

RUSSIAN RIVER RECORDER

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Medicine in Early Healdsburg



Photo courtesy Roland Osmon

OFFICE OF EYE SPECIALIST, DR. BROWNE, IN HEALDSBURG.

ROLAND K. TRUITT POSING AS SUBJECT IN CENTER

DR. BROWNE SEATED AT RIGHT,

CIRCA 1885

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THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES CONTAIN INFORMATION THAT, IN A FEW INSTANCES, OVERLAPS. TO RETAIN A SENSE OF CONTINUITY AND ILLUSTRATE THE INTERCONNECTED EVENTS IN THE MEDICAL HISTORY OF HEALDSBURG, THESE PASSAGES HAVE NOT BEEN EDITED.

A Short History of Healdsburg General Hospital

By Alice Grove

In 74 years Healdsburg General Hospital has grown from a five-room sanitarium to a large modern building serving the complex medical needs of today's community.

Dr. J. Walter Seawell established the original Healdsburg General Hospital in 1908 as a five room sanitarium in connection with his home at 211 North street. In 1915 Dr. J. C. Condit opened a small hospital in his office on the west side of the plaza. He operated this facility until 1918 when it was sold to Dr. F. E. Sohler.

Drs. Seawell and Sohler merged their hospitals in 1920, selecting as a suitable site the large T.S. Merchant home on the southwest corner of Johnson and Lincoln Streets. This old home, converted into a hospital complete with surgery, served the area's medical needs until January, 1929, when it was destroyed by fire.

Mrs. Charles A. Jones R.N. was hired as director of the hospital. Nercilla, as she was affectionately called by all in the community, served in this capacity

until illness forced her retirement in 1965. Her husband, Charles, a former World War I army medic, worked with his wife in many capacities. General manager, maintenance manager, or purchasing agent, are titles which would be used today. When circumstances demanded, Charles became janitor, cook, gardner, or any of the jobs that keep a hospital running efficiently.

During the fire in 1929, as many patients were sent home as could be safely moved and cared for at their homes. Some were moved to the A. E. Bowers home next to the hospital and cared for there, until they could be dismissed.

The old Rosenberg family home on the southwest corner of East and North Streets was offered for use as a temporary hospital. This location is where Rosenberg and Bush Department Store now stands.

The immediate need for a new hospital was recognized by local citizens. Within ten days following the fire, a fund drive had raised almost \$50,000.00. Mr. F. S. Barton of San Francisco was hired as architect, and only three months after the fire, construction was started on the new building. All local workers and materials were used and the hospital was built on the same site of the old Merchant home, at Johnson and Lincoln Streets.

The new hospital, a one story, stucco, tile-roofed building was completed in the record time of six months and opened in October, 1929, less than one year after the fire. The new hospital soon established an excellent reputation in medical circles, being noted as one of the best hospitals in northern California. It was one of the first hospitals of its size to be inspected and recognized by the American College of Surgeons.

The sign bearing the name "Healdsburg General Hospital", was placed over the front entrance. This impressive entrance was further enhanced by glazed tile steps leading to double half-glassed doors.

Immediately on entering, one stepped into a waiting room furnished in comfortable wicker furniture brightened by colorful print fabric cushions. Another set of double doors separated the waiting room from the hospital

OLD HEALDSBURG
GENERAL HOSPITAL
SW CORNER OF
JOHNSON & LINCOLN
CIRCA 1930



proper. A wide hall led from these doors to the rear exit, with rooms to the right and left. The two most spacious and expensive private rooms were immediately off the second pair of doors. The hospital contained ten private rooms in all, each with toilet and basin, and two two-bed wards.

In the center of the hospital, a wing extended both north and south. The south wing was a large room with floor to ceiling windows known as the solarium or sun room. It was furnished in the same decor as the front waiting room and was used by patients as a lounge area, or a place to visit with their callers. A room such as this was a necessity, for hospital stays were much longer than today, and the change of scenery and mood found in the sun room often did much to alleviate the depression accompanying a long hospitalization.

The north wing contained a large modern surgery, a smaller surgery that doubled as an obstetrical delivery room, an emergency treatment room, a nursery large enough to accommodate 7 or 8 babies. One wall of the nursery held cabinets that had individual compartments for each baby's clothing. There was a long period when all parents had to bring infant apparel and needs to the hospital. It was required that they be taken home, washed, and returned each day of the usual ten day confinement.

Also in the north wing was an X-Ray room and dark room. The X-Ray machinery was updated as newer and better equipment came on the market.

