

What's Up Doc?
A History of Whiting's Early Doctors
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In the last newsletter I wrote about Whiting's first doctor, so this month I thought I'd spotlight some other doctors who played an important role in the development of the city. Whiting's early doctors worked diligently to safeguard the community from a multitude of infectious and contagious diseases. Fortunately, there were seldom epidemics to occur in Whiting. However, the community was never entirely free from preventable diseases. During the early part of the 1890s typhoid fever spread throughout the area.

Typhoid fever was a very dreaded infectious disease. Worldwide, it was commonly transmitted by ingestion of food or water contaminated with feces from an infected person or animal. Typhoid fever in many cases was a fatal disease. However, in Whiting residents quickly learned how to protect their drinking water. Likewise, the milk supply needed to be guarded with sales coming under municipal control. Streets and alleys were regularly cleaned and city authorities regulated the gathering and disposal of garbage.

One of the doctors fighting typhoid fever, during this time, was Dr. Aaron J. Lauer. Lauer was a practicing doctor in Whiting for nearly five decades. At one time he was able to claim the title of being the longest practicing physician in Lake County. Lauer in reference to the typhoid fever outbreak stated, "Doctors in Whiting during this period seldom had less than three to five cases of typhoid fever under their care."

Dr. Lauer was born in Rochester, Indiana on December 14, 1871. He was the son of Joseph and Mary (Koch) Lauer. Lauer was educated in the public schools of Rochester. In 1893 he graduated from Benet Medical School of Chicago. That April, Lauer established his first medical practice in Monterey, Indiana. Four months later, Dr. Lauer relocated his practice to Whiting, Indiana, where he developed a successful practice.

For six years, Lauer served as secretary of Whiting's health board. Lauer held this position during two city administrations, those of Mayors William E. Warwick and Beaumont Parks. Also during World War I, Dr. Lauer served as secretary of the Whiting Robertsdale Selective Service Board, Lake Board Number 1. During this time, he gave up his office and moved to the First National Bank building to devote his time to the selective service board.

In the 1939 historical edition of the *Whiting Times* Dr. Lauer recalled the early health conditions in Whiting, "In the early nineties, the one outstanding disease, owing to water contamination was typhoid fever. Since that time typhoid fever along with other communicable diseases have been materially decreased if not entirely eradicated." Between 1893 and 1903, there were on average 50 to 75 cases of typhoid fever a year, with a death rate of approximately 25 per cent.

Dr. A. J. Lauer was a humanitarian. He had a vision of a community that worked together towards the betterment of the poor. Likewise, he was a book lover, who was an advocate of the public library system. Lauer served as a member of the Whiting Public Library Board of Trustees. During his time on the Board of Health, Lauer devoted his time to put Whiting to the forefront in healthfulness and sanitation. In addition to Dr. Lauer's Whiting organizations, he was also a member of the American Medical, the Indiana Medical and the Lake County Medical societies.

During Whiting's history there were several doctors who made their start by administering to the city's sick and infirmed. Dr. Bertram Urson Doolittle, for instance, served

as a pediatric doctor. He was said to have had a very pleasing demeanor who understood the sensitive nature of children. Doolittle was born in 1861 in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

In 1903 Doolittle graduated from the Indiana College of Medicine. Over the next two years he finished up a post-graduate course load at the Fort Wayne College of Medicine. Doolittle then came to Whiting to take over the practice of Dr. Take. Doolittle did a lot to win over Whiting's residents. He soon added many families to his practice, which grew by the month. Doolittle's patients regarded him as a professional and a friend. He passed away in Whiting on May 14, 1914 following a two-week illness from rheumatism and pneumonia.

Dr. George Soper Hilliard was Whiting's premier dentist. He was born on June 4, 1870 on a farm at Schuyler Falls in New York. Hilliard received his public education in Plattsburg, New York. After graduating from high school, Hilliard accepted a position as a clerk at a summer hotel. He worked at the resort from 1888 to 1890, attending college during the winter season.

In 1890 Hilliard went into the laundry business. For the next three years he operated a laundry. Hilliard's first laundry was back home in Plattsburg, New York. His second attempt at laundering was in Hot Springs, South Dakota. In 1893 Hilliard decided he washed enough clothes and decided to enroll in the Northwestern Dental College. That same year, he married his wife Arlie Douglass on November 1, 1893.

Dr. G. S. Hilliard graduated from the dental college in 1896. At this time, he moved to East Chicago, Indiana. In 1897 Dr. Hilliard relocated to Whiting. He immediately opened an office in the Porter and Kessler building. Hilliard later commissioned the construction of the 2-story brick structure located at the corner of 119th Street and Oliver Street. The First National Bank occupied the first floor. The doctor's dental rooms and residence was located on the second floor. He passed away in Whiting on November 9, 1951.

