

CHAPTER IX

MEDICAL NOTES

One might assume from my activity in so many things that I would not have much time for the study and active practice of medicine. However, by reading medical and surgical books and magazines, and attending medical and surgical conventions, I think I managed to keep fairly well abreast of the times. As I was always a member of both the Canadian and the Ontario Medical Associations, I usually attended their conventions, held in the principal cities of Canada. In 1923, I made an application to the American College of Surgeons. After I had compiled the history and surgical procedure of one hundred major surgical operations and paid my fee, I was accepted as a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. Following this, I attended some of their conventions in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago. Another surgical convention which I always attended was the N.Y.C.R. This was usually held in New York or Detroit.

It was because I was a surgeon for the old M.C.R. and had so many injuries to care for, that I became especially interested in surgical work. In those days, wounds were usually exposed to infection until attended. We would clean the wounds with soap and water and if lacerated, we used a wet bichloride of mercury dressing. Amputations of fingers and toes were very frequent. Amputations of arms or legs always distressed me because many could have been avoided with proper care by the patient.

Major surgery was not done in St. Thomas by the local doctors until Dr. A. F. Tufford arrived in 1895. He had taken a special course in New York for hernia operations. Many men had their hernias repaired by him. The results were good and the doctor was quite popular. In February 1896, he operated on a girl, ten years old, for appendicitis. She died the next day. Everyone was shocked and the operation for appendicitis became very unpopular. I remember when I did my first appendectomy, it was on a young man working on the M.C.R. On opening the abdomen, I found that the tip of the appendix was adherent and on separation, a few drops of pus appeared. I inserted a drain and closed the wound. I was so fearful of the result that I sent a lawyer to the hospital for the young man to make his will. Fortunately however, he made a quick recovery.

When Dr. Tufford operated for hernias, I often gave the anaesthetic. Then I began to do major surgery myself in 1907. Dr. A. C. Campbell gave the anaesthetic while I operated. By 1908, Dr. A. C. Campbell, Dr. F. O. Lawrence and I worked as a team, doing major surgery. When one operated, the other two either gave the anaesthetic or assisted with the operation.

I remember that we were doing trephining of the skull for depressed fracture, removal of eyes, tonsils, thyroids, chest operations, gall bladder drainage, gastro-enterostomy, appendectomies, repair of ruptured gastric ulcers, hysterectomies, etc. When Dr. A. C. died in 1928, Dr. Douglas Ewin often gave the anaesthetic. Dr. Douglas Carrie and I worked together for a while about this time. I remember assisting him at his first thyroidectomy.

In 1932, my son, John Ferguson Curtis, after graduating in medicine at the University of Toronto Medical Faculty and spending a year each at the Toronto General Hospital and the Royal Victoria in Montreal as an intern, started practice with me. It was at first a partnership, but later we each looked after our own practice, sharing a common reception room. I retired from surgical work in 1941, but continued working part time until 1958, when I finally retired from active practice after about 65 years of medical practice in St. Thomas.

C H A P T E R   X

SOME PERSONAL MEDICAL EXPERIENCES



In my early days in the practice of medicine, I was called to see a baby, a few months old, who had pain in the abdomen and was passing blood. On examination, I found a rather hard lump in the lower abdomen. My diagnosis was intussusception of the bowel. It is a condition in which the bowel runs into itself like the finger of a glove. In those days it was fatal because the bowel was obstructed. The baby's mother brought me a fountain syringe which we filled with warm water. I put a shoulder pad made with a cotton bandage on the nozzle of the syringe. The mother held the baby by the feet while I inserted the nozzle into the bowel and raised the bag over my head to let the water run into the bowel. At first, not much water ran into the bowel but soon we could feel something give way and the intussusception was gone. The patient is a grandfather today.

