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|-------------|---|---------|
| Fall | W. R. Brown's Civil War Diary The War Within a War | Page 3 |
| 1970 | | |
| Volume 7 | Ramsey County Medical Society Survives Its First 100 Years | Page 14 |
| Number 2 | Forgotten Pioneers . . . X | Page 20 |
| | Book Review: History of A Region And A People | Page 22 |

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ON THE COVER: A field hospital during the Civil War often was literally that, with the surgeons caring for the wounded behind whatever shelter they could find. In this painting by Heisser, from a panorama of the Battle of Gettysburg, surgeons are at work behind a haystack while the battle rages in the field behind them.

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The operating room at St. Luke's Hospital, St. Paul, about 1890. At left, the Society's seal designed by R. V. Sweeny.



Ramsey County Medical Society Survives 100 Years

BY ROBERT ROSENTHAL, M.D.

THE Ramsey County Medical Society was organized exactly 100 years ago, not as a new organization so much but as a reorganization of an earlier medical group.

Those pioneer organizers of 100 years ago felt that the Society really was an outgrowth of the St. Paul Academy of Medicine and Surgery which had its beginning in 1860 and became defunct after six years. Many of the charter members of this old society also were charter members of the Ramsey County Medical Society. No doubt the Civil War was the main reason for the demise of the old Academy; it suffices to point out that

nine of its 12 charter members served in the war.

However, the Ramsey County Medical Society did not emerge from Jupiter's head, fully grown and armed, like Athena. It had to grow like an infant and overcome the many childhood diseases. In 1870, St. Paul was still a pioneer city, not quite 30 years old. The first physician, Dr. John Jay Dewey, had settled here in 1847, and the first hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital, had opened its doors to patients only 16 years earlier, in 1854.

The State Medical Society can trace its own origins back as early as 1853, but it did not become a viable body until 1869, when the St. Paul Academy of Medicine and Surgery had been dead for four years. Thus the St. Paul area needed a local society, especially as the regular physicians were almost

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Robert Rosenthal is a graduate of the medical school of the University of Vienna, Austria. He began the practice of pediatrics in St. Paul in 1924. His interests in history reach into many areas, but especially the history of medicine and local medical history.

outnumbered by eclectic, homeopathic* and other practitioners. We must remember, too, that both a medical school and a licensing body still were lacking in Minnesota.

On February 14, 1870, 11 physicians met in the office of Dr. D. Herman Smith in the Ingersoll Block on Bridge Square to organize the Ramsey County Medical Society. Dr. Samuel Willey was temporary chairman of this meeting, at which the first officers were elected. They were Drs. Daniel W. Hand, president; Alfred Wharton, vice-president; William Banks, corresponding secretary; Charles Hodge Boardman, recording secretary, and Samuel D. Flagg, treasurer. All were fine physicians of excellent character. It should be noted that Dr. Willey was not elected an officer because he was suffering from advanced tuberculosis.

DRS. FLAGG, Banks and Frank Lawson were appointed to draw up a constitution and by-laws and to have them ready in one week. They worked hard and actually did present the constitution and by-laws a week later. This time 12 physicians were present. All regular* physicians were notified and requested to sign the articles before the next meeting in order to become members; future candidates for membership would have to be voted upon. Twenty-two physicians signed the articles and became members. One more physician wanted to join, but, as he refused to promise to give up some unethical practices, he was not allowed to become a member. We do not know his ethical shortcomings.

Everything looked promising. The first regular meeting was held in Dr. E. H. Smith's office with 10 members in attendance. There were regular meetings during the first year, with an average attendance of about 50 per cent of the membership. This record has never since been reached. However, six members never attended any meetings at all during that first year.

