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Article Summary: Letters from Dr. Davis to his fiancée emphasize the competition among physicians for patients in McCook. He describes his medical cases, his social life in the rapidly growing town, his earnings and investments, and the house that he is having built.

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Doctors Mentioned: A J Willey, Robert Livingston, Zachius L Kay, T B Stutzman, A J Shaw, Moore, N Atwood, Presson, C T Dildine, M A Hoover, Wallace Keim, L J Spickelmeier

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Photographs / Images: Dr Byron B Davis; Ryan Turner's map of McCook, Nebraska, 1886; west of Main Avenue, McCook (undated photograph); the Commercial Hotel, where Dr Davis lived during his early days in McCook; McCook residence of Dr Davis; residence of Dr Z L Kay

The McCook, Nebraska, Letters of Dr. Byron B. Davis, 1885-1887

Edited by Dr. John B. Davis

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Byron Bennett Davis was one of McCook, Nebraska's first physicians. Born in Fayette, Wisconsin, on June 14, 1861, he came to Nebraska with his parents, William and Martha Haywood Davis, in 1869. The family settled at Salem in Richardson County. Young Davis taught school to pay for his education at the University of Nebraska, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1882. He graduated from the Minnesota College of Medicine in Minneapolis in 1884. Letters Davis wrote as a student suggest that he was attracted to the medical profession because it offered the opportunity to alleviate human suffering. The successful physician, he wrote, would be the one who could employ practical thinking when textbook solutions were lacking.

After a year of postgraduate training in New York City, Davis established his first practice in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the spring of 1885. Not only was there stiff competition from established physicians, but Davis soon discovered that the new doctors in town attracted "the deadbeats. . . who make it a practice to go to every new doctor as long as he will trust them." It was not long before Davis concluded that better opportunities lay elsewhere. He decided to visit the Republican Valley of western Nebraska where several new towns had been founded during the early 1880s. After stopping at communities along the line of the Burlington Railroad between Holdrege and Culbertson, Davis decided to settle in McCook. He arrived there on May 28, 1885.

McCook in the spring of 1885 was just over three years old, but growth had been rapid because the town had been designated a Burlington Railroad division point. A government land office that opened in June 1883 helped attract settlers to the area and stimulated the town's development. By 1885 McCook had acquired most of the trappings of urban stability including a school, an opera house, and a public park. It boasted a population nearing 2,000 residents. With Byron Davis's arrival, the town claimed five physicians. Through hard



Dr. Byron B. Davis. Courtesy of Dr. John B. Davis.

work and his willingness to take on challenging cases, Dr. Davis soon earned a reputation in McCook and surrounding areas as an able and dedicated physician.

Though he retained much of his medical school idealism, Davis soon realized that medicine was a business as well as a profession. His growing practice provided opportunities to invest financially in the future of McCook and Red Willow County. Like many of his contemporaries, he acquired government land for speculative purposes though it is unknown whether he realized much income from his small-scale land holdings. Davis also joined with other businessmen to form the McCook Investment Company and demonstrated his confidence in the community by building a new house for himself and his future bride in the spring of 1887.

Davis practiced medicine in McCook from 1885 to 1893. He won a four year term on the University of Nebraska Board of Regents in 1888. After leaving McCook, Dr. Davis studied in Berlin, Germany, for several months before going to Omaha where he resided until his death in April 1933. Davis specialized in surgery and became chairman of the Department of Surgery of the Nebraska Medical College in 1930. He authored over seventy articles for medical journals, many of which dealt with the causes and treatment of cancer.

From McCook, Davis wrote frequently to his fiance Sopha Myers who lived in Beatrice, Nebraska, before the couple's marriage on June 7, 1887. The letters were preserved by Byron Davis's son, Dr. Herbert Davis of Omaha, and are now in the possession of the Davis family. Edited excerpts from the letters appear below. Except for portions relating to Davis's pending marriage, most references to personal affairs have been omitted.

THE LETTERS

Culbertson, Neb., May 20, 1885

Dear Sopha:

I just landed in this town and as it is almost 11 p.m. and I'll have plenty of time to look over the town in the morning, will talk to you a few pen scratches. This is a fine country out here. Doubtless you'll be pleased to know how things in this neck o'woods impress one. Did not make a stop Monday till I reached Holdrege. Found the town booming. Everything is bustle and activity. A large number of R.R. men were there ready to begin work on the road from Holdrege to the north west to cross the U.P. probably at Ogallala. There are to be some good towns along the route and I may go up there if I don't change my mind. Tuesday I went to Oxford, a little town very pretty and with some fine citizens but too many physicians for my health. By the way their new

R.R. eating house is about as fine as any I ever saw. Tuesday after supper I came on to Arapahoe, a much neater and more civilized village than I expected. Stopped until noon today when I came on to Cambridge. Did not like the place very well, though I'm inclined to think I could do something there, if I find nothing better. At 4 p.m. today came on a freight to Indianola and had time to see as much of the town as I cared to before the train got started, so I came right on to McCook. The latter is a fine town and the temptation to stop is great. Believe I could make it go there in West McCook, but want to look farther. Believe it can be made the handsomest town in the state. The R.R. holds it up and there seems to be a good deal of money there. There are five physicians there, but it is claimed that only two are doing much practice. Believe if I could get a little foothold there, it would be a fine location. Came here on the late train and hear that a new "medicine man" came here a short time ago. Expect to go on to Stratton tomorrow. Have heard from several sources that Stratton is a good point. Also Benkelman in Dundy County. Oberlin and Atwood, Kansas are being puffed a good deal and I may get down there in a day or two. This is interesting work I'm engaged in and don't feel like deciding what is to be done till I look the field over pretty thoroughly.

How is it my girl, are you becoming a little more resigned to the idea of my leaving Lincoln? Am still firmly of the opinion that it was the only thing to do. When you see me in my sombrero etc., you'll conclude I missed my calling in not being a "cowboy." Don't know where I shall be next week. Will let you know when I "get there." Written with a roomful of homesteaders.

As always, Byron

McCook, Neb., May 28, 1885

Doubtless you will be surprised to learn that I've concluded to stop at McCook. Visited Stratton, Atwood, Oberlin, etc. and found the field already as fully occupied as it is here. This is a fine town and seems to promise a steady growth. The B. & M. R.R. is backing it up and will probably put in additional shops in the fall. There are four physicians in the town. I make the fifth. Two of them about the same as told me that if I came in here they would cut my throat—professionally speaking. This of course put me on my mettle and I propose to go my full length. Told them I intended to treat them courteously—but at the same time gave them to understand that I have as good rights as they. "Medicine men are fighters!" I imagine you say. Old Dr. [A.J.] Willey the B. & M. R.R. surgeon received me in an entirely different manner. He is a rough and ready old fellow and reminds me of Dr. [Robert] Livingston of Plattsmouth of whom he is a great friend. Both of them are old army surgeons. I make my headquarters at present with Dr. W. at the B. & M.

Pharmacy. Cannot find a room in the whole town for an office. Shall get one as soon as possible. The doctor promises that he can throw enough practice into my hands from the start to pay my expenses, besides giving me a chance to help him in his R.R. work. Have been long enough in the world to take what he says with a grain of allowance but still think I've made a very fair strike. Don't expect to make my fortune in a year but *do* hope to make my salt. Conveniences here are unheard of. Am writing this standing up behind the show-case.

There has been a great deal of rain out here ever since I came. Was caught out in a hail storm last Saturday—the worst I ever saw. It continued for two hours. Five of us were out on the prairie and devoted our time holding blankets over our horses heads and trying to control them. Considerable stock was reported killed only two or three miles south of us.

Of course it won't be like living in Lincoln, but McCook is going to make a good town— but I'd better keep still till I find out whether she too starves me out. If this thing should happen, suppose you would conclude that I am a “fizzle.” Am not willing to give you a chance to think that.

Last night I wrote to Mother and Father of my whereabouts. It will be their first intimation of any intention of this kind. . . . Mother will expect me to be scalped by the Indians or perforated by the bullet of a cowboy.

June 4, 1885

It is swelteringly hot today and I have just taken a walk to see a patient in South McCook—fully a mile away. As I came back called around to see the office a Mr. Scott is building me. It is to be 12 x 20 ft. divided into a front and small rear room for consultation. It will seem much more like home when I have an office to myself. A drug store becomes a monotonous place to stay.

Why don't you take up a tree claim? If you do there is not much time to lose, but you could sell your relinquishment with little trouble a year from now, and you know you need not live on the land. If I can find a good chance to contest a claim near McCook I shall do so and make it my “homestead.” By sleeping on it occasionally, at the end of six months, if I am flush, can “pay out on it.”¹

June 18, 1885

The past ten days I have had a fearfully bad case on my hands. A young man at the hotel was probably snake-bitten, though no mark was found, in the hand while swimming. The hand and arm became frightfully swollen to the shoulder and erysipelas set in. He was very low and now have opened the arm in five places and get out something like a pint of pus three times a day. Think he will recover.

Last Tuesday evening we "McCookies" had the pleasure and great honor of listening to Belva Lockwood tell us what she knew about "Social and Political Life in Washington."² Was agreeably surprised in regard to the lady's general appearance, but she has not the brilliancy or masterfulness that I had been led to expect. It was really a mediocre essay—about up to the average newspaper correspondent article—don't know but even that degree of praise would be considered uncomplimentary by the correspondent. The school gave a very nicely prepared exhibition Thursday eve.

Practice is still in status quo. I manage to have something or other to do about every day but it is nothing large up to the present writing. The young man with the poisoned arm is the only case of any special importance that I have had. He is almost well again. It is much more encouraging than in [Lincoln]. Have a better and more influential class of patients. Am not by any means disposed to be discouraged. If I continue to do as well as I did in June, shall not starve—that is some consolation.

July 9, 1885

Turning to the subject of practice, must say that I see no reason to be discouraged though I've found no Waterloo as yet. Yesterday I struck three cases and today I did nothing but collect the fee from one of yesterday's victims. Hope to have a still better report to make soon.

Tuesday I went up into Frontier County expecting to pre-empt³ a quarter of land if any good claims were to be found but was unsuccessful except in passing a very enjoyable day—or rather a funny day. Had for my companion an old Scotch-Irish tailor who has spent the last thirty-five years of his life in New York City. You can imagine that he was a "tenderfoot" of the tenderest kind. The expressions he used about the bare prairie scenery were of an original character to say the least.

Our Fourth was quite a success. The fireworks were postponed until Monday evening on account of the rain.

July 22, 1885

Since I began writing, two little girls came into the office to invite me to attend their "dance" at the Commercial Hotel tonight. The ages of the ladies who are getting it up range from nine to fifteen years. What do you think of the precocity of us McCookies? Shall I go? Think I'll step over a few minutes after awhile to show my good will.

