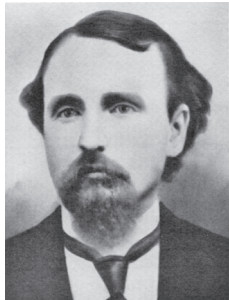


Military Doctors Preceded St. Alexis Founding



Dr. B. Slaughter

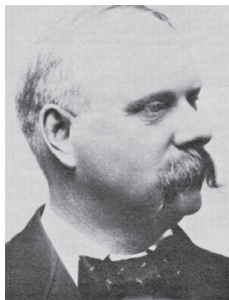
Professional medicine came to Bismarck soon after the town was founded in 1872. The existence of a military installation, Camp Hancock, on the town site and an important post, Fort Abraham Lincoln, across the Missouri River, guaranteed the presence of doctors, and these medical men often served the general public in addition to their army clientele.

For the most part, the work of the frontier surgeon involved major trauma, such as broken bones. Most army personnel were fairly young and relatively healthy, who used the infirmary only after injury. For that reason, the medical problems encountered by army doctors were simple and many diseases were ignored. Others, such as tuberculosis, caused separation from the military. As a result military physicians engaged in a practice that was relatively limited.

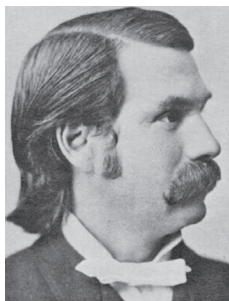
The city of Bismarck benefited from military doctors most in that they chose to locate in the city after they had completed their service in the army. Dr. Benjamin Slaughter settled in 1872. Dr. Henry R. Porter, a surgeon, survived the battle of the Little Big Horn River and remained in 1876. And Dr. W. A. Bently arrived in 1877.

Nurses also appeared in Bismarck's early history. Unlike doctors, however, nurses represented a relatively new profession, established in the mid-19th Century by Englishwoman, Florence Nightingale. Schools of nursing appeared in the U.S. after the Civil War. In 1880, the medical professionals in Bismarck consisted of Drs. Slaughter, Porter and Bently and a nurse, Nancy McCully, a 59-year old widow of undetermined education.

In 1878, the Abbot from St. Johns Abbey in Minnesota began considering various sites for a girls' academy. City leaders and ministers told him the community did not need a college as much as a hospital. The abbot went to Mother Scholastica in Minnesota to ask the aid of the Benedictine Sisters to see if they would undertake the work. Although up to that point the Benedictines had not been involved in the care of the sick, they had a tradition of undertaking whatever work needed to be done. Thus in 1883 Mother Scholastica came to Bismarck to look for a site for a hospital. Sisters that came to Bismarck in 1884 to staff a hospital were: Sister Gabriel McCoy; Sister Thomas Ryan; Sister Juliana Venne; Sister Opportuna Plemmel and Sister Alexia Kurst, as the Superior.



Dr. H. Porter



Dr. W. A. Bently

The Development of Health Care Systems in Bismarck, 1872-1937, by Kevin A. Hessinger; North Dakota History: Journal of the Northern Plains, Volume 53, No. 1, Winter 1986.