

Pioneer Physicians in Martin County

A number of the early settlers in Martin County included doctors. Dr. Schafer came to Center Chain in 1858. Dr. McDuff served the Tenhassen area from 1862-1865. Dr. Denton was appointed county physician in 1865. Dr. Orville Patterson Chubb came to Martin County in 1865. Dr. David Winslow Hunt arrived in Fairmont in 1871. The following is an account of one of the pioneer doctors of Martin County as documented in the MCHS archives and in the May 20, 1978, edition of the *Sentinel*.

Among the pioneer physicians in Martin County, apparently the first doctor to permanently settle in Fairmont was Dr. David Winslow Hunt. He was born in Mason, New Hampshire in 1845. He was the son of Dr. Nehemiah A. Hunt, a “circuit riding doctor” of Blue Earth and Faribault counties in the early 1860’s.

In 1862, Hunt entered the Union Army at the age of seventeen. He spent some time in a Confederate prison, endured some minor wounds, and after a lengthy hospital stay was discharged and returned home.

After regaining his health, which took a considerable amount of time, he resumed his education. He was a teacher in Vernon Center in 1868-69. He then graduated from Ann Arbor Medical School in 1871 and moved to Fairmont that same year. He practiced medicine in Fairmont for the next thirteen years.

Hunt, a likable mild mannered individual was considered to be a good doctor. He had a long, thick mustache in contrast to the beard worn by most doctors of that era. He likely performed the first operation of any significance in Martin County. This operation, considered a “cutting” operation, took place in 1874 and involved hernia repair for John Rooney who lived in a log cabin. There were also instances of amputations made necessary as a result of hands and feet being frozen. One amputation of both feet was done in the basement of a log cabin.

An interesting article in an 1875 edition of the *Sentinel* read as follows: “Dr. Hunt went to St. Paul to attend a State Medical Society. He will be gone about a week and in the meantime people had better refrain from getting sick.” Hunt, the only physician in Fairmont at that time, also owned and operated a drug store.

In 1882, Dr. David Winslow Hunt turned his practice over to his brother, Dr. Fred N. Hunt. Dr. David Winslow Hunt felt that he could no longer tolerate the Minnesota climate and, as a result, moved to California where he practiced medicine in Anaheim, Redlands, and Glendale. During his years in California, he invested much of his income in a number of speculative ventures of that time including orange orchards, walnut groves, and oil wells. Although he failed to reap the benefits of these investments, some of the land he owned on Signal Hill and Long Beach later made millionaires of many people.

Dr. Hunt passed away in 1922 at the Soldiers Home in Sawtell.

For more information about Dr. David Winslow Hunt and other pioneer physicians of Martin County, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.