By the way, speaking of sociability, this is the most unsocial town I was ever in. Was at a W.C.T.U. social last evening and almost vowed I'd never go to such a thing again in the town. Talk about the acme of stiffness and formality and it was to be found there in its most flourishing form. Got acquainted with a few old ladies. Did not object to their

being old if they had had any notion of politeness. As it was I've set down the definition of "perdition" to be attending a "sociable?" in McCook. If I'd only been a little more acquainted it would have been difficult to resist an effort to introduce an innovation in the shape of a little air of cordiality. The reception com. would come around to perfect strangers and tell them they must "make themselves at home," and that the object was to "give the people a chance to know one another." Saying this, they would turn on their heel, depart and seek other souls to gladden without introducing their guests to a soul. Looked like the height of impudence didn't it? Does that not make you long to be a citizen of McCook?

Have a bad case of hysteria⁴ in a lady aged about thirty. She lives eight miles up Driftwood [Creek]. Am studying her case and reading everything on the subject I can lay my hands on. It is a strange disease. Hysteria simulates every known disease and some that are not known. Many keen physicians have been deceived into treating some severe organic disease when it would turn out to be hysterical especially for it is a disease. Its subjects lack will-power, have generally been accustomed to follow their every inclination too much.

July 29, 1885

Thus far in July—having two days yet to hear from—my practice has amounted, all told, to \$79.00. Of this I have taken in just \$37.00 in cash. Think most of the rest is good. Taking everything into consideration this is the best month's showing since I began practice. Will let you know from time to time whether I "beat the record." That looks very small but nevertheless I hope it is the nucleus of a good practice. As for Dr. [Zachius L.] Kay, am afraid if you apply the "survival of the fittest" theory he will keep ahead for I have concluded that he is a good practitioner—though I don't regard him very highly as a man. He calls on me frequently of late and tries to be very agreeable.

Night before last was called to a case of delirium tremens which turned out to be "alcoholic coma." Was called at 10 p.m. No pulse and immediate dissolution was expected. Began hypodermic stimulation and in the course of a half an hour began to detect slight pulse and this improved. Stayed with him till 2:30 a.m. At 4 a.m. yesterday was again hastily summoned and found him very nervous though not really conscious. At 8 a.m. he began to grow much worse and for three or four hours he was very near death from suffocating, his lungs and throat becoming clogged with mucous. The so-called death rattle was present for a long time in spite of our changing his position to clear lungs and his family had given him up. I sent for Dr. [T.B.] Stutzman to consult, and he gave it as his opinion that he would die before 10 a.m. I almost agreed with him but made the politic—as the sequel showed—statement that there was one chance in a hundred for him and I thought it right to

do our best under the circumstances. So I remained constantly at work at him and by noon began to see less serious symptoms and made up my mind that the man must be saved if skill and perseverance would do it. There is still a flicker of life remaining and as long as that remains there is hope. He was reported all over town as dying or dead and being a man well-known and quite popular in spite of his drinking habits—the case is attracting considerable attention. Have been with him almost constantly.

Excuse this letter. I've had just two and a half hours sleep in the last sixty hours—am sleepy and fear will get no sleep tonight.

August 6, 1885

Practice:—that man lived and is now able to be about the streets. He is very grateful but am afraid he will go back to his old habits again. If he does, I told him it will kill him. Have the cook of the Commercial [Hotel] under my care. He is threatened with typhoid. Mr. [George E.] Johnston [owner of the hotel] tells me I can have nothing to eat till he is cured. Of course that calls for an extra effort. To end my monthly report for July will say that the last two days I did \$17.00 worth of work and collected \$10.00 in money. Those figures all look very small but am not disposed to draw anything but a favorable omen from them. Thus far this month there has been little doing.

August 18, 1885

Last Saturday morning Dr. Willey, the B. & M. surgeon of this division of the road, sent for me to consult with him on a case. After thoroughly examining the woman and trying all my resources, I unhesitatingly advised a surgical operation. He was disposed to think she would die anyway, operation or no operation, and manifestly showed that he was afraid to operate. Sunday afternoon Dr. [A.J.] Shaw of this place and Dr. Moore of Tekamah were called in. They too—at least Shaw—were disposed to procrastinate and I got interested and told them we had no right to put off the operation since the woman was growing weaker every hour. Dr. Shaw fired the “boy just out of college” nonsense at me and said he was going to cure her without the knife. I retorted that “conservative surgery” was a good thing but like all other good things could be carried too far and insinuated that this was a case in which further delay was hazardous, etc. etc. etc. At last they decided upon an operation and again backed out. I remarked to them that as they were in the majority it would be necessary for me to submit but this delay was against my protest as to wait till Monday would put the lady well-nigh beyond reach of surgical interference. They overpowered me and it was put off and put off until yesterday p.m. when it was decided to operate, the chances being that the patient would die

on the table. Dr. Willey, who can saw off legs and arms with great assurance, was absolutely afraid to undertake so delicate an operation as this and informed me that I was to do the operation. Had not been counting on that but as I had insisted so strongly upon the thing could not well back out. Well, found a worse condition of affairs than expected but think the operation a success so far as the mechanical part is concerned but do not yet have much hope of saving the woman.

August 26, 1885

Well my patient, who has been taking a good deal of my time of late, is much better and bids fair to recover.

September 9, 1885

Practice is so-so. Not so very good and not so very bad. I have booked thus far this month just 45 dollars. This being the ninth of the month that is at the rate of 150 dollars per month. But as it is uncertain whether this will continue through the month and very doubtful whether I can collect more than 75% am not over-sanguine.

Was up to Stratton last night by the late train and returned on the early morning train so you need not be surprised at the announcement that I am "tired and sleepy too."

September 17, 1885

The patient I speak of is an old lady almost 70 years of age who is having a siege of Typho-malarial fever.⁵ For about a week I despaired of her recovery but now it looks a little more encouraging. Have another bad case in the person of a young lady with inflammatory rheumatism with the heart trouble which so often accompanies that disease. For some reason in the short time I have been in McCook, it has been my luck to have quite a number of very hard cases on my hands. Luck has favored me and I have yet to record the first death. How long this can be said-deponent sayeth not.

September 26, 1885

This month's practice bids fair to almost double any previous month. If this would continue through the year it would afford me infinite satisfaction. That is more however than one has any right to expect at this stage of the game. You may know that I look upon the footing of the little column with some interest. Bought a half interest the other day in a contest case.⁶ Don't know whether it will be all loss or a little gain.

Am thinking seriously of changing my office into one of the new brick buildings. The rooms are much pleasanter and are not so likely to attract loafers as rooms opening directly on the street. Like upstairs rooms better in every way.

October 2, 1885

Yesterday I took almost a holiday. Bought a half interest in a contest case and went out to see if the claim was any account. It is located six miles south of Culbertson and after getting lost and wandering about three or four hours we found the quarter to be a very good one and hope we can make a few dollars out of it at any rate. Took dinner—and it was the best meal I have eaten for many a long day—in a “dug-out.” The people were very pleasant and everything was as neat and in as good order as in the best kept house in Lincoln. They have an organ and seem to enjoy life just as well as (probably better) the dwellers on Fifth Avenue.

Have been looking up my book and am not a little pleased over the results of my September's work. The whole amount of my practice for the month foots up \$187.50. As it was only the fourth month of the residence in McCook, it gives me a feeling of satisfaction not easy to communicate through the medium of words. Of course this was not all cash but I think at least 75% is collectable. My success has been all that could be desired. If I were at all superstitious should almost imagine that a good fairy presided over my fortunes, for I have had an exceptionally large number of really desperate cases which turned out to be curable and either through my medicines or in spite of my medicines all have got well or are on the road to recovery. It is impossible that this record can last always and I am continually on the lookout to see a turning of the tide.

The wind is blowing a gale today and it would be dusty were it not for our metropolitan airs—this time in the shape of a street-sprinkler. Another new brick store was started in McCook this week and did I tell you about the large three story brick hotel upon which work has commenced? It is proposed to complete it this fall.

October 10, 1885

Yesterday I had the pleasure (?) of riding 17 miles and back towards the southwest. The wind was blowing terribly and the air was enriched by a good deal of government land. As I had to stop over three hours with my patient—an old lady of seventy odd years, a chronic invalid—it used up the day.

In regard to that R.R. position I know nothing positively yet.⁷ If I get the appointment I shall certainly have a pass. Had I a pass today should be tempted to use it. It is reported that old Dr. Willey is about to lose his position anyway so I will not be crowding him out.

Since I began writing this a man came running to my office and demanded my instantaneous presence at the hotel as a man had fallen in a fit. Found it to be epilepsy. He fell upon his face cutting a great gash across his nose, he was frothing at the mouth and in every way a frightful spectacle to the uninitiated. I reassured them, got him to bed,



West of Main Avenue, McCook.

dressed his nose, and he has "come to" all right. The trouble is, it will probably be repeated. He is one of the best surveyors in this part of the country and is a candidate on both tickets for County Surveyor. It is a pity, for the disease is almost incurable.⁸

October 14, 1885

This is the first day of the fair and our town is full to overflowing. It is fine weather and all seems promising for a successful fair. Horses are here from all the adjoining states. Several quite fast ones.

There is to be a theatre in town during the fair and a party consisting of three couples is booked to go tomorrow evening. My company is a Miss [Nellie] Stockton, a clerk in the U.S. Land Office who impresses me as being a very bright and intelligent lady. The other couples consist of two school ma'ams, a gentleman land office clerk, and a lawyer. No doubt it will be a brilliant crowd, whether the play is any account or not.

Practice is not so very crowding just now, though I put in a good day yesterday. My typhoid fever case—the old lady I think I told you about here—is almost well. A young lady only four doors from my office died of typhoid fever last week. For some reason we have had almost an epidemic this fall.

October 17, 1885

Well, they have me on my back, for how long I do not know. Hope for the best. I am being very well cared for considering that I'm among strangers, but of course it isn't like being at Mother's.

Took to my bed day before yesterday. Had been coming down for several days before then. Think if somebody had already been a resident of McCook I should have been bundled off to bed three or four days earlier and would be all right by this time.⁹

Thought I *must* write for I may not be able to write again for some time. Dr. Kay persists in having my disease Typhoid Fever but I humbly enter my protest and call it a mild remittent. Where Doctors can't agree things ought not to go on and think this patient will rebel and *get up*.

October 30, 1885

I am clothed and in my right mind. This is the first day I have been up, and although I feel very weak and cannot walk except by aid of chairs etc., am feeling first-rate and hope to be able to start for Salem¹⁰ Monday. Shall go to Lincoln Monday, stay at my sister's overnight and go down to S.[alem] Tuesday if I am strong enough.



The Commercial Hotel (left) was frequented by Dr. Byron Davis during his early residence in McCook. Courtesy of High Plains Historical Society.

November 18, 1885

My office is situated not far from purgatory. You see while I was convalescing a law and real estate firm was allowed to occupy the office under the delusion that the new place would be fixed by the time I was ready to go to work. Alas! mistaken calculations! It will not be completed for two weeks and in the meanwhile I must endure life under extremely uncongenial surroundings. For of my three pardners, one is on a chronic drunk, the second is so lazy he "doesn't get a move on himself" (western slang) oftener than once a week, the third is the redeeming feature and all he lacks is brains to make him a tolerably respectable fellow. Notwithstanding all this I manage to get along very comfortably without losing *any meals*.

Tomorrow am going out to look at an 80 [acres] about ten miles from town which has not been taken. If a good piece of land, shall preempt and "hold it down" this winter. It will be more valuable than a quarter section in Cheyenne Co. Kas.