Then a gradual decline of attendance set in and by the end of the fifth year, the

**Eclectic medical schools taught a system which consisted of what was assumed to be the best in all other medical systems. Diseases usually were treated with a single remedy and indigenous plant remedies also were developed. Homeopathic physicians practiced a system of medicine based on the theory that diseases can be cured with small doses of drugs which produced symptoms like the disease in healthy persons. "Regular" physicians were those who had graduated from regular medical schools and often were designated "allopaths." in contrast to homeopaths.*

Society's life had ebbed away. This state of suspended animation lasted four years.

In 1879, the Society was revived and this time its life flickered away after only three years, or, to quote one of the pioneer members, it went into a "nearly fatal state of coma."

THE COMA, however, was short. That same year, 1882, the Society was again reorganized, but after seven more active years, and in spite of increased membership, it was indeed, sick again. Before it completely expired, a strenuous effort was made in 1889 to put it on a more solid foundation. Since then, in spite of recurrent indispositions, the Society has not only continued to live, but has grown larger and stronger.

The cover of the St. Paul Medical College's catalogue. In 1870, the St. Paul School of Medical Instruction was organized as a medical preparatory school. It later was called the St. Paul Medical School, but soon ceased to function. In 1880-81, the St. Paul Medical College was organized as the medical department of Hamline University. Discontinued the next year, the college was reorganized in 1885-6, and located at 204 West Ninth Street. It surrendered its charter in 1888 when the school of medicine was organized at the University of Minnesota.

ST. PAUL MEDICAL COLLEGE

IN THE

CITY OF ST. PAUL, MINN.



ANNUAL CATALOGUE.

1885-'6.



The first Children's Hospital, at Smith and Walnut Streets, opened in 1924. The author comments that he worked in this old hospital.

By 1890, only graduates of medical schools approved by the American Medical Association and properly licensed physicians were accepted as members. The new members were requested to sign the constitution and the code of ethics of the AMA.

Between 1882 and 1891, from 18 to 23 new members were elected. However, some of these increases were offset by deaths, dropouts and members moving away. Election procedures were similar to those today: four-fifths of the vote was required to elect a member. A rejected member could apply again after a year.

Gradually the Society enrolled most of the county's regular physicians, although even at the turn of the century, 20 regular physicians who would have been eligible were not members.

In 1900, when the membership was 137, the Society still had three of its original members: Drs. Wharton, Flagg and C. E. Smith. All army surgeons stationed at Fort Snelling had been given honorary memberships, but by 1900 this practice was considered an unwarranted courtesy and was changed to regular membership. Physicians earned emeritus memberships after only 25 years.

IT WAS FELT that the success of the Society or lack of it depended much upon the programs. To improve them, a pathological committee with Dr. Gustave A. Renz

as chairman was created in the 1890's. It worked well for awhile but lost its momentum after five or six years and was abandoned.

A bone of contention during the Society's early years was a meeting place. At first meetings were rotated through various doctors' offices. Of course, there always were some who objected. After a year or so, Dr. Brewer Mattocks' office was chosen as a regular meeting place, but even this was not satisfactory for any length of time.

Dr. Daniel W. Hand



In 1879, Dr. Alexander J. Stone offered the rooms of the St. Paul School of Medical Instruction. Meetings were held there for three years and then the rotation of doctors' offices began again.

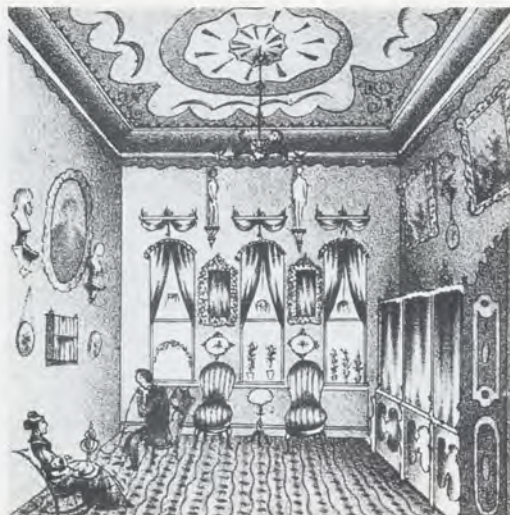
The Society's leading members felt something else had to be done to make the meetings more appealing. Dinner meetings seemed ideal at first. In 1889, arrangements were made with various hotels; the Ryan, the Windsor, and the Aberdeen. This continued with some success until owners of the new Lowry Arcade offered to set aside two rooms for the Society — a large room for meetings and a library and a smaller room for a laboratory.

