

## IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE AREA?

"Run and get Aunt Betsy, Elmer! It's time!" Elmer, 10, knew his mother was expecting another child. His father had gone to Ann Arbor the day before with a wagon of grain to be sold at the mill. He would bring back flour, sugar and other essential items the family needed. It was not anticipated his mother would deliver the baby before his father would return.

The midwife was not his aunt; everyone called her Aunt Betsy. Not a possessor of any special training in medicine, she had gained experience going with her mother on many other medical emergencies when she was younger and was often called upon to serve as midwife. She was also capable of setting bones, reducing fevers (of which there were many in this swampy part of Michigan), and closing and treating wounds.

The family had settled in Livingston County, Michigan Territory, only two years before. The log home had been made quite weatherproof and the fireplace served to cook food and furnish warmth. A small garden supplied produce during the summer and potatoes, onions and carrots for the winter. (Maybe this winter they wouldn't have to eat acorns again.) The cow, chickens and pigs allowed them to put eggs, meat and milk on the table.

As Elmer hurried along the faint path through the woods and fields he imagined an Indian was following. That shadow ahead must surely have been a bear or wolf. With his father gone he knew his mother depended on him so he conquered his fear and ran faster. When Aunt Betsy saw him coming she knew what had to be done. Gathering her supplies she gave Elmer an apple (a treat since they had no apple trees yet) and the two hastened back to the cabin. He had heard Pa tell Aunt Betsy that when they next butchered he'd be sure she was paid with some meat. How Elmer wished there was a doctor nearby as in the eastern New York town from which they had come.

"For several years after the first settlers entered Livingston County there was no physician located in all its territory." Franklin Ellis, the writer of The 1880 History of Livingston County, goes on to say that settlers living in the southern part of the county depended on doctors of Washtenaw County. Those in the north called on Dr. F. Curtis who had settled in Rochester in 1832. Shortly after he moved to Kensington, at the east Livingston County line. Patients came all the way from Livingston Centre (Howell) when they needed the services of Dr. Curtis, about 1835. (By Marieanna Bair. To be continued. The writer hopes that persons with knowledge of medical practitioners in the area, since the turn of the century, will contact her. 229-6402)

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