November 24, 1885

In reply to your questions "Where are you tonight?" and "What are you thinking about?" I must answer with humiliation and shame that I was lost on the prairie twenty-five miles south west of here about the time you were writing and was thinking about camping for the night. My errand was to look at a quarter of land for a friend of mine in Richardson Co. and the getting lost, my mother would say, was a judgment upon me for Sabbath breaking. The land was over 30 miles from here and we were on the road back—[Leon] Moss, a young lawyer was with me—the first thing we knew we were eight miles out of the way and one of the horses was almost given out having been driven at least sixty miles. It was very cloudy and consequently very dark with now and then a little drizzling rain for variety. We must have traveled ten miles before being able to find a house. At last an honest farmer's house was found and two hungry mortals were literally taken in out of the wet and fed. On the whole it was quite a jolly escapade though I was so tired that I tossed from side to side till 3 o'clock in the morning before going to sleep.

It came to my actual knowledge the other day that within a week I had lost at least fifteen dollars worth of practice for the sole reason that I am unmarried. Can see no reason in the thing but that seems to be an insuperable objection in a large number of good families in this town. It makes me pause and think. To be married and have a home gives one an appearance of permanency in a place which goes far in gaining the people's confidence. It is very important to get the best possible hold upon the people now while the town is new and the people not *tied* to any particular doctor. For instance here is a family which Dr. Kay gets solely because he is married and I am not. Another family comes to

town-friends of No. 1. Someone in family No. 2 gets sick. They ask No. 1 about the doctors. The reply is "We employ Dr. Kay." As a result Dr. K. gets the family for all time. This is not a fanciful sketch but is happening here right along.

There was a Catholic fair in town last week and I was the lucky winner of a very fine cane rocking-chair which must have cost eight or ten dollars. It cost me 25 cents. It's very comfortable.

Have changed my quarters temporarily to the room in which I was sick. That crowd was too much for me.

December 2, 1885

Practice is *so-so*. It is, to say the least, very uneven. Some days there is nothing to do and others are comparatively good. Yesterday for instance, was a fair day. To be more definite, I took in fourteen dollars in cash yesterday most of which was earned on the same day. Would that I could do that well every day! Just wait a few years and we'll see.

We have a doctor in this town who, when called to see a patient, notices a few superficial symptoms and from them makes a diagnosis which is often entirely foreign to the real difficulty. In other words he has no intimate knowledge of the human system and consequently seldom can appreciate underlying causes and conditions.

A Mr. Holt, ex-drunkard and now dry, is holding a series of temperance meetings in our little village. May he do good for we sadly need a little stirring up in that direction. He is a coarse-fibred man and fairly disgusting as a speaker. The only thing he has to recommend him is his earnestness and the popularity of the cause he labors in. Several who were just crossing the line between moderate and excessive drinking have signed the pledge. May they keep it! I see evil results of drinking, from the mental as well as physical standpoint, almost every day.

December 12, 1885

Was just called to the McCook House to see a sick man. Was also called this p.m. in consultation to the bedside of a young man about to die of Pneumonia brought on through hard drinking and exposure. He is a perfect gentleman and a man of a good deal of ability when sober, but whiskey will be the death of him if not now, at some later period. His brother is president of two banks, one in Indianola and one here, Senator [James W.] Dolan, perhaps you remember such a man in the State Senate. What possesses men to become slaves?

December 29, 1885

Have just examined two men for life insurance. That is a fair day's work of itself and it seems to stand by itself for it's about all I've done today. This morning about 3 o'clock we were wakened by a severe

crash and roar but did not investigate thinking it was thunder. On rising this morning we found that fine new two story brick [building] two doors from here utterly demolished and piled upon a small wooden building next to it. All this was the result of a defective foundation of soft stone. Loss about \$3,000 and a dog. Verily it is about time the McCook builders were learning to build! Am becoming absolutely afraid to step inside a brick building. There will be some terrible loss of life some of these days I fear, for this is the third tumble of brick walls since my residence here.

January 13, 1886

Thus far the year 1886 has been a very busy one for me with very little to show for it thus far. I just stopped to "count up" and find that my practice thus far has amounted to exactly five dollars per day. As we only count upon from 65% to 75% of the work done, this is not an especially good showing but I'm bound to reach my \$1500 cash gross income this year if it's a possible thing!!! Was called out nights during that cold weather oftener than was strictly agreeable but I'll not grumble at that but rather hope for a continuation of the same.

My contest was "continued" till Feb. 15th on account of the absence of my principal witness who could not get there. Don't think that woman is going to appear against me. If she does, I shall feel like dismissing the case, "scared out by a woman!"¹¹

January 24, 1886

This is one of those quiet beautiful sabbaths in which nature seems doing her best to impress men with the sacredness of the day. The sun is half hidden by the clouds as if afraid to break the spell with his presence. Guess that's enough poesy for this time.

My time and thoughts have been pretty largely occupied the past two or three days with a little boy eight years of age who is very low with pneumonia. Just came from his bedside and should not be surprised any minute to hear of his death. Never saw pneumonia come upon a person so violently and as he is a puny little boy at best it has almost completely overcome his vital powers. There was an affecting scene at his bedside about 4 o'clock this morning. He called his parents and brothers and sisters about him and told them that he was going to die and go to heaven and he urged them all to so live that they would meet him there. One of his brothers uses tobacco and he asked him not to do so anymore. All this coming from a boy only eight years old, small and frail, in a clear earnest voice, must indeed have seemed to his family like a message from the other land. He is one of the brightest little fellows I ever saw. He wants me to stay with him as much as I can. When I stoop down over him he pats my cheek with his little hand, seems to understand that I am doing all I can for him, but thinks he is past help. I

have only a very small grain of hope left of saving him. Such a case impresses one most forcibly with the responsibilities of my profession. To have a life hovering between the two worlds and all the friends of the loved one turned to one with tearful beseeching eyes—this makes all the common cares and perplexities of life seem very petty indeed.

January 26, 1886

Let me tell you how I was cheated out of my breakfast this morning. Mr. Hess came for me before I was up to go to see a sick child in East McCook. Got up and dressed and told him that if there was no hurry would go and eat breakfast first and then come right down. That was satisfactory, but just as I got out of the front door of the drug store a man came hurrying across the street wanting me to go to *West* McCook. Thought he could be put off till I ate breakfast and had visited Mr. Hess's child but just as I got to the hotel steps another man came running from *West* McCook to tell me to hurry. Suffice it to say I did not get my breakfast but the redeeming feature is that I have thirteen dollars set to my credit as the result of my forenoon's work.

That little boy I told you of Sunday is still in a very dangerous condition, though I have a little more grounds for hope than I had two days ago. He is a bright, patient little fellow.

January 29, 1886

That little boy has been going on about the same until today he seems better and [I] am becoming more and more encouraged. Dr. Kay saw him once and said he could not live. Wednesday I ran across a case which I began to think demanded the same operation as that performed upon Mrs. Rowel¹² but just as I was about to despair, I succeeded in giving her temporary relief, though symptoms demanding the operation may arise at any time. Am about discouraged concerning Mrs. Rowel. The operation was recovered from but while yet very weak, malarial fever came upon her and handled her roughly. She has times at getting better and then some new and unexpected complication will arise and bring her near death's door. Am inclined to think she will never get well again.

Was just called up town to see a sick child, and must close this shortly and visit an old lady whose husband just interviewed me—a dead-beat case unless I can get the old fellow to do a little work for me sometime. Am beginning to feel as if I was getting a sort of professional standing here now. By the way, I put my papers on a homestead yesterday and am now a “horny-handed tiller of the soil.”

February 5, 1886

We have been visited with another snow storm and quite cold weather again. By the way I had a little adventure which was quite interesting while it lasted. Wednesday p.m. I was called to see a patient 15 miles in the country and in a strange locality. On the road out a horse slipped down and broke the "buggy" enough to hinder me considerably so that I did not get started back till "the shades of night were falling fast." It was very cloudy and dark and soon a thick, driving snow storm "set in." Kept the road all right for a time, until the road was completely obliterated by the snow. Then the horses could scarcely be persuaded to go in any other direction than with the wind—about at right angles to the direction I wanted to go. To make the story short, we wandered around an hour or two until I had no idea of the points of the compass and began to think I was destined to pass the night on the bleak prairie. But fortunately I at last spied a light and soon found myself at the log cabin of an old German, somewhat chilled but in other respects ship-shape. There I passed the night and came home yesterday morning with more respect for the Nebraska prairies than I had before.

February 14, 1886

Allow me to inform you that my rep. [utation] is extending. Yesterday a woman came from Cambridge to put herself under my treatment. Her husband is a wealthy stockman and they are at the Commercial intending to stay several days until I get the run of the case when I can treat her by seeing her only semi-occasionally. She has heart disease and is almost a traveling hospital. Tomorrow evening I am to go to Culbertson on the 10 p.m. train and the next morning go with Dr. [N.] Atwood of C. (to help him perform a surgical operation, six miles into the country.)

February 18, 1886

I did an operation six miles from Culbertson Tuesday and now I learn that the old Doctor whom I operated for is making a mess of the after-treatment. Am expecting a telegram every minute asking me to go up on the noon train. Wish, under the circumstances, I had not undertaken the thing at all without having the patient here in McCook where I could attend right to her. A failure always rebounds to the surgeon's discredit no matter how little blame he really deserves. I undertook the affair thinking that the physician in charge was fully able to attend to the aftertreatment.

In regard to that little boy who was so low with pneumonia, all the report I have to give is that he did not die and is feeling much better but the deposit in his lung has not cleared away and I fear it is going to leave a crippled lung—in other words, "chronic pneumonia."

Our C. [hautauqua] L. [literary] and S. [cientific] C. [ircle] is in a semi-prosperous condition and hope our labors will not be entirely without profit. We have a dozen members. Friday eve. the Knights of Pythias have a reception—*very select*. My company is to be Miss [Ida] Hollister, a lady clerk in the U.S. Land Office. She is also a member of our reading circle.

That telegram which I have been expecting has just arrived and I shall go to Culbertson on noon train, returning this evening. It's hard work to leave town just at present, I have so many patients here. None are so *very* sick.

Took the trip yesterday and returned on the evening train. Am very much afraid that my operation is going to result in failure. "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" and this is a little more true in surgery than in anything else. Found that my Culbertson *colleague* had commanded that no water be brought near the wound and the result of such treatment was manifest in the air.

I showed my respect for the doctor's judgement by calling for water and proceeding to do a thorough cleansing with water and carbolic acid. Don't know whether I was too late to accomplish anything or not. *Some very stupid men are practicing medicine*. I'm to visit said patient again tomorrow.

February 21, 1886

Just had the honor of prescribing for a child of a homeopathic physician.¹³ By the way we have two brand new physicians in town, thus making seven of us in all. Whether we can all make a living or not is a question not yet decided. Either the people here must more of them get sick, or we must have an influx of strangers, or last sad thought, some of us M.D.'s must emigrate or starve. I had a square meal at noon so don't worry about me yet awhile. Seriously, the pill and powder fraternity is overdone here and we that are already here can ill afford to have our practice cut in upon—but guess we'll have to *submit gracefully*. I'm *not* growling—just showing my righteous indignation. Think I can hold most of the practice I already have at any rate.

