

A Prairie Doctor
of the Eighties

*J. H. Long, M.D.
Madison Wis.*



The Author After Fifty Years of Service.



A PRAIRIE DOCTOR OF THE EIGHTIES

Some Personal Recollections
and
Some Early Medical and Social History
of a Prairie State

By

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With Two Chapters on
"THE PRAIRIE DOCTOR'S WIFE"
By Maggie E. Long

With Illustrations

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*To my sainted wife who shared
these experiences and to the three
daughters born and reared in the
pioneer atmosphere*

PREFACE

On the occasion of the Centennial of the University of Nebraska College of Medicine, it is most fitting that the Centennial Committee of the Medical Center reissue this quite marvelous autobiography by Dr. Francis A. Long. **A Prairie Doctor of the Eighties** is a valuable book, both in the literary and the historical sense. It is thus my pleasure to provide a Preface to a book about a man I knew and admired.

Francis Long was born on February 16, 1859 and grew up near Kreidersville, Pennsylvania. He worked as a common laborer about the coal mines, in car shops and as an accountant in a lumber yard in Carbon County, Pennsylvania. He came west with his family in December 1876 to Moulton, Iowa. Following graduation from Normal School, he taught school for two years near Moulton. He studied medicine in an apprenticeship under a physician with whom he boarded while teaching school. In 1880 he entered the Medical School of the University of Iowa. Following graduation in 1882 he located in Madison, Nebraska, where he began the medical practice he describes so vividly in this book.

A pioneer in early medicine in Nebraska, he was active in local, district, and state medical organizations such as the Madison-Five Counties, the Elkhorn Valley, and the Missouri Valley. In fact, every association with medicine as its dominating interest received his cooperation and active support. He was president of the Nebraska Medical Association in 1906-07. He was the Nebraska delegate to the American Medical Association in Atlantic City in 1907, in Chicago in 1908, and in Los Angeles in 1911. He was the Nebraska delegate to the A.M.A. Council on Medical Education in 1909-10. He became a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons in 1915.

His great role, in his latter professional years, was that of medical editor and publisher. A state medical association publication was first proposed by Francis

A. Long in his presidential address before the State Association in 1907. He made a study of sixteen medical publications then in circulation. Nothing further was done until 1913 when Dr. Long was made chairman of a committee to investigate the contract with the then-existing journal. He was empowered to establish a state medical association journal in 1916.

Under Dr. Long's editorial direction, from 1920 to his death in 1937, the **Nebraska State Medical Journal** flourished both as a medium for excellent scientific papers and as a common visible bond that united the urban physician of Nebraska with his counterpart practicing in the far-flung towns of western Nebraska. For those of us who knew Dr. Long personally, we found that he was always fair and supportive in his editorial comments and judgements. He was soft spoken and a perfectionist in his craft.

Dr. Long carried on a large practice even while his editorial labors took a great deal of his time. Eventually, his health made it necessary for him to retire from medical practice to devote full-time to the editorship of the Journal and to the duties required for the supervision of organized medicine on both state and national fronts. He felt that the **Nebraska State Medical Journal** was perhaps the most cohesive thing in the state's medical organization, and its influence should be widened by catering to the human side of all physicians of the state. He felt that the physician is, first of all, a scientific personage; but he is also a human being with tastes for the lighter things pertaining to his professional life. He felt the *esprit de corps* of the profession must be nurtured. To him this implied that sympathy, devotion, enthusiasm and a zealous honor of the body as a whole should be preserved at all times. He also believed that frank discussion in open forum of the problems of the profession was vital to its progress.

For those of us that were privileged to know this unusual man during our formative years, he was a figure of great stature. He was indeed a physician of

multifaceted disciplines. First and foremost, he was industrious, imaginative, honest, and forthright in his thinking and the execution of his many offices. As physicians or as citizens, we should be proud of this pioneer of the medical profession in Nebraska, and pleased that this excellent book is here available to us again.

*Harley Anderson, M.D.
University of Nebraska
College of Medicine, Class of 1925
Omaha, Nebraska, June, 1980*

THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER

(By Permission)

As many of my readers know, I am an ardent admirer of the General Practitioner, especially those of the country variety. Here comes in a poem on the subject from one of my correspondents. The ideal seems higher than Kipling's, but I know men who illustrate it.

IF

If you can change tires at four below at four a. m.!

If you can set a fractured femur with a piece of string and a flat iron and get as good results as the mechanical engineering staff of a City Hospital at ten per cent of their fee;

If you can drive through ten miles of mud to ease the little child of a deadbeat—

If you can do a podalic version on the kitchen table of a farmhouse with husband holding legs and grandma giving chloroform—

If you can diagnose tonsillitis from diphtheria with a laboratory forty-eight miles away,

If you can pull the three pronged fish-hooked molar of the 250 pound hired man—

If you can maintain your equilibrium when the lordly Specialist sneeringly refers to the General Practitioner—

Then you are a real Country Doctor!

—William Lyon Phelps, in *Scribner's Magazine*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

For years I have felt that some permanent record should be made of the transition period of medicine, particularly in the Pioneer West. More recently I have been impressed with the idea that unless I undertook to do this work it might be left undone.

My narrative is essentially a contribution to the medical and social history of the Middle West in the Eighties—and after. It is believed that the narrative covers an almost untouched field.

The encouragement of such men as Dr. Olin West, Secretary of the American Medical Association; the late Dr. George H. Simmons, for twenty-five years Editor of the Journal of the American Medical Association; the late Dr. Franklin H. Martin, Founder and Director-General of the American College of Surgeons, and Dr. Palmer Findley, noted gynecologist and author, has spurred me on in the preparation of this volume. Many thanks are also due to Dr. Addison Sheldon, Superintendent of the Nebraska Historical Society, for suggestions and assistance. Other friends have rendered assistance.

Finally if it had not been for the constant encouragement of my wife and three loyal daughters, the task would never have been completed.

I have had the temerity to attempt to show by illustration the seven ages of the physician, from which one may see what can happen to a cross-roads country doctor, rather than to show classic beauty. I trust the reader will approve.

Madison, Nebr.
July, 1937.

—F. A. LONG.

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