

Rethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian

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DR. WILLIAM O. BURBANK 1860 - 1947

No. 24

"One's real life is often
the life one does not live". ... Wilde

At the time of his death Dr. W. O. Burbank was the oldest Orleans County physician in point of service. He was born in Gaines, graduated from the Albion Academy and then the University of Buffalo in March of 1889. Late in April of the same year he opened an office at Waterport but two years later he moved to Pavilion in Genesee County. He married his first wife there and they had one son, Homer. Upon her death he married Ella Lattin of Gaines in 1909 from whom he separated in 1920.

During his twenty years of practice in Pavilion he was Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh Railroad surgeon, Pavilion coroner, health officer and a member of the Pavilion Board of Education for nine years. In 1911 he moved his practice into Albion where he stayed for twelve years until he moved to Gaines. There his office and residence was located in the old red brick store on Rt. 104 at 279 which had once belonged to Hiram Knickerbocker and has since been demolished. He wrote poetry for his own amusement and just prior to his death had resided with Mrs. Daisy Tills of Gaines.

Now the interesting part...the life he did not live...BASEBALL. And it might well have brought to him fame and fortune. He once struck out 23 men in 11 innings and received \$290 for pitching three games for a Lockport team. The State Baseball Throw Championship was won by the doctor with a pitch of 336 feet. He is believed to be the first man to throw a drop ball in New York State. And now the story gets even better. After he had started his training to become a physician he attended a World Series game where he met the renowned and famous ball player Ty Cobb. A friend of Burbanks had called him down from the stands to throw a few balls during the warmup period. His technique interested Cobb and the professional challenged him to strike him out. Well, by now you've guessed it. The doctor pitched his speedy drop ball to Cobb, striking him out three successive times. The team manager noticed the feat with great admiration and offered young Burbank \$100,000 within ten years, but work as a doctor has a stronger appeal.

Dr. Burbank was related to the noted horticulturalist Luther Burbank and also to the famous newspaper publisher Horace Greeley. The doctor once said however, "It isn't your family record but what you are yourself that counts."