

Dr. Hansford H. Milbee, Marshfield Clinic Founder
Nominated by Brian Finnegan, MCHS History Archive

Born in Barrie, Ontario, Canada about 60 miles north of Toronto. After high school, Hansford entered the Canadian Collegiate Institute. He finished there in 1892 and entered Trinity Medical College, part of the University of Toronto in Ontario. He received his medical degree in 1896 with a Certificate of Honour. He returned to his hometown to practice medicine but found the business slow.



A pharmacist friend from New Richmond, WI suggested they partner up, so in 1898 Milbee moved himself and became the first doctor to establish a practice in the nearby town of Roberts. Doctoring between Roberts and New Richmond, however, brought meager rewards. In August of 1899, a tornado struck the town, lifting the drug store from its foundation, destroying the building and all its merchandise. In those few moments, Milbee's partnership in the pharmacy ended.

The one bright spot among Dr Milbee's experiences in Roberts was meeting Cornelia Bowron. They both enjoyed ice skating, they met on a winter afternoon and fell in love gliding on the ice of Simco Lake.

Milbee and his new wife arrived in Marshfield in August of 1901. They purchased a home on South Maple Avenue, raising two children, Neil and Ruth.

Dr. Milbee's greatest qualities were a quiet, compassionate kindness and gentleness. He was loved by the community and respected by his colleagues. His knowledge, personality, capacity to patiently listen, and his bedside manner made him the most popular physician in Marshfield.

Diagnosis and treatment of disease were Milbee's chief interest, challenge and enjoyment. He was a born "thinking" doctor. He did perform surgery but it didn't hold the same interest for him. Neither did obstetrics even though he was skilled and well-suited to the business. What K.W. Doege became to surgery in early Marshfield, H.H. Milbee became to medicine.

Dr. Milbee was more intent on looking after patients than socializing. His wife found it impossible to entertain at home because he was seldom there. Often when they were invited out, the occasion was frustrated by medical calls. The family's lifestyle centered around the doctor's work.

Hansford was careful about the safety of his family especially during epidemics of infectious disease. Whenever Milbee came home from a case of infection he changed clothes in the horse barn and disinfected himself before entering the house.

When the clinic was organized, he specialized in internal medicine. Around 1925, Milbee was in charge of the clinic's first electrocardiograph machine, located in the hospital basement.

Dr. Milbee was one of the prime movers in the organizational development of the Marshfield Clinic. He distinguished himself as a great teacher of medical students and nurses. He generously shared his knowledge, experience, and skills with the other doctors in the community.

He became the second president of the clinic following the death of Karl W. Doege in June 1932 until his own death in August 1934. He was diligent, kind, gentle, and courteous to all people. He helped mold the image of the Marshfield Clinic. He was symbolic of all that they had created and hoped for the future.

He was a kind and loving father who made happy times for his children by taking them with their friends on his long country calls. In his later life, he found happy diversion in gardening. He especially enjoyed raising dahlias. He passed away in August 1934.

Taken from the writings of Stanley Custer, MD, first historian of Marshfield Clinic
Submitted by Brian Finnegan, MCHS History Archive