

TABOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

February 2021 Newsletter

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Tabor Historical Society News

Chuck Douglass

An important part of Tabor's history and cultural heritage is a place most of us would prefer to forget: the graveyard. Tabor's cemetery was known in the early days as simply the burial ground or "silent city" and is the final resting place for many of the area's earliest pioneers and their families. The first person interred there was three-year-old James Gates, who was taken by cholera on May 20, 1853. His baby sister would follow a year later, attesting to the terrible toll of disease in the early years. Town founders George B. Gaston, John Todd, and Samuel Adams can also be found there, along with many others.

As Tabor grew so did the cemetery, for years the responsibility of the Cemetery Association of the Congregational Church. There were continuing challenges facing the volunteers. At their annual meeting on May 8, 1896, they recorded that during the previous year the grounds had been mowed four times, graves trimmed and leveled, and not less than 150 graves re-mounded, "about a third of which had to be found by careful search." The church also erected 90 oak headboards on "otherwise unmarked graves." The overall care of the cemetery grounds eventually passed to the town but upkeep of headstones and monuments remain a family responsibility. Unfortunately, the passage of time has taken its toll and many gravesites are now orphaned without a proper caretaker. Many historically important markers are in dire need of restoration, evident by even a casual walk through the grounds. Seen below is the resting place of Deacon Origen Cumings, one of Tabor's founders and a conductor on its Underground Railroad—his sister Abbie's headstone has fallen to the ground. There are other markers in even worse shape.

The historical society maintains a fund it inherited from the *Friends of the Cemetery* when that organization disbanded several years ago. The money has remained dormant for far too long and we are looking for anyone interested in helping to revitalize the important work of restoring and preserving Tabor's historical gravesites. If you think you can help, please let us know.



The markers for Origen (L) and sister Abbie Cumings. John Todd was heartbroken when told his close friend had drowned while swimming in the Nishnabotna River.

Deacon Origen Cumings, right, was among the first to settle in Tabor in 1853.



Did You Know?

Tabor was the home of several photo studios in the early 1900s. One of the more successful was owned and operated by Adella Mattie Webb, known as Dell to her friends. One of five children, she was a descendent of early Tabor pioneers Lemuel and Elizabeth Hill Webb. She grew up in town and graduated from Tabor High School in 1886. Dell attended Tabor College as a part-time student in the early 1890s, but with the advent of inexpensive and reliable cameras, she decided to take a chance on earning a living as a photographer. As well as maintaining a studio, she captured images in and around Tabor and many iconic photographs, including those of Tabor College, are attributed to her work. As was common for the era, she converted many of her photos into postcards and sold them for a modest sum, accessible to most people. Adella never married and cared for her parents until their passing. She then began a nursing career and eventually left Iowa, working in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, where she passed in 1947.



Adella's high school graduation portrait



Adella's photograph of Tabor College's Gaston Hall



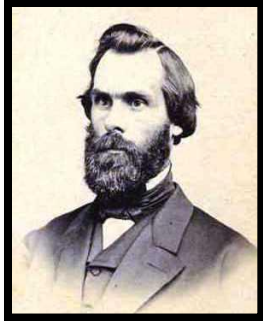
Adella Webb's studio portrait of Edwin Todd, son of Quintus and Hattie Todd, and grandson of the Reverend John and Martha Todd. It's a good bet he wasn't happy with his outfit, if his less-than-happy expression is any clue.



Medicine Men

Harry Wilkins

Since its founding in 1852, Tabor has been home to many physicians. Some doctors, deciding Tabor was a great place to live, became sustaining members of the community and were fondly remembered by their patients and friends. Although they maintained offices, some located in their homes, all were expected to make house calls night and day in all seasons. The country doctors were medical jack-of-all-trades conducting anything from a simple examination to a surgical procedure, sometimes performed by the light of a kerosene lamp.

