

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE AREA? (Cont.)

Many of the surrounding communities, by 1860, had several physicians in place. Between 1838 and 1858 thirteen physicians had come to Howell. Fowlerville, Hartland, and Pinckney all had several doctors during this period of time. Often these doctors didn't stay more than two years and not all had a medical degree. Several practiced the "Thompsonian" system. (This term is unfamiliar to this writer. Perhaps someone can enlighten us.) Several were homeopaths.

Dr. Thomas Curtis (physician of the mid 1830s of whom we wrote earlier) had his office in the tavern he built in Kensington. A physician often was in the drug store business. (Conflict of interest?)

Several served with the Michigan units in the Civil War. Among these was Dr. William J. McHench, U.S. Army Assistant Surgeon General. The doctor was born, 9-13-31, on a farm in Schoharie County, New York. He acquired a little more than the basic education available in the local school district and arrived in Michigan to teach in Brighton and Green Oak Townships in 1853. Within the year he "began reading medicine with Dr. Ira P. Bingham of Brighton and in the fall of 1855 entered the medical department of the University of Michigan, graduating with the class of 1858." Because of extra studies he undertook he was considered better equipped than the average young doctor. He expanded his medical education by attending lectures and keeping up with medical developments. Except for a few months in New Hudson and service in the Civil War, he spent 52 years in Brighton practicing medicine. (Not all of Dr. McHench's patients survived his ministrations. In 1893 he operated on Andrew Keary who "died while under chloroform on his own kitchen table as Dr. McHench was operating.")

In 1868, he married Margaret Sowle whose parents came to Brighton in 1845 when she was an infant. The doctor was also involved with city government. He is listed as one of the first two assessors when Brighton became a village in 1867. Dr. McHench died in 1-1-11 and is buried in Fairview Cemetery beside his wife who died in 1904.

In 1880, William C. Brown, who was born in Gallupville, New York, 1851, came to Brighton. He was a nephew of Dr. McHench and practiced with him. Not long after his arrival he married Louisa Becker, daughter of John Becker of the Pipp and Becker Hardware Store. (Later Ratz' Hardware, now the Gristmill, S.E. corner Main & Hyne.) When Dr. Brown set up his own practice it naturally followed that his office was set up on the second floor of the hardware store. (By Marieanna Bair. To be continued. It is hoped 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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