

Pioneer Physicians in Martin County: Part II – Dr. Rice & Dr. Bixby

The following are accounts of two of the pioneer doctors of Martin County as documented in the MCHS archives and in the May 27, 1978, edition of the *Sentinel*.

Dr. Henry Nicky Rice was another of the pioneer doctors to serve Martin County in the 1800's. Dr. Rice was born near Fort Wayne, Indiana. He entered the military at the age of eighteen and served in Company B of the 74th Indiana Volunteer Infantry from 1862-1865. He was wounded in the battle of Lovejoy Station, he marched with Sherman to the sea, and he spent a short time in Libby Prison. He returned home in 1865 after serving in the military. He taught school for one year in 1865, and was married in 1866. Then, he moved to East Chain in Martin County and joined his father in farming and running a store.

The October 16, 1874, edition of the *Martin County Sentinel* stated that Henry Rice went to Keokuk, Iowa, to study medicine. It went on to state that he had been studying with the "renowned and successful practitioner, Dr. Winch, of Blue Earth."

Dr. Rice was described as a tall and slender man with a long black beard. He frequently drove an open buckboard and always dressed in a black coat and a black silk hat. Rice was considered a doctor with a genuine professional bearing. His practice proved to be very successful, and as a result, he accumulated a considerable amount of property during his time in Fairmont. In addition, Dr. Rice was active in civic affairs, he served as mayor of Fairmont for several terms, and he served one term in the state legislature in 1876.

Upon leaving Martin County, Dr. Rice moved to California and practiced medicine there until 1907. He and his wife, Sarah Ellen, were married for sixty-six years. They had six children and twenty grandchildren. Dr. Rice passed away in 1935 while living in Hollywood.

Another pioneer doctor in Martin County was Dr. Ammi Bixby. He was born in 1856 on a farm just east of Iowa Lake where he also spent his youth and attended country school.

Bixby began his training with a physician in Estherville, Iowa, and later moved to Sherburn becoming their first doctor.

In 1879, Dr. Bixby moved to North Platte, Nebraska, and practiced medicine there for two years. Apparently uncertain as to his career path, he left his medical practice and worked briefly for a newspaper in Iowa. He then left the newspaper and attended Rush Medical School. However, it seems that he felt his ultimate calling was to journalism, so he left medical school for newspaper work. Bixby worked in a number of newspaper offices and became a writer of human interest stories. Eventually he became quite popular and was sought after as a speaker giving many lectures throughout the west.

Dr. Bixby made an annual trip to Martin County to attend historical meetings at which he provided some interesting commentaries. He referred to his medical practice of the past

in humorous terms stating that “the only apparent good result of his practice in Sherburn was the establishment of a cemetery . . . that it had never been needed before because the people were so healthy. He said at these meetings that he saw many faces which would not have been present, he was sure, had he continued to practice.”

For more information on Dr. Rice or Dr. Bixby, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.