



HENRY HAWKINS BARKER,  
PIONEER PHYSICIAN.

## DR. HENRY HAWKINS BARKER—A PIONEER PHYSICIAN.

BY J. F. KENNEDY, M. D.\*

Iowa annals are not very rich in the record of the physicians who came to the State in an early day. While the names and deeds of a few are preserved in the histories of some of the counties yet scarcely anything can be found relative to the diseases and their characteristics as encountered in Iowa earlier than the fifties. I have been fortunate in obtaining some few facts in regard to one of the earliest physicians in the State that I am sure are worthy of record and will prove interesting to many readers of *The Annals of Iowa*—especially to our pioneers.

Doctor Henry Hawkins Barker, the subject of this sketch, was born October 7, 1814, in what is now West Virginia. At an early day his father's family removed to Indiana, locating at Greensburg. Here he studied medicine and in the winter of 1829-30 attended lectures at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, one of the best medical colleges in the country. It is also stated that he attended medical lectures in Cincinnati, Ohio. It will thus be seen that he was well equipped professionally.

In 1838 with his father, mother, four brothers and a sister he came to the Territory of Iowa and settled in Keosauqua, Van Buren county. That must have been at this early date a good part of Iowa to immigrate to, for I find quite a number of the prominent people of Iowa and some now residents of other States who were in an early day residents of that county.

Doctor Barker was married to Mrs. Dorothy C. Twombly, mother of Captain V. P. Twombly of Des Moines, at Keosauqua in 1844. To them three children were born, two dying in infancy. The last, Henry Wilder Barker, born in 1853, is yet living, and for the last twenty-five years has

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been employed in the offices of the Great Northern Railroad at St. Paul, Minn.

For seventeen years Doctor Barker practiced medicine and engaged in the drug business. There are those yet living who have a grateful remembrance of him. His pleasant, genial manner and his professional skill endeared him to all who required his professional services. Among those who thus remember him is Mr. P. M. Casady, of Des Moines, a prominent and highly respected citizen, who on coming to Iowa in 1846 was taken sick at Keosauqua and was taken care of by Dr. Barker. The doctor was the first physician to settle in Keosauqua with the exception of Dr. Cyrus H. Ober, who preceded him a short time. Dr. Barker died at Keosauqua March 6, 1855, at the early age of forty, of consumption the seeds of which had been "planted" in his system by exposure during those early pioneer days in a new territory. His stepson, Captain Twombly, who was thirteen years of age at the time of his death has a very vivid and pleasant recollection of him. As a husband, father, citizen and physician he was greatly beloved by all who knew him and his early death at a time when strong men were greatly needed in Iowa was a great loss to the State.

There are no records of his long rides, his exposures to storms, the impassable condition of the roads (if roads there were) and the great amount of gratuitous services cheerfully rendered at that early day by all honorable physicians.

We find him a year after locating at Keosauqua facing a war—I believe the border line war between Iowa and Missouri. The following is a verbatim copy of his appointment as assistant surgeon:

Head Quarters  
Inspectors Office  
Vanburen Dec., 14th 1839  
H. H. Barker Sir

you are Hereby Autherised to officiate as Surgeons Mate of the 2nd Reg. of the 1st Brg. of the 1st Division I. M protem and it is enjoined on you to do all the Duties appertaining to the rules and regulations of War to the best of your ability

H. King Brg Ins. pt.  
Div. 1st Br I. M

Upon receiving his appointment the following official oath was taken :

H. H. Barker you do Solely Swear that you will Support the constitution of the U. S. and perform all the duties appertaining to your office So help you God  
 H. H. Barker  
 Sworn & Subscribed to  
 before me this 14th Day  
 of Dec 1839  
 H King Brg—Ins pt Div  
 1st Br. I. M

There is nothing to indicate that the doctor was called upon to do any surgical work as the war ended before it really began.

The following history of an epidemic of sickness in and about Keosauqua will be especially interesting to physicians. It was found among his papers and so far as known was never published. This interesting account and many of the facts above referred to were kindly furnished by his stepson Captain Twombly. The doctor writes :

Prevailing diseases of 1840 between the last of June and the first of October:—I had the care of more than one hundred and sixty-seven cases of fever in Van Buren county, which generally went through their course and required close and vigilant attendance. I also had many cases of the same sort which, either from original mildness or prompt treatment, proved to be comparatively slight—the latter class, however, (patients) were so much indisposed as to be unable to attend to their ordinary business for a period of one or two weeks, though unlike the former, they were not entirely confined to their beds for any considerable time. Of these cases one-half the mortality happened in the month of September. In the succeeding month the epidemic, if it might be so called, terminated. Persons of all ages from one year old to seventy, and of both sexes were the subjects of the disease. It is perhaps needless to remark that the following statements apply more particularly to the severer cases. A majority of the cases were ushered in by slight chill; coldness of the extremities; an excruciating pain in the back, loins and head; dryness of the skin; extreme thirst; great arterial excitement and determination of blood to the head; great torpor of the liver and frequent ejections of glary mucus from the stomach. The great majority, however, had no apparent local affection except of the brain and of the parts that more directly sympathize with that organ. A few of the cases were attended with petechiae. In nearly every instance, whether severe or moderate, the disease began with more or less pain in the head, especially about the forehead. Vertigo was also a symptom almost universal. In some, a sudden faintness, dizziness or a sense of extreme exhaustion was present so that the patient could neither sit nor stand upright. In other cases the attack resembled a severe concussion of the brain. Indeed everything seemed to show that the brain or nervous system was the primary seat of the disease.

In some cases the skin was preternaturally cool for several of the

first days and subsequently, in temperature, it never exceeded the standard of health. Hemorrhage from the nose was not an unfrequent occurrence and was one of the most fatal symptoms that occurred and was the first alarm given to the bystander.

There were two varieties of attack, the sudden and the insidious. The most sudden attacks were the soonest relieved, provided the patients had prompt and appropriate treatment, and under such circumstances the disease rarely exceeded five or seven days. In some of the severest cases the disease arrived at its height on the third day and under careful management the patient appeared subsequently to be free from danger. The recovery in most instances was the evident consequence of the prompt and decisive treatment and of the necessity which both patients and attendants felt of following prescriptions scrupulously.

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UP TO the year 1836, Iowa as well as Wisconsin, was embraced in the Territory of Michigan, and as lately as 1832, it was an Indian territory, except a claim at Du Buque's lead mines, which had been entered and worked by a few miners two or three years previously. The first emigrants who made farms in the State entered the territory in February, 1833, and settled a few miles west of Burlington. The first Christian Church gathered was a Baptist one in 1834.—*St. Charles Intelligencer*, July 31, 1856.

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WE had an article prepared for this paper on the subject of our Legislature, but owing to the exhibitions we made and the injury it might do our Territory abroad we concluded it would be best to say as little about their extravagance and disposition to quarrel with the Governor as possible.—*Iowa Sun (Davenport)* January 26, 1839.

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