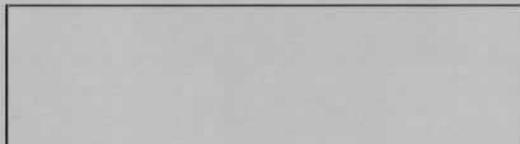


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## Medicine in Early Brighton

Low land prices in the Northwest Territory during the 1830s were an incentive to hundreds in the eastern United States who packed their families on a boat in the Erie Canal to begin the first leg of their journey to a better life. These newly arrived settlers in Livingston County had left behind not only all educational, cultural and religious resources, but also family support and access to doctors.

What did a doctor's medical training consist of? Most 'doctors' got their medical education working with another doctor; not unlike a would-be attorney apprenticing with another to practice law. Some read medical books and then decided for themselves they were doctors.

In the Michigan Territory during the early 19th century, there was no 911 service in the event of an emergency. Any doctors were several hours away via Indian trails through forests and around swamps or by way of blazed trees.

Today, it is difficult to conceive the desperation, which settlers experienced, if an accident or illness befell a family member. Cutting trees or squaring logs for a cabin occasionally resulted in broken bones and deep flesh wounds. If gangrene occurred, it was usually a matter of amputating the limb or dying of blood poisoning. Cooking at a fireplace occasionally resulted in a garment catching fire. A tipped-over lamp or candle was the source of severe burns. A tourniquet applied to a snake bite to stop the spread of venom occasionally caused the inadvertent loss of limb.

Not until 1835, when Dr. Thomas Curtis moved to Kensington Village (just east of the county line), was any medical assistance available to the southeast quarter of the county. There, Curtis built a tavern, had an office and, probably, a drug store.

The Brighton area's first doctor was Wilbur Fisher from Ann

Arbor, who moved here in 1836. It is said his medicines were certainly given in sufficiently large doses to cure "... if quantity were the consideration."

Dr. Ira P. Bingham (brother of Governor Kinsley S. Bingham of Green Oak Township) was in the area in 1835. He located his practice in Brighton in 1841, where he practiced for 40 years, living in the Brighton (Eastern) House for a time. Dr. Bingham is buried in the Old Village Cemetery. In 1854, William J. McHench arrived to teach in local schools. Within a year, he began "reading" medicine with Dr. Bingham and in the fall of 1855 entered the medical department at University of Michigan, where he received his degree in 1858. Following service as U.S. Army Assistant Surgeon General during the Civil War, he continued studying to keep up with medical developments. He continued his practice in Brighton for 52 years after the war. His gravesite is in Fairview Cemetery.

*Compiled by Marieanna Bair "Michigan Memorabilia" by William Pless, "1880 History of Livingston County" by Franklin Ellis, "From Settlement to City - Brighton, Michigan" by Carol McMacken and clippings. To be continued. Additions/corrections requested. 810/229-6402.*



### Online Historical Resources

There are many great resources online that make it easy for the serious historian and casual history buff to do research. One of my favorite is the Seeking Michigan site. This web site contains a large collection of stories, maps, photos, documents, oral histories and more. It is also easy to browse and search. I would highly recommend visiting this site to learn about Michigan's great history. - Dave Ball

Seeking Michigan online at: [seekingmichigan.org](http://seekingmichigan.org)