In the center of the two wings, the nurses station served as hub of the hospital. The emergency entrance was on the northwest side of the building adjacent to the station, so it was the vantage point of the entire hospital. A large efficient kitchen and staff dining room completed the hospital.

For a 40 year period following 1929, Healdsburg General Hospital served not only as a community facility, but drew patients from all Northern Sonoma County. Patients came from as far away as Annapolis, Boonville, Philo, and Cloverdale. During this time, a new wing was added on the west end of the building, expanding the capacity to 25 patients.

In the late 1960's plans were started and clearing operations begun for construction of the present two million dollar Healdsburg General Hospital on a large site at 1375 University Street. Again, Healdsburg takes pride in its modern medical facility, a far cry from the early beginnings but a testimony to the hard work and concern of our community during the last 74 years.



SOLARIUM OF
HEALDSBURG GENERAL HOSPITAL
CIRCA 1930

Healdsburg Physicians

By Frances Etschell

J. WALTER SEAWELL, M.D.

Dr. J. Walter Seawell is best remembered as being one who "seemed to be a part of every action taken for the good of Healdsburg." J. Walter Seawell was born in Healdsburg on December 14, 1879, to James and Alice Seawell, distinguished pioneer Sonoma County residents. He graduated from Healdsburg High School and then from the University of California Medical School in 1901. Dr. Seawell interned at St. Luke's Hospital in San Francisco. He and his home town friend, Dr. Billy Moore, came home to finish their internship together in Healdsburg. Dr. Moore returned to San Francisco to practice, but Dr. Seawell stayed to begin a practice that would span 30 years of unselfish and dedicated service to the people of Healdsburg and outlying communities.

The gold lettered inscription, "DR. J. WALTER SEAWELL", in the transom window over the entry door, announced to the community that he was at their service. For over thirty years he maintained his private hospital and solarium in the right wing of his house at 211 North St.

He did a great deal of charity work. His regular charge for a visit was only \$2. He brought many children into the world, charging only \$25, and later \$35, for the service. He delivered babies at home, sometimes driving to the homes and ranches three times a day.

Young Dr. Seawell married Jessie Hale Smith of Alameda on August 24, 1903. The Seawells were known as kind and gracious people as well as prominent members of Healdsburg society. Because they opened their home so often to guests, the Seawells added a dining room to their home in 1903. The Seawells had two daughters, Marjorie Seawell Barlow and Dorothy Seawell Bowles. The girls attended high school one year, then were sent overseas to Switzerland where they finished school.

Understandably, Dr. Seawell was one of the first owners of an automobile in Healdsburg. According to the local newspapers, "On June 1, 1905, there were 2,475 registered automobiles in California. In Sonoma County there were but 41 while in Healdsburg there were six, in Cloverdale and in Geyserville, one each. Those lucky (or maybe not so lucky) owners in Healdsburg included W.T. Albertson who had two, Dr. J. Walter Seawell, James I. Bobst, Alexander L. McAfee, and Dr. J. W. Swisher."

Dr. Seawell did much to see to it that the City of Healdsburg and environs kept abreast of the latest developments in medicine and public health. Wishing to give his patients the best possible care, Dr. Seawell gave notice that he would be leaving May 18, 1913, for the east where he would be entering the John Hopkins or Howard University to take a post graduate course. Dr. Sohler of Geyserville took over his patients for the summer. In about 1920 when Healdsburg and the north bay area in general were visited by a devastating typhoid epidemic, Dr. Seawell agitated for the installation of a chlorating plant in the municipal water system. There have been no typhoid deaths in Healdsburg since that time.

For 13 years Dr. Seawell operated a hospital near his home at 211 North Street. In 1918 Dr. F.E. Sohler moved his practice to Healdsburg from Geyserville and he and Dr. Seawell became known as the "Two Physicians". After World War I, they established the first hospital of importance in Healdsburg in a two story home on the southwest corner of Johnson and Lincoln Streets. After this building was destroyed by fire, the two doctors spear-headed the building of a new hospital, Healdsburg General, on the same site. It was a community-owned organization.

At the time of Dr. Seawell's death, the Healdsburg Tribune reported, "Since its opening in Oct. 1929, Dr. Seawell has been president of the board of directors of the General Hospital, Inc. It represents a long sought dream of his, and his fostering and management of it resulted in its pre-eminent position in the county. Medical men have said it

is the best equipped between San Francisco and Willits."