Another interesting doctor to practice in Whiting was George Henry Hoskins. He was born in Essex, New York on October 18, 1872. Hoskins graduated from Northwestern University Medical School in 1898. Shortly after graduation, the young M.D. came to Whiting where he hung out his shingle. Hoskins was known to apply physics to the sick and balm to the wounded.

Twelve years after arriving in Whiting, Hoskins had built up a large practice. He married Bertha Dewey on October 24, 1900 and later raised a family. An interesting fact to note, Hoskins made house calls not on foot but riding in his motor car. Hoskins was also Whiting's first health officer, and in 1902 was elected Lake County Coroner. He passed away in Chicago on November 3, 1920.

Like Dr. A. J. Lauer, Dr. Edward Lucian Dewey was an active member of the Whiting Board of Health. He was born in Millville, Wisconsin on December 23, 1868. In 1904 he graduated from the Jenner Medical College in Chicago. That same year, Whiting had an opening for a surgeon. Dewey was a progressive, up-to-date physician and surgeon. He felt that he was the right fit for Whiting's needs. Dr. Dewey immediately went about setting up shop at 440 119th Street. In no time he built up a fine practice.

Since Dewey's practice was quite scattered, he bought one of the first automobiles in Whiting. Dewey purchased a Maxwell Runabout, which unfortunately ran poorly during the cold winters, when cold air ran into the carburetor. To alleviate this problem, Dr. Dewey constructed a makeshift muffler, which consisted of a system of flues through which air was drawn before it entered the carburetor.

The device worked, so Dewey patented it and began to show it to the press. The car burned absolutely no gasoline. It ran on kerosene, which cost only 6.5 cents per gallon. Dewey's automobile got 18.5 miles per gallon. The good doctor figured that his invention would revolutionize energy prizes, and in the process make him a rich man. However, this was not the type of product that would be popular in a town that made their living off the production of gasoline. He passed away from a cerebral hemorrhage in Whiting on October 22, 1928.

Dr. Chauncery Marshall Gillespie succeeded the practice of Dr. Wells. Gillespie's office was located at the corner of 119th Street and Oliver Street. The building housed the First National bank. C. M. Gillespie was born in Belfast, Ireland on May 4, 1879 to Rev. Robert Gillespie and Kate Waters. Rev. Gillespie was a Presbyterian missionary who relocated his family to India from 1881 to 1887. C.M. returned to the United Kingdom, where he studied chemistry and medicine at Edinburgh University from 1897 to 1901.

In 1907 Gillespie immigrated to Whiting, Indiana, where he worked in the shipping department of the Standard Oil Company. After some time at the refinery he moved to the operating department. Gillespie then took a position as a chemist at the Glucose Company. With hopes of becoming a medical doctor, C. M. Gillespie enrolled at the Benet Medical College of Chicago, where he graduated in 1910. Shortly after taking both the Indiana and Illinois state boards, Gillespie returned to Whiting, where he served the community for several years. Gillespie passed away on July 29, 1952.

With Whiting surrounded by half a dozen cities and being a portal to Chicago, the burden of protecting the public's health was very challenging. As was seen in the last newsletter Whiting's early doctors worked hard to protect their residents from a variety of infectious and contagious diseases. In this issue I will report on some more of these physicians and acknowledge their contributions to the community.

In 1939 Emil Pekarek was given the distinction of being the oldest practicing pharmacist in the city of Whiting. He was born in Brumm, Hungary on April 13, 1885. Emil arrived in Whiting in 1912. At this time, he accepted employment as a pharmacist. Within a short time Pekarek acquired ownership of the drug store in which he had been an employee. Emil Pekarek changed the name of the store to the Central Drug Store. The drug store, at that time, was located in the Bank of Whiting building, which was located at the corner of New York Avenue and 119th Street.

Emil Pekarek was a member of the Whiting Elks lodge. He was also part of Whiting's chapter of the Knights of Columbus. Pekarek was a member of the National Association of retail druggists, as well as, the Indiana and Lake County associations. Emil Pekarek was also prominent in civic affairs. He served as a member of the Whiting Board of Health for one term. In 1909 Emil was married to his wife Emily. The two had one son, Dr. Edward A. Pekarek. He passed away in Phoenix, Arizona on May 15, 1962.

Dr. James J. Cravens was a well-known dentist throughout Whiting. He was born in Marco, Indiana on August 25, 1899. Dr. Cravens graduated from Kokomo High School in Kokomo, Indiana. He later went on to graduate from Indiana University's School of Dentistry.

James Cravens came to Whiting in 1923. Shortly after his arrival, he married Lucille Riley. During World War I, Dr. Cravens saw service in the United States Army, in the ordinance department. Cravens belonged to the American Dental Association, the Whiting Lions Club and the American Legion Post 80. In addition, Dr. and Mrs. Cravens were quite active in the social life of the Whiting community. He passed away on February 5, 1949.

Dr. Jeremiah Anthony McCarthy considered himself a great student of nature. He stated in the 1939 historical edition of the *Whiting Times*, "Nature's masterpiece, man and (I) am always ready to serve him in a dissecting or assembling manner."