Was up to see my Culbertson patient again yesterday. It is yet too early to form much of an idea about the success of the operation—though I'm *not* very enthusiastic.

February 25, 1886

Quinsy¹⁴ is almost epidemic here in McCook. Have treated at least fifteen or twenty children for that disease within the last few days. It is not generally very severe, lasting usually only five or six days. The little boy with pneumonia is improving right along and sits up some. The little fellow is very much emaciated—a pitiful object withal. Was at Culbertson again yesterday and am strongly impressed with the notion

that my operation was an unqualified failure. Can't tell yet for certain.

March 1, 1886

Yesterday (Saturday) morning was called up before seven o'clock and without being allowed time to eat a bite of breakfast hurried to a place ten miles up Driftwood [Creek]. Got back to McCook at about 11 a.m., attended to some cases in town and had just finished eating my dinner and reading your good letter when I was again hastily summoned to the same place ten miles away. Stayed right there till after 9 o'clock this morning. The only sleep I had was about an hour in the comfortable position found in lying across a trunk and two chairs and pulling my overcoat over me. This was awhile after midnight and was allowed no more rest. Arrived back in town between 10 and 11 this a.m., visited a case, Dr. Kay made an hour's call, ate my dinner, and on the road back to my office was called to hold a consultation with a physician I had never seen at the house of a Mr. Turner twelve miles N.E. of here on the Red Willow. Held the consultation and in spite of the bad roads—snow, slush, and mud—arrived back in town at 7 o'clock—two hours ago. Examined a candidate for life insurance, had a prescription filled for a little boy (another case of pneumonia in a 3 yr. old boy), ate my supper, and now—I am here.

March 6, 1886

Have not been very busy this week and consequently took occasion to "take in" the M.E. Church sociable. We had a lively time, almost boisterous part of the evening, and am afraid I made a little more than my share of the noise. Let myself loose, *forgot my dignity*, and "boldly waded in." 'Twas really enjoyable and reminded me of the distant past (when I was a soph. [omore]).

Must now go down under a bank in South McCook where in a little dark, filthy sod shanty about 10 ft. sq. live a man and his wife with four squalid children. The wife is quite sick and if she recovers under the circumstances she'll do well. I would not sleep in such a place for a good deal. There seems to be disease in the air. Can't see how those children can live in such a place. They are nice enough people but criminally ignorant and shiftless.

March 17, 1886

Just returned from Stratton this morning. Yesterday while eating dinner and after the 1 p.m. train had arrived, a telegram was handed me demanding my immediate presence in Stratton. Dropped dinner and rushed down to the depot. When [I] arrived in Stratton found that patient lived fifteen miles south of Stratton. Found a lady with strong indications of beginning consumption. Got started back at 11 p.m. and

arrived at hotel at 1:30 in the morning. Went to bed and was called up to take the 4 o'clock train. A fine night's work especially as I got the cash for my services. That thought does tend to prevent weariness.

March 23, 1886

This is the pleasantest day of the season. Almost too fine to stay indoors.

This morning I took that little boy who has had such a siege with lung fever and its "sequelae" for the past three months for a drive—the first time he has been out of doors. It makes me feel pretty good.

March 31, 1886

Yesterday was a sixteen dollar day—at least I did that much work and put it on my books. Providence, you see, smiles upon us. Have been figuring on my homestead. It is 15 miles from town and I could hold it and probably prove up in six months by sleeping there two nights in the week and having a goodly amount of breaking done. But the trouble is I should doubtless lose almost as much practice as the claim would be worth. Hardly know yet what I shall do with it. The land will be worth something two or three years hence.

April 4, 1886

Had a glorious trip to see that lady in Rawlins Co, Kas. Friday night. It snowed and the wind blew all night and I can tell you it was a hard job to keep the road but arrived in Stratton just in time for the 4:30 a.m. train. The lady (my correspondent whose letters I showed you) has probably only a few weeks to live. Her consumption seems to be of the galloping kind.¹⁵ Poor woman. It is hard to meet cases for whom one can not help knowing that he can do nothing toward a permanent cure but only mitigate some of the more distressing symptoms.

April 8, 1886

The first city election of the *city* of McCook was held last Tuesday and we are now duly organized as a city of the second class with a full set of city officers. And thus progresses the good work.

The 1st of April I made a new departure. Am not so sure that I'll be able to have the "sand" to keep it up. It is to keep a professional diary. The plan is this: Every patient I see from one suffering with the slightest cold to one at the point of death is put into the book. All the symptoms are noted down, and a full record of the treatment is kept. This may sometime be valuable in case I want to write a paper upon any particular disease or plan of treatment.

April 10, 1886

Believe I mentioned our first city election. Our old town board met

Wednesday evening and refused to issue certificates of election to the new officers. This results in quite an obstruction. Don't know what the outcome will be. If the village board does not reconsider, the question will have to go into the courts. There is no reason for the thing only that the new officers are not acceptable to the old board and they feel like being stubborn. Besides there is quite a suspicion of fraud on the day of election.

April 18, 1886

Just after beginning this letter was called to make a drive to the country—3½ miles. Believe it is the windiest day I ever attempted to drive. Could hardly hold the reins in my hands and my lap-robe took a sudden departure for parts unknown and up to this time has not been retaken. There is a strong suspicion that it started for Canada.

April 25, 1886

It is a cold day and a strong wind blows the rain in a terrific manner. (Is it thus in Lincoln?) I was called out through the mud at half past two o'clock this morning and have not been still since. In fact, to be explicit, I earned eleven dollars this morning before church. Am now waiting for the rain to hold up a little so that I can make another call. Attended the M.E. Church this morning. The church was quite beautifully decorated and Easter services were very *creditable*. One would think that our Congregational Church was in the last throes and its obituary notice already written up but I feel that if we could get a minister with a modicum of energy and ability new life would be instilled into our lifeless hulk. As it is I go more to the M.E. Church than to the Congregational. Is that wrong?

May 2, 1886

Well yesterday was a hard day but not a very profitable one. I want you to know about how we are prospering so will just inform you that during the month of April I took in, in cash, one hundred and twenty-nine dollars. Have averaged over a hundred dollars per month thus far this year in cash. Someway I don't feel that is very bad taking into consideration the length of time I have been here. Believe we can live comfortably—and lay by a little on that amount.

May 6, 1886

Dr. Presson of Beatrice was just in and wants me appointed examining surgeon for the Western Mutual Benevolent Association of Beatrice. Suppose I can make a few dollars a year at it. Am now examiner for several life ins. cos.

Yesterday was the busiest day I have had for two months. Two trips to the country the last one twelve miles away made it harder than usual.

May 13, 1886

Quite a good deal of prairie is being broken and more solid and extensive improvement being made in this vicinity than ever before. Business houses in our town are not being built as much as last year but a good many residences.

May 19, 1886

Took a drive fifteen miles into the country to see a lady this A.M.—the fourth trip to the same place within the past ten days. Have a very sick patient. Took Dr. Kay with me today for consultation. He ratified my diagnosis and advised a continuation of the treatment.

Last evening I had conferred upon me the first degree of Masonry. Thought if I was to be here alone another year I might as well go into the lodge.

May 24, 1886

This evening there is to be given in the Opera House by local talent an "Old Folks Concert." I am booked to act as Miss Stockton's escort. She is angry with me because I failed to do my duty in relation to the Chautauqua Circle. We shall probably have a "racket."

Tomorrow morning I must visit a patient fifteen miles in the country. Expect to start at 3 or 4 o'clock to avoid the heat of the day. Have to visit that patient about every third day and sometimes every other day.

By the way, did I tell you that the Methodists are starting a college— or university as they call it—about 18 miles down the road from McCook?¹⁶ The cowboy swagger of the Republican Valley will now speedily give way to "culchaw."

Just now I am making a good many examinations for the Western Mutual Benevolent Association of Beatrice. Their agent has taken twenty-eight risks here in McCook within the last week. Wonder if it is any good? For some reason I do not have much confidence in the company.

June 2, 1886

The Old Folks' Concert which should have been given a week ago was postponed until last eve on account of the storm. It was a very creditable entertainment. After the concert I sat up with a patient who was struck by lightning last Friday. Her husband was sick at the time but now both are doing well and will recover.

June 6, 1886

Am tired out. Have not been so utterly wearied for a long time as the past day or two. With a cranky old woman and a man with delirium tremens each sending for me every half hour or so, life has been made a

burden to me. But both are about well and I'll hope to get a little rest. My office practice the last few days has been remarkably good. All this makes me feel first rate, though tired.

I have at least secured some lots for our home. They are a little nearer to the office than the ones I wrote you about. Just five and one-half blocks away and I think their location about as desirable as any in the town. They cost five hundred dollars.

June 20, 1886

Have been quite busy since returning home. Friday was called to see the consumptive patient whom I have spoken of fifteen miles in the country and had the esteemed privilege of riding home in one of the heaviest rainstorms I have seen for many a day. Found the patient spitting blood considerably and with some other bad symptoms. Yesterday I was called to see a patient at Trenton 23 miles west. Last evening "Queen Esther" was given in the Opera hall by home talent. It is probably the best entertainment ever given in McCook. Did not suppose we had so much musical talent in the town. As I was called out twice during the evening and at last gave it up and concluded it was not my night out, cannot speak of the play except as the small part which I heard impressed me.

July 1, 1886

Have an old gentleman on my hands now, 80 yrs. of age who is suffering from Bright's disease. He is not likely to recover. Six miles from town.

July 10, 1886

As the thermometer registered 108 in the shade and as the drive was twenty-two miles from town to Danbury—starting at 2 p.m. made one of the most wretchedly hot trips I ever attempted. Did not start home till almost sundown so the return trip was quite pleasant.

The wheat harvest in this locality is almost completed and is a very fair one. The corn still looks splendidly but a few more days such as we are now having will, I fear, make it hide its head.

You asked me what I had done with my homestead. Am sorry to say that I still have it on my hands. My six months will be up by the 28th of this month and then I suppose it will be contested unless I succeed in disposing of it and such a prospect is not very flattering. If I could hold it until after harvest think it would bring a fair price. Suppose I shall have to give it away almost and that does not suit my plans in the least. The loss of two or three hundred, in my present financial status, means a good deal. Because just now I am counting upon every dollar with a good deal of anxiety. Well if I lose it shall doubtless be able to survive the shock and five years from now be as well off.

Practice is a little slow yet. That old gentleman I was speaking of died last Sunday evening. This hot weather will surely produce sickness if it continues much longer. I am an observer of the signs of the times.

July 22, 1886

A letter from John Hartman a day or two ago informed me of a fine opening in Kearney for a medical partnership if I wished to form one. It seems that the leading physicians of Kearney were Drs. [C.T.] Dildine and [M.A.] Hoover. Recently Dr. Dildine died and there would be a good chance to go into partnership with Hoover. I wrote him my thanks and told him that I felt well enough satisfied at present and unless such a partnership would promise a decided increase in my revenue I did not care to consider the proposition. Can hardly see that we have much to complain of in regard to the present status of practice. In fact I feel considerably gratified at my apparent success since coming to McCook although I hope to be able to increase the net profits soon.