THE FIRST meeting in these new quarters was held in 1896. This was now neutral ground, nobody could object, and harmony among the members seemed to be inevitable.

This was the first permanent home of the Society. Dinner meetings were abandoned, except for occasional annual banquets, or, for a short time, quarterly dinners. It had seemed that at such meetings there was more sociability among members and this made for increased participation.

At the turn of the century, the membership fee still was only \$5. Every member received all the advantages of membership, including the use of the library and the laboratory, as well as 10 meal tickets, so it would seem that no member could feel cheated.

The financial condition of the Society, however, always had been precarious until the beginning of the present century, when Dr. Edouard Boeckmann became its outstanding benefactor. He put the Society on a sound financial foundation by turning over to it the sterilization of surgical gut by a process he had developed. Income from



A doctor's office of the 1870's, from *Andreas Illustrated Historical Atlas of Minnesota* for 1874.

the sale of this gut produced the principle funds of the Society and, in 1904, the Edouard Boeckmann Library Building Fund was created.

IN 1912 the new Lowry Medical Arts Building on St. Peter Street offered the Society rooms for meetings, library and laboratory. These were the Society's quarters until December, 1930, when it moved to its present quarters which were furnished by the building fund. The new move was properly celebrated, and members had the pleasure of meeting their sole surviving charter member, Dr. Brewer Mattocks, who, though an invalid, was brought from the Old Soldiers Home in Minneapolis.

St. Joseph's Hospital, St. Paul, around the turn of the century.





Dr. Edouard Boeckmann

It was the same Dr. Mattocks who, about 1900, suggested that the Society have a seal and proposed its design: a microscope, scalpel, and pen with the legend, "dissect, observe and write." The latter was translated into Latin by Bishop John Ireland, to read *incidere, inspicere, inscribere*. The artist who designed it was the pioneer druggist, R. O. Sweeny, well-known for his sketches of early St. Paul.

A SPECIAL chapter in the history of the Society should be devoted to the library. It is not as old as the Society itself. When the St. Paul Academy of Medicine and Surgery was liquidated, its collection of books was returned to the donors. No doubt there were some books that belonged to the Society, but they were shifted around and never developed into a real library. When Dr. Henry Longstreet Taylor retired as Society secretary in 1895, he made a plea at the annual meeting that a medical reference library be developed. The president, Dr. Arthur B. Ancker, appointed a committee of three who decided to provide a room, borrow reference works from members, and return them on request. However, 30 years later, most of the original owners no longer were alive and all the books still were in the library.

There were no funds at first, so the library depended upon donations and gifts of books and journals. There is a story that one board member went around every Saturday with an express wagon, visiting doctors' homes and going through attics and storerooms to pick up discarded books and journals. Thus, complete files of good journals gradually were acquired.

IN 1897 the library association's duties were taken over by the Society. Not enough



Dr. John Jay Dewey

money could be raised for the library, so in 1898 the Society began publishing the *St. Paul Medical Journal* with the idea of receiving other journals in exchange, of receiving review copies of medical books, and of raising money through advertising in its pages. The journal lived for 19 years. It ceased publication when the state journal, *Minnesota Medicine*, was launched.

The first editor of the *St. Paul Medical Journal* was Dr. Burnside Foster, probably the most erudite local physician of that period. He served as editor until his death in 1917. Dr. Longstreet Taylor was business manager for 10 years and was followed by Dr. John M. Armstrong.