McCarthy was born on May 15, 1896 in Terre Haute, Indiana. He was the son of Daniel and Elizabeth McCarthy. After finishing up his secondary education, McCarthy attended the University of Notre Dame. He graduated from the college with a Bachelor of Science degree. Following graduation, Jeremiah attended Northwestern, where he left as a Doctor of Medicine.

Dr. McCarthy came to Whiting in 1924. He stated that he was a dues paying member of nearly every club in Whiting. However, he was adamantly opposed to joining the Democratic party. Dr. McCarthy strongly believed in not meddling in politics. He married Mary E. McNamara in 1924 and later Kathryn Mooney in 1938. Dr. McCarthy passed away in Los Angeles, California on February 7, 1969.

George A. Thegze was born in Europe on October 28, 1909. He was the son of Rev. and Mrs. Thegze. After immigrating to the United States, George attended the University of Pittsburgh for some time. In 1935 he graduated from the University of Budapest with an M.D. degree. After graduation, Thegze returned to America, opening a medical practice in Whiting.

Dr. Thegze's office was located at 1341 119th Street. George Thegze was an active member of the Knights of Columbus and the Elks Lodge. In addition, Thegze was a chairman of the health and safety committee of the Boy Scouts of America. For some time, he even served as a trustee for the Whiting Public Library. George passed away on June 4, 1972. He is buried with his wife Kathryn at the Saint Nicholas Cemetery in Hammond.

Dr. Clementine Frankowski was a woman of firsts. She was the first female doctor at St. Catherine Hospital. Dr. Frankowski was also Hammond and Indiana's first female city health officer. In addition, she was the first female President of the Lake County Medical Society, as well as, the Indiana Heart Association Northwest.

Clementine Frankowski was born on November 6, 1906 to Constantin and Pelaga Frankowski. She graduated from Whiting High School in 1925. She went on to receive a Bachelor of Science from St. Xavier College in 1929. Four years later, Dr. Frankowski received her M.D. from Loyola Medical School. She then went on to complete an internship at the Women's & Children's Hospital.

Dr. Frankowski spent a lifetime in the practice of medicine for the residents of Whiting. She, like many of her predecessor, did not practice medicine for a paycheck, but for the reward she received when helping people. Clementine Frankowski was known to write a prescription for many in need throughout the community. Her generosity toward needy patients was well known. In addition, she provided free medical care for all the members of local convents and rectories.

Clementine Frankowski was a very religious person. She would often pray for her patients daily. Dr. Frankowski was not only generous to her patients but also to her parish. She donated the beautiful altar at St. Adalbert Church, which is still being used. Interestingly, when Dr. Frankowski applied for a position at St. Margaret's Hospital, she was turned down because she was a woman. She passed away on April 13, 1994.

Dr. Peter Stecy was also a popular Whiting physician and surgeon. Stecy was born on January 29, 1911 in Whiting. He was the son of Charles and Mary Stecy. Stecy received his rudimentary education in the Whiting Public Schools. In 1926 he graduated from Whiting High School.

After graduating from high school, Peter Stecy attended Northwestern University located in Evanston, Illinois. He graduated from Northwestern with a Bachelor of Science in 1930. Six years later he received his M.D. from the Loyola Medical School located in Chicago. Following his graduation from Loyola, Dr. Stecy served his internship at St. Mary's Mercy hospital in Gary.

Dr. Stecy practiced for a short while in Chicago. He then came home to Whiting, where he established an office in the Central State Bank building. Besides his local practice, Dr. Stecy was on the staff of St. Mary's hospital and St. Catherine's hospital. He was also a member of the Lake County Medical Association. In addition, Stecy was the health officer for the Lake County Health Department for many years. Likewise, he served for two terms as the Lake County coroner.

When war called, Dr. Peter Stecy answered the call. He served as a surgeon during World War II. Stecy did not serve in some field hospital, but on the front lines. He was a member of the U.S. Army Medical Corps, serving a five year term.

Dr. Stecy like Dr. Frankowski gave back to his hometown and its residents. Dr. Stecy served as Whiting High School's team doctor. In a time, when an athletic trainer was a luxury, Whiting had its own M.D. on the sidelines. Stecy, also, provided free health exams and physicals to all Whiting school system athletes. Likewise, Dr. Stecy provided free health care services, including surgery for Whiting's indigent. Peter Stecy passed away in May 1987.

Dr. Stecy's generosity continued even after his death. Stecy's daughter was instructed to establish a scholarship in honor of her father's name. The Dr. Peter Stecy scholarship is awarded to a deserving Whiting High School graduate each year. The scholarship is given out at the Whiting's commencement ceremony every year.

Whiting's history is one that is rich and diverse. There are all kinds of treasures that can be found within the drawers of the Local History Room. If you would like to find out more about Whiting, stop by the library to begin your search.