

History of Health Care in Keswick Ridge

Part Two: Community Doctors

Evelyn Fidler, April 12, 2020

As Keswick Ridge entered the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the community grew in population and the need for continuous health care. Medical schools were graduating well trained and educated doctors equipped with the latest knowledge of diagnosis and procedures. In Keswick Ridge, community doctors were bringing their practices to the area, as well as making Keswick Ridge their home.

Three of these doctors were Dr. Benjamin Coburn, Dr. Oscar Emery Morehouse and Dr. Beverley Robertson

Benjamin Coburn (1838 to 1900) was the son of David Coburn and Sarah Slood. Benjamin was one of four boys and a girl. Tragically, his parents passed away in 1850 when Benjamin was only 12. He went to live with family in Fredericton and was educated at the Baptist Seminary. Benjamin went on to study medicine at Harvard and Vermont College and served for a time with the Union Army as a surgeon.

Dr. Coburn first practiced in Chipman where he married Effie King. After eight years, and with Benjamin in ill health, the family moved to Florida for a year. On return, he took up practice in Keswick Ridge. The family expanded to include two sons and one daughter. Dr. Coburn took over the practice of Dr. Brown. In 1899, he moved back to Fredericton where he passed away in 1900.

Dr. Coburn kept a diary which is invaluable in documenting the early years of his career. The first page records that he began his practice on October 5, 1863.

Dr. O.E. Morehouse followed Dr. Barker. Oscar Emery Morehouse was born in 1857, the son of Elisha Morehouse and Eunice Crouse. Oscar was the oldest child in a family of modest means. Family history claims that Oscar decided to become a doctor after caring for the Leckey family who were hit hard with Diphtheria. Oscar moved in to care for the family as no one in the community would enter the home. He was also courting one of the older daughters. The father and four daughters died, including the daughter Oscar was courting. The wife of the first Anglican Bishop of Fredericton, Bishop Medley, heard of Oscar's care of the family and urged him to become a doctor.

Oscar needed to learn Latin to attend medical school at McGill. He was tutored by the local Anglican minister. Dr. Morehouse attended McGill from 1885 until 1889 where he graduated as a medical doctor. He had fallen in love with Bertie McKiel, the daughter of the Anglican minister Rev. William McKiel. They married shortly after his graduation. Together they had four children before Bertie died in childbirth. Oscar then married Maud Burt and they had four children including Oscar Emery Junior who followed in his father's footsteps to become a medical doctor in Keswick Ridge. Dr. Morehouse died in 1935 and was buried in St. Paul's Anglican cemetery.

Beverley Robertson was born on a farm in Big Cove, Queens County in 1874. He was the youngest of ten born to John S. Robertson (born in Scotch Settlement) and Prudence Guiou. At the age of fourteen he left home and entered the Provincial Normal School to train to be a teacher, graduating in 1892. Being a teacher wasn't his real intention, he was saving money to go to McGill University in Montreal to become a medical doctor. He graduated in 1905 as a qualified surgeon and medical doctor. His second practice was in Keswick Ridge where he spent the rest of his life. He married Carrie Ingersoll from Seal Cove, Grand Manan in 1908. Carrie was the daughter of a schooner captain and she also trained as a teacher at the Provincial Normal School. They had one child, John Ingersoll Robertson who was born in 1910.

The Robertsons were very active in the community. Dr. Robertson was the councillor for the Parish of Bright from 1929 to 1949. He purchased a block of land on Crock's Point and raised foxes, employing many local men. He also established an apple orchard. Dr. Robertson was very active in the local Mactaquac Baptist church and a set of stained glass windows was dedicated in the church in memory of Dr. and Mrs. Robertson.

Mary McKeen said of the doctor:

"Dr. Robertson was very obliging and always available when needed. He never turned anyone down even in the most severe winter storms. He was a very kind man, always the same, never out of sorts."

Dr. Robertson died of a cerebral hemorrhage and hypertension at the age of 77 in 1951. Mrs. Robertson died in 1972.

The hard work and dedication of these early country doctors is especially amazing when set against the fact that many came from humble beginnings and struggled to obtain an expensive education. Before confederation, many doctors had to travel to New England to receive training. Dr. Coburn's diary reveals that being a country doctor was not financially lucrative, at least in the early years. Keswick Ridge is particularly fortunate that these country doctors served many years practicing in the community.

Health care in Keswick Ridge was not only provided by trained doctors; pharmacists, midwives and nurses also took care of the community. Their important role will be the topic of Part Three.



Keswick Ridge Historical Society <<http://keswickridge.ca/?p=groups>>

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