

## Early Doctors and their Horses

Ask anyone of a certain age what they remember nostalgically about doctors and their childhoods and they will say house calls. I certainly remember when the doctor came to my house to give me a shot of some kind, and I locked myself in the bathroom. The doctor remembered it also.

In the early days of Greene, the doctor made his house calls with horse and buggy. And one doctor possibly rode his horse. I have anecdotes about three doctors who were in Greene from 1861 to 1904 and their horses.

The first is Dr. Allen Mohawk. Mildred Folsom has wonderful stories in her book, *From Raft to Railroad*, about Dr. Mohawk. A Mohawk Indian, he was over six feet tall, a skilled horseman and a lover of sports. He lived in the brick cottage on South Chenango Street where the Joseph Egglestons live now and then moved one house south to where Tracy Gaylord lives. He died there in 1869 and is buried in Sylvan Lawn Cemetery. There are stories of his war-whoops startling people and other horses to his advantage in races. His own horse, a light bay with a white face, was very accustomed to it. Sometimes when he was on his way home, he would let out one of his war-whoops to alert his wife to open the barn doors so he could enter at full gallop. Wouldn't it have been fun to have him come to the house to cure you? Mrs. Folsom says that his skill with herbs was legendary. His daughter, Carolina Mohawk, carried on the tradition of horsemanship and theatrics. She was known professionally as Go-Won-Go, toured Europe in stage productions and had her own Indian shows. More about her in another article.

In the very same house where Dr. Mohawk died, another doctor came to live in 1873, Dr. George O. Williams. He had started practicing medicine in Smithville Flats in 1867. His father, Rufus Williams, was a doctor in Upper Lisle. Dr. Williams had two horses, Nellie and Penelope, that his granddaughter, Jane Williams Kelly, has written about and I am quoting from her letter: 'When my father (Ray Williams) was a teenager, his father had a horse, Nellie, who disliked everyone but the doctor. It was Ray's job to brush her. He had to be careful, as she would reach around and nip him. When the doctor's father came to visit from Upper Lisle, he put his horse and buggy in the stall next to Nellie. (This stall was in the barn that Dr. Mohawk used, and is now the upright of the Williams' house on South Canal Street). Nellie, of course, reached right around and nipped at the guest horse, peacefully munching hay, suspecting nothing. Great-grandfather looked around the barn to find something to put between the stalls. When he got some boards fixed, he couldn't get out of the stall and had to climb into the hay chute and get out that way. His brother, watching from the open barn door, thought the whole incident hilarious.'

'Some time later, grandfather Williams felt that Nellie was unable to stand the rigors of being a doctor's horse--out day and night in all kinds of weather. She then went to a farmer on the Coventry road. After a few years, grandfather went down the road on his way to Greene and saw Nellie with other horses. He left his horse and buggy and walked back to the pasture. When he called her, Nellie left the other horses and came right to the fence. She and grandfather spent some time together. As he finally went to leave, Nellie walked with him on her side of the fence to the end of the pasture. Grandfather was a gentle, soft-hearted person and that Nellie still

remembered him after a long time just about broke him up’

‘When grandfather Williams died of pneumonia in February of 1916, he had a horse, Penelope, who was everything a lady should be—gentle, obedient, a friend to one and all. She was sold, along with the buggy and sleigh, her blankets and tack.’

‘One blanket, never sold, was an almost new red plaid. It was our extra blanket, known as the ‘horse blanket’. It went to Girl Scout camp and, later, to Boy Scout camp. It was my extra blanket at Hartwick College.’

‘Now a little threadbare, Penelope’s blanket is folded up on the top shelf of the linen closet here in our house.’

Now this treasured ‘horse blanket’ has a new home in the Library Museum run by the Greene Historical Society. Jane graciously sent it to the museum last year.

In 1904, Dr. David Ralph Bowen came to Greene to practice. He was the grandfather of Molly Conner Thomson. When Molly came to live here, she met Dr. Louis Juliand, a veterinarian in Greene. He was so tall that sometimes he had to bend down to look in a horse’s mouth. He knew Dr. Bowen and told Molly that her grandfather went out in all kinds of weather to make house calls. I quote from a brochure that Molly gave me of some reminiscences of the doctor:

‘So much of my country practice was in Central or Northern New York State that weather made an exaggerated impression...In the Greene area neighborliness was emphasized and more than once I answered calls with an escort of six to 10 teams. The shovelers were followed by a four horse team dragging an iron cauldron in which a man sat. This turned a good one-way track into a well packed two-way road on the return trip.’

‘It was at Greene that I lost a much prized mare. Traveling along a drifted road the cutter upset, throwing me out. The frightened mare turned sidewise throwing the cutter against a tree, causing her to stumble forward to strike her head and break her neck. For weeks I had to hire a rig from the local livery, which was also the horse swapping center. One village character scarcely ever lost in a horse trade because the one he swapped was so nearly valueless that he couldn’t lose much. The entrance to the stable was alongside the Chenango House barn, the porch of which was used by loafers. As this man drove past the porch one day his new horse began, as David Harum said, “to stand without hitching”. Chirping the reins and other tricks seemed to have no effect. One of the spectators sang out, “Cal, what you got there?” “Humph”, said he, “real estate I guess, but I can’t move it.”’

After his upstate New York experience, Dr. Bowen settled near Philadelphia and became an “X-ray Man” as they were so called around 1910 at the Pennsylvania Hospital.

Roentgenology was a new field and he wrote numerous papers on the developing process and was clearly a leader. He mentions that following the flu epidemic in 1918 and the gas attacks in France, there was an enormous demand for X-rays.

There are countless more horse stories to be told. The bond between man and horse is strong. Clifford Thomas had Kit. Ann Bouley had Babe. Share your story by emailing [pogr@aol.com](mailto:pogr@aol.com)

