



# Madison County Genealogical Society



Madison County Genealogical Society  
P.O. Box 1031, Norfolk, NE 68702-1031  
mcgs@telebeep.com

[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nemcgs/) [www.nesgs.org/~mcgs](http://www.nesgs.org/~mcgs)

## Some Early Day Madison County Physicians

by F. A. Long, M. D.

This article deals only with physicians who came to Madison County before 1900.

The first medical practice act passed in Nebraska took effect in 1881. It provided that graduates of reputable medical schools shall register with the county clerk of the county in which they desired to practice and also provided that non-graduates who had been engaged in the practice of medicine in Nebraska for two years prior to the taking effect of the statute be allowed to continue to practice medicine upon registration. All physicians of the county were supposed to have registered under this act up to 1891. In 1891, an act creating the State Board of Health was passed, and this act provided for the registration of all physicians with the state board which granted licenses. The licenses so granted were registered with the county clerk. Licenses, however, did not contain the name of the college of graduation, and this proved a handicap in our search for facts.

### Part 1: Madison

The permanent settlers came to Madison County primarily in the early 1870s. Among them were three men who were known as "doctors," although none of them was a graduate, and all three lived on claims. One was A. A. "DOC" WEBSTER. He lived on a homestead in Fairview. He registered in 1882 as 48 years old and as having practiced in Indiana sixteen years and Madison county two years. He had no medical education. He also posed as versed in the law. It appears that he dispensed some homeopathic remedies, but he never pretended to do a regular practice. He moved to Keyapaha County and died near Mills at an advanced age.

"Dr." JOHN QUINCY ADAMS HARVEY lived on a claim on Taylor creek, three miles from Madison, on a farm later owned by Alex Graves. He seems to have accommodated his neighbors when they needed medical care, by use of "roots and yarbs" and by giving calomel and quinine. He was an eccentric character, lived by himself and was the first coroner of Madison County. One early-day story was that when called to the cabin of a settler found dead down Union Creek, he opened the door, looked in, and in his high pitched voice pronounced the verdict--"Deader'n hell!" He left Madison County in the late 1880s.

DR. JOHN L. WILBERGER settled on Union Creek about three miles south of the Green Garden Lutheran Church in the early 1870s. He had been a practitioner in eastern Iowa but not a graduate. He was a rather shrewd man and appears to have done considerable practice before the advent of the regular physician. In the early 1880s, he located in Omaha for several years catering to the business of the slums, but he later returned to Madison, where he died, in the late 1880s.

A DOCTOR MERRIAM was the first regular physician at Madison. Just when he located here, how long he remained, when he left, and what his full name was, is not known. He moved to Wisner, where he died about 1890.

DR. S. J. BRIDENSTINE was a graduate of the Medical Department of Iowa State University. He located at Madison in 1875 and remained there until 1889 when he moved to the Puget Sound country. He went first to Port Orchard and later to Ballard, a suburb of Seattle, where he died Nov. 25, 1928. He was the best liked of all Madison's physicians. He early took up the study of electricity in medicine and had some very fine apparatus.

A DOCTOR FLEISCHMAN came to Madison in the latter part of 1880 and remained until early 1882 when he left somewhat surreptitiously. He left a board bill at the hotel and all his equipment. Reports seemed to indicate that he was either discouraged or lazy. He never acquired any considerable business.