When the Edouard Boeckmann Library Building Fund was established, in 1904, the library received money to buy important American and foreign journals and textbooks. Dr. Charles Wheaton, the trustee of funds left over from the AMA meeting in St. Paul in 1901, added more than \$3,000 to the Boeckmann fund. Off and on, real wind-

Dr. Alfred Wharton





State Hospital for Crippled Children, or Gillette Hospital, St. Paul, about the 1920's.

falls in the form of entire libraries of retiring or deceased physicians added greatly to the library. In 1912 the library was moved to the Lowry Medical Building and in 1930 to its present quarters in the Society's offices on the 15th floor of the Lowry Medical Arts Building.

A NUMBER of Society members devoted time, interest and knowledge to the library and helped make it outstanding in this area. Besides Drs. Boeckmann and Taylor, they included Drs. John L. Rothrock, John M. Armstrong and Wallace H. Cole, whose knowledge and appreciation of books gave the library its greatest impetus.

An important innovation, thanks to Dr. Armstrong, was the Memorial Fund which provided for gifts in memory of deceased members. The fund has made it possible to acquire many early American medical books and other works important to the history of medicine. These acquisitions have made the library an attraction for scholars all over the United States. Its holdings of rare old books are mentioned in important medical bibliographies.

Space does not permit the listing of all the achievements of members of the Society. It should suffice to mention a few: the foundings by Dr. Alexander J. Stone in 1871 of the St. Paul School for Medical Instruction, a medical preparatory school, which later became the St. Paul Medical School; the first successful cholecystectomy* at St. Joseph's Hospital in 1886 by Dr. Justus Ohage, Sr.; the establishment of the first school of nursing by Dr. Harry J. O'Brien in 1894; the first removal of the entire transverse colon by Dr. Arnold Schwyzer in 1898 (apparently he also was the first American

*Surgical removal of the gall bladder.

physician to use a bronchoscope); the founding by Dr. Arthur A. Gillette of the first State Hospital for Cripples and Deformed Children in this country; the pioneering plastic surgery of Dr. Harry Ritchy; the building by Dr. Walter R. Ramsey of the Children's Hospital, the first in the northern part of the country between Chicago and the West Coast.

The Society has long since outgrown its weak and staggering youth and has become a strong body of medical men who have endeavored to make medical practice in this county and this state comparable to the best in the country. We close the history of the Society at the threshold of its second century, with the wish of the old scholars: *vivat, crescat, floreat* — may it continue to live and grow and prosper.

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Photo by Henry Hall

THE GIBBS HOUSE

Headquarters of the Ramsey County Historical Society, 2097 Larpenteur Avenue West, St. Paul, Minnesota.

THE Ramsey County Historical Society was founded in 1949. During the following years the Society, believing that a sense of history is of great importance in giving a new, mobile generation a knowledge of its roots in the past, acquired the 100-year-old farm home which had belonged to Heman R. Gibbs. The Society restored the Gibbs House and in 1954 opened it to the public as a museum which would depict the way of life of an early Minnesota settler.

In 1958, the Society erected a barn behind the farm house which is maintained as an agricultural museum to display the tools and other implements used by the men who broke up the prairie soil and farmed with horse and oxen. In 1966, the Society moved to its museum property a one-room rural schoolhouse, dating from the 1870's. The white frame school came from near Milan, Minnesota. Now restored to the period of the late 1890's, the school actually is used for classes and meetings. In the basement beneath the school building, the Society has its office, library and collections. In 1968, the Society acquired from the University of Minnesota the use of the white barn adjoining the Society's property. Here is housed a collection of carriages and sleighs which once belonged to James J. Hill.

Today, in addition to maintaining the Gibbs property, the Ramsey County Historical Society is active in the preservation of historic sites in Ramsey county, conducts tours, prepares pamphlets and other publications, organizes demonstrations of pioneer crafts and maintains a Speakers' Bureau for schools and organizations. It is the Society's hope that through its work the rich heritage of the sturdy men and women who were the pioneers of Ramsey County will be preserved for future generations.