July 25, 1886

I have a case of diphtheria on my hands. The first I have seen in Nebraska. The victim is a boy ten years old, and as the disease seems thus far to be running a mild course I have strong hopes of his recovery. Do you know the anxiety of having such a case wears one completely out?

August 4, 1886

A frank confession is good for the soul: *ergo*, I'll confess to a mistake I made in a diagnosis. That case, of supposed strychnia poisoning which I spoke of, and which I treated for that, and then when she began to recover concluded from her peculiar conduct that I had made a mistake and had been treating hysteria for strychnia poisoning is the one I wish to confess about. She herself has since admitted that she took a dose of strychnine. The only thing that prevents my appearing ridiculous in the eyes of those interested is that I was not so frank with them and did not fully give up the strychnia theory but merely remarked that she had "some symptoms that reminded me of hysteria." On the other hand they give me great credit for saving her. It makes one feel a little cheap, but it is not "policy" to disabuse their minds. My treatment until all danger was past was for strychnia poisoning—and that no doubt is what saved her—so I conscientiously try to educate myself to believe that I deserve all the credit they give me. Don't feel so badly about it as I should were it not a mistake which I think almost anyone would have made under similar circumstances.

August 8, 1886

The "professional secret" which was divulged to you [the strychnine case] tickled your sense of the ludicrous as I expected it would. Don't you see it takes practice for one to get himself out of a ridiculous box with dignity; and I imagine you never saw me so dignified in your life as I was during that late blunder. Well—well—medicine is not yet a fixed science and it is doubtful whether it ever will be. Until it is, blunders just as absurd are liable to happen to any of us. The fewer they are however, the better it will be for the reputation of the physician and the bodily welfare of his patient. Could all come out as luckily as my latest, it would be fortunate.

Have a patient with pneumonia who has been wavering between life and death for the last three or four days. Don't know yet which will be victorious. Stole a case from Dr. Stutzman yesterday. The Dr. had been treating the gentleman for three days for incessant vomiting, but all the time he kept growing worse. So early yesterday morning Dr. S. was bounced and I was called in. By hard work I had his vomiting stopped within twelve hours and today he is sitting up. Feel particularly good about it because Stutzman exerts himself to steal all the cases from the other doctors that he can get. Fraternal love, you see, is one of the cardinal virtues which we sometimes neglect.

August 15, 1886

If it has been as warm there as here you have doubtless been engaged during the past week in a desperate but unsuccessful attempt to keep warm [cool?]. It has been simply terrible here and with all the rest my days and nights have been fully employed in visiting the sick. Most of the victims are among the children. I lost one bright little patient Wednesday night. He was an only child, two and one half years old and about as cute a child as you ever saw. It almost killed his parents. Worked for three hours over his mother to get her quieted down. She was wild. Lung fever [pneumonia] was what killed him.

You know how it is to be completely wearied out body and mind? That has been about my condition for three or four days. But am hopeful that we shall have it easier now, though the weather is no better.

McCook is about to establish a Library Association. Believe we are now large enough and prosperous enough to support a good public library. It will add a little to the chances for mental growth if a good selection is made.

Heard a sermon on agriculture this morning. A good one!

August 17, 1886

There has been an unprecedented amount of sickness here the past few days. Have been going day and night—almost. Most of the trouble is among children—infants. I wrote you about the little boy who died of

pneumonia last Wednesday night. Yesterday morning another little patient breathed his last. He was about ten months old, has never been well, and for a long time I did not think he could be brought through last winter. At last he fell an easy victim to Cholera Infantum.¹⁷ Dr. Kay has a little patient which will probably die before night of the same disease. Most of the other sick ones are improving, except a man eight miles in the country whom I was out to see yesterday. As I got to bed at 2:30 this morning I feel somewhat sleepy. An old lady suffering from intense and constant vomiting is what kept me up.

August 22, 1886

Was up all night last night at a consultation case near Culbertson. The patient died this morning. Disease the past few weeks seem more fatal than I ever saw it before. The hot weather alone is sufficient to exhaust a person even if he is not very sick. Was called to three new cases yesterday afternoon and to two more this morning. Hope that none of them are going to be very sick, though it is yet a little too early to tell definitely. The lady who had pneumonia was doing finely and had begun to sit up but was allowed by her friends to have her own way too much and yesterday was taken with a relapse. This morning her fever was higher than ever. So you see I'm busy.

August 25, 1886

Expect to be subpoenaed to go to Culbertson tomorrow to testify in a malpractice case, or murder. I don't know which it will be. If all accounts be true it ought to be the latter.

A mass meeting of citizens last night resolved to form a public library association. I did some hard rustling to bring it about and am correspondingly pleased with the result. As I am chairman of the Com. on organization and we are to report next Tuesday eve must get the com. together tonight and get to work.

September 3, 1886

Our library is still progressing and I see no reason why it should not be made a success. One thing is certain we need it badly and the only way to realize anything is by exertion. McCook is large enough to support a good one and that is what we are going to have. We hope to start with four or five hundred volumes and gradually add to that. If we only succeed in getting a good committee on selection of books a strong point will be gained.

We are still confidently expecting the Rock Island Road. Do not think it will come but, you know, loyalty to the town demands that I expect it. Don't you know that people in this world are not thought to be quite true blue if they do not bend their opinions to suit the wishes of the majority? Therefore we all of us ought to be confident the road will come.

September 7, 1886

I was upon the hill last evening looking through a cottage which a gentleman is building. It gave me a hint which I hope can be worked into a slight improvement over our plans. Have not time now to study it out but if I succeed in making anything out of it, will send you the results of my labors. Believe it will pay us to devote considerable time to planning our cottage for it is to be our home and we want it as conveniently arranged as it is possible to make it. Furthermore we want the plans as definite as possible before next spring when the work of building will commence.

Since the weather became cooler it has been getting distressingly healthy here in McCook. If you hear of my being on the point of starving hope you'll not fail to send me a crust of bread. During a healthy season a "medicine man" is a helpless creature truly.

September 13, 1886

Was called about daylight Sunday morning to see a sick woman fifteen or sixteen miles north west of town—a place I had never been. On my return found an urgent call to visit a man south east of town across the river, also found A. R. Keim and after eating dinner took him along. This latter is a case of genuine typhoid fever. When we came back found a call to go right up to the north side of town. Counting up I find I drove over forty miles besides all the town practice. Ran across three sick children after church last night. Today has been even more busy. Have made three quite lengthy trips to the country besides several visits in town and a large number of office consultations.

For tomorrow I am already booked for those (three) (same) trips to the country, several town calls, and a trip to Trenton—22 miles west—by the noon train, returning at 5 p.m.

September 18, 1886

It is Saturday eve and this has been the busiest week I have seen since I began practicing medicine. Must brag—my practice during this week of seven days ending tonight at midnight has amounted to just one hundred and twenty five dollars and fifty cents with the four hours from now to midnight yet to hear from. Have been on the jump I assure you. Yesterday gave three teams all the driving they wanted. Last night at midnight took supper sixteen miles north west of here and drove in after that. My patients are all but one of them improving so I feel a trifle better.

Was intending to fix up that plan for a house that I have in mind but have been too busy the past week to think anything about it. Glad to learn that you are accumulating a list of cottages for my inspection. Am glad this is the last year of boarding at hotels and sleeping in my office. Have been doing just about that sort of thing for ten years.

September 28, 1886

Made four trips to Culbertson within three days. Succeeded in saving a baby when the Culbertson M.D. told the mother that all she had to do was prepare to lose it. The thing does not indicate any special skill on my part; only obtuseness on the part of old Dr. Atwood. But it does me just as good as far as reputation is concerned as if it had been a miraculous cure. As the father of the child is a wealthy and influential lumber merchant—having yards in three towns up the road—the little affair will probably help me to more practice. Was almost sick with a cold last evening but at 11 p.m. started out in the chill night air to make a call thirteen miles in the country among the canyons south of the Driftwood. Lost my way but at last reached my destination right side up but shaking with the cold plus a severe headache. Was kept busy all the time and started back at 9:30 o'clock this morning; so you see I've not had a wink of sleep since night before last. Am feeling a hundred per cent better however today, so guess the night's work did me good.

October 5, 1886

I want to give you the result of September's work. Feel quite proud of it and yet I hope sometime to do more than that right along. My month's work amounted to exactly \$317.50. The amount of actual cash taken in was \$244.00.

October 10, 1886

The McCook Fair was a splendid success. The races were as good as those at the state fair and the display of produce was as good though of course the quantity was less. The \$5000 offered in premiums can all be paid so you can imagine we had some crowds. Friday p.m. I gallantly drove Mrs. Kay and Miss Stockton down in my cart, Dr. Kay and the children going in his. In the evening the same crowd, omitting the children, went to the Opera House to hear "Under the Gaslight." Absolutely the weakest troupe I ever had the agony of listening to for two and a half hours. Not half of them knew their lines.

Our town still flourisheth. A new bank is about to be started. Dr. Kay is building a very pretty residence. It will be the best in town.

October 13, 1886

We—that is, a dozen leading business and professional men of McCook—have a scheme. It is a secret at present. You may help me keep it. The scheme is this: to form a stock company, have it incorporated, and do a general loaning and in a year or two, a banking business. It will be known under the name of the "McCook Investment Company." The capital stock is to be \$25,000 with the privilege of increasing at any time to \$100,000 or any fraction thereof. It is divided into 250 shares of one hundred dollars each. The stock is to be paid in

my monthly installments. I have taken twenty shares. Our object is to make money and it is to be done by loaning on chattels for which we can command from 2% to 3% per month, shaving notes, buying county warrants, purchasing real estate, loaning on real estate, etc. etc. We also expect to negotiate loans in the east at a low rate of interest and place them here at higher rates. Also in a short time, to receive deposits the same as banks. Our dozen is made up of the solid men of the town. C. [Charles F.] Babcock, the present receiver in the U.S. Land Office; G. [Gilbert L.] Laws, register of the U.S. Land Office and candidate for Sec. of State, as well as business and professional men of the town. We shall start out very modestly but I see no reason why we should not succeed in making a little money. Not a great amount but it will be a good investment and no wild-cat speculation.

October 17, 1886

This morning Geo. Chenery brought my horse around to the door and Ed. Lowman constituted himself my coachman driving me around to my patient's doors and holding the horse till the visits were completed.¹⁸ Suppose I could have got around myself but such thoughtfulness is appreciated nonetheless and will not soon be forgotten. Am feeling much better this p.m. so you have no cause to feel uneasy about me. Shall be as well as ever within two days. Remember there are no symptoms of fever. It is only a severe cold aggravated by having been called out o' nights a good deal of late.

I told you, if I mistake not, about the "McCook Investment Company." We met again last night and adopted articles of incorporation. Permit me to inform you that I was elected as one of the Board of Directors. You'll please lift your hat to me! It will not probably take them long to discover that I am not a financier.

Did I tell you about the sick baby—suffering from the brain trouble, which so frequently complicates the diseases of infancy? It is the child of a man who is just starting a bank here. Think we are going to save the little fellow. If so I'll have some staunch friends for the parents appreciate the gravity of the trouble and are disposed to give full credit. They are very fine people. Mrs. [Frank H.] Spearman is a lady whom you will like to know.

