

Dr. Patten 'Still At It' After 53 Years As Morristown Physician

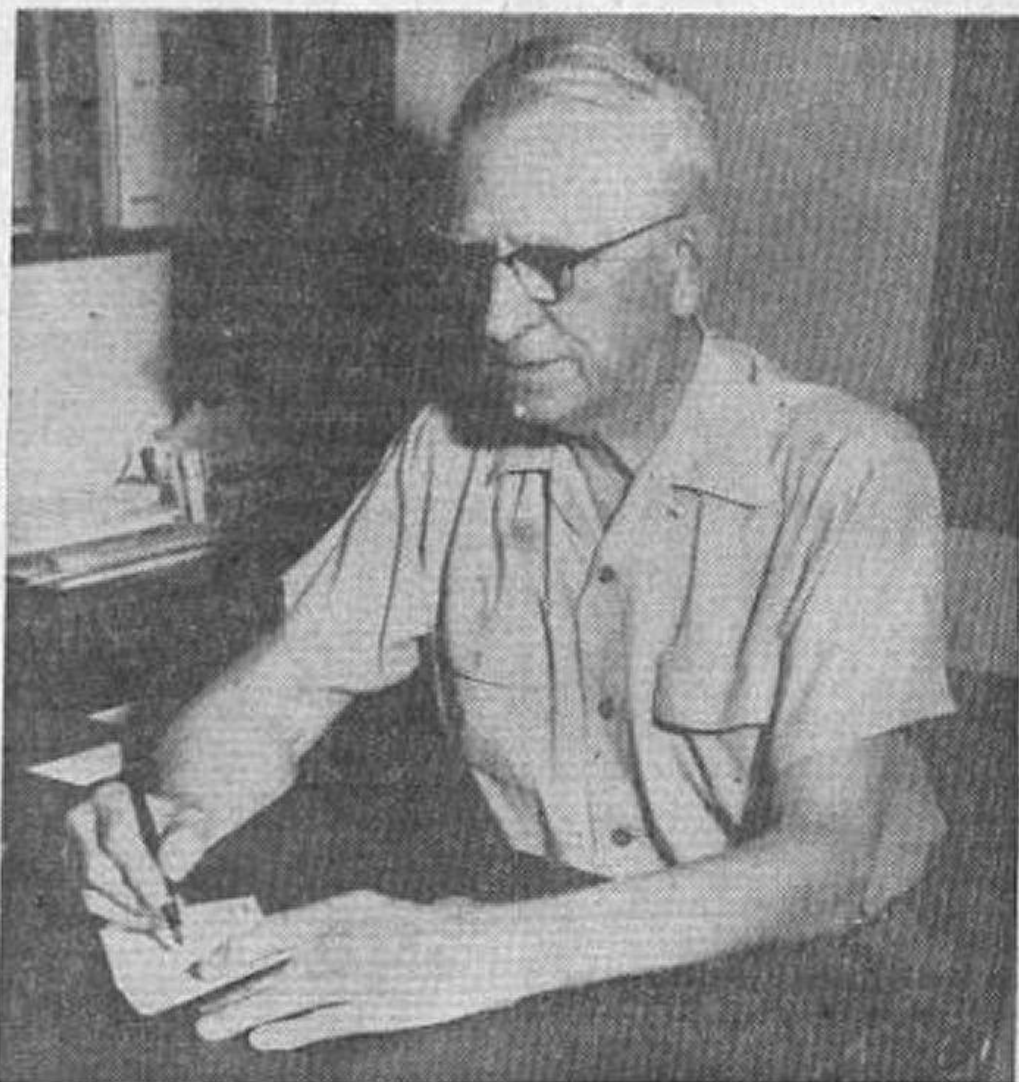
Dr. Vernon C. Patten, for 53 years a general practitioner in Morristown, is at 84 still fulfilling his Hippocratic Oath with every bit as much enthusiasm as when he first began.

In fact, the thought of retirement hasn't occurred to the elderly gentleman who proudly declares to be "still at it". "That's the way good doctors do and besides", he continued, "I wouldn't know what to do with myself if I weren't working."

