

MEDICINE IN FAIRPORT

last in a series

John Kraai was born in the Netherlands in 1909. He and his family came to the US in 1920 and John grew up in Pittsford and Penfield, graduating from East Rochester High School in 1926. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Rochester, received his MD from the University's School of Medicine and Dentistry, and completed his residency at Rochester General Hospital. He began his practice with Dr. Libby Pulisfer in Rochester, then opened an office in his family's Penfield home. In 1937 he opened his Fairport practice in his home at 84 South Main Street, where he lived with his wife Elizabeth and his seven children.



Dr. John Kraai

Over the course of his nearly fifty years of practice in Fairport, Dr. John Kraai became somewhat of a legend. There are many, many stories of his late night office hours, his house calls, and his absolute devotion to his patients.

It was said of John Kraai that his "heart and soul was medicine", that he was "one of the better people on earth", that he found his "ultimate joy and satisfaction in healing, tending, and nurturing life in every way he was able." He was also known for telling funny stories and for really being able to swear. He had candy in his office for children and showcases of mementos and gifts. Counselor and friend as well as prescriber of medicine, he took the time to ask about a patient's family. The Kraai family rarely had a big dinner when a plate wasn't taken to some patient. In his later years, he asked friends who were alone or lonely to drive with him to appointments, thereby giving them a purpose.

The doctor probably delivered over 5,000 babies during the course of his practice. Often bringing gifts of fruit or flowers, he made innumerable house calls at any hour of the day or night – many at no charge.

Although never taking much time for vacations, Kraai was an avid outdoorsman and member of the local Polar Bear Club (those who often remove ice from a swimming area in order to take a winter swim). He hunted raccoon with a group of friends, who fully understood that they might have to ride with him to see a sick patient or a pregnant woman because his patients always came first. He loved his property in Penfield, planting seedlings, clearing overgrown areas, pruning trees, and harvesting fruits and nuts from his trees. Eventually he donated 70 acres of land along Pittsford-Palmyra Road to the Town of Perinton.

At his funeral in 1985, the Rev. John Cedarleaf said of him: "If a saint is one who lets life shine through, then most certainly, John was that."

Since the 1950's, while there continue to be a number of physicians in the area, most do not have practices in the village or in their homes, but in facilities specifically designed for the practice of medicine. House calls have become a thing of the past, while visits to specialists have become routine. In the field of medicine, the 21st century may well be as different from the 20th as the 20th was from the 19th.