DR. F. A. LONG, (the original writer of this article), located at Madison, June 27, 1882, with a diploma under his arm from the Iowa University College of Medicine, but with very little knowledge of the world and its ways and without money. He secured very little business the first few years. It took about five years to get on a living basis, after which the fates were kinder to him. With Dr. F. L. Frink, (of Newman Grove), he did an appendectomy in December 1892, perhaps the first one in all north Nebraska. He was always interested in surgery and did various operations of considerable magnitude in pioneer days. He early became interested in medical society work and, with Dr. P. H. Salter, organized the Elkhorn Valley Medical Society, Dec. 26, 1896, at Norfolk and became its first secretary and third president. He was president of the Nebraska State Medical Association in 1906 and was delegate to the American Medical Association at Atlantic City in 1907; Chicago, 1908; and Los Angeles, 1911. He was the delegate representing the Nebraska State Medical Association at the Second Conservation Congress at St. Paul. He was the Nebraska member of the Council on Medical Education and Medical Legislation in Chicago for two successive years and has been editor of The Nebraska State Medical Journal since 1920 and has been chairman of the publication board since the inception of the Journal in 1916. He has been vice-president of the International Meridian Highway Association since 1923, and has for many years been actively interested in the Good Roads movement.

DR. A. B. COX came to Madison from North Carolina in 1882. He was a minister-doctor, an elderly man of 66, who had ridden the bridle paths of the Southland for thirty-eight years and had ministered to soul and body. He was neither an educated minister nor an educated doctor, but he was faithful to his patients and had a large following among Virginians in this county. After a few years he moved to Blaine County, then just being settled, and died there.

DR. W. F. COLLINS came to Madison from southwestern Iowa, perhaps Shenandoah, in 1883. He had practiced in Indiana thirteen years. He was not a graduate, but, I believe was a veteran of the Civil War. He never acquired any considerable practice and after a few years moved back to Iowa. For a time he lived on and owned a farm east of town, known as the Weiland place.

DR. J. H. MACKAY came to Madison in 1883 or 1884. He was a recent graduate of the Chicago Homeopathic Medical School. He was in some respects a brilliant man but also an erratic character. He married a Madison girl, a Miss Sylvia Johnson, from whom he was afterward divorced. At one time he was editor of the Madison Reporter, a Democratic organ. Through the influence of Senator Allen, he was appointed superintendent of the Norfolk State Hospital in 1896, a position which he resigned under some pressure, a year later. He later practiced in Norfolk and finally went to Texas where, in Houston, he died in January, 1922. At one time, he was the editor of a homeopathic medical journal published in Omaha.

DR. J. B. HAWK went to Madison from Emerson, Iowa in 1884. He was a graduate of a homeopathic medical school. He remained only about six months and then moved to Grand Island. He died many years ago.

DR. W. F. HUTCHINSON came to Madison from Bridgeport, Conn., about 1886 or 1887. Prior to coming to Madison, he had been a fulminate mixer in the Union Metallic Cartridge Company works at Bridgeport. He had a diploma from a college at Keokuk which was afterward found to be bogus. He also claimed to be a Fellow of the Royal College of London. He claimed to be a specialist in diseases of women. He became associated with Dr. Bridenstine and later purchased Dr. Bridenstine's equipment and good will. He left Madison about 1891 and moved to Minneapolis where he died.

DR. CHARLES E. GOSSARD, a half brother of the Senator Allen, came to Madison to succeed Dr. Mackay when the latter was appointed to the Norfolk State Hospital in 1896. He practiced here a number of years before relocating at Topeka, Kansas. He was a graduate of the General Medical College of Chicago, 1883.

DR. E. N. SMART came to Madison from Humphrey in 1894. He graduated from Drake University College of Medicine in 1884. He had been instructor of anatomy at his alma mater. For many years he enjoyed a large practice in the community. He remained active until his death which occurred suddenly April 17, 1927, aged 71 years. He had taken much interest in the collection of antiques of which he left a large and valuable collection.

DR. G. C. WEBER located in Madison and registered in 1890 as a graduate of the Medical College of Heidelberg, 1856, which was probably not true, since he did not display common knowledge of medicine. He came to Madison from Humphrey where he had been for a short time. After a few years' residence he moved to Blair.

Dr. F. A. Long, Editor, The Nebraska State Medical Journal, Madison, Nebr. Volume XV, Number 4, April 1930--pp. 159-163. Rewritten and excerpted by Nancy Zaruba.

---