

Medical School & Graduation

Shortly after Joseph's birth in Fort Worth in 1879, Isaac, Annie, and little Joseph traveled (by horse and buggy or possibly by train some of the distance) 260 miles away to St. Louis, Missouri where Isaac poured all his energies into his dream of becoming a doctor. The details of Isaac's medical studies and work in the St. Louis area are still unknown. There were several medical schools in St. Louis at the time such as the Missouri Medical College that began in 1875. Another one was the St. Louis Medical College established in 1842. These later merged into the Medical School of the Washington University.

One piece of information located in St. Louis City Directory for 1882 is the residence of Isaac M. Darter, physician. This address is within nine blocks of the Missouri Medical College (northeast corner of 23rd and Lucas) which as previously stated later merged and became part of the medical school of Washington University:

Darter, Isaac M., physician, r. 32 S. 20th (1882)

One can imagine Dr. Darter and his wife Annie being awed and amazed at the size of St. Louis (about 350,000 population) when traveling in their horse and buggy across the newly constructed and huge Eads Bridge (that had opened to traffic in 1874 and became one of the engineering wonders in the world). The long bridge crosses the wide Mississippi River with the full view of the city of St. Louis on the other side. Every time I drive by this bridge, which still exists across the Mississippi River, I think of my Grandfather and Grandmother and my father as a baby traveling across it by horse and buggy.

The eastern approach to Eads Bridge was described as "a grand highway" that was carried "across a space of some sixty feet on immense steel column, which support great Iron girders." The road divided and descended with the carriage road dropping at a rate of about three feet to the hundred and the railway descending at a proportion of one foot to the hundred. The railway tracks of the bridge connected with the tracks of the St. Louis and Vandalia Railroad in East St. Louis, while the carriageway descended to Dyke Street (Broadway) on Bloody Island (Bond 1969:63).

Tragedy struck the family after about a year and one-half there when their infant son Joseph, just two months short of two years, died on 16 July 1881. The 1880 US census indicates that Joseph was born in Fort Worth in 1879. He is buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery (lot 24, grave #139), St. Louis, MO. The St. Louis City Death Records 1858-1908 Record lists the following:

Joseph T. Darter
Address (of J. Darter and his family): 32 S 20th
Death Date: 15 Jul 1881

Birth Place: Texas
Cemetery: Bellefontaine

A visit to this grave revealed that there is no head stone indicating the family's lack of money at that time. Isaac and Annie now knew very personally the overwhelming grief of loosing a child, which he undoubtedly saw repeated countless times in the next decade of his medical practice.

A second son, Francis Michael Darter, was born in St. Louis, MO, four months after the death of Joseph, on 27 November 1881. Francis (or Frank as he came to be known will be used herein to distinguish him from his grandfather Francis M. Darter, born in 1809, whom he was named after) must have been a great joy to Isaac and Annie after the loss of Joseph. Son Frank stated "At the time of my birth, my father was finishing his final degree in Medicine and the following year they moved to Frankfort (they actually moved to Louisville), KY, where he finished his degree in surgery."

Isaac's son Frank said that his father told him as a young child that one of his assignments was to assist in moving a part of the oldest cemetery in St. Louis. He stated that he had found the glass broken and markings within several long buried caskets indicating the person had regained consciousness. Isaac gave his family strict orders to treat his body properly prior to his burial so there was no chance of this happening to him. Additional research is needed to determine where he studied and worked during his time spent in St. Louis from 1880-82.

Sometime in 1882, Isaac and Annie and their young son Frank moved to Louisville, KY where he completed his medical studies at the University of Louisville and received his medical degree. Dr. Darter spent at least one full year studying at the University of Louisville as shown in the Alumni Database. Why did Isaac attend the University of Louisville? It is likely that he was inspired or influenced by Ft. Worth doctors such as the very prominent Dr. Carroll M. Peak, Fort Worth's first civilian doctor. Dr. Peak had attended the University of Louisville and graduated in 1851 from the School of Medicine. (Ref 15) The University of Louisville medical institute was flourishing as early as the 1840's.