Dr. Seawell was elected president of the Sonoma County Medical Society in 1910. He had for a long time been on the board of lecturers of the College of Medicine of the University of California, his alma mater. He also served as alumni instructor, and under his tutelage six graduates of the College have served in actual practice in Healdsburg. Among them was Dr. Harold "Brick" Miller, former football star and later an obstetrician. Dr. Seawell served for 20 years as public health officer of Healdsburg, serving much of his time in the capacity without pay. He was also a charter member of the Kiwanis Club and president of the Healdsburg Country Club. He also served some time as a physician for the Lytton Salvation Army Home. This home used to be an orphanage for boys and girls. Dr. Seawell was also the physician for the Northwestern Pacific Railroad.

Aside from his many contributions to the community, Dr. Seawell was known as a fine man with a great laugh, a man that was always ready to accommodate the needy.

Dr. Seawell died of a sudden heart attack on Christmas day, 1937. Dr. and Mrs. Seawell were returning that evening from



SONOMA COUNTY DOCTORS
DR. SEAWELL (FRONT LEFT)
DR. SOHLER (FIRST ON
RIGHT STANDING)
CIRCA 1920

a call on Mrs. Morton, mother of Mrs. Jess Murry, who was gravely ill at the Joseph T. Grace ranch on Westside Road. Upon leaving the Grace ranch the Seawell car became mired in the mud. Unable to extricate the car himself, the doctor asked Murry for a towline. As Murry approached the doctor, apparently suffering a seizure, asked to be taken to Healdsburg. Once being lifted into the car however, Dr. Seawell suffered a worse seizure and asked to be taken to the Grace home. Even as his medicine bag was brought and Dr. Seawell attempted to take medicine from it, the doctor succumbed at the age of 58.

Following his death all Healdsburg business houses closed the hour before noon and the flag at City Hall stood at half mast all day. So many citizens attended the funeral that the services were amplified to the mourners outside. 18 nurses who had worked with Dr. Seawell during his 30 years of service sat together in starched white uniforms to express their unified grief.

Dr. D.C. Oakleaf took over the offices and practice of Dr. Seawell in 1938.

Mrs. Hooper purchased the home at 211 North St. from the Seawell estate in 1969. Mrs. Hooper felt compelled to scrape off the gold lettering on the transom window only six years ago because of the derelicts that would come at all hours of the night seeking help from "DR. J. WALTER SEAWELL".

Mr. and Mrs. Ray Lewand bought the home in 1981 and opened a bed and breakfast inn, the Camelia Inn, for visitors to the City. So once again this grand old home has become a haven for those with a need.

† IN MEMORIAM †

WE WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS WHO HAVE PASSED AWAY IN RECENT MONTHS.

CHARLOTTE NALLEY

HAROLD SULLIVAN

FRANK E. SOHLER, M.D.

Frank E. Sohler, born in Red Lake Falls, Minnesota, came west to Kelseyville, Lake County, when he was 15 years old. He attended Lakeport Academy during which time he an enthusiastic bicycle racer.

Dr. Sohler graduated from Cooper Medical College, which is now part of Stanford University, in 1906. At the time of the earthquake he was on the staff at the famous French Hospital and handled a typhoid outbreak that came in the aftermath of the quake and fire.

Dr. Sohler met Luella May Bremner at Stanford that same year. Luella came from the east to the small coastal town of Manchester in California. The Bremner family then moved to Bennett Valley in Sonoma County. Luella frequently saw the author, Jack London, while riding to high school. Dr. Sohler and Luella May were married February 2, 1907, in the old Methodist Church in Santa Rosa.

After Dr. Sohler graduated from medical school, he set up his office on lower Fourth Street in Santa Rosa, and then moved to Geyserville in 1907. He was a typical country doctor with his office in his home. Dr. Sohler combined business with pleasure by sometimes making house calls on a bicycle instead of horse and buggy. He covered the entire countryside from Geyserville to the coast, and many miles to the north.

The Sohler family came to Healdsburg in 1918, at the end of World War I, and bought Dr. Condit's house on the southwest corner of Fitch & East Sts. They had two children, Frank Jr., and Ruth.

Dr. Sohler's office and hospital were on the top floor of Whitney's Drug Store, next to the Fox building on West Street (300 block of Healdsburg Avenue). He would ride up in the Fox building elevator to get to his office next door, which he shared with Dr. Kinley, a dentist.

Dr. Sohler had the first big X-ray machine north of San Francisco, and numbered among the few to have a car in Sonoma County.

