

MEDICINE IN FAIRPORT

second in a series

The last two decades of the 19th century were active ones for medicine in Fairport. During that time, a number of physicians opened practices in the village.

Dr. Charles Briggs practiced medicine in Fairport for over 50 years. Born in 1855, he apprenticed under Dr. H.D.Vosburg in Lyons for one year with duties that included work at the Wayne County Almshouse and Asylum. He subsequently attended Buffalo Medical College for three years, graduating in 1880. Dr. Briggs then settled in Fairport with his bride Louise Meade of Macedon Center.



Sadly, “Louie” died in childbirth a mere year later prompting the doctor to specialize in obstetrics. Over the course of his 50 year practice it is estimated that he delivered approximately 1800 babies. He recalled spending all night at the patient’s home during the birth process and having to keep five horses in his barn in order to be ready to go out at a moment’s notice. He remembered driving over rail fences in the winter and often losing the road and floundering around in snow drifts for hours.

Dr. Charles Briggs

Briggs saw many changes in medicine over the years of his practice, noting that “people have learned more about hygiene, sanitation, proper eating...” He was instrumental in cleaning up filthy stagnant mosquito-infested ponds in order to stop the spread of “swamp fever” or malaria. He noted that after 50 years the “most important change is along the lines of preventive medicine. I’ve seen five or six die in one family from diphtheria. Then we got anti-toxin and then toxin anti-toxin. Deaths from diphtheria these days [1931] are not common....” That interest in public health and preventive medicine led to his being named the first Health Officer in his area and also led him to encourage the establishment of the area’s Board of Health in 1901

His granddaughter, Betty Briggs Satterwhite Stevenson, remembered his office on South Main Street in the Bown Block as being a bit scary since upon entering the office one was greeted by a human skeleton. She, however, was intrigued by it, absorbing anatomy lessons from her grandfather. There were also shelves with numerous glass jars containing small fetuses, gallstones, and a tape worm that resembled yards of flat, white noodles.

Dr. Briggs married Nettie Palmer of Fairport after the death of his first wife and fathered three children, Edith, Charles, and Irving. He was active in the Methodist Church and a founder of the Y.M.C.A. branch in Fairport. After Nettie’s death in 1922, Dr. Briggs was married a third time, to Lillian Pannell of Fairport. This committed doctor, husband, father, and lover of his community died at the age of 77 in 1933.

In the late 1880’s Dr. Magill and Dr. Tubbs opened offices in the village. Dr. Magill was born in Canada and after moving to Pittsford studied with Dr. Paul Carpenter. He subsequently attended the University of Buffalo Medical College for two years, graduating in 1886. He opened his Fairport practice in 1887. Dr. Franklin Tubbs of Lockport studied at Hahnemann Medical College and the Hospital of Chicago, also graduating in 1886. After practicing in Holley for a short time, he came to Fairport with his wife Sarah and his two daughters Belle and Anna. His home and office were at the corner of South Main and Pleasant Streets where orthodontist Dr. David Huff currently has offices.

The next column in this series on Fairport physicians will feature Drs. George Price and James Fox, both of whom began their practices in the 1890's.