

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

DR. CHARLES W. BORUP: AN UP-TO-DATE WILDERNESS PHYSICIAN

A prominent physician well known to readers of a certain metropolitan newspaper of Minnesota through his caustic and witty statements in a daily column has remarked that one of the earmarks of an up-to-date, reliable physician is his acquaintance with current medical literature. Judged by this standard, one of Minnesota's earliest doctors would not have been found wanting, though so far removed from civilization that no one save himself could have known whether or not he was keeping abreast of the times from a medical point of view. Dr. Charles Wulff Borup, who was born and educated in Denmark, settled in Minnesota in 1848; but in the early thirties he was giving medical advice and treatment to Indians and traders of the same region, though living on the south shore of Lake Superior or on an eastern tributary of the St. Croix River. During these years, as the papers of the American Fur Company show, he was a subscriber to the *American Medical Journal*, the standard organ of the American medical profession, which was sent to him from Philadelphia via the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes to the Sault and thence by express runner, canoe, Mackinac boat, and later by schooner to his trading post. By the time it reached him the cost must have been considerably more than the subscription price of five dollars which Lea and Blanchard of Philadelphia charged.

For many years Borup seems to have been the only trained physician west of Sault Ste. Marie and north of Fort Snelling. His chief business was trading with the Indians for the American Fur Company, but whites, Indians, and half-breeds sought his medical advice; and his orders, sent to the company's headquarters in New York, included many for drugs and appliances. On February 28, 1835, for example, his order called

for: "1 good Toothdrawer," "1 dz bougies in set," "1 lb camphor," "2 ounces Quicksilver," "1/2 lb Cantharides in Powder," "1 ounce Sulphur Antim: præcipitatum," "1 pint Spiritus Pennyroyal," "1/2 ounce oleum Cargophyl," "1 Bottle Carpenters Compound Syrup of Liverwort," "2 Gross vials assorted with Corks," and other similar items.

The progress which medical science has made since Borup's time is evident from the doctor's apparent belief that cold air injures the lungs. On May 11, 1841, he writes: "I wish to purchase a newly invented instrument (if it may be called so), the intention of which is preventing the cold air from affecting the lungs. It consists in a kind of mouth covering furnished inside with metallic Springs through which the air is drawn into the lungs. It is to be had in the principal apothecary^s shops in Broadway. . . . There are two kinds one for ladies one for gentlemen." One cannot help wondering whether the patient was satisfied with the use of this curious ancestor of modern quack appliances.

It may be interesting to notice that Borup also subscribed to some of the standard literary quarterlies and weeklies of the period. Thus his letter of May 20, 1840, to Ramsay Crooks shows that he received the *American Quarterly Review*, the *New York Review*, and a weekly, the *New York Herald*. If his "neighbors" were generous, he may also have had opportunity to read the *National Intelligencer* which John Livingston at the Sault received; and his wife may have borrowed *Godey's Lady's Book* for which William Johnston at Mackinac subscribed. Dr. Borup visited Sault Ste. Marie and Mackinac not infrequently and exchange of reading matter with his friends may be conjectured. A study of the literature which entered the log forts of Borup's fellow traders throughout the region of the upper Great Lakes would be worth while, for, as a class, these clerks were men of more than ordinary education and refinement.



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