IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE AREA?

As settlers moved to the area in the 1830s and 40s they left behind cultural and educational opportunities, family ties and anyone with any medical training. Maybe that wasn't all bad. The lack of understanding of the human body and the many ills which might befall it allowed horrifying treatments to take place. The fixing of leeches to a wound to get rid of putrified flesh or the letting of blood to combat an illness are sufficient examples for our readers.

The cholera epidemic of the early 1830s ensured that settlers did not linger long in heavily populated areas as Detroit on their journey west. Families had little with which to fight the dreaded plagues. Other terrifying diagnoses included scarlet fever, measles, diphtheria, typhoid, tuberculosis, whooping cough, ague (malaria) all took a heavy toll on the population; especially, it seemed, where many lived in close proximity. Little knowledge of how disease spreads, and lack of sanitary water and facilities often decimated the helpless settlers. Being born and surviving was a major accomplishment.

We hear of the pioneers who lived well past their 80th birthday and might be misled to believe those were the 'good old days.' A short tour of an old cemetery soon dispels that opinion. The numbers of graves of those who never lived to their 5th birthday is disheartening.

These brave people seldom went to see a doctor but when there were more sick people in the family than well, there was little choice. Dr. Samuel W. Pattison, in 1836, located in Pontonville (Penton) relates, "I was guided to many of these places (in the northern part of the county) through timbered openings by marked trees and often following Indian trails....During the months of August and September the intermittent and remittent fevers - diseases peculiar to low or flat countries - prevailed to an alarming extent. The well were the exception; whole families were down, many became discouraged and some fled, but it was remarkable that most of these returned to Michigan."

With a doctor several hours horse or buggy ride away, the mother of the family was expected to be able to treat the patient. Researching the remedies used is almost as revolting to the imagination as studying the illnesses. A mixture of lard and turpentine rubbed on the chest treated a chest cold. A mustard plaster or one of hot fried onions in a bag on one's chest was the remedy for more severe congestion. And a caring mother couldn't let her family approach Spring without a dose of castor oil to 'clean out the system.' (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)

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O.Box 481
Brighton, MI 48116

Grand River Trail

TRAIL TALES

Brighton Area Preservation News

The purpose of the Brighton Area Historical Society is to preserve, advance and disseminate knowledge of the history of the Brighton Area.

The membership is composed of people who feel this purpose is worthwhile and should be promoted.

NOVEMBER ANNUAL MEETING

NOVEMBER 13

The Brighton Area Historical Society will hold its annual meeting at 7:30 at Scranton Middle School. A potluck will be held at 6:30. You are invited to bring a dish to pass, and enjoy a bit of fun and good food before the meeting.

Election of Officers will take place at this meeting. Leota Mason has been chosen to head the nomination committee. At this time the following slate has been chosen:

President: Gary McCririe
Vice President: Cathy Qualls
Secretary: Marieanna Bair
Treasurer: Marge White

Board of Directors:
Marieanna Bair
Mike Cuthbert
Rudy Herrmann
Penny Szczesniak

JEO MIKE TO SPEAK AT GENERAL MEETING

November 13

Joe Mike, a local artist, will be presenting a program on "Our Community".

He will talk after the election of officers takes place.

We look forward to hearing his talk and hope to see you there. Bring a friend and enjoy a night of entertainment.

The committee is still looking for a secretary nomination, and more people to serve on the Board of Directors. A complete slate will be presented at the meeting. Nominations will be accepted from the floor at the meeting.

Please come and cast your vote and show support for these officers.