

Dr. John G. Randall Comes to Monroe in 1898

How does a young doctor living in Monroe in 1905 find out about and purchase a medical practice in Missoula, Montana without ever having been to that state? Thanks to Al Stauffacher, of New Glarus, who shared a Montana Historical Society publication, we now have the answer to that question. This column demonstrates the importance of archives that save documents to chronicle the lives of people who are no longer here to answer our questions.

A short article in the Monroe Sentinel on June 22, 1898 announced that Dr. J. G. Randall, a young homeopathic physician had his office over Stevenson & Treat's store on the northwest corner of the square. He was a graduate of Beloit College and the Hahnemann College and School of Clinics of Chicago. "He comes highly recommended as a young man and as a competent physician and surgeon." His business card was also included in the paper that day and gave his office hours as 11:00 a.m. to noon, 1:00 to 3:00, and 7:00 to 8:30. The card also stated that he resided with Mrs. Schutze [sic] on the corner of N. Jackson and Payne Streets (now 16th Avenue and 9th Street).

Not much about Dr. Randall's time here is known, but an advertisement in the 1900 city directory stated that he had an office on the second floor on the west side of the square. The ad said that he was a physician and a surgeon and gave both his home and his office phone numbers. His residence was listed as 101 East Payne, in the block east of 17th Avenue on 9th Street. The 1900 census shows that he was still lodging with Caroline Schuetze, four of her adult children, and Harry Popejoy, another lodger, who worked as a barber.

The Montana publication stated that Ernest Wright, who was a seminary student in Chicago, lived in Monroe for a short time in 1904 while serving as a substitute pastor at the Presbyterian Church. Wright learned, two months after he arrived in Missoula to serve as a Presbyterian minister, that a doctor (one of his parishioners) there wanted to sell his profitable medical practice. So Wright, who was about to perform a wedding, wrote a quick note to his friend, John Randall, on July 18, 1905 to inform him of the opportunity. He must have developed quite a friendship as his letter closed with, "Now John, I honestly believe this is what you want." Randall responded affirmatively by telegram within a day of receiving the letter. Eleven documents, exchanged between the three men, are preserved in the University of Montana's manuscript holdings.

In a correspondence on July 21, Wright shared that Missoula had a population of about 12,000 people while Monroe had about 4,200. It was called the garden city of Montana with fruit and berries growing in abundance. The nights and mornings were always cool with "no dirty mines or smelters." The city also housed two major medical facilities.

Wright must have thought much of Randall after their time together in Monroe. Wright's letter to Randall on July 21 said, "Your telegram reached me this morning at 11:47, and I assure you it was a very welcome piece of paper." This telegram was the verification that he was going to purchase Glasgow's practice. In a letter Wright shared that he was excited to share experiences with Randall asking if he had ever hunted bears, stating that there were "lots of them in the mountains near here." Wright also mentioned that fishing was also popular even though he had not tried it yet.

Dr. William Glasgow, who was also a homeopathic physician, had established his business in Missoula in 1901 and was looking for "a decent fellow" to take over his practice before his move to Seattle. Glasgow wrote a letter to Randall on July 24 about the practice and shared that he would be the only homeopath within 125 miles. Glasgow attested, "You will make good money from the time you start in here." He had already taken in \$562 in cash that month and had only one month that fell below \$400. Wright shared with Randall that Glasgow took in \$4,500 in 1904, a substantial amount for the time. Wright assured Randall that the western Montana "ranchers and farmers pay in cash a great deal" unlike the farmers in Wisconsin who often paid in kind.



Dr. John Geddes Randall was raised in Beloit and practiced homeopathic medicine in Monroe from 1898 until he moved to Missoula, Montana in 1905.

To open a new practice in Missoula would be quite costly, but Wright pointed out that it would be wise for Randall to purchase Glasgow's practice, "His office rooms are fine, and would be eagerly gobbled up if others got a chance at them." The office was in downtown Missoula and would include the office equipment - chairs, a small couch, and a table in the reception room. In the consultation room were a roll-top desk and revolving chair, two other chairs, a medicine cabinet, an operating table, and a leather couch. It would be up to Randall to purchase the supplies and medicines he would need.

Dr. Glasgow suggested that Randall route his trip through St. Paul, where he would be able to stock up on the needed supplies. His friend, Wright, who was getting ready to leave for a vacation, offered to meet Randall there and transport about 70 pounds for Randall if he needed the help.

We'll learn more about the correspondence between these men next week and find out how long it took for Randall to make the move.