After World War I, Dr. Sohler and Dr. J. Walter Seawell, "The Two Physicians", started the first hospital of importance in Healdsburg in a two-story home on the southwest corner of Johnson and Lincoln Streets. Tragically, the building was destroyed by fire. The two doctors spearheaded the building of the "Old General Hospital" that now stands on the site. At that time it was the most modern hospital north of San Francisco.

In December, 1939, he moved from his offices in the Breiling building to take offices in the new Anderson Medico-Dental building on Matheson and East Streets. Dr. Sohler was still practicing medicine in 1940.

In the years that Dr. Sohler was busy setting up his practice, Mrs. Sohler was busy rearranging houses on North and Fitch Streets. When the family moved into their home in 1918, there were three identical houses in a row, an arm's length apart. Mrs. Sohler wanted to have a garden so she bought the middle house on North Street, lowered the roof and basement, and moved it to the southeast corner of Powell (Plaza) and Fitch Streets. Mr. Brown, owner of the drug store on Matheson and West Streets, bought the house and made it his home. The home is still standing today. Mrs. Sohler, meanwhile, hired Carrol Reiner to design her garden. Reiner, a newly-graduated landscape architect, made this his first professional project, combining a lovely pool with large chestnut trees. Mrs. Sohler remodeled the home many times and even changed the direction of the front of the house to Fitch Street.

The Sohlers loved to travel and , in fact The Sohlers loved to travel, circling the globe many times and visiting Africa extensively.

Dr. Sohler served the community's medical needs for over 40 years and was one of the oldest doctors in point of service in Sonoma County.

In his many years of practice in this area he delivered babies through the third generation in the same families. He was 65 years old when he died December 29, 1946.

Dr. Sohler had known that he was ill with a heart condition for 17 years

preceding his death. At the onset of his illness, his colleagues at Stanford Hospital told him that his days were numbered. It is a tribute to his character that despite his illness he continued in his calm, dignified manner to take care of his patients until the day he died.

1983 Historical Society Officers

Historical Society officers and directors for 1983 were elected at the November Historical Society meeting. They are as follows:

PRESIDENT	DOROTHY WALTERS
VICE PRESIDENT	DENNIS HILL
RECORDING SEC'Y	DARLA MEEKER
CORRESP. SEC'Y	HAZEL WILSON
TREASURER	ELEANOR HADRICH
DIRECTOR	VERNA LAFON
DIRECTOR	DONALD LOVELESS
DIRECTOR	ROBERT JONES
DIRECTOR	MAJOR PHILLIPS

APPOINTMENTS:

NEWSLETTER ED.	HANNAH CLAYBORN
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Congratulations to the new officers and directors and sincere thanks for the good job of our outgoing officers.

Special Thanks

A special thank-you goes to Historical Society members MR. AND MRS. HENRY ANDERSON, who used a good deal of friendly persuasion to convince MR. STEVEN CRAIG, operations manager of the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, to donate a beautiful 7 foot high walnut display case to the museum. We also thank MR. FRANK DE HOME of the academy for delivering the case which will be set up in the museum in February.
 THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The Hotel Palms, Healdsburg, Cal.



CROCKER SANITARIUM 504 MATHESON STREET
LATER THE "HOTEL PALMS" IN 1907
(NOW PALMS APARTMENTS)

Crocker Sanitarium

According to a 1940 issue of the Healdsburg Tribune, the Crocker Sanitarium was built at 504 Matheson Street in 1904 by Dr. H.B. Crocker. Crocker graduated from the California Medical College in 1900.

The mission-style sanitarium that he erected had a capacity of 20 patients, and might best be described by the following excerpts from a brochure circa 1905:

"The Crocker Sanitarium is a pleasant home in the quiet country for invalids...Cool, concrete, fireproof building with every modern equipment...We have no dietary fads...fresh fruit, vegetables, butter, cream, milk, poultry and eggs from our own farm...We receive no contagious or violent cases."

...We make a thorough examination without charge; X-Ray if required...We state at once if a case is curable or incurable...WE CHARGE ONLY FOR RESULTS. OUR PATIENTS ARE ALWAYS SATISFIED."

"...PLENTY OF SUNSHINE IN HEALDSBURG. NO FOG. NO COLD WINDS... baths and best of food, daintily served in patient's room..."
"There are certain ailments in the treatment of which we have been especially successful... WE CURE chronic constipation with one treatment. No drugs used. WE CURE external cancers and tumors without the knife. WE CURE hysteria, chorea and mild nervous troubles. WE CURE THE LIQUOR HABIT WITHOUT ANY SUFFERING."