Am going to sell my tree claim if I find a good chance. It's so far away and they watch so closely that it will be contested the first thing I know. Therefore it seems best to get it off my hands.

October 21, 1886

Have another sick baby on my hands in Culbertson. My rep. at that town is increasing so that among the well-to-do citizens I'm nearly always sent for in serious cases. Doubtless some first-class doctor will settle there soon and cut off some of my revenue from that direction.

Their three physicians now there don't seem to command a great amount of confidence.

That sick baby I wrote you about is almost as well as ever. I tell you, Sopha, in such cases the pleasure of feeling that one has been an instrument in restoring a sick child to its parents is enough to counter-balance all the hard work and aggravations connected with the practice of medicine.

October 28, 1886

For the last two weeks have been hoping to be able to pay you a visit about Saturday and Sunday but find that it will be almost impossible to get away this week. Have a bad case in Culbertson which requires frequent visits, also a bad case of typhoid fever which I am uncertain which way it will go, besides these there are several other cases more or less severe which it would hardly be the part of prudence to leave. Don't believe I ever wished so much to go but suppose we shall have to fall back upon the old maxim of "business before pleasure."

Yesterday Dr. Kay and I drove to Trenton, twenty-five miles up the road, and under the direction of the coroner took up a body buried two days before and performed a post-mortem examination. The girl died under rather suspicious circumstances and the community was aroused, suspicion of foul play being rife. It was therefore thought best for it to be investigated and Dr. Kay and myself were selected to make the investigation. In my mind the girl's father and Dr. A.H. the attending physician—the persons upon whom the cold hands of suspicion had been laid—were completely exonerated from all blame. It seems as if the majority of people are a great deal more ready to believe evil of people than good. The broad charity taught in the Bible is not practiced much even by those who make the loudest and longest prayers. But enough of such moralizing.

November 1, 1886

Business. Practice during the month of October was not so good as in September though if I can keep going at that rate think we can manage to live and gradually "reduce the public debt." Practice amounted in the gross to \$279.00 while in actual cash I only took in \$159.00 You know I made an estimate at the beginning of the year that the cash income (gross) for 1886 would be \$1500.00. Shall probably run a hundred dollars ahead of that from present outlook.

November 10, 1886

When I arrived home Monday evening, found it raining slightly. Also found a man at the depot waiting to see me and get me to go and see his sick baby. Found him very sick with pneumonia and it is still uncertain whether he will recover. Found several others awaiting me at the drug

store and was kept busy until quite late. Most of these had called in Dr. Kay but with the understanding that I was to be called up as soon as I returned. Quite a good deal of sickness has started up, more than I expected this late in the fall. Have now under treatment three cases of pneumonia and two of typhoid fever, all but one of them very sick. These together with the trivial miscellaneous ills, make me busy.

November 18, 1886

Last Tuesday, take it all in all, was the stormiest and most disagreeable day I ever experienced. One could scarcely see the buildings across the street the snow was so thick and as for facing the storm it was next to an impossibility. I was quite busy most of the day around town. Along in the afternoon, a man came in for me from six miles in the country. At first thought I would go as the case seemed quite urgent but on further consideration my prudence asserted itself and I refused to make the attempt. Had it not been necessary to exactly face the storm which was then at its greatest violence guess it would have been all right but the snow was deep and the canyons in that direction deeper. Besides it would not have been possible to get a horse to face that storm. So I sent the man to the other physicians and they all followed my example and refused to go. I tell you it is hard to refuse to go where one knows he is needed. Just think how we would feel if one of our friends were placed under the same circumstances!

November 24, 1886

Excuse this lead pencil and me for using it for I am sitting at the bedside of a little patient suffering from membranous croup.¹⁹ (Shall I give you an account of the case?) Rose Williams, a little girl age 8 yrs. was taken sick last Saturday evening, the symptoms were difficulty of breathing and a "croupy" cough. Early Sunday morning I was called in and informed the father that it was membranous croup and that she would probably have a very serious time. Late Sunday night I saw that she was steadily growing worse and began to think it would be necessary to perform tracheotomy (look in the dictionary). About daylight they called me up again and found her much worse. Along towards noon with Dr. Kay's assistance, also Wallace Keim's (he was in town) I cut into the trachea and inserted a tube, just when she seemed to be breathing her last. It took considerable energetic using of artificial respiration to get her to breathing again but at the end of about 15 mins. she began to breath of her own accord. Have been with her every minute since then except when Dr. Kay comes up and relieves me. The tube is being continually filled up with shreds of membrane which have to be removed. Whether we get her through or not is still a question but am going to fight it for all there is in it. She is getting very weak and exhausted but I'm still hopeful. Should she recover it will probably do

my practice no harm at least. Since the operation have scarcely had time to attend to my other practice at all.

Have a call now to go ten miles in the country to a poison case and have just sent a note to Dr. Kay to see if he can come and stay here while I make the trip. Am not very anxious however for I don't like to leave the little girl. She doesn't think anyone can do for her as well as I do and when [I am] away she keeps inquiring when I will be back.

Am not able to write more than a few words at a time. Have to keep clearing the tube, using the atomizer, etc. Besides am pretty nearly at the end of my rope, physically speaking.

November 30, 1886

I have had only two nights sleep since a week ago Monday, am not very wide awake. As I have an intensely painful felon²⁰ on the middle finger of my left hand my temper is not so angelic as one would desire.

You are interested in my little girl patient. Have watched and attended her closely since the operation. It has been a very hard case but is growing more encouraging right along. Expect to be able to take the tube out for good this p.m. and sew up the wound. The little girl is feeling much better, has a good appetite, laughs and plays as she sits up in bed. Should she make a good recovery it ought to be worth several dollars to us, my dear, as well as giving the satisfaction of being looked upon as skilled in the profession. We have had some diptheria in town of late, in fact the scare has almost broken up the school, unnecessarily so I think.

My finger throbs so I'm almost wild. As soon as I get that operation completed shall lance it. Must get out and stir around or I'll get mad and lance the thing now.

December 2, 1886

My little patient with the tube in her throat is doing finely. But there is so much diptheria in town that the school has been closed. There are not so many cases but there is great fear of an epidemic and it was thought best to be on the safe side. There are about half a dozen cases.

December 5, 1886

It's Sunday afternoon again, and the first time I've been able to take a good long free breath for three weeks.

Diptheria in town is about the same. Two cases died of it Friday. That makes three cases in all. I have not lost any. For some reason luck nearly always favors me. Perhaps it is not good for me in the long run. Don't you think I've been especially fortunate in nearly all my undertakings? Just think of it! I've only been in McCook about eighteen

months and have had an opportunity thrust upon me to do two of the very gravest operations in surgery. The first one was successful and unless some unexpected complication arises the second will also be a success. These things help a fellow's reputation and add to his practice. Of course much of our practice depends upon how we discharge the everyday duties but these *striking cases* spread one's reputation among people who regularly employ someone else but when some difficult case arises they are thus influenced in their choice of counsel.

December 9, 1886

Allow me to inform you that I have just returned from a professional trip to Sherman Co., Kansas, sixty miles south of Haigler near the Colorado line. Haigler is eighty miles west of here and the nearest R.R. point. That makes a trip of 140 miles, 60 miles by team. Was called to see a man who had cut the main artery of the leg just below the knee. I had to cut down upon the artery above the knee and ligate it.²¹ Those trips are hard ones but there is some money in them. The greatest trouble is that it interferes so much with my practice in town. Was gone from Monday noon till Wednesday p.m. Left the man in fair condition. The most we have to fear now is gangrene of the leg. If that should occur nothing will save him but amputation. Left him in charge of two local physicians.

The little girl with the tracheal tube is still improving. With the exception of some cough she may be counted almost well.

December 12, 1886

Dr. [L.J.] Spickelmier has a very bad case of diphtheria on hand. I was just called to see the little boy—two years old—in consultation. It may be necessary to perform tracheotomy. Those cases are very distressing. I don't like to see them.

December 22, 1886

My little girl, whom I performed tracheotomy upon, is now able to walk down town. You have no idea how much quiet satisfaction such a case gives one. That is where one knows that prompt action has saved life.

Yesterday at 2 p.m. was called to see a woman with typho-malarial fever who lives in Hayes County, twenty miles north west of here. Made the drive and got back about nine o'clock last evening. Don't know when I've been more thoroughly chilled. Those long drives are a great deal pleasanter in warm weather.

Am much interested to know what the legislature is going to do for the Medical Department of the University this winter. Hope it will receive better treatment than it did at the hands of the last legislature.

Now that Lincoln is growing so fast, there is [a] much better chance to make a success of the venture than there has been. Hope to have our legislators from this part of the state in a proper frame of mind before they leave for the battlefield. My plan is to make it a four years course and so thorough that the graduates from the medical department of the State of Nebraska will be conspicuous not for ignorance of medicine as well as everything else, but for eminence in their professions. Am also interested in getting a medical examining board appointed and make it impossible for a man to practice medicine in the state unless he knows something about it. I've met so many ignorant doctors since I came to McCook that its a wonder I haven't soured upon the whole profes. [sion].

December 26, 1886

How did I spend the day Xmas? That is easily answered. Wrote a few office prescriptions and made a professional visit or two before dinner. Took dinner with the Congregational ladies who served dinner for the money there was in it; then Geo. Chenery, Ed. Lowman, and I repaired to the B. & M. House and took a second dinner—am still alive. We then adjourned to my office, chatted awhile, tried to play Euchre but failed to become interested; then I read the remainder of the afternoon; newspapers, "Tristram Shandy" & c. Did not go to supper, but George tried to teach me to play Cribbage instead. Soon tired of this and Representative-elect [William W.] Brown from the District west of here came in to get me to prescribe for his sore eyes; did so and then hobnobbed with him awhile in regard to some measures to be introduced in the next session. After he departed I wandered up to the Young People's Association's Social, the first I had attended for six years or more. They had a very pleasant entertainment and a good crowd. It is the social organization of the town. Guess it's a very good scheme.

Thursday p.m. in my office was organized the "Republican Valley Medical Society." Whether it will be of any benefit to its members is still a question but we hope to at least get better acquainted by this means. The organization is intended to include all the regular medicine men in the counties of Furnas, Red Willow, Hitchcock, Dundy, Gosper, Frontier, Hayes, and Chase. Four weeks from next Tuesday we meet and discuss the "Membranous Affections of the Throat." This will give a chance to see what our professional brethren are made of. It would hardly be possible to find a subject of more vital interest just now.

December 29, 1886

Day before yesterday took another trip to Hayes Co. to see a woman with typho-malarial fever. Went to Culbertson on the R.R. and took a

livery team from there. 'Twas a chilly drive, I can't stand the cold so well as in my "younger days."

January 8, 1887

The next time I come am going to bring a couple numbers in "Shop-pell's Modern Houses" and see if they can give us any hints. We want to get our plans perfected so that we can get a contractor to figure on it. There is to be so much building in the spring that we want to make arrangements early or our nest will not be ready in June and we want everything to be in readiness.

