

What Happened To Dr. Hendrick

In November 1896, a large announcement appeared in the Muskegon Chronicle titled, "Annual Announcement of the City Hospital, 225 Peck Street, Muskegon, Mich. Dr. A. W. Hendrick, Manager". (This is not to be confused with the "Muskegon City Hospital" managed by Dr. Hauber.) The article praises the accommodations of the hospital and qualifications of the doctor and some of the ailments he treats. It says the hospital treats piles, ruptures, cancer, fractures, and consumption. They perform surgical operations and treat all forms of female complaints and chronic diseases. They also successfully treat drinking, opium, and tobacco habits.

Another article from the "Morning News of Muskegon" says, "Dr. Hendrick and his hospital are becoming very favorably noted for the large amount of very excellent surgery being done here. Those who go there for treatment come away, generally cured".

I was able to find quite a few testimonies and some other notices in the Chronicle. One such notice says: "Doctor Hendrick has performed 70 operations with 20 of them being large and dangerous and not one person has died....this kind of surgery does not most always end up with a funeral".

I was surprised to find people so openly writing about medical treatment they had had, treatments for ruptures, seizures, constipation, piles, and cancer of the womb to name a few. These testimonies also gave their names and addresses!

Who was this much praised doctor that you probably never heard of? Dr. Alexander W. Hendrick was born August 8, 1836 to Alexander W. Hendrick and Betsey A. Record in Berlin, New York. As a young man, he went to college in New Hampton, New Hampshire where he took a course in the Bible School there. He entered the ministry at the age of 24. He worked in the ministry for 5 years. In 1860, he married Miss Harriet Horton. He later left the ministry and it says he graduated from Hahemann Medical College in Chicago in 1871. They first moved to Kalamazoo, then to Galien and from there to Paw Paw, Michigan. He had a pretty successful practice there. In 1888, there was a fire that destroyed his office along with much of his medical equipment and his medical library. The loss was valued at \$1350. That would in today's money be equal to about \$36,517.36.

He and his wife had six children, four of them survived to adulthood.

They moved to Muskegon in 1894 and open an office on Western Ave. In 1895, he opens the hospital on Peck St., where he and his family also live. By all accounts he seems to be doing quite well. That is until 1897.

On Saturday, July 17, 1897 his wife Harriet calls the police asking for protection. She is taken to police headquarters in a "very nervous condition" accompanied by her husband. He tells the police that she has been having these attacks for a few years but that this time she became violent. The police notice bruises on Harriet that Dr. Hendrick says are self-inflicted. He said he noticed

this episode coming on for a few days now. He said she had an attack of vertigo that morning and then became very nervous and insanely violent. He said she got the bruises when they tried to stop her from leaving the home. He said he called Dr. Quick who gave her some medication. Dr. Hendrick says he thinks she needs a few days of quiet and she'll be normal again.

Mrs. Hendricks tells the police that she became upset over a deed to the house that he had her sign over to him and that she is perfectly sane. The incident started on Friday night.

Deputy Sherriff then makes application to the probate court for her to have an exam to see if she is insane. Judge Vanderwerp appoints 5 doctors to examine her on Monday. She doesn't want to return home asks to be allowed to stay at the Sherriff's residence until then.

The doctors do the exam on Monday. She stays with a friend until they go to court on Tuesday the 22nd.

On the 22nd Mrs. Hendrick arrives at the court of Judge Vanderwerp with her lawyer. The room is packed with 90% of those attending being women. A witness is called who said Dr Hendrick had called him in where he saw Mrs. Hendrick unconscious on the floor. He then helped get her into bed. He said she started rambling on about some other women. He said he thought this all happened after Dr. Quick had been there.

Next their 17 year old daughter was called. She told of how her mother was jealous of a former female patient of the doctor named Jenny Wenting who was in her 20's and had stayed at the hospital for a couple months. While they argued, she did hear mention of the deed for the hospital property. She said her mother seemed crazy that Friday night and said she didn't know what caused it but it happened after she had taken some medicine.

