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Easton (Mass.) Physician's Daybook

1831-1833

1 volume (0.15 linear ft.)

Call no.: MS 283

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The Bristol County, Massachusetts, towns of Easton and Norton had only a small number of trained physicians in the antebellum period tending to a growing population. During the 1830s, that number was probably less and ten, including those with allopathic medical degrees, alternative practitioners, and those who had irregular educations.

The unidentified physician who kept this daybook appears to have practiced in either Easton or Norton, Massachusetts, during the early 1830s. The daybook includes brief records of patient names and dates of visits, medical care dispensed, and minimal records of medical procedures.

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Background

The Bristol County, Massachusetts, towns of Easton and Norton had only a small number of trained physicians in the antebellum period tending to a growing population. During the 1830s, that number was probably less and ten, including those with allopathic medical degrees, alternative practitioners, and those who had irregular educations.

Scope of collection

This daybook covers the practice of an unidentified physician in the years 1831-1833. The entries are brief and sometimes in a medical shorthand, with the majority simply listing a debit for a call, advice, or medicine. A few indicate "new medicine," with what appears to be a higher charge for a new treatment. Other frequent entries include dentistry work, venesection (bleeding), and childbirth, which the doctor recorded with the abbreviation "puella." Inoculation, also a common procedure, increased sharply in August 1831, which may indicate an outbreak of some disease such as smallpox or measles, however there is no indication of the disease. A visit on Dec. 13, 1831, the physician charged \$1.50 (a large sum) to Lucius Howard "to visit & med. & attend abortion." The physician visited Howard again on the 15th and 17th, dispensing the sedative valerian.

Apart from medical care, other debits show the doctor selling grain and boards, and renting out his horse and chaise. Credit entries were infrequent, and almost all noted cash as the means of payment. Some debit entries were marked paid, meaning presumably that they were settled at the time of service. The physician totaled the charges at the bottom of each page and calculated his receipts both monthly and yearly. In 1831 he billed for a total of \$1952.32, and in 1832, \$2046.16. How much he collected is not recorded.

The physician who owned this book appears to have been based in Bristol County, Massachusetts, and probably in either Easton, where most of his patients were located, or, less likely in Norton. Town histories list at least seven physicians in these towns for that period; consultations with a Dr. Dean, presumably Samuel Dean of Easton (1794-1872) are mentioned at least twice in July 1831.

In addition to private patients, the owner of the daybook saw charity cases in Norton, Easton, and Bridgewater, as well as Plymouth County. Among his frequent patients were the families of Nathan Alger, Welcome Lothrop, Oliver and Lyman Dickaman, Cyrus Lathrop, Caleb and Nathan Pratt, and Samuel Wilbur. A few, presumably independent women, appeared under their own names, but most were listed under their husbands' names even as widows.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Charles Apfelbaum, 1989.

Bibliography

Chaffin, William L., *History of the town of Easton, Massachusetts*. Cambridge, 1886

Clark, George Faber, *A history of the town of Norton, Bristol County, Massachusetts, from 1669-1859*. Boston, 1859

Processing Information

Processed by Lisa May, August 1989.

Language:

English

Acknowledgments

Encoding funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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Cite as: Eaton (Mass.) Physician's Daybook (MS 283). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

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