One of my old patients, whom I have been treating almost ever since I came to McCook, died night before last. He was an old soldier, who has been suffering from chronic rheumatism ever since the war. Have been expecting the end for some time, though he was able to come to town about ten days ago.

January 19, 1887

Found on my return²² that some of my patients had been flying high. Two or three telegrams from Culbertson, etc. etc. So be it. Also found indications of a boom the coming season. Several tents are pitched near the round house. The explanation is that a party of R.R. surveyors are busily engaged in surveying a route for a proposed branch road from this place. Am also informed that the Lincoln Land Company has raised the price of lots 20% throughout. Whether this is an artful dodge to sell the lots or there is really going to be a boom I know not. Should not object to see the town doubled in population the next twelve months.

January 22, 1887

My work has been more than usually hard. The cause is chiefly having had three quite severe cases in Culbertson besides my patients here. Thursday received a telegram just before the 1 p.m. train to go to Culbertson and see two sick babies. Saw the patients and returning on the 5:15 p.m. train, just as I stepped off the train at McCook another telegram was handed me requesting me to go to Culbertson at once to see Mrs. Bullard, who was very sick. They had not known of my being in town and went to the depot to telegraph me just as our train left Culbertson. Went back on the 9:55 p.m. train, saw Mrs. Bullard, got to bed in the Culbertson House at little after twelve o'clock, giving orders to be called at 4 a.m. so that I could see the patient again and come home on the 5 a.m. train. A few minutes before four there was a horrible hammering upon the door, a cry that the house was on fire, and to get out as soon as possible. Found that the whole house was full of smoke and everybody grabbed his clothes and got out the quickest way possible not stopping to dress until we got down stairs. The town was soon

aroused, a bucket brigade formed, and after a half hour's hard work, the fire was under control. Just as I started for the depot, the father of one of the sick babies came to telegraph me to come up on [the] first train but finding me I went with him to see the child with the understanding that as soon as it was light he should send a team to McCook to take me down. Meantime I got my breakfast and in two hours was back in McCook ready for the day's routine.

Next Tuesday the Republican Valley Medical Society meets again. We expect quite a number of M.D.s from up and down the road. Medical lore will be so thick in town that one might "cut it with a knife."

January 26, 1887

Yes, the Republican Valley Medical Society met in this place yesterday. We had an interesting session. I had the "honor" of being elected Secretary. Our next meeting will be in Arapahoe the second Tuesday of April. No doubt many hard scientific nuts will be cracked. It is a very dignified body; so much so that for a time the meeting reminded me of a funeral. This was not on the principle that seeing the author of a book reminds one of the book. We had a long discussion upon the code and at least I carried the day in making the code more liberal and allowing us to consult with Homeopathists, Eclectics,²³ and other irregulars under certain restrictions.

February 4, 1887

I feel very anxious to have you like McCook. When I first came here one of my greatest regrets was to be obliged to bring you here instead of Lincoln. If it had not been for that feeling [I] should have left Lincoln sooner than I did. But [I] kept hoping against hope that something might occur which would relieve the financial tension under which I was laboring. But now am glad I came, for all things have prospered in a moderate degree and am very hopeful that you will like the town. Guess we shall be so happy in our little home that you'll not care much if the town is not quite what one would wish. Don't understand me to be depreciating McCook for we have a flourishing little town.

Guess I'm sober this morning. The past two or three days have been full of work. But January was the poorest month so far as cash receipts go, that I have had for some time.

February 8, 1887

Sunday am afraid violence was done to the Commandment "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy," for I gave three teams all the driving they wanted besides attending to quite a lively office practice. Shall I go into details? After getting in late Saturday night after a long drive up to Driftwood I slept well until about day-light Sunday morning when I was called to visit a patient over on the Red Willow. Got back to

town about twenty minutes before train time and a telegram being handed me to go to Culbertson on the noon train, I swallowed my dinner and went. The case was a consultation with Dr. Atwood over a sick man in the country south of town. By hurrying and driving fast got back to Culbertson in time for the 5 o'clock train. Devoted two hours to rapid office and town work, ate my supper and just as I thought there was a minute to breathe had another call over on Red Willow. Got back at 1 o'clock in the morning. Taking into consideration the fact that it had been storming all day and that I had been thoroughly chilled several times it was not much wonder that I was restless and did not sleep after going to bed. Felt so badly that I refused to get up to see a patient. Yesterday was just as busy but my work was confined to town. Was out a couple of hours in the night last night and this is the first time I have had any leisure since Saturday.

February 16, 1887

That pencil drawing came yesterday morning and I send it to you. Think it as neat a thing as I have seen. The Architect went beyond my instructions. I told him twelve hundred dollars was the limit, but that looks so neat I have been wondering if it will not be best to follow his plans. It comes to this point. We shall have to pay for it in installments. As it will probably be our home for several years at least will it not be better to be a little longer in paying for it and have a home that will be more as we want it? The cost will doubtless exceed his estimate at least a couple hundred dollars. To make the rooms smaller I fear would spoil the general effect. Of course it is a little bad to have so much indebtedness but my practice is well established and I feel as if I could put myself out considerably in order to have a cottage to our taste. That plan is unique. There is not another house in town at all like it.

A lady patient of mine died Monday of quick consumption.²⁴ Have had some long drives in the country of late. The weather is so fine, however, that I do not mind it much. Then too my socks are so warm, my neck muffler so thick, my big cap comes down over my ears so cosily, and my big thick mittens reach so high on my wrists that I could not be cold anyway.

February 19, 1887

Am glad you are so well pleased with the pencil drawing of our cottage. Suppose it will be well to wait a short time before we decide whether to have the plans carried out unmodified, and give a little more time to count the cost. I look at it in this way: The building of said cottage and paying for it too, is a matter of common interest. Should we go beyond what we had intended it will require a little more economy on our part to successfully discharge the increased indebtedness.

Last year my cash income above all expenses was \$900. It seems to

me that we can make no mistake in counting upon that right along if we keep our health; and do not know that it shows any more business shrewdness to be all the time looking out for sickness than to go right along doing our best. Should we conclude to build according to present plans, looking at it purely from an investment standpoint, do not think it would be a blunder. Those lots are now worth fully eight hundred dollars. By the way, they cost me about \$515, and I made them, and a hundred dollars besides, above all expenses during the last six months of last year. But I look upon it from another standpoint and that is that we want our little home as neat and attractive as possible. We would be happy in a smaller and cheaper home, but very soon we would begin to think of building again and I so far agree with you in your sentiment as to wish to remain in our first home as long as possible.

February 27, 1887

I take pleasure in informing you that I attended church this morning, the occasion was notable chiefly for its rarity. This month, I think, has been the busiest one yet, take it right through. Have not been broken of my rest as much as usual but long, cold drives have been of almost daily occurrence and I bear witness that such work wears. Last Wednesday a man fifteen miles up the Driftwood had his leg completely crushed by a falling tree. It is a question whether it can be saved or not but I am going to do my best to help him save it. An amputation is always a sad thing to me, and I never intend to do such an operation unless it is absolutely the only thing that is left for me. Am almost a "crank" on that point.

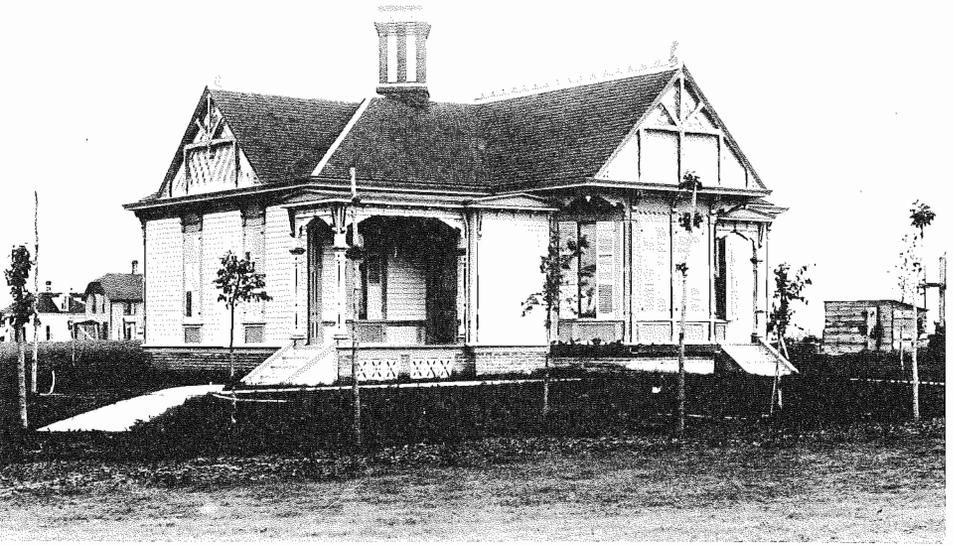
In regard to your surmise about the cost of carrying out those specifications, you are about right. Don't think it can be built for much less than \$2000. That will take a few months more to pay for it but we shall feel better satisfied in the end. Another very practical consideration is that people are very apt to employ the physician who seems most prosperous. Draw your own inferences.

March 10, 1887

Yesterday was what is known among surgeons as a field day. Had three surgical operations; two of them not very extensive but the third was the amputation of that poor fellow's leg, fifteen miles in the country. Took Dr. Kay along to give chloroform and Geo. Chenery and the editor of the Democrat as supernumeraries. Everything passed off in good style and we left the patient in good condition. Shall go out to see him this p.m. It is very pleasant. Wish thou wert here to go with me. Must go to West McCook. Adieu.

March 23, 1887

Had an opportunity of making Crete a visit Monday. When the train from B.[eatrice] arrived found the train from the east three hours late



McCook residence of Dr. Byron B. Davis. . . (Below) Residence of Dr. Z.L. Kay.



and had that length of time to loaf.²⁵ After eating dinner wandered up to the Crete Nurseries and ordered some box elder trees to set out around our lots. Concluded that we would like them a little better than soft maples. What do you think? Their foliage is very fine.

Found my patients all doing well. They could spare me as well as not. The outlook for an easy time the next few weeks is painfully apparent. Found the stump of the amputated leg I told you of doing nicely. The man sat up a while yesterday only twelve days after the amputation. That's a result most pleasing to me and doubtless to the patient.

March 26, 1887

I'm all "broke up!" Don't be alarmed for it's only that pesky house which is perplexing me. . . The contractors assure me it can't be done for less than three thousand dollars. . . Last evening wrote a book to the architect, told him his drawings were very pretty but that he did not seem to understand the English language. That I had limited him to \$1500. and he had said that his plans could be carried out for that amount. Instructed him that if he could furnish a neat design of a gabled cottage within the fifteen hundred dollar limit or even exceed that one or two hundred dollars, to go ahead. If not, to carry out the same interior plan but make it a "square roofed" design.

March 31, 1887

That house has been perplexing but guess we shall have to take it as it comes. And it is not coming very fast. Am expecting new plans every day.

Last evening I had the honor of presiding over a caucus of about fifty of the leading business men of McCook. The object of our deliberations was to put in nomination candidates for the city offices to be elected next Tuesday. We accomplished what we came together for. You did not know before that I am a ward politician, did you? Am not very rabid. We are likely to have an exceedingly warm fight. The political cauldron bubbles and boils and foams. After Tuesday all will be quiet again.