Dr. Hendrick then testified that his wife was selfish and jealous and has been for over 20 years. He then began giving some of his educational history and how he had been a minister and then went into medicine but did not provide a certificate. When asked about Miss Jenny Wenting, (the woman his wife was so jealous of) he admitted that when she left his hospital she had a baby with her. He wouldn't say weather or not the baby had been born at the hospital. He said they found a home for the baby in Kalamazoo and that he and Jenny took the baby there. On the way back, they spent the night at a hotel in Holland registering under assumed names. He couldn't explain why they had done that except "that they did".

The report from the group of doctors who examined Mrs. Hendrick said they were of the opinion that she was NOT insane, just nervous. The evidence showed that while she may have been temporarily insane on Friday, it was because of domestic problems and her nervous condition but that she was now perfectly sane.

Judge Vanderwerp made an order on July 27, 1897 releasing her as sane.

In August, Dr. Hendrick, who is 61, files for divorce for cruel and abusive treatment. This divorce will be contentious and plays out in the newspapers over months.

Mrs. Hendrick files a cross-bill for unwarranted jealousy and improper relations with another woman. She accuses him of drugging her to make her look insane and tying her hands and feet leaving bruises. She denies his accusations that she was cruel and abusive. She says that during the early years when he was a minister times were hard. She helped as she could and worked hard to raise their children. She said he later assumes to be qualified and pretended to practice medicine and at times still working in the ministry. She says she inherited money from her father that she gave him for his business and their home that was not returned. She is 57 and has no other income. She asks for alimony since he has considerable assets. Temporary alimony is granted.

In November, an order is filed by Judge Russell for contempt of court against Dr. Hendrick for not paying the court ordered temporary support and is ordered to show cause. He then shows up after an absence of several days. He says he has secured the funds to start making payments.

The final trial for divorce ends in March 1898 where they must divide the property. The Judge had arranged for a complete inventory of all property and its value. She is awarded the property in Kalamazoo and ½ the interest in the other property including the hospital building in Muskegon. He is also ordered to pay back money he owes her and solicitor's and register's fees. A payment schedule, with interest, is set up. If he fails to make the payments, the entire amount will be due in full. The divorce is decreed on January 10, 1899.

On January 12th a notice appears in the Chronicle from Harriet's lawyer regarding a recent article about the decree of the divorce case of Dr. A. W. Hendrick vs Harriet Hendrick. Apparently, it did not show to whom the decree was granted. They wanted it known that Mrs. Hendrick had filed a cross bill in the suit brought against her by husband in which she asked for a divorce because of cruel treatment. The court sustained a portion of her charges and the decree was granted to her on the grounds that her husband had been guilty of extreme cruelty. (The earlier article did say that Harriet's claims that Dr. Hendrick drugged her and committed adultery with Miss Wenting were unsubstantiated.)

On January 19, 1899 the hospital mysteriously is gutted by fire. (Isn't that strange? Another fire with a rather large pay out.) No one was living there at the time because his daughters had left several weeks before and he was supposed to be in Kalamazoo on business. He was actually in Ohio where he married Miss Minnie Garber. They later move to Sparta to live.

Before he can collect on the insurance, Harriet sues the Dr. and Concordia Fire Insurance Company to prevent him from collecting until he has first paid her the unpaid alimony that was ordered by the court. Harriet wins and he files a counter suit.

In March he is arrested for not paying damages to Adolph Miller who had sued him previously. He furnishes \$1000 bond.

In August his new wife, Minnie, reports him missing. She said on the 18th he received a letter that upset him. He told her he had to go to Muskegon to see patients and his attorney. He put on his best clothes, took \$85 and a revolver with him but did not take his medical bag. In his open safe she found a copy of his Will that named his daughters as legatees dated 1895. He has been gone for several days and she is afraid he may have committed suicide. She says if he doesn't return soon she plans to go back to Ohio to live.

They investigate his disappearance but Dr. Alexander Hendrick is never seen nor heard from again.

In February 1900, Harriet is awarded her settlement from the insurance and the sale of the hospital property. In 1903 she married Hiram Newell in Emerald, Wisconsin. She died in 1924 in Ashtabula, Ohio at the age of 84.

Dr. Hendrick's wife Minnie returns to Ohio where she never remarries and dies in 1941 in Greenville at the age of 84.

Frances Harrington

Information taken from newspaper archives at genealogybank.com