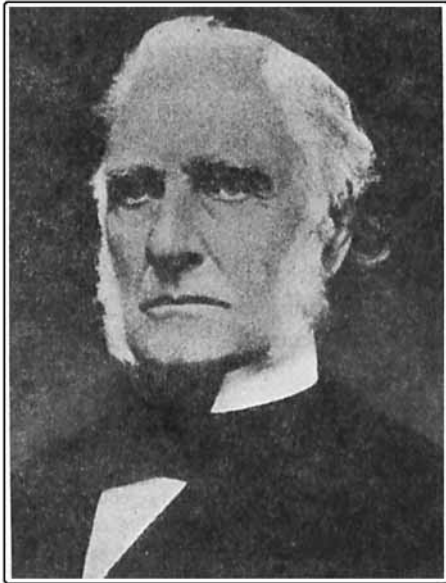


PHILO CARPENTER—PIONEER PHARMACIST OF CHICAGO.*

BY WILLIAM B. DAY.

The summer of 1832 found the little settlement at Fort Dearborn at the head of Lake Michigan in desperate condition. Outside of the fort, there were scarcely two hundred persons in the village and the majority of these were Indians and half-breeds. The advantageous location, on the portage between the Great Lakes and the Illinois River, had been recognized by the French explorer, LaSalle, a century and a half before, but the incursions of hostile natives and the ravages of malaria had retarded settlement and now was added to these perils an outbreak of the dread disease, cholera. At this inopportune time arrived a young man who was destined to play an important part in the growth of the future metropolis. Philo



PHILO CARPENTER.* * Chicago Historical Society Photo.

Chicago's First Pharmacist.

Carpenter came of pilgrim stock. Both of his grandfathers had fought in the Revolution; one had been a major in charge of West Point at the close of that struggle. As a boy he had grown up on a farm in the Berkshires of Massachusetts and following a common-school education had enjoyed the opportunity of attending the academy at South Adams. Here he became interested in medicine and when, later, he removed to Troy, New York, he entered the employ of a druggist of that city and continued his medical studies. Such was his industry and success that within a few years he was admitted to partnership in the business. The death of his bride in the first year of their married life and the return of a cousin who had traveled from Detroit to St. Louis on an Indian pony and who had been greatly impressed by the opportunities of the new country then just opening to settlement, turned the young man's thoughts toward

the West. He closed out his business early in 1832 and invested in a stock of drugs and medicines which he shipped to Fort Dearborn. The journey was long and arduous, comprising a short trip by rail to Schenectady, then by canal boat to Buffalo, then by steamer to Detroit, by wagon to Niles, Michigan, and by lighter down the river to St. Joseph where he had expected to go by sailing vessel across the lake to Fort Dearborn. The captain of the schooner had, however, learned of the outbreak of cholera and refused to make the trip, so Carpenter and a friend engaged two Indians to tow them around the head of the lake in a canoe. At Calumet, one of the Indians was attacked by cholera, but the druggist-doctor prescribed for him and they pushed on until they were within sight of the fort, when the Indians refused to go further. The voyagers were

* Section on Historical Pharmacy, A. Ph. A., Miami meeting, 1931.

fortunate in finding a settler who owned an ox-team and he brought them and their trunks to the fort the following day.

This was July 18, 1832. The cholera was raging fearfully among troops and settlers, and medical aid was quite inadequate to cope with the situation. Carpenter engaged at once in ministering to the sick and dying. Fearless of the disease himself, he seemed to bear a charmed life. It was impossible in many cases to obtain the help of physicians and Chicago's first druggist did their work as necessity forced it on him.

When the shipment of goods arrived, Carpenter opened Chicago's first drug store in a log building on Lake Street, near the river. There was a great demand for drugs, especially quinine, and the business prospered almost from the beginning. In 1833 the town of Chicago was organized and among the 28 voters, 13 of whom



Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society.

South Water Street in 1834, now Wacker Drive, Chicago.

were candidates for office, we find our druggist, who, however, never sought or accepted office. The anticipated building of the Illinois and Michigan canal, though it was not actually begun until 1836, called attention to the young town and the population increased rapidly. Carpenter's business grew and he moved into more commodious quarters and enlarged his stock. His advertisement in a Chicago newspaper in 1835 lists not only a variety of drugs, chemicals, cosmetics and perfumery but also garden seeds, onion seeds, potatoes, leathers, stoves and castings, road scrapers, wagon boxes, plows and mill irons and maple sugar kettles. With unusual vision, Carpenter discerned in the small trading post, the embryo of a great metropolis. He invested all his earnings in real estate both in the town itself and in the country roundabout. But in the course of his business, Carpenter had become security for several friends and when the financial panic of 1837 came, he found his small fortune swept away. It is of interest to know that he scheduled all of his real

estate and allowed his creditors to select what they deemed a fair equivalent for their debt. They took 960 acres of farm land, 4 1/2 blocks in Carpenter's subdivision to Chicago, 1/2 block of the school section and 3 lots on Washington Street near the present site of the Chamber of Commerce, and the house and lot on LaSalle Street (his homesite), to satisfy the debt of \$8500; property that not many years after was valued at more than \$1,000,000. It is indicative of the fine character of the man that he faithfully carried out his agreement and the only criticism that he made of the settlement was to say, "I should have thought they might have left me my home." But with the revival of business Carpenter began to amass a new fortune. In 1842 he removed his drug store to 143 Lake Street. It was then known as the "Checkered Drug Store," so named from the black, white and red squares with which it was painted. In 1843 he sold it to Dr. J. Brinkerhoff and retired to devote his time to the care of his extensive real estate holdings. Carpenter took an active part in the religious life of the city. He was a charter member of the First Presbyterian Church but when this church declined to take a radical stand on the slavery question he left his friends and associates of twenty years and built, largely at his own expense, the First Congregational Church, which stood on the southwest corner of Washington and Green Streets. He was an ardent Abolitionist and his home was one of the stations of the "underground railway," which helped many slaves on their way to Canada and freedom in the '50s.

Although regarded as an extremist by many people Carpenter was not a disagreeable reformer and was greatly loved. E. O. Gale, the druggist-author of "Reminiscences of Early Chicago," says of him, "From the time Philo Carpenter came here until the grave closed over him, I never heard a person accuse him of saying or doing anything unbecoming in the high-minded Christian gentleman."

A public-spirited citizen, he took a leading part in affairs but was never prevailed upon to accept public office. He strongly opposed the sale of the school section, urging that only alternate blocks be sold. Had his advice been followed, the city of Chicago would be the richer by millions of dollars. He organized the first Sunday School and served as its superintendent. He was a deacon of the Congregational Church and was noted for his benevolence and philanthropy. He was one of the founders of the Chicago Eye and Ear Infirmary and of the Relief and Aid Society. He was one of the incorporators of the Chicago Theological Seminary and a generous supporter of the Chicago Historical Society. On his death, in 1886, he left a considerable part of his fortune to colleges, charitable organizations and religious institutions. The Carpenter School and Carpenter Street in Chicago were named for him.

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