

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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A tribute to a country doctor
By Jay Graybeal

Last year the historical society published "Carroll County Physicians of the Nineteenth Centuries" by Dr. Theodore Woodward. Since then some new materials have come to light. Recently Lola Crawford of Westminster shared a June 24, 1938 *Times* front page editorial written by editor H. Peyton Gorsuch. Gorsuch wrote of Dr. Jesse Francis Crawford (1819-1885) who practiced in the Franklin district from 1844 until his death:

"One day this week, Carroll Dulaney, the Baltimore News-Post columnist said: 'Another thing I'd like to see before I die is the old fashioned doctor who asks to see your tongue.'

"Well Carroll, hope your wish may become a reality before flowers are placed upon your casket and 'taps' are sounded. Do not know whether there are any of the old-fashioned doctors who diagnosed their cases by looking at the tongue, are still living and practicing in your domain, but am inclined to believe there are some of the good old-time doctors living in some of the counties in Maryland.

"Way back in the days when we went barefoot in summer and wore home knit woolen stockings and copper toed red top boots in winter, Dr. J. Francis Crawford was our family physician and a fine, jolly character he was. Even his presence in a sick room was cheering and helpful. Aside from his profession, fox hunting was his hobby and he always kept good riding and jumping horses, and a fine pack of hounds.

"On his professional calls, at least at our house, he was seldom in a hurry and if near meal time would accept the always standing invitation to remain. No matter what the ailment was the first thing he said to the patient was, "Let me see your tongue," then he would feel your pulse, ask a question or two, and decide upon the medicine to give. He would sit down at the table, open his saddle bags, take out some bottles, and, without measuring or weighing, pour powders from two or three bottles, mix and then divide in about equal portions, wrap neatly in little papers and give directions when and how often to be given. If his decision was pills, he would use a liquid medicine to mix the powders and knead to the proper consistency, then roll into a long strip, cut into pill size with a knife, and with deft fingers shape them into perfectly round pills. One thing we remember was whether powders, pills or liquids, they were not easy to take, usually bitter and far from tempting in taste. But they seemed to be effective and his percentage of cures would rank well up with the physicians of the present day.

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"The county doctor of those ancient times was an important person in a community, not only in illness, but he was often called upon for advice and counsel in business and family affairs. He endured many hardships and the weather was never too bad or the roads too rough to answer calls, by day or night and he never stopped to consider whether or when he would be paid his small fee, and oftentimes he was never paid, but if the family needed his services again he would go.

"Many of these old country doctors were uncrowned kings, and their lives were spent in rendering service to their fellowman.

"Not appreciated as they should have been on earth, trust they are now wearing crowns and playing harps."

Gorsuch's description of Crawford corroborates a belief by Woodward that the early county physicians were deeply devoted to their patients and their communities.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

*Photo caption: Dr. Jesse Francis Crawford c.1875, subject of H. P. Gorsuch's 1938 editorial.
Photo given to historical society by Lola Crawford.*