic. Mary was renowned for her *Deshler's Salve* to treat burns, wounds, and abscesses. It was made from a combination of beeswax, turpentine, resin, linseed oil and sheep or deer's tallow. This legacy was long-lived with advertisements and references appearing well into the mid-twentieth century. The eminent Dr. Wistar recorded the Deshler's Salve remedy in the *Pharmacopeia*.



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Mary and David built a summer “cottage” in Germantown on the avenue in 1751-52. Twenty years later they added a 3-story, 9-room addition to the front of the house. They had six children; Ester, Isaac (died as an infant), Mary, Sarah (died young), Catherine, and Samuel (died young). Mary died at age 58 and was buried in the Friends Arch Street Meeting burial ground in Philadelphia. David lived another 18 years, and would witness much upheaval, including the occupation of their summer retreat in 1777 by the commander-in-chief of the British Army, Sir William Howe. The Battle of Germantown would be fought outside their front door. Just after his death, the Deshler home would become the temporary refuge of President George Washington during the Yellow Fever epidemic in the fall of 1793 and again in the summer of 1794, earning it the moniker of the “Germantown White House.” Today the house is administered by the U.S. National Park Service as part of Independence National Historical Park.