Doctors Who Served Mt. Vernon

Many family doctors have set up their practices in the Mt. Vernon area over the years. Doctors such as Dr. William J. Donald, Dr. C. E. Sole in 1892, and Dr. Lewis in 1897, all served the area residents well. Doctor Donald practiced for 15 years in Mt. Vernon. In 1884, Dr. N. H. Goodenow moved his office from the Hotel De Allen to the Andrew Peterson residence, next to the creamery. There was also Dr. Osborne, who came from the west and lived and had his office with Mr. and Mrs. John Korner. Doctor Sweat and Dr. Sowle lived in the house once owned by Arthur Moore. Doctor James M. Kelly lived near what was once the Kelly Hill Cheese Factory, and later moved his practice into Mt. Vernon. There was once a Dr. Evans who also administered to the people of Mt. Vernon in the traditional country doctor fashion. Doctor E. E. McPeek practiced in Mt. Vernon in 1886, and for some years his slogan was, *"Any calls promptly attended to, day or nite."*

The Mt. Horeb Times newspaper reported in 1895, *"Typhoid fever is setting in quite thick at present, Dr. McPeek kept busy day and night with the sick."* In 1884, the newspaper reported, *"Young America has been on the tare since the circus was here in spring, trying their feats on the turning pole. A number of the boys of the village were trying a trapeze performance on Sunday, when George Brader, son of Ike Brader, was thrown from the pole and fell about ten feet and broke his left arm close to the wrist. He quietly walked to Dr, Sweat's office, who set the fracture. He never made a wimper, but stood it without a tear."* Two advertisements for medicines in the Mt. Horeb Times of 1897 read: *"The most pleasant little pill for regulating the bowels, are 'DeWitt's Little Early Risers'. Cure sick head-ache and constipation. Small pill, Small dose."* The second ad read; *"Travelers find a safe companion in 'DeWitt's Colic and Cholear Cure'. A change in drinking water and in diet often causes severe and dangerous complaints. This medicine always cures them."*

Dr. H. A. Sharpe came here as a graduate to begin his practice in 1908. He lived in the Minor house and had his office there. Roger Way now owns the home. After boarding for a time with Mr. and Mrs. Carl Erfurth, Dr. Sharpe married a young woman from the city of Chicago. Making the change to a country home where she had to cook on a wood stove and carry water in a pail was a great hardship for her. She had been used to having a gas stove and running water. Dr. Sharpe died on January 20, 1940. This was a great shock to the community of Mt. Vernon.

Dr. Walter Stebbins was the local country doctor for the Mt. Vernon area from 1901 through 1908. He came to Mt. Vernon from New York, at the age of 26, to start his first medical practice.

Top right facing page:

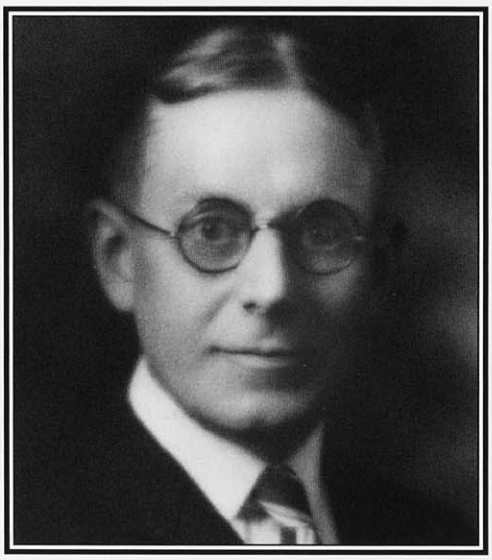
Dr. Walter Stebbins, Mt. Vernon doctor from 1901 to 1908. -Courtesy of Carol Olson.

Left:

The residence and office of Dr. H. A. Sharpe in Mt. Vernon, 1908. -Courtesy of the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society, Inc.

Bottom right facing page:

Mrs. Jennie (Dievendorf) Stebbins. -Courtesy of Carol Olson.



This was back in the days when doctors made house calls, by horse and buggy. Walter got started by leasing horses and a buggy from the local livery stable to make his rounds. In February, 1901, he married Jennie Dievendorf, whom he had met at school in New York. Their first home was over the tavern in Mt. Vernon. They received a cutter and a team of horses as a wedding gift from Jennie's family. As Walter was a city boy, he new little about harnessing horses and had to rely on Jennie, who had a farm background, to teach him. Over time, she let Walter do the harnessing, but always had some pretext to join him in the barn to ensure that he was doing it right. She wanted to make sure that Walter would get to his destination, because the people there needed him. The roads were not nearly so good back then, in fact, the Doctor described them as being *"pretty awful"*. He kept five horses, using one team in the morning and one in the afternoon. Sometimes he used a two-wheeled cart, but even that was often difficult because of the deep wagon tracks.

Dr. Walter Stebbins had many clients to visit and became well acquainted with the local people and the countryside. John and Vona Donald owned a large farm west of town. The first time the Stebbinses had the Donalds over for dinner, Jennie warned Walter to pay attention when dishing up the food because they were short on potatoes, and he should not dish up too much on any one plate. She knew that Walter was inclined to get wrapped up in the conversation and become over generous in serving the food. Well, this was exactly what happened again that night, so Jennie kicked him under the table. Nothing happened, so she kicked him again a bit harder, and then again a third time. At this point, Mr. Donald said, *"Doctor, I've been receiving a message under the table, and I believe it's meant for you!"*. Well, that broke the ice, and the two couples soon became the best of friends.

Jennie gave birth to a son, George, in 1903, who also grew up to be a doctor. In 1905, she gave birth to a daughter, Sarah (Longenecker), who is living in Madison today, a beloved mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Sarah has memories of riding with her father when he made his rounds and of sleigh-rides to clients' homes in the winter. She became a good friend of Delma Donald (Woodburn), daughter of John and Vona Donald. She also remembers some of the houses they lived in, including the one on the east end of Mt. Vernon beyond the park. The house was on a hill on the north side of the road with a sandy playground area. The barn was across the road near the stream. Her father frequently drove the team into the stream to wash off the mud and dust at the end of the day.

The Stebbins family moved to Verona in 1909, and a daughter, Eugenia was born that year. Walter and Jennie moved to Madison in 1971. In addition to the family practice, Dr. Stebbins served as a Madison City Health Officer, and a physician for the Dane County Home in Verona. He was a member the Madison General Hospital medical staff. Dr. Walter Stebbins died in 1968, at the age of 93, after a very active life and a long medical career.