



DOCTOR GARDNER in his physicianly prime. Many the patient he bled, many the stork he raced.

# Dr. Gardner's Call Book

BY ROBERT L. WHEELER

## It shows the cost of medical care in R.I. in the 1830's

**O**N FEB. 3, 1832, Dr. Johnson Gardner, a young physician practicing in North Providence, made the following entry in his call book: "This morning or about 12 o'clock noon Mrs. Gardner was delivered of a fine little girl. . . . Women present, Mrs. Buffington, Mrs. Wilkinson, Mrs. Lyons and Mrs. Baker. Also Mother Sisson. All went on well."

Having written which, Doctor Gardner took his quill and scratched a check mark on the margin of the page to indicate that he and his wife considered themselves paid for their joint obstetrical labors. Similar check marks all through the book show that the doctor invariably collected for his services. In this instance he got what was even better than cash on the barrel-head—a baby daughter.

His usual charge for a delivery was \$6. If the stork beat him to the bedside he cut the fee to \$2. Thus in July, 1831, a Mr. Crocker of Valley Falls became a parent for two dollars and a quarter, the 25 cents being for Drops and Pills.

Doctor Gardner's call book, a substantial ledger with a dilapidated leather binding, is owned by his great-grandson, Charles C. Gardner, 10 Park Ave., Matunuck. It reposes on the table of the front room; on the wall hangs a portrait of Doctor Gardner taken sometime prior to the Civil War, during which he examined recruits for the Union Army at an office on Benefit Street, Providence. He was born in Rehoboth in 1799 and died in Pawtucket in 1869.

The call book covers only three years (1830-1833) of a practice which extended from 1826 until a few years before Doctor Gardner's death. He studied medicine with Drs. Usher Parsons and Levi Wheaton of Providence and graduated from the medical department of Brown University in 1824. He commenced practice in Providence two years later. During the 1830's he was considered one of the most successful physicians in the town. In 1842 he moved to Seekonk. A Democrat in politics, Doctor Gardner was suc-

cessively a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives and a state senator. In the 1850's he was one of the three commissioners appointed by Governor Boutwell to settle the boundary line between Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In 1853 he retired to Pawtucket and died there, leaving behind him a reputation for geniality, courtesy and fair dealing. The doctor's meticulous will bequeathed one son his outhouse, the other his well. He was in every way a sterling character.

His great-grandson's wife, Mrs. Margaret Gardner, is a former student nurse at Memorial Hospital, Pawtucket. Poring over the doctor's call book with a nurse's seeing eye, she points out items showing how times have changed in the medical profession, particularly in the matter of fees.

His ordinary charge for a visit was from 50 cents to a dollar and medicines ran anywhere from 12 cents to \$3. Bleeding was a dollar and a tooth extraction was 25 cents, as noted in the case of the sister of Gideon L. Spencer, who had her aching molar yanked for that modest sum.

Even when he had to perform a serious operation, Doctor Gardner's fee was nothing to give you ulcers, which had not then been invented. In 1831 the doctor did a trepanning on the son of Deacon David Brown of Attleboro. It being a serious case, he charged \$2.50 for the afternoon visit, plus 50 cents for "sundry medicines." For the actual operation, which was per-

formed in the evening, Doctors Main and Webb assisting, he got \$5. The Deacon got out of the whole thing for \$8.50 and the trepanning was a successful job, too, for later entries record other visits, for which a lower fee is charged.

In some cases, Doctor Gardner instituted something in the nature of a "physician's service," with payment by the year. In 1831 occurs the notation, "Agreed, with the Rev. Benjamin Fessenden to attend his family and furnish medicine which I prescribe for the same one year from date, 4th April, 1831, for the sum of \$15." The agreement could not have been continued from year to year, for there is a later entry, "Rev. B. Fessenden, medicine and medical advice, \$2.50."

He made a similar agreement with Samuel Bourne, but only billed him \$10 for a year's attendance. Apparently he believed in charging the clergy more than the laity. Or possibly the doctor charged according to the patient's ability to pay. The call book records an attempt made in Pawtucket in 1832 to regulate fees "signed by all the physicians in the place who have agreed to strictly abide by the same." The scale of fees is not given.

The doctor was a man of varied interests. In the back of the book are a couple of pages devoted to a "Record of Judicial Proceedings, 1843," set down while Doctor Gardner was a justice of the peace in Seekonk. In one case Arnold L. Malburg of Seekonk is charged with selling rum, wine and brandy without a license and also with being a "common Sabbath breaker and profaner of the Lord's Day." He was convicted on the first count and fined \$10, but the charge of Sabbath breaking was not proved.

On Dec. 16, 1843, there appeared before Doctor Gardner ("at a justice court holden in my office") one Joseph B. Fitts charged with that he did, on the 8th day of December, contrary to the statute made and provided, "presume to travel on the public road with a sleigh or sled drawn by a horse without bells attached to same." Three dollars and costs.



Matunuck August 1, 1830

David Martin	Dr.	To visit at C. Falls & send medicine	1 00
Nancy Martin	Dr.	To visit & Medicines at C. F.	75
Ann Jenckes	Dr.	To vis. in name, & add. fee	50
Wm. Arnold (Cottleborough)	Dr.	To visit - sent Daughter & send medicine	1 50
Col. J. M. Goodwin	Dr.	To vis. in afternoon	50
Army Agent	Dr.	To 1 Box Tooth paid	25
		1 Tooth Brush	12 1/2
		1 Box Teeth	12 1/2
Army Agent	Dr.	To 1 Tooth Brush Capt. Silby	25
Ann Jenckes	Dr.	To vis. in afternoon	50
		Exp. Flour 6 cans	06
		Exp. Sulph. Acid. Dilut. fee	12 1/2
Wm. Arnold	Dr.	To vis. his wife & add. fee	1 50
Scott Smith	Dr.	To vis. 1 Box pills this morn.	50
		Exp. Nut. Diets	50
Wm. Arnold	Dr.	To vis. in Cottleborough	1 50
Ann Gardner	Dr.	To 1 Box pills	25
Mr. David Martin	Dr.	To vis. in name himself	60
		Exp. Nut. 1/2	75
		Exp. Nut. 1/2	12 1/2
Henry Marshant	Dr.	To 1/2 Box Squills & Z. Lent	12 1/2
		bill fee	06

FIRST ENTRIES in ancient call book show visits to David Martin, Nancy Martin, Ann Jenckes, William Arnold, Colonel Goodwin. Sold to one young patient: a toothbrush.

Pictures by H. Raymond Ball



GREAT-GRANDSON, Charles C. Gardner of Matunuck, and his wife, Mrs. Margaret Gardner, glance over record of the doctor's calls. Good doctor — good collector, too!