Was just surprised by a man coming in and paying on an old bill which I had given up and put on the "dead beat" list. Such surprises are so rare that they deserve special mention.

April 3, 1887

We are having a warm political fight this spring for Mayor and other city officers. The opposition—to catch the populace—called a citizens mass convention last evening. Those of us who had participated in the meeting a few evenings since concluded to have some fun. We were there with our friends. On a division of the house we stood 160 strong against 100 on the part of the opposition. Those who had called the

convention then bolted and went to another hall and put up [I.J.] Starbuck for mayor. We remained masters of the situation and put up essentially the same ticket that we had put into the field at the business men's meeting a few days ago. The fun of it is those other fellows paid for the hall, invited the citizens in, were beaten, and then left us in possession of the opera hall which they had paid for. The fun is not over. Tuesday will be likely. It was the liveliest caucus I ever attended. The whole scheme was hatched here in my office. I must reform and quit politics. This however was in a good cause and will probably rid the town of gambling dens.

April 10, 1887

Have been around to see my measly patients this morning and it looks as if the rest of the day is to abound in leisure. That word above is not used in the figurative sense, but literally. There is almost an epidemic of measles in the town.

Did I tell you about our town politics? Permit me to add that "we have met the enemy and they are ours," by a large majority. This was a stunner to the gambling element.²⁶

Tuesday our medical society meets in Arapahoe. We hope to have an interesting and profitable meeting. I sent out invitations to thirty physicians up and down the road. I tell you I would like to see more genuine hard students in the medical profession. It is a sad fact that a large number of doctors quit studying as soon as they get their degree—just the time when work should begin. But fear that is the thing to be expected. It is just so in law.

April 13, 1887

Yesterday the meeting of the Medical Society in Arapahoe was a complete success. If we can keep up such an interest as was manifest there, our association will be of great value to the physicians of south western Nebraska. Our next meeting will be held in Cambridge next July. They tried to get me to write a paper for the next meeting but I told them I was going to be *unusually busy* the next three months and must be excused until the October meeting.

I was elected delegate to the State Medical Society which meets in Omaha the first Tuesday in May—in three weeks—and I'm very much tempted to go. Should not think of such a thing if it were not of direct interest to our profession, and everything of that kind which will help me and be of assistance to my patients I ought to be engaged in.

One bid has just come in on our cottage. It is \$2300 exclusive of plumbing. That will bring it almost if not quite twenty-five hundred dollars. The other bid will probably be in this afternoon and I want to get them to work at once. The next time we want to build a house we will arrange to commence it a *year* before it is wanted. The present plans

are so much like the first that a casual observer would think them the same.

April 22, 1887

Our cottage is now under full headway and they agree to push it as rapidly as possible towards completion. I made a slight change which will increase the cost a very little. The entire cost complete and ready for occupancy will be twenty-four hundred and seventy-five dollars. It is a great relief to my mind to see the work progressing. Our good citizens manifest considerable interest in the thing. I tell them it is for rent and they are hopeful that I will find a "good renter."

Have been doing a good deal of driving yesterday and the day before. Almost a hundred miles. Had a good chance to muse.

Ex-Gov. [Robert W.] Furnas has been here the past week setting out the park to shade trees. That will make our home just so much more beautiful and desirable. It will also help us when we are visited by blizzards from the NW.

April 28, 1887

Sickness is booming at the present time in McCook. Drove my little horse 32 miles yesterday afternoon. Was then busy making town calls till 10 o'clock. This morning was called up early and disposed of three patients before I had a chance to get my breakfast. Struck a case of delirium tremens at the "B. & M. House." A man who lives in Wilmington, North Carolina had been in Denver on a week's spree and was on his way home. By the time he reached McCook, he was so badly off that he had to stop. If there was ever a person in a pitiable condition it is a man suffering from that trouble.

Six calls have accumulated since I settled down. Guess I'd better talk fast and get about it. Measles is the chief cry from all quarters. The latest is a baby only thirteen days old who is nicely broken out. You see the McCook babies are enterprising.

May 4, 1887

Our nest has most of the frame sticks up in position. It will soon assume the form of a house. It does me good to see it progress. I feel as if every nail driven furthers the realization of our hopes. Must go up sometime this afternoon and water those trees. It would not do to neglect them. They must all live.

Have been having a time the past two days. Three weeks ago Mrs. Babbitt, a lady living three miles from town, swallowed a chicken bone and it passed down the oesophagus almost to the stomach and there lodged. It gave no serious inconvenience and it was decided that it had passed on and only left a "sore place." Monday noon the lady vomited and the bone—with very sharp corners "came up," along with a great

amount of blood. It is probable that a small artery of the lower oesophagus was severed. She vomited over a gallon of blood within eighteen hours. I have been with her a good deal and for a long time despaired almost of her life. For a time she lay like a dead person, almost pulseless. But now I think we have succeeded in stopping the hemorrhage and have strong hope of her recovery. It is a strange case. Never saw one like it.

May 19, 1887

The past forty eight hours kept me busy. Was up all night Tuesday night and a large part of last night. That is the way. A doctor's work is almost as irregular as a gambler's luck. Yesterday Dr. Kay met with an accident which might have been serious. He has a wild colt which he was driving and she suddenly became uncontrollable and threw him violently upon the ground causing some concussion of the brain. He seems better now and will probably be out in a few days.

I took a drive almost over to Danbury yesterday. Found a very sick woman and fear, if she is no better, they may be after me again today. Such long drives I do not appreciate as fully as I ought.

Our home is progressing slowly but surely. They are laying the floors now. It begins to make more of a showing. It makes me feel good to see it gradually assume form and to know that it is to be home.

A call has just come for me to go eleven miles in the country to see a "Dutchman" with sciatica as nearly as I can determine from the symptoms given.

This year I believe our cash income in the gross will be at least \$2500.

May 29, 1887

Dr. Kay had a relapse so to speak and is now confined to the house under my professional care.

This morning a patient of mine died from the effects of an accident. His team ran away last Wednesday throwing him to the ground and injuring him internally. He gradually sank until two o'clock this morning when death came. He leaves a wife and three small children.

Our cottage is doing finely. Begins to look a little like a house. Siding almost all on. Those trees all of them died. That puts us back just a year. It is most decidedly provoking to be inflicted with damaged trees—they must have been damaged because all who took trees of the same kind lost them.

People seem very curious to know the lady who is to occupy "that house." I tell them that I am as anxious about it as they are. Well their curiosity will not have to wait much longer.

June 5, 1887

Am not going to church this morning. There is to be a Masonic funeral at 1 o'clock in which I am to take part. A large farmer 10 miles from town died yesterday of heart disease. I had been making him two visits a day so you can imagine I was kept busy. Dr. Kay is now able to come down town.

I'll just send this little messenger ahead to tell you that I'm coming. It is Sunday morning and fear me I shall be compelled to break the Sabbath all up into small bits. Have been so rushed with practice all week that almost everything has been put off and now it will be necessary to get down to business in order to get off tomorrow night. Shall reach Beatrice on the early Tuesday morning train. Shall then proceed to interview that judge, get shaved and then Mr. Gregory, Frank, and myself will repair to you. Let me see! The ceremony is to occur at 9:30.²⁷ That will give us plenty of time to catch the U.P. Train. I am not certain but Mr. Gregory will want to catch the B. & M. train to Tecumseh.

I see that you have the picture of the ceremony well in mind. Methinks one thing was omitted—my awkwardness. I feel as if I would not know what to do with my feet. I almost think that you will be the sober one. Yes we shall both feel deeply, but oft-times the feeling is not so apparent at the time as when there is better chance to realize it.

God bless our home! Let us try to make it not only a happy home from the worldly standpoint but a Christian home!

NOTES

¹“Selling a relinquishment” and “contesting” a claim were techniques frequently used by individuals speculating in government land. In the former instance, a person filed a homestead or timber culture entry without any intention of living on the land or fulfilling the other legal requirements necessary to receive title from the government. The filing was made simply to hold the land until the entry-right could be sold at a profit. The speculator would offer to relinquish his claim for a sum of money so that the tract would be available for subsequent entry. Though it was illegal to claim government land for speculative purposes, the law was almost impossible to enforce.

Speculators also sought to acquire government land by “contesting” the legitimacy of a claim, often the claim of another speculator. Many claims were contested on the grounds that the filings were fraudulent or that the claimant had failed to meet other requirements of the land laws. However, the contest procedure also served to attract speculators. If a claim was contested successfully, the contestant had first priority for a period of thirty days to file a claim on the same tract.

Another provision of the Homestead Act provided that six months after the filing date, the claim could be commuted to cash by paying the government price of \$1.25 per acre. The land was often resold for a large profit.

²Belva Lockwood, lawyer, author of 1878 legislation admitting women to practice law before the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1884 she was nominated for President by the Equal Rights Party and was a popular speaker on the lecture circuit. *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White and Co., 1899), 2:301.

³The Pre-Emption Act of 1841 allowed an individual to declare his intention to claim 160 acres of government land and then purchase the land at the price of \$1.25 per acre. In some cases, the claimant was not required to "prove up" and make final payment for up to thirty months after filing the declaratory statement. This encouraged the filing of pre-emption claims in order to hold land for speculative purposes.

⁴Hysteria was considered to be a psychoneurosis which affected various physiological functions and simulated organic disorders.

⁵Typho-malarial fever exhibited typhoid-like symptoms though it was assumed to be malarial in nature.

⁶See Note 1.

⁷Davis was being considered for appointment as surgeon for the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad.

⁸Epilepsy can now be controlled with medication.

⁹A reference to the future Mrs. Davis, Sopha Myers.

¹⁰Salem, Richardson County, Nebraska.

¹¹Earlier Davis had purchased interests in two contest cases.

¹²This may refer to the woman on whom Davis had operated on August 18.

¹³Homeopathic medicine treated disease by the administration of minute doses of remedies that would in healthy persons produce symptoms of the disease being treated.

¹⁴Acute tonsillitis.

¹⁵Pulmonary tuberculosis that had reached a terminal stage.

¹⁶Mallalieu University at Bartley was sponsored by the Methodist Church. The "University" opened its doors in the fall of 1886 with about sixty students, but it failed to survive the economic depression of the early 1890s.

¹⁷An acute, non-contagious intestinal disorder in infants.

¹⁸George Chenery was the druggist in whose building Davis had his office. Lowman was a local dry goods merchant.

¹⁹An infection of the larynx in infants and children that is characterized by difficult breathing, a harsh cough, and the accumulation of membranous material in the airway.

²⁰A felon is an infection involving the deep tissues of a finger.

²¹The artery was tied to stop the bleeding.

²²Perhaps a trip to Beatrice to visit Sopha Myers.

²³Eclectic medicine depended primarily on plant remedies.

²⁴See Note 15.

²⁵Another visit to Beatrice to visit Sopha Myers.

²⁶A reform ticket captured the McCook municipal election in April 1887.

²⁷The couple were married in Beatrice, Nebraska on June 7, 1887, by the Reverend Lewis Gregory of Lincoln.