

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

The early years of medical care compared to today

Ripon has a history of medical options dating back to the mid-1800s, when the community was founded.

By 1850, Ripon had 22 doctors during a time when the city's overall population was approximately 600 people, although there wasn't a fully graduated physician practicing until 1853.

Even though not officially certified or graduates of medical colleges, records state there were many able and popular doctors practicing who had "medical training," plus experience as an acting physician.

Popular physicians in early Ripon

Dr. Aaron Everhard (1824-1892) was one of the most successful physicians and popular citizens of Ripon. Educated in typical school rooms at that time period, he went on to graduate from Western Reserve Academy in Cleveland, Ohio in 1848.

After medical practice in Ohio, he received additional education from Rush Medical College in Chicago and came to Green Lake. He then established his practice in Ripon in 1856, where he partnered with a Dr. Rogers for 12 years, and later Dr. Henry L. (H.L.) Barnes for two years. In addition to his medical practice he was elected mayor of the city of Ripon 13 times between the years 1871 and 1892.

Everhard also served as postmaster for four years, and was sought for advice in public affairs. He prospered in Ripon until his death in 1892.

Everhard's Federal Census reads that his family lived in Ward 2 in the city of Ripon, without any specific street address.

H.L. Barnes (1834-1918) started and grew his practice as a bright, active and successful physician and surgeon in Ripon. He arrived in Wisconsin in 1846 and chose to settle here after graduating from Cleveland Medi-



DR. HENRY L. Barnes stands proudly in front of his medical office located at 222 Watson St. in the late 1800s. This building is no longer standing and is an open lot next to the current BPG Salvage Store business. Inset, is Dr. Aaron Everhard's college certificate from Rush Medical School in Chicago.

submitted photos

cal College in 1858.

In addition to his medical practice, he joined the Civil War to serve as a military surgeon attending to the wounded in North Carolina, Indiana, Washington, D.C. and Milwaukee, before being discharged from military service. He maintained his medical and military careers as a veteran of two wars and 47 years of service as a commander in the National Guard.

H.L. Barnes, his wife and children lived at 608 Woodside Ave.

His practice grew to include his son, Dr. Edgar C. Barnes (1865-1954), who attended Ripon schools and medical, plus surgical colleges in Chicago and New York. He returned to Ripon in 1890 to setup practice.

Edgar Barnes grew up on Woodside Avenue, but throughout his adult life he and his wife, Amy Field Barnes, lived on Hall, Tygart

and Jackson Streets — the longest time at 344 Jackson St.

Like his father, Edgar Barnes had a long military career starting at age 16 as a Ripon "Prairie City Guard" and was a 2nd Lt. as part of the U.S. Army in the Spanish American War with service in Puerto Rico. Returning from military service, he resumed his medical practice in Ripon and was then called to World War I in Europe, where he performed the role of major surgeon, like his father before him. He then once again came home to Ripon to serve in the National Guard until retiring after 25 years of military service — all the while working as a doctor in Ripon.

Dr. Eldon. L. Watson (1896-1961) served as a physician and surgeon in Ripon for 22 years. His early chosen field of study was engineering at Northland College in Ashland, Wis.

Afterward, he attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison and earned degrees to become a physician and surgeon.

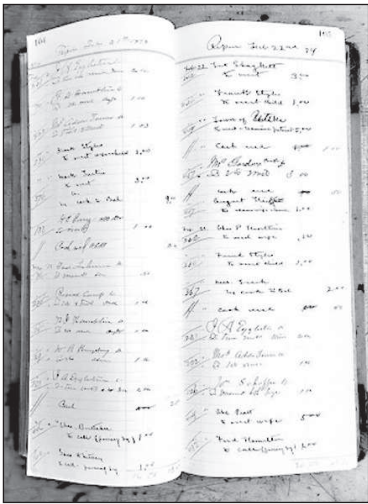
Watson served as a pilot in World War I and was shot down while flying over France. He survived and returned to the United States, where he became a teacher for a short time before relocating to Ripon to purchase the medical practice of Dr. Backus and Dittmer located at 320 Watson St. Watson and his family resided at 545 Watson St.

His daughter, Patricia Watson Wissing, remembers her father "was on-call 24 hours a day for patients located in Ripon and also the surrounding rural farm areas."

This meant he kept office

hours, plus made house calls to city residences and farms.

Wissing doesn't recall conversations about Watson delivering any babies. She knows that doctor and patient visits, plus diagnoses, were always kept private and confidential.



THIS IS ONE example from Dr. Henry L. and Dr. Edgar C. Barnes' patient and billings ledger dated January 1894.

submitted photo

donated to the Ripon Historical Society over the years and it is interesting to see the types of medical work these doctors were practicing, plus the associated costs.

Costs are categorized and listed by patient names as "visits, prescriptions, medicine, home (meaning house calls), dietary (meaning recommended foods), vaccinations, consultations, and attendant" only. Next to these medical ledger entries are the associated costs which range from



THESE ARE just some of the surgical tools used by Dr. Henry L. Barnes throughout his career in Ripon. submitted photo

\$1 to \$5 (which equates to \$38.05 to \$190.26 today).

No diagnosis or patient's personal health conditions were noted or listed anywhere within the ledgers.

Ripon's doctors today

One hundred years after the city's founding, in 1960 there were only nine practicing physicians (including surgeons) listed in the Ripon Telephone Directory.

The first-ever Ripon Municipal Hospital opened in 1936 with 15 patient rooms to accommodate up to 19 patients. Watson served as chief of staff to the hospital, in addition to his ongoing practice. The hospital building was located near Griswold, Metomen and Newbury streets. That hospital (now converted into residential apartments) operated until the current and much larger SSM Health (formerly Agnesian) Ripon Community Hospital opened in 2014.

Ripon's medical networks and facilities today, including patient centers, offer access to more than 50 physicians and medical specialists serving the community of more than 7,000 people.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.riponhistory.org.



A DOCTOR'S HOUSE call bag included medicine and supplemental treatments for use in case of emergencies and illnesses.

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