One night in the horse and buggy days, I was called to a confinement on the Sparta road about a mile from the village. On arriving about two o'clock in the morning, I found that the patient was not having severe pains. I looked around but found nothing to sit on but a wooden chair. I sat and waited and waited until daylight, when I heard a peculiar noise. It turned out to be what seemed to be millions of flies just rousing from their sleep. I took a walk down the lane to think. On coming back to the house, breakfast was being prepared. I told them that I never ate breakfast (which was a lie) and that I would just have a cup of tea without cream and a soda biscuit, which I picked from the middle of the pack. I waited and waited but the patient was still not having any pains or at least very few. It was getting on near dinner time and I was hungry when a happy thought came to me. I had some cousins on the Lake road. I told the patient that I had a patient on the Lake road that I would go to see and come back later. I arrived at William Millman's home as they were about to start dinner. I never enjoyed a meal more in my life. Everything was spick and span and the food delicious. Celia Millman, the daughter of William, was the cook that day. After dinner, on my way back to town, I called on the patient, but found nothing doing, so came on home. After a few days, I was called again and this time was able to finish the job. Incidentally, I never received any pay for that case.

One other night, also in those early days, I was called by Dr. --- of West Lorne to bring instruments and a nurse. I called Miss Casey and we took the train for West Lorne. On arrival, a horse and buggy was on hand. We drove about ten miles over the worst roads I ever saw. On reaching our destination, we found a little boy about ten or twelve years old very ill. On examination I found his abdomen distended and filled with pus. His heart was beating fast and he looked very sick indeed. We gave him an anaesthetic and opened the abdomen in the region of the appendix and out came a large amount of pus. I put in a drain and left him in charge of the nurse. He died the next day. His life could have been saved if he had been attended earlier. Procrastination has caused many deaths.



In March of 1908, I was called to see Mr. and Mrs. Launt by their neighbours. Mrs. Launt was formerly Annie Dodd. On arrival, I found Mr. Launt unconscious and breathing loudly and fast. Mrs. Launt was walking about in a daze. Apparently the night before, on retiring, they had filled the base burner with coal and closed the dampers. They were not seen until that afternoon. They were both brought to the Amasa Wood Hospital. Mrs. Launt soon began to improve, but Mr. Launt was still unconscious. A friend of his asked me if anything more could be done. I told him a blood transfusion might help. He at once offered to donate his blood. I had just read in the "Annals of Surgery" about a direct blood transfusion, so I went to a jeweller and had him make a small tube about one eighth of an inch in diameter and one and a half inches long. The donor and the patient were each put on a table and the left arms of each were brought together. After dissecting the vein of the recipient and the radial artery of the donor, the vein of the recipient was cut and brought through the tube and the end turned back over the tube and the clamps were removed. The blood of the donor was flowing freely. When the donor began to show the loss of blood and the recipient some sign of improvement, the operation was stopped. The improvement did not last long however, as the patient died the next day.

One winter, we had more snow than usual. I was called one day to see a patient north of Yarmouth Centre. I drove a horse and cutter. On turning off the main highway (Talbot Road) there were no tracks in the snow. I had gone about fifty yards, when the horse suddenly floundered in the snow. Apparently there was a bridge and we missed it. Percy, the horse, behaved like a human being. He remained quiet as I unhitched him from the cutter and pulled the cutter back. Then I took hold of his bridle and led him out of the snow, dragging his hind legs because the snow was so deep. I tied Percy to the fence, put a blanket on him and walked about a quarter of a mile over the snow banks to see the patient. This must have been early in my practice, because Percy was the first horse I had as a doctor.

Early in 1920, in the midst of winter, I was at a full dress party at the home of Dr. A. C. Campbell on Metcalf Street when a call came from Dr. Sinclair of Aylmer. He had been called to see a Mr. Cline who had a strangulated hernia. Mr. Cline lived alone near Lyons. I was asked to bring instruments. I went home, changed my clothes, went to the office to pick up instruments and dressings and boarded a Grand Trunk freight for Aylmer. When I got there, I rented a horse and cutter from the livery stable and started off to the patient's home. Dr. Sinclair and I wrapped the instruments in a towel and with all the towels we could find, put them all in a dish pan and boiled them on the stove. Then we put the patient on the kitchen table, prepared the site in the usual way, then draped the hot wet towels over the man's body. The instruments were put on a nearby table on top of a wet sterilized towel. The anaesthesia was given, I think by Dr. Leeson. I relieved the strangulated bowel and closed the wound. This was all done by lamplight. The patient made a good recovery. After the operation was over, someone drove my horse back to Aylmer and I boarded a freight for home.

