

History of Health Care in Keswick Ridge

Part One: Early Practitioners

Evelyn Fidler, March 15, 2020

Since time began, villages and communities have relied on those with specialized knowledge of healing to ease pain, suffering and the effects of disease. Whether they were medicine men, midwives, nurses, herbalists, pharmacists or doctors, the community could not thrive without them. Keswick Ridge is no different. This series of blog posts highlights some of the key health care specialists providing knowledgeable care throughout the 250 years of the history of Keswick Ridge.

No mention has been found for medical doctors prior to the mid nineteenth century. If desperate, residents could travel to Fredericton for treatment or be seen by doctors from other areas. These doctors include Doctor William Caverhill, of Upper Caverhill (Queensbury Parish), who had settled in that area in 1820 from Scotland. Evelyn Gordon and Henry Grant in their book, On the Ridge, in the chapter on "The Country Doctors," mention two early doctors, Dr. Barker and Dr. Brown. They admit not knowing a lot about these early doctors, but a little digging has turned up some information.

Dr. Jacob Henry Barker (1839-1911) was born in Sheffield, the son of Dr. Jacob W. Barker and Anne Turney Barker. His parents were married in Burton in 1834 and his father died sometime before 1848. Jacob was the second oldest of six children. Dr. Barker was a graduate of Harvard University in 1859. His first known practice was in Upper Keswick before moving on to Sheffield (until 1870), Douglas (1871), then Gibson and finally Fort Fairfield in Maine (1893) until his death in 1911. He married Mary Elizabeth Tayler on June 21, 1865 in Sheffield. By 1871, they had two boys Harry and Ernest (ages 3 and 1). Before 1881, the family was joined by son Tilley and daughters Stella and Gretchen. The family attended the Methodist church. An interesting fact is that Doctor Barker also acted as enumerator for Douglas during the 1881 census.

Dr. Theodore Clowes Brown (1838 -1893) graduated from the University of Vermont in 1859 and the University of Pennsylvania in 1860. Sometime between 1860 and 1870 he practised medicine in Keswick Ridge. Before 1864, he married Harriet (last name unknown). In 1871 they had two children, Frank (who later became a doctor) and Mary. Dr. Brown was a surgeon of the Canadian School of Infantry, based in Fredericton, from at least 1870 until his death. Dr Brown also served on the original Medical Council of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick. The family lived in Fredericton and attended the local Anglican church. Between 1886 and 1892, Harriet passed away and he married Etta Arnold in 1892. On April 25, 1893, Dr. Brown died of paralysis and was buried in Forest Hill Cemetery. Dr. Brenton Stewart, in his book Medicine in New Brunswick (1974), hints that Dr. Brown may have suffered bankruptcy towards the end of his life. This might be born out by the fact that in 1896, Etta left for Boston to seek employment.

Dr. John Robert Hagerman (May 3, 1839-1926) was born in Bear Island. He was the son of William Hagerman and Francis Kilburn. He apprenticed to Dr. Brown before leaving for Harvard. Dr. Hagerman graduated in 1864 and practiced in St. Marys before moving to Florenceville to start a drug store. As well, Dr. Hagerman was a surgeon in the local militia in 1865, around the time of the Fenian scare. He married Margaret ("Maggie") Hammond, from Kingsclear (1840-1915) on January 10, 1866. His grandson recalls that Dr. Hagerman would sometimes hear wolves howling as he traveled by sleigh at night. His grandson tells the story of Dr. Hagerman calling on a young girl who was struck unconscious by lightning so badly the locket around her neck had melted. Her grandmother shoved the little girl in a rain barrel, the shock revived her, and she recovered normally. He died on July 14, 1926 of chronic Bright's disease, a type of kidney disease.

As you can see, Keswick Ridge was served by a few talented and capable physicians in the mid-nineteenth century. In part 2, we explore the careers of those who succeeded or practiced alongside these great men, Dr. Robertson, Dr. Morehouse and Dr. Coburn.

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