Unobtrusive to the point of requiring persuasion before agreeing to an interview, the white haired doctor admits now being the county's oldest physician in practice—"and probably in age"—he adds with a twinkle in his eye.

Dr. Patten's ancestors have been a prominent part of Hanover township since they pioneered in 1820, just two years after the region was settled. At that time his great-grandfather, Benjamin Cole, was a Revolutionary War soldier and the first casualty in Hanover cemetery which was dedicated with his burial. The cemetery, a short distance south of Morristown, is all that remains of the community of Hanover which boasted a post office, railroad,

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FILLING PRESCRIPTIONS—Almost synonymous with the medical profession is the task of filling countless prescriptions for patients as Dr. Patten is shown doing in the office of his Morristown home.

Personality

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church and school before its abandonment some 100 years ago.

Equally distinguished were Benjamin's three sons, Abel, Calvin and Seth, the latter being Dr. Patten's grandfather, who all served in the War of 1812. Stepping down still another generation, his father, a farmer the majority of his life, became conductor on the old Knightstown-Shelbyville railroad a year before its operation ended in 1853.

Their quiet and reserved yet extremely friendly descendent lives and has his office in a large white colonial home that he shares with wife Anna whom he married about 30 years ago after his first wife's death.

Much has been altered since the time over a half a century back when the mode of travel was a horse and buggy but the 24-hours a day responsibility to his patients remains unchanged. He doubts if any doctor really enjoys making night calls, but they are a part of his job which the 84-year-old continues to execute faithfully.

Dr. Patten can claim affiliation with three universities, Butler, then located in Irvington, De Pauw and finally Indiana Medical College in Indianapolis where he received his diploma six years later.

Interest in medicine came after he had completed "a couple of years' work" in college because of a doctor associate who "talked nothing by medicine."

Following our country's entry into World War I, the doctor volunteered his services as a surgeon in the army and was stationed in Kansas and South Carolina. However the Armistice that same year (1918) cut short his work and prevented his going overseas.

Despite the fact that being a doctor is an all-consuming profession, the elderly gentleman has found numerous other ways of contributing to the betterment of Morristown. With the organization of their Willard E. Hensley Legion Post, which Dr. Patten "guessed" was begun in 1920, he became the first post commander and a charter member. Some "six or eight years ago" the post presented him with a well-earned citation as Number 1 citizen of the community.

For "sticking around 50 years", as he puts it, the doctor is the possessor of two 50-year pins, one from the Masonic lodge of which he is a Master Mason and the other from the medical profession.

Very distinct, vivid and, at the same time, heart-breaking memories linger of his work on the town board in aiding the establishment of a local fire department in 1924. With the new fire fighting apparatus not six weeks old, his own house burned to the ground because the chemical equipment ran out of chemicals in extremely dry weather.

During a term as president of the Dodds Memorial Hall Association, ground for the Morristown city hall was broken and construction completed in 1922. Another presidency held was as head of the County Medical Society several years back.

Asked if he had ever been in public office, Dr. Patten grinned and replied that he "had run on the ticket" for coroner but his "politics were wrong." He is a Republican in a decidedly Democratic county and Hanover township's GOP majority was not sufficient to "offset the whole county."

A large section of one wall in his office is given to bookshelves bearing many pages of medical knowledge. But one shelf is decorated solely with the pictures of his eight grandchildren and one great-grandson, the offspring of his two daughters and son. His favorite topic of conversation seems to be these young people and with the pride of any grandparent, he showed his interviewer a letter telling of a college scholarship won by one granddaughter, a promising singer, and of another, a recent graduate nurse from Texas Christian University.

The kindly gentleman declined to relate any professional experiences saying "That's all water over the dam." Besides he doesn't see how anyone else could possibly be interested in them so "the best way to do with such things is to forget them," he believes.

So while many of the incidents in his lifetime are known only to him and his patients, an all-around reputation as being a member of a pioneer family, a civic minded citizen, family man and fine doctor remain and will be long remembered as considerably more than "water over the dam."