Another time, Dr. McLay of Aylmer phoned me that he had a patient with a ruptured abdominal cyst and asked me to bring two nurses, instruments and dressings and pick him up at Aylmer. I had just bought a new car and the nurses, Miss Verna McCallum and Miss Roma Chambers and I arrived in Aylmer in style and picked up Dr. McLay. We soon arrived at our destination. The nurses soon had everything in readiness at the patient's home. Dr. Leeson gave the anaesthetic and Dr. McLay assisted. The operation was a success and everyone was happy.

On two occasions while I was operating on a kitchen table, the light failed. Once in Aylmer, when a thunderstorm came up, I had to stop for a few minutes for the electric lights to come on again. Another time was at a house, a mile north of Fingal. We were doing an appendectomy. The room in which the operation was performed was on the north east corner of the house. It was late afternoon. The sun went under a cloud and I had to finish, mostly by feel. The last of my kitchen table operations was in 1926.



# Students Help Refugees

1942



**"OUR KNITTING CLUB"**—a sub-organization of the Middlemarch Junior Red Cross under the direction of their teacher, Miss Marvel Kniffen, of the Middlemarch School, have completed an all wool afghan, to be given to refugee children.

The afghan consists of sixty-three blocks each six inches square. The blocks were knitted by Cathryn Lyle, Louise Lyle, Joan Wilson, Elizabeth Foris, Viola Erskine, Amy Fatcher, Betty Anne Begg, Margaret Dubber and Eleanor Lyle, members of the club, and assembled and sewn by their teacher.

Besides the wool afghan, the members have knitted a number of wash cloths, scarfs and socks. Special commendation goes to a grade three student who has completed two pairs of four-year-old child's socks and two scarfs.

The members, in turn, entertained the club at their parents' home. The collection received at these meetings is to be used to buy a wool blanket for refugees.



<sup>the</sup> Middlemarch Women's Institute  
invites you to a  
**COMMUNITY Potluck  
Supper**

on Jan. 11, 99  
at 6:30 p.m.

at ELGIN Manor

please bring: cups, cutlery, plates  
& favourite dish.

Contact

if coming or not - 769-2392 - Lois Kruppe  
by Jan. 6 633-7017 - Carol Temple  
631-4719 - Mary Carroll

Activities & Entertainment  
for all ages ~~~~~ See you!



MIDDLEMARCH WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

INVITES YOU TO A

**COMMUNITY POTLUCK SUPPER ON JANUARY 11, 1999**

**at: 6:30 P.M. at the ELGIN MANOR.**

B It was during the November meeting of the Middlemarch jW.I. that the topic of a Community potluck was discussed among the members. It was decided that we would hold this event on the second Monday in January 1999, at the Elgin Manor. Marg Carroll would ask if this would be o.k.

A committee was formed with Lois Kruppe, Margaret Carroll and Carol Temple.

Flyers were sketched out by Marion Tufford and then taken to VanPelts stationary in St. Thomas for photocopy. We copied 100 flyers and put one in each mailbox starting

with the Gill Family and along both sides of the road to John and Lois Kruppe. The families were to phone one of the committee members if they were coming.

The evening of the potluck was something to be desired. It was snowing hard with big wet flakes and accumulating fast. Some members were afraid that we would have a poor turnout because of the weather but we had a great turnout, over 60 people. Robertta Butler sat at the registration table and greeted everyone and asked them to sign and wear a nametag.

We sat down to a great variety of food, what a spread there was, from salads, hot and cold dishes and desserts. We supplied tea, coffee and McDonalds orange drink.

After the meal everyone was welcomed by our President Lois Kruppe. Lois asked everyone if they were interested in having a second potluck next year. There was an overwhelming applause. It was decided to have a second potluck in January of 2000. Flyers would again be sent out to remind everyone.