The University Of Louisville School Of Medicine is a vibrant institution with a proud heritage as one of the most comprehensive medical facilities in the southeastern United States.

Students traveled from all over the South and West to attend its lectures and clinics. Despite initial municipal funding, the school operated on a proprietary basis, enjoying considerable autonomy. The school's library was one of the finest in the country, including numerous volumes purchased in Europe. Gas lamps provided brilliant night-time lighting for specially equipped rooms. In 1846 the Louisville Medical

Institute became the Medical Department of the newly formed University of Louisville. In the ensuing years of the 19th century, Louisville boasted six more medical colleges, most of which would eventually be absorbed by the University Medical Department. Some of the best medical minds of their day taught medicine at Eighth and Chestnut and in the wards of City Hospital.

An adjunct to clinical teaching was the school's institution of outpatient dispensary care for indigents during the 1850-51 sessions. Other improvements in medical education were instituted even earlier. In 1841, Samuel D. Gross, a professor of surgery, set up one of the country's first surgical laboratories, which was used for the study of wounds in dog intestines. The school's medical practitioners then applied information gleaned from such research to the care of patients. (Ref 8)

Isaac must have had a tremendous amount of desire, courage, and passion to become a doctor and surgeon to travel so far away from home with a wife and young child and little money. The Darter family had no previous doctors in this branch of the family. Becoming a doctor required highly developed physical, intellectual, and financial skills and knowledge. He obviously studied very hard knowing that soon he would be a long ways away from his professors and that he would have to work under some difficult conditions. His brothers and sisters probably helped him financially for which he in turn helped them during his medical practice in Ft. Worth. Isaac's older sister, Martha Elizabeth, was a very good schoolteacher and bright person and helped her brothers a great deal in their studies. She must have had a great influence on Isaac as well as his older brother William or W. A. Darter who became a leading citizen of Forth Worth. It appears that one strong Darter family characteristic is perseverance in that whatever they set forth to accomplish, they finish, no matter what the odds. (Ref 1, 4, 13)

Then, finally came graduation day for the family. The date on his diploma from the University of Louisville, Medical Department, the Degree of Doctor of Medicine, is February 27, 1883. This was obviously a very joyous occasion for the young family and was the fulfillment of Isaac's life long dream of becoming a doctor. Isaac was 32, Annie 25, and Frank 2 years. The photo of a younger Isaac may well have been taken for his graduation from the University of Louisville Medical School.



University of Louisville, Medical Department
The Degree of Doctor of Medicine
Isaac M. Darter of Texas
27 February 1883

Quite a number of faculty members besides the President of the University of Louisville signed Isaac's diploma. It is interesting to read the titles of those signing and to wonder if each had examined and passed Isaac in their area of specialization. What a challenge this must have been to satisfy all of these speciality areas.

- ! Professor of Anatomy and Diseases of the Eye and Ear
- ! Professor Principles and Practices of Medicine and Clinical Medicine
- ! Professor of Physiology and Clinical Diseases of the Chest
- ! Professor of State Medicine and Sanitary Science
- ! Professor of Pathology, Clinical Medicine, and Diseases of the Nervous System
- ! Professor of Surgery and Clinical Surgery
- ! Professor of Obstetrics and Medical and Surgical Diseases of Women
- ! Professor of Surgical Pathology and Operative Surgery
- ! Professor of Materia Medica, Therapeutics, and Clinical Medicine
- ! Lecturer on Medical Chemistry

His medical diploma shown below represents a great accomplishment in terms of all the preparatory education required, the courage to travel a long ways from home with a young family to get an education, the death of his first born child, the intellectual and physical challenges of medical school, and of course, the large financial sacrifice. All of these experiences were destined to prepare him for a very challenging but fruitful career in medicine. In one short decade that Isaac was able to practice medicine, he would become known as a "self made man, and has built himself up in the profession by strict devotion to his work" as stated when he became the City Physician of the City of Forth Worth, Texas.



Dr. I. M. Darter as a young man, probably upon graduation from the University of Louisville School of Medicine in February 1883 at age 32.