

Charles Deland Clawson, M.D. 1838-1917
And
Bethesda Sanitarium, Havana, New York
By
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There is an old saying, "The history of a town is found in the lives of its citizens." In truth, this can be said of Dr. Charles Deland Clawson, one of our pioneer doctors.

Dr. Clawson, grandfather of the late Charles Lattin, was born in Lodi, N.Y. in the early part of the nineteenth century, May 17, 1838. Here he attended the local schools, and always interested in the health and welfare of others, he decided early in life to make medicine a career. After attending Seneca Institute in Lodi for a year, he began the study of medicine under the direction of Dr. James Flood, a prominent Lodi physician at the time. The following year, 1858, he entered the Medical College of the University of Michigan at the age of twenty years. While there, he made his home with a Dr. Lovejoy who assisted him in his studies and took him upon many of his visits so that he gained a practical knowledge of the profession. For a year or so after this, he taught school in order to earn enough money to further his studies in medicine. The Lattin family still has the school bell that he used on his desk.

In the fall of 1860 he attended the University of Buffalo Medical College, receiving his degree in 1861. After graduation he started his professional career in Canoga in Seneca County, his dream of medicine almost fulfilled. In 1862 he married Miss Loretta L'Amoreaux, daughter of a prominent Lodi family. For the next twenty years he maintained his practice in Canoga, which was steadily increasing. Eight children were born to the Clawsons, four of whom survived: Mrs. John Quirk, Watkins Glen, Mrs. Charles Lattin, Elmira, Miss Carrie Clawson, Montour Falls, and Monroe Schuyler Clawson, Newark, New Jersey.

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In 1876, Dr. Clawson, while still living and practicing in Canoga, purchased what was then known as the Cole's Magnetic Springs in Havana. It was a large two-story structure located where the present Montour Motel is operating now, near Clawson Boulevard and Catharine Street in Montour Falls. For five years he commuted by steamboat to operate the place as a hospital. After the Bethesda Sanitarium, so named, had been raised and a new first floor built to make it a three-story building, the doctor's family moved here from Canoga, in 1881.

For 40 years he and his wife operated a fifty-bed hospital, and this with no assistance from the community financially. As many as seven surgeons performed in the operating room. The treatment of cancer was known far and wide. They also conducted a State and Federally approved Nursing School in the Sanitarium. In 1883 the property known as the Westlake Sanitarium, situated only a short distance from the spring was purchased and the cancer cases transferred to that building.

About this time Dr. Clawson wrote two booklets, one, "The Symptoms, Causes, Cure and Prevention of Cancer," the other, "Orificial Surgery." He also invented several kinds of surgical scissors. In those days it was neither profitable nor ethical to profit from these inventions. But their design is little changed from the originals. Many of these items, including Dr. Clawson's medical bag, related papers, booklets, etc. may be viewed in the Schuyler County Museum, located on Catharine Street in Montour Falls.

Dr. Clawson continued to further perfect himself in his chosen calling by attending Hahnemann Medical College in Philadelphia, and later Chicago Homeopathic College for Orificial Surgery Study. And his wife contributed most of her time assisting the Doctor by directing the complicated nursing and housekeeping of the establishment, as well as the bookkeeping and strictly business part of the enterprise. "Without him, its head, there would have been no Bethesda Sanitarium, without her, its heart, it could never have succeeded."

It is understandable why "Bethesda Sanitarium" was so called. "Bethesda" was a spring in Jerusalem, which was supposed to possess healing powers "when the water is troubled." Jesus here cured a sick man who had waited 38 years but had always been set aside by others. Other influences radiated from Bethesda Sanitarium aside from mere bodily healing...

The Sanitarium was also known for its treatment of chronic diseases, rheumatism, neuralgia, asthma, liver and kidney complaints, nervous and spinal diseases, diabetes, etc. Methods of treatment were varied. One of the advertisements reads:

Our Institution

Has been improved in a great many respects during the past year. It is supplied with all the modern improvements in remedial agencies. We have a full supply of electrical apparatus, used in the treatment of diseases. We give Thermal, Electro-Thermal, Electro-Therapeutic, Shower Chemical, Sea Water, and Local Baths of ladies and gentlemen, each class being supplied with a competent attendant. We also give hot and cold packs.

We design keeping it in a quiet, home-like way, where patients may have an opportunity for rest and recreation, away from care and responsibility. We get rid of medicines as far as possible, and depend on natural remedial agencies. We try to supply our patients with proper food and correct hygienic conditions. We, however, do not diet every person who comes to us. The tables are supplied with fresh vegetables, butter and milk from our garden and farm. Ladies or gentlemen visiting Havana for healthy, pleasure or business will find good accommodations at moderate prices.