"Our modern methods enable us to avoid many surgical operations, yet we have a thoroughly equipped operating room... the ceiling, furniture and walls in our operating room are white enamel and can be washed with antiseptics...our instruments are sterilized...We never have blood poisoning..because WE TAKE NO CHANCES."

"...The man or woman who is tired of the grind of business or social life; the city dweller who needs a respite from the fog, cold winds and nerve-wracking noise; and the invalid who needs good food, fresh air ...should GET BACK TO NATURE...The Crocker Sanitarium will receive a limited number of select people during the season. Our rate of THREE DOLLARS per day covers all expenses of boats and transportation to points of interest. All the comforts of a city home. None of the inconveniences of the country..."

The Crocker Sanitarium appears, at least from its glowing brochure, to have served as a vacation resort to the weary as well as a medical sanitarium to the sick.

It is important to note that Dr. H.B. Crocker was the first in his field to provide medical treatment and hospitalization insurance, charging \$1 a month to a stipulated list of subscribers.

The sanitarium today is known as the "Palms Apartments".

Museum News

"THE TOYS OF CHRISTMAS PAST", which is the Fourth Annual Christmas Antique and Collectible Toy exhibit at the Edwin Langhart Museum, opened December 1st and will run through January 22nd. Each year the show gets bigger and better (and I don't know how long we can keep that up).

This year's exhibit features collections of bisque, china-head, and composition dolls, including a large collection of Madame Alexander character dolls from the 1920's and 1930's. Also included are a collection of original "Barbie" dolls. 1930's Lionel electric trains and earlier tin wind-up trains are also in abundance this year.

A 1900 Christmas scene complete with tree and trimmings creates a realistic look at Christmas Past.

Do you like tin win-up toys? This year we have many tin toys from three different collectors. They date from 1890 to 1950.

This exhibit is recommended for children of all ages!

Many thanks to those who loaned or donated items for this exhibit:

STELLA ALOISE	VERNA LAFON
MRS. BURGETT	BARCLAY NALLEY
BERTHA CARLEY	FLORENCE O'BRIEN
GLENDA CASTELLI	ROY PATCHEN
TOM CITRO	SHIRLEY PEMBERTON
WARREN DAVIS	MAJOR PHILLIPS
(VINTAGE ANTIQUES)	DR. FRANCIS RITZ
BONNIE HARRIS	LAUREL RITZ
SUSAN HENSON	DR. GERSH THOMPSON
CARLA HOAG	VIRGINIA TUSI
CLEONE CLAYBORN	PATRICIA WILSON
BETH VANDERFORD	KEZIAH VANDERFORD
MARTHA WITCOSKY	WARREN KITCHEN

ARTIFACT DONATIONS to the Museum have been received from:

MINERVA R. ANDREWS	MAJOR PHILLIPS
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JUNE JONES	IRA ROSENBERG
FREDELLA LEVEY	BARBARA SCHREIBER
ROY LOWE	MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM
ROY & EVA PATCHEN	FITCH

1983 Dues Are Now Payable

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR HISTORICAL SOCIETY BY PAYING YOUR DUES PROMPTLY. We work very hard to bring history close to you, and mailing out special notices is not a favorite task.

STUDENTS.....\$2.50
ACTIVE.....\$5.00
SUSTAINING.....\$25.00
PATRON.....\$250.00

Mail check to:

Healdsburg Historical Society
P.O. Box 952
Healdsburg, CA 95448

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT!!

MANY THANKS TO OUR NEW PATRON MEMBER
MARY LOU EDDINGER

BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR ARTICLES THIS ISSUE

"HEALDSBURG GENERAL HOSPITAL" by Alice Grove
various undated newspaper clippings
gathered by Mrs. Harlan, 1969
at the Edwin Langhart Museum

"HEALDSBURG PHYSICIANS" by Frances Etchell
Healdsburg Tribune newspapers:
10/27/04, 4/24/13, 12/27/37, 1/3/47,
Diamond Jubilee edition 8/26/40, pg. 50
Healdsburg Enterprise newspapers:
7/25/03, 8/29/03
Personal Interviews: Charlotte Nalley
(1/20/82); Ruth Sohler Dibble (1/20/82);
Chrystal Langhart (1/14/82).

"CROCKER SANITARIUM" by Hannah Clayborn
Healdsburg Tribune Diamond Jubilee
edition 8/26/40, pg. 48
undated Sanitarium brochure at the Edwin
Langhart Museum.

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QUARTERLY EDITOR: HANNAH CLAYBORN
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(God bless Laurie)