After the meal everyone, with chair in hand, filed out to the main room where Jim Waite, of St. Thomas was waiting to speak about his adventures in Japan with the CANADIAN CURLING TEAM. Margaret Carroll introduced Jim. Jim was with the Canadian Curling Team in Japan for the Olympics. Jim was a coach for the team. The clothing company ROOTS sponsored the team. The team were outfitted with clothing for the games, casual wear, sleepwear, snowsuits, etc., even underwear. An infant son of one of the team members was outfitted with various sizes of clothing right down to the diapers had the ROOTS logo on them.

Jim had the children from the audience model the clothing that he brought with him to show. The children had a great time showing these items around the room to the various people.

Jim Lyle thanked Jim Waite for the very interesting report on his involvement with the team.

The Middlemarch W.I. presented a donation to the Manor for our use.

The Institute also presented Mr. Waite with a small donation.



# METHODIST CHURCH, MIDDLEMARCH

REV. A. G. HARRIS, PASTOR

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## GRAND ORGAN DEMONSTRATION

—ON—

# Monday, March 28, 1910

Under the Auspices of the Ladies' Aid

MRS. JOHN CURTIS, President

MRS. B. STINCHCOMBE, Secretary

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## PROGRAMME

Chairman's address.....	Rev. A. G. Harris
Music.....	By the Choir
Selection.....	Prof. Tanny, London
Selection.....	Quartette from St. Thomas
Reading.....	Miss M. Thompson
Solo.....	Colin McKenzie, St. Thomas
Duet.....	Misses Harris and Timewell, Fingal
Selection.....	Prof. Tanny, London
Reading.....	Miss Smith, London
Solo.....	Prof. Tanny, London
Reading.....	Miss Thompson
Duet.....	Misses Harris and Timewell
Solo.....	Miss Smith, London

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Admission 25 cents; Children 15 cents

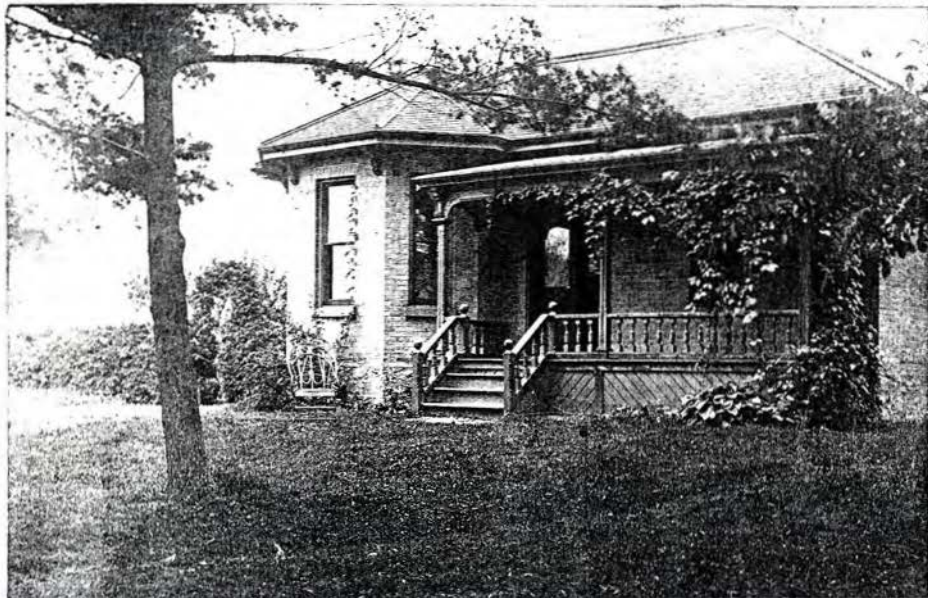
GOD SAVE THE KING





*Middlemarch Womens Institute*





RESIDENCE OF JOHN HENRY FUTCHER  
MIDDLEMARCH. ONTARIO





C 1902

AT. HOMEVIEW FARM

MIDDLEMARCH. ONTARIO

L.R. JESSIE "FUTCHER" LYLE  
DORA "FUTCHER" DOWLER

JAMES NORTHWOOD FUTCHER HOME