Bethesda Sanitarium Company
1889 *Montour Springs, Havana, N. Y.*

Bethesda Sanitarium became famous for its water treatments, famous for the water baths from its natural springs which contained curative properties such as iron, lime, soda, magnesia, sodium, etc. This remarkable spring was discovered to possess curative properties in the year 1860 by a young boy who was working nearby. The boy had a chronic ulcer on his hand, which had been declared incurable. He was in the habit of going to this spring to bathe his hand in the waters several times a day, for the purpose of relieving the burning sensation in the sore. In a few days he discovered that it commenced healing, and by constantly bathing it in the waters, it was entirely healed.

This was followed by the trials of others which had a like effect, and notably so in the case of Dr. Post, one of our local physicians, whom we knew as our family doctor. His office was located on Henry Street. He was a remarkable man, very slight in stature, almost 5', pocked skin and large nose, always smiling, congenial, even enjoying a nip or two when offered.

Dr. Post, by accident, had sulphuric acid spilled on his face, which resulted in a large open sore, an open ulcer that covered a large part of the left side of his face, and involved one of the eyelids. This sore could not be healed by any means, which he used. But very soon after he began to bathe his face in the water of the spring, and using it as drinking water. The surface began to heal, and soon it was cured. Other cases of like nature were cured in a short time.

It is interesting to note that this spring water was discovered to be magnetic also. Mr. Ball, then editor of the Havana Journal, believing that the water might be magnetic tested it with his pocketknife, and found, sure enough, that it would pick up a common ten-penny nail.

As children, we could recall the walking to and from the Montour Grammar School, which was located here in the present Rural Urban Center. We used a short cut through the Sanitarium grounds. A well-worn path from Broadway Street to Catharine Street cut through the northwest end of the property. This walk invited many an inquisitive search among the debris of the half demolished structure. Pieces of lumber were widely scattered over the grounds. Parts of the foundation stones still remained, and many nails and mortar fragments strewn about.

Picking our way carefully among the ruins, we were anxious to search for various bottles filled with unknown particles and specimens, and small bottles filled with bright colored powders and pills. There never failed to excite our curiosity and imagination, although we realized that the contents would be poisonous and harmful.

And we never used this path without stopping at the magnetic spring. The small structure over the spring had long been razed. All that remained was the foundation wall and the steps that led down to the spring where the water flowed. Cupping our hands we would bend down to get our drink of water, never realizing the curative powers that had been so famous, and never realizing how unsanitary the surrounding area could be. If this spring were here today, it would be located just about 50 feet from Catharine Street toward the center of Clawson Boulevard.

Mention should be made of Dr. and Mrs. Clawson's influence on our village of Montour Falls. Both were very active in Community affairs. Dr. Clawson was one of the incorporators of the Elmira & Seneca Lake Railroad. He was the first one to purpose the building of this road, which work was subsequently taken up by General Mulford and pushed forward to completion. He was a director of the Havana Bridge Works, the present Shepard Niles Crane and Hoist Co., as well as Trustee of the Cook Academy Board. Both he and his wife were active in the Methodist Church, both strong advocates of the cause of Temperance.

Dr. Clawson died at the age of 79, and his funeral was conducted at his home known as "The Brick House," the present site of our Museum.

Just as Dr. Clawson had left an historical legacy for us to share, so can we say that his grandson, Charles Lattin, our late departed friend, had also left his historical mark on our lives, by making it possible for our County to own and enjoy his home, "The Old Brick Tavern Stand" as our Schuyler County Historical Museum. This must have been no easy decision for him and his family to make, especially since they have shared so many happy memorable years within this home; and too, the boyhood memories and the family stories of his Grandparents that must have some from his parents many times have reflected the past life that must have taken place in and near that home.

Like his grandfather Clawson, Charles Lattin, too, gave up a promising position in Washington, D.C. to return here to his hometown for the remainder of this life.

He also became active in Community Affairs, being a former Trustee of the Village of Montour Falls, and very active in the activities of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, a member of the Sullivan Trail Council of Boy Scouts of America, and a member of the Schuyler County Historical Society.

Retired as the advertising manager of the Shepard Niles Crane & Hoist Corp., he continued to be progressive and public spirited. He dedicated his life; not to medicine as his grandfather, but to many untold humanitarian acts of generosity, kindness, and encouragement. His strong moral and just standard of life touched all who knew him, and his friends and colleagues held him in the highest esteem and respect.

We would like to think that had Dr. Clawson been here at this time, he too, would join with us in saying these few words, "Well done, Charlie."