



DR. H. L. WHITMAN

DOCTOR HENRY L. WHITMAN

One of the best and most beloved of early settlers of Des Moines was Doctor Henry Lyman Whitman.

He was born in Hartford, Connecticut, December Thirtieth, 1814, of English ancestry, who crossed the Atlantic in 1638, four years after the family from whom my own family descended, all of whom settled in the same vicinity in Connecticut.

He spent his life on a farm until the age of seventeen, receiving the education afforded by the common schools of that day. During his eighteenth year, he attended Hartford Academy, and fitted himself to enter Amherst College, from which he graduated in 1839, with distinction as a scholar. He then spent two years teaching in Tennessee and Missouri, when he returned to Weathersfield, Connecticut, and began the study of medicine with Doctor Welch, an eminent practitioner, preparatory to entering Jefferson Medical College, at Philadelphia, from which he graduated in 1845.

His Western teaching tour convinced him the West presented the best inducements to a young man with aspirations or ambition, and he came to Freeport, Illinois, where he remained two years, securing an extensive and good practice, but the spirit of migration was rife everywhere, and in 1848, the lead-mine district of Dubuque was an attractive point. Thither he went, and for five years was engaged in laborious and lucrative business.

In 1853, Raccoon Forks and Fort Des Moines had come into prominence as the probable Capital of the state. Public sentiment was largely in favor of removing the Seat of Government from Iowa City to a more central point in the state, which Fort Des Moines, geographically, was then admitted to be. The military post had given it a prestige which portended well to that end. It was also the objective point of several railroads—on paper, it is true. Emigration was moving toward it rapidly, and the Doctor came that year.

The town was small, little more than a village, with less than eight hundred inhabitants, great and small, the small ones averaging more than the usual census ratio, for the stork was a busy bird in those days.

The most accessible and comfortable tavern in town was the Marvin House, near Walnut, on the east side of Third. It was the headquarters of the stage coach lines, and the home of the most popular young men of that time. The Doctor being a bachelor, fond of good company, also made it his home until the Demoin House was built, when he removed there, remaining until his marriage, in December, 1865, when he purchased the residence built by J. E. Jewett, which stood on First Street, and was removed to give place to the new Library Building.

He opened an office in a small frame building on the north side of Walnut Street, near Fourth, and soon found demand for his services. There were but few settlers in the county, and the long drives over bad roads, or no roads at all, in sunshine and storm, were wearisome, and added much to the labor of his town practice, but he never refused a call. His sympathetic nature, and loyalty to the principles of his profession, dominated all idea of pecuniary profit. He soon won the most implicit, abiding confidence and trust of the people. In every home, his presence was welcomed as a benizen of helpfulness. His practice assumed such proportions, it was a marvel how he could do so much, for he was a regular contributor to leading medical journals, and had extensive business interests.

In 1858, he originated the movement for the organization of the Polk County Medical Society, was elected its first President, and held the place several years. He was a member of the American Medical Association, and the Iowa State Medical Society. He stood very high in the profession, and took great interest in the honor and standing of its membership. Charlatanism and quackery in all their forms he did not hesitate at all time, and in all places, to denounce in terms unmistakable—there was no ambiguity about it. He was a "Regular" in all the term implies, a model, talented, educated physician.

In 1871, when the Citizens' Bank was organized, he became a stockholder, and when, in 1872, it was reorganized by Governor Merrill as a

national bank, he was elected one of the Directors, a place he held during his life.

Politically, he was a Whig, but always opposed to slave-holding, and, with the earnestness of an Abolitionist, advocated the emancipation of the slaves in the South long before the Civil War came, a position which, at that time, required some moral courage, for there was a strong pro-slavery sentiment in the body politic of Polk County. The Doctor, however, was not a politician, took little or no part in it. His mind and efforts were engrossed in helping the sick, the needy, and community generally.

During the war period, when its terrible effects began to impress themselves on the families of the men engaged on the battlefields, and charity was needed for their relief in many ways, the Doctor's patriotism was most generously manifested. During the entire war, a call from the family of a soldier was responded to as quickly and cheerfully as though a millionaire's dollars were behind it—in fact, more so. For all such service, he refused compensation, and seemed only pleased that he could render aid.

He was a sanitarian, and believing the healthfulness of a community depended largely on its cleanliness, he took great interest in the sanitary affairs of the town.

Socially, he possessed great conversational powers, and scholastic attainments of high degree. He was modest, affable, and companionable. In all the relations of life, he was the exemplar of ideal manhood. He was a stern moralist, excluded from his intimacy all who did not meet his standard of rectitude, yet his sympathies reached all humanity. He regarded his profession as intended for the good of those with whom he lived, and so it was he won his way into the hearts and homes of the community to a notable degree. It was said of him by Doctor Ward, one of the well-known old-time physicians of the town: "No man more completely had the hearts and affections of the people than Doctor Whitman."

He was an active member of the Old Settlers' Association, and heartily welcomed at its periodical gatherings.

He was public-spirited, and actively supported all measures to promote the church and school.

Religiously, he was a Congregationalist, but on coming to Des Moines, there being no organization of that faith, he affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, and formed a companionship with Father Bird which intensified as the years passed, so long as they lived. When the Congregational Church was organized, he became a member of it. He was a true, Christian man, whose highest ideal was to render full service to God, his fellow-man, his family, and himself.

In 1875, he retired from practice, devoting his time to business affairs and literary work, until 1884, when his health failed, and he went to Duluth for recuperation, where he was attacked with a severe cold, which, despite the skill of the best medical men, terminated fatally, August Seventeenth, 1885, and caused profound sorrow throughout the town, county, and state. Expressions of love and esteem of him were received from all directions. The homes of Des Moines had lost a friend in need, a wise counselor and comforter in adversity.

On receipt of notice of his decease, the County Medical Society, in special session, adopted resolutions expressive of its profound esteem for him, his professional integrity, devotion to principle and honor, his irreproachable character, and worth as a citizen.

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