

MEDICINE IN FAIRPORT

first in a series

While records indicate that there were many doctors who provided care in Perinton and Fairport early in the 19th century, most people chose to rely upon themselves and whatever home remedies they could find to cope with illness and accidents. Epidemics of “swamp fever” (a type of malaria), cholera, and typhoid would at times sweep through a population that had no concept of the germ theory of disease. Accidents and fires claimed numerous lives, as did common childhood illnesses and child birth itself. Doctors did what they could, but they had very little at their disposal besides herbs, patent medicines, purgatives, and bleeding. Sometimes it was safer not to see the doctor! People in remote areas often used Indian remedies as cure-alls and collected herbs like slippery elm, wintergreen, and burdock to dry and use in case of illness.



Dr. J.W. Magill

Early doctors rode around on horseback visiting the sick, often providing little but a sympathetic ear. Their medical kit contained perhaps a mortar and pestle, a few herbs, assorted knives and saws, bandages, a bottle of leeches, and purgatives. They were poorly paid and, according to old records, were often given things like goose feathers, muskrat pelts, turnips, potatoes, eggs, and woven cloth for their services.

In the 1860's there were three types of physicians. The regular doctors or “allopaths” believed in “bleed, blister, and purge.” The “homeopaths” believed in letting nature take its course and perhaps giving a few harmless placebos. The “eclectics” combined what they deemed best from the other two. In those days it was not always clear whether one died from the disease or from the treatment.

Dr. Adams was Fairport's first known physician. Dr. Northrup started his practice in Perinton in 1821, but had moved to Michigan by 1840. In 1824, Dr. Aldrich was paid by the Town of Perinton's Overseer of the Poor \$12.50 for attending to Joseph Randolph and his family. Most of these early doctors were primarily self-taught, serving an apprenticeship with another physician, doing a lot of reading, and perhaps attending a medical society's lectures. By 1850, the town had Dr. John Brown, Dr. Richard Lemon, and Dr. William Devoe who was trained in England. In 1858 Dr Thomas Durand and Dr. Francis Wilcox opened practices.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, like many communities, Fairport and Perinton had numerous resident physicians in private practice. Most of them had attended a medical college and most had studied or interned with another physician. The 1880's and 1890's saw at least six physicians open practices in the village of Fairport.

Both Dr. Clapp and Dr. Briggs opened offices in 1880. They were followed in 1886 by Dr. J. Franklin Tubbs, in 1887 by Dr. J.W. Magill, and in the 1890's by Dr. George Price and Dr. James Fox.

Dr. Wesley Clapp had his office and home at 15 Perrin Street. The Greek Revival house had three parts: an apartment for Dr. Clapp's mother Almira, Dr. Clapp's offices, and living quarters for the family, which included Charlotte and her siblings, George, Lewis, Marion, and Robert. Two of the Clapp sons became physicians, and daughter Charlotte served as Perinton town clerk and historian for over 30 years.

Upcoming columns will feature a number of Fairport's physicians who practiced in the village between the 1880's and the 1980's.

