

Dr. Karl W. Doege, Marshfield Clinic Founder  
Nominated by Brian Finnegan, MCHS History Archive

Born April 1867 in Stettin, Germany. At the age of 14, the Doege family moved to the Cleveland, Ohio area in 1881 because the German government and culture were deteriorating. His father, August, found work and began saving money to buy a farm.

In the meantime, they sent Karl to Milwaukee to the German American Academy to become a teacher. He became proficient in English, science, math, and history. He also learned how to play the violin. By 1883 Karl's father had earned enough money for a down payment on a farm and purchased a 40 acre farm just outside of Thorp where they farmed for the rest of their days.



Karl was 18 when he completed his studies and was told about a teaching vacancy in the St. Paul public school system where he worked for one year. He then learned that there was a teaching position back in Cleveland that he applied for and got the job. He shared lodging with a medical student from Western Reserve University. Here Karl spent most of his spare time pouring over his roommate's medical texts or examining the human skeleton hanging in the corner.

After learning what was required, Karl saved enough money for application fees, gave up his teaching position, and enrolled in medical school. Admission requirements included at least two years of post-high school education and passing an admissions exam. That was easy for Karl, who became an aggressive, interested, hard-working and serious-minded student in one of the few good medical schools in the country. He completed his studies in June 1890 and graduated at the top of his class.

During his training years Karl did not spend all of his time studying. He dated Frieda Walz from Cleveland. They grew close but were not going to let marriage interfere with his education. After graduation, he boarded a train to go visit his family in Thorp before finding a place to practice medicine. The train conductor, noticing his German accent, said that there were many Germans in a town called Marshfield who could use a German-speaking doctor. Besides, he heard they were building a new hospital there. "You ought to look it over", he told Karl.

Settling in Marshfield, the first case that Dr. Doege attended in his office was a patient with a broken leg. He authoritatively convinced the patient that he could set his leg and that it would heal right. With confident methodical skill he reduced the fracture and splinted it with plaster of paris like the book said. The outcome was as Dr. Doege had predicted. The patient was pleased with the result, the skill and businesslike attitude of the young doctor.

Dr. Doege quickly became a very popular doctor. He was not a joiner nor involved in community affairs. He was a very private aristocratic man. He kept busy with doctoring, first, last, and always.

In May 1891, about a year after setting up practice, the 24 year old physician took a few days off and went back to Ohio to pick up the girl he had left behind. They were married while in Cleveland and returned to Marshfield shortly thereafter.

In 1916, Dr. Karl Doege and five other surgeons and physicians organized the Marshfield Clinic, with Doege being elected its first president. One of his greatest ambitions was realized in the construction of the new clinic building (in 1926) with its elaborate and complete equipment for diagnosing and treating human ailments. Through the constant efforts in this direction, definite progress also marked the development of St. Joseph's Hospital in this city. Much of the equipment and special facilities found in that institution for the care of medical and surgical patients was installed under his direction.

Karl's two sons, Karl H. and Paul F., both became successful physicians and practiced in Marshfield for many years carrying on their father's legacy.

In the public mind Dr. Karl W. Doege has long been regarded as a most skillful and versatile surgeon, operating with equal facility on every part of the body. His operating room experience was constantly being supplemented with extensive research and study at leading medical centers in Europe and the United States.

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