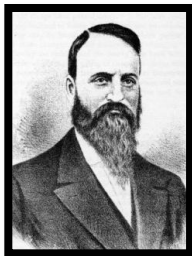


Dr. J.F. Sanborn

Tabor's first resident doctor, John Fitts Sanborn (1825-1905), was in fact a dentist. Establishing his practice around 1859, he joined the Congregational Church and village government, helping, among other things, to raise money for the construction of Tabor's first school. Reverend John Todd, one of Tabor's founders and its spiritual leader, mentioned Sanborn in his personal journal on a regular basis, where he noted the cost of the dental services over the 30 years of Sanborn's practice. For example, Todd paid 25 cents for a simple tooth extraction, \$1.50 for filling a tooth and in 1879, \$8.00 for a partial plate of false teeth for his wife Martha. Although based in Tabor, Dr. Sanborn supported the local area with dental services by riding a monthly circuit to Sidney, Riverton, Randolph, and Thurman. Always a town booster, Dr. Sanborn helped found the town's first historical society in 1894 and was entrusted with storing the records of Tabor's pioneer generation.

Another early Tabor doctor was Radway Rush Hanley (1829-1906). The New York-born Hanley completed medical training at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia before settling in Tabor in 1864. As well as maintaining a medical practice in town he served as a trustee of Tabor College and as an ordained minister in the Baptist Church. Reverend Todd relied on Hanley to treat his wife Martha when she was stricken with epileptic seizures, a malady that plagued her throughout her adult life. Medical science at that time was making progress in the treatment of epileptics but best practices of the day remained primitive by today's standards. Patent medicines, many opiate-based, were routinely provided as was the practice of bloodletting, the intentional withdrawal blood, which was used on occasion by Dr. Hanley in Martha's case. In the summer of 1868 Hanley also treated John Todd for fever associated with ague (malaria) using a quinine regimen, which gave the minister intermittent relief.

Other 19th century treatments commonly relied on home remedies, and the Todd family employed a range of herbs, roots, and plant-based tonics to control various illnesses. Some remedies were effective but required extreme care as seen in an 1881 journal notation where Todd wrote, with concern, about his daughter Bertha mistakenly giving her mother not three drops but a half-teaspoon of aconite plant extract. Also known as monkshood, small amounts were effective in controlling pain but higher doses were deadly.



Dr. Merrill D. Otis

Dr. Merrill David Otis (1830-1889) arrived in Tabor with an impressive education—a graduate of Chicago's Rush Medical College and the St. Joseph School of Physicians and Surgeons, he practiced medicine in Henry County, Iowa, for twelve years before moving to town in 1866. Dr. Otis would remain in Tabor the rest of his life and was renowned for his skill as a healer and surgeon and, later on, as a businessman. It was said that he owned 'some of the most valuable sites in the city' which would eventually include the Palace Pharmacy and associated eye clinic, operated with his son Clarence. He maintained his office in the rear of the pharmacy allowing patients

the convenience of a combining a doctor's visit with the purchase of medicine, school supplies, hair brushes, stationary, or even perfume.



Dr. J. T. Tweedy

One of the more colorful doctors to call Tabor home was Dr. John T. Tweedy (1854-1919). He brought his family to Tabor in 1890, and through hard work earned a sterling reputation based on his belief that the road was never too long or the night too dark that he would not go to the bedside of a patient. But that's not to say he didn't occasionally run into stormy weather. Based on the testimony of Robert McClelland, one of Tabor's leading citizens, the good doctor was hauled into court in the spring of 1903 accused of storing alcoholic beverages for resale, in violation Iowa's prohibitory laws. As a Christian community, Tabor took immense pride in the fact that there were no saloons in town (and never had been) to lead its citizens astray. Armed with a search warrant the sheriff seized a four-gallon container of whiskey and a one-gallon jug of brandy from the doctor's office. Tweedy claimed the alcohol was being lawfully held for medicinal purposes and demanded a jury trial, which he received. Six men heard the testimony and agreed with the defendant. The judge dismissed the charge and ordered the evidence returned to the doctor but, unfortunately, the jug of brandy had disappeared, determined to have been stolen from the county jail where it was being stored. Courtroom drama aside, Dr. Tweedy was fondly remembered for his selflessness during the 1918 Flu epidemic when he went for days without changing his clothes as he rushed from home to home caring for the sick.

