

Kenneth McQueen

## Practised in Depression

# Being barely paid was no deterrent when doctor began



KENNETH MCQUEEN

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Staff Reporter

PICTON - The pay was poor or non-existent and the hours long but for Kenneth McQueen, a young country doctor in Prince Edward County during the Depression, the practice of medicine was humanitarian with its own rewards.

The family physician, who retired this month after 53 years in his profession, recalls that his arrival here was badly timed. He had graduated from Queen's University in 1930 and wanted to open a practice in Picton but there were already too many doctors in town.

Two physicians already in practice here advised their new colleague that he should consider Bloomfield Village, since the doctor there had just died.

"In September, 1931, I went to Bloomfield," says McQueen, remembering his early days in the county.

While there were a number of cars in Prince Edward, the horse-and-buggy days had not yet come to an end. In the winter months, during his first year in practice, McQueen hired a horse and cutter and a driver to take him on his rounds.

"You went to the patients, then, particularly in the winter months," he says.

He was summoned to cases at East Lake, West Lake, Cherry Valley, Milford and Point Petre, during his years of practice in Bloomfield.

"Sometimes, you were paid in produce - vegetables or a quarter of beef or perhaps firewood. One time I got a load of 'dry' wood and put it in the furnace and it sizzled and sizzled with water. I had to get applewood to burn with it."

Times were hard during the Depression and McQueen recalls that at one time he had 40 maternity cases which were never paid for. "I'd go along the street and see some babies who weren't paid for. Even now I see some of them," says the doctor who has delivered more than 1,000 infants in his 53 years of practice.

He says that in 1947, the income of physicians became more stable through the introduction of

health insurance plans. Medical welfare became available for indigent patients.

"We worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week," McQueen says, discussing his early days in medicine in the county.

"You'd come home from church on Sunday and think it was Grand Central Station, especially in the winter months. The people just came. I didn't have an appointment system until 1959."

McQueen, who was the first physician in the county to use the sulpha-type drug Daganan, says early home remedies sometimes did patients more harm than good.

"The standbys were potato and onion poultices and turpentine rub. Some people took turpentine and sugar. I've seen it burn out the stomach. Doctors did not recommend it but it was used as a kidney remedy. It didn't help, I know that."

McQueen says it was difficult to persuade patients to ignore these old remedies which had been passed down from generation to generation.

He had an opportunity to use the drug Daganan successfully on a female patient who was critically ill with pneumonia. "I thought she wasn't going to live. They were using the drug in Kingston and I was the first one to use it here."

The sulpha drugs were introduced in the late 1930s and early 1940s. They lost effect in time and were followed by the penicillin drugs.

McQueen practised medicine in Bloomfield for 35 years, then moved to Picton in 1966. "I did more calls in Picton and I felt it was time that they came to me instead of me coming to them."

He retired this month, after 18 years of practice in town but will continue to act as the physician for one local nursing home. "I started in a Depression and I quit in a Depression," he says.

How has medicine changed in the past 50 years? "The practice of medicine used to be a humanity. Now, it's a regular business. The doctor-patient relationship is not the same as it used to be," McQueen says.

The  
Intelligencer  
May 29, 1984