

Dr. J Oscar Dicks

Borough School Board Member (1911-1936)

In this man lived an unlimited effort to make our athletic department the finest in this vicinity.... Hundreds of students learned to play the game under Dr. Dicks – the game on the athletic field – and the larger game of life. He wanted to win cleanly, and he wanted his teams to enjoy their competition.

*James Reilly, Class of 1942
Garnet and White, December 1939*

Born in Dover, Delaware, on October 31, 1875, Dr. J. Oscar Dicks moved to West Chester while a child. He was a graduate of West Chester High School and the University of Pennsylvania. After receiving his medical degree from Hahnemann Medical College, Philadelphia, in 1899, he opened an office in the borough. He spent the next thirty-nine years earning a reputation as one of the best-known and well-liked physicians in West Chester. A fellow of the American College of Surgeons, he served as an assistant surgeon on the staff of the Chester County Hospital.

Dr. Dicks' interest in athletics dated back to service at age sixteen as a catcher for the (then) well-known Brandywine Baseball Team. In addition, he was a member of the semi-professional baseball team in Oxford for a time. He brought his interest in sports to the West Chester Borough School Board, where he headed the Athletic Committee and was a strong force behind the acquisition of the athletic field and stadium on Penn Street in 1928.

The stadium was renamed the J. Oscar Dicks Stadium on October 21, 1939. The dedication took place at halftime during a football game between West Chester and Downingtown High Schools. G. Roland Moore was chairman of the High School Alumni Committee that planned the ceremony. He described Dr. Dicks' contribution to sports in West Chester; Alumni Association President Dr. Joseph S. Clark presented a plaque lauding Dr. Dicks' service; Rev. Jacob A. Winterstein of the Church of the Holy Trinity, West Chester, gave a dedicatory prayer; and everyone stood in silence before singing the Alma Mater.

During his tenure on the Board, Dr. Dicks was also active in community organizations. He was chairman of the Rotary Club's Student Loan Committee and was a member of the West Chester Lodge 322, Free and Accepted Masons; of the Fame Fire Company; and of the Church of the Holy Trinity.

His death on November 14, 1938, caught the community by surprise. Although he had suffered a severe heart attack in July 1937, he had recovered sufficiently to resume his practice. He attended a football game between West Chester and Coatesville on Armistice Day 1938, and the following Saturday played golf. The next day, he suffered another severe heart attack; still another, the fatal attack, followed on Monday, November 14.

"Throughout his life, Dr. Dicks took a great interest in affairs of the community that pertained to young people, athletics and anything that was for the betterment of the borough," the *Daily Local News* wrote in his obituary on November 15, 1938. The newspaper called him "ever pleasant and genial... never too busy to greet his friends whenever and wherever he met them."

From *A Legacy of Learning: The History of the West Chester Area Schools* by Florence Sechler Miller