Another beloved healer was Doctor Brownlow Bartley Miller (1885-1958) who faithfully served the people of Tabor for 46 years, successfully bridging the horse-drawn era of the country doctor to the modern age of 20th century medicine. Brownlow Miller was a local boy who was born in the Hillsdale community of Mills County. A graduate of Glenwood High School, he earned his medical degree from the University of Nebraska College of Medicine before beginning his practice in Tabor in 1908. A man of considerable energy, he combined a medical practice with service on the town council, school board, as a trustee of the Congregational Church, as vice president of the First State Bank, and as a member in social organizations like the American Legion, Shriners, Eastern Star, and Rotary Club. A line from his obituary clearly reflected the love he engendered: "Virtually every useful phase of community life has been furthered by the interest and effort of this man. That Tabor is a good and progressive part of the American scene is due, in no small measure, to the life of Dr. Miller."

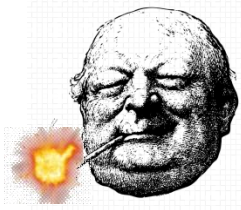


Dr. B.B. Miller

Reflecting back on the bygone era of the horse-and-buggy doctor, Doc Miller had many entertaining stories about house calls that didn't turn out quite as he'd expected. He recalled one occasion when he received a summons from the mother of an out-of-town family who urgently requested he come out to see her son, adding, "And *please* bring a rope." A rope? asked Dr. Miller. Yes, replied the caller. Miller went home, found a length of rope, harnessed his horses Pierre and Gregory to the buggy and rode out to the farm, wondering all the way about the nature of the apparent emergency. Entering the farm's courtyard, he was met with a bustle of activity with neighbors gathered around, several demanding to know what took him so long and whether he brought the rope. The doctor asked where he could find the patient when the boy's mother exclaimed "he's in the well . . . *why else would we want a rope!*"

Maintaining a good sense of humor was undoubtedly an important part of any country doctor's medical bag.

It Really Happened!



On October 28, 1920, the Tabor Beacon reported that John L. Johnson was visiting town when his pipe exploded. It seems as though he had recently been using .32 caliber bullets and had left some in his pocket, along with his pipe tobacco. Johnson scooped out some tobacco without realizing he had snagged a bullet as well and loaded the pipe bowl. He was in front of the Tabor movie house when he lit up and within seconds the pipe exploded and the bullet “sailed up into the air, coming painfully close to his face.” According to the article, Mr. Johnson began notifying all of his pipe friends that “loaded cartridges do not make good smoking.”



New Invention Takes Tabor College by Storm



This group photograph of Tabor College students dates to around 1890. At first glance it appears to show a typical pose of playful students mugging for the camera . . . but on closer examination it's evident they are showing off their recently acquired paper drinking straws. Patented by Ohio-born Marvin Stone in 1888, the mass produced straws were seen as a novelty item, at least among the college crowd. Some of the students are holding laboratory beakers, suggesting they were playing hooky from chemistry class. Or possibly, the scholars were paying homage to the straw's inventor since Stone was a graduate of Ohio's Oberlin College, the alma mater of the town founder and spiritual leader, Reverend John Todd and his wife Martha. In the early years, Tabor College was called 'The Oberlin of the West.'



Yesterday and Today



Above: Tabor in 1915 and today, below, looking north from the southeast corner of Orange and Main Streets. The curved roof of the opera house can be seen in the center of the older photograph—streets were as yet unpaved.



As was common in most small towns of the era, many services were available to residents, as seen in newspaper advertisements from the time (right).

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