

Dr. Charles H. Quinlan

The Historical Society has a special fondness for the subject of this “Alphabet Story,” because it was as part of his estate that our museum building at 361 E. Westminster was constructed in 1870. Dr. Charles H. Quinlan was born in Albany, New York in 1821; he died in Evanston in 1897. In between, he became one of the most important contributors to the founding of the City of Lake Forest.

After graduating from the Albany Academy in 1842, Charles Quinlan trained in medicine and dentistry for four years under his uncle, Dr. Harvey, in Buffalo. Once that apprenticeship ended, he struck out on his own in the young city of Chicago, establishing a dental practice on Lake Street.

Shortly after his arrival in 1846, Charles Quinlan achieved fame as the first Midwestern physician to administer anesthesia, during an amputation performed at Rush Medical College. He produced the sulphuric ether using instructions sent to him by his uncle in Buffalo. The success of this experiment granted Quinlan greater renown, and his practice increased accordingly. Soon, he was joined in Chicago by his brother, Dr. John D. Quinlan, as well as a wife, Miss Ruth Efner of Buffalo. He began studying for a degree in medicine at Rush Medical College, eventually earning his M.D. in 1865.

In the late 1850s, Quinlan, who had begun to dabble in real estate, became an investor in the Lake Forest Association, subscribing \$1,000. Charles and Ruth Quinlan and their family moved into their new home on Deerpath in 1859. It was one of the first estates built in the newly platted Lake Forest. This Greek Revival frame house, painted white with green shutters and large fluted columns, featured orchards to the rear of the property and a large “grapery” in the front.

Dr. Quinlan’s fingerprints are all over the shaping of early Lake Forest. He was one of 24 voters who approved Lake Forest’s charter in 1861. At that time, Quinlan was elected the first city treasurer. He also served on Lind (later Lake Forest) University’s first board of trustees. A founding elder of First Presbyterian Church, Quinlan was the first Sunday School superintendent and even sold the church the land on which the present building stands. His seven children, William, George, Edward, Charles, Sophie, Ann and Jennie, attended school at Lake Forest Academy, the Dickinson Seminary for Young Ladies, and Ferry Hall. And, certainly not least among his contributions, Dr. Quinlan was the only practitioner of medicine and dentistry here in the 1860s.

A devastating fire in 1869 ravaged the Quinlan home on Deerpath. At this time, they moved into another property owned by Dr. Quinlan in Lake Forest, a smaller frame home on the corner of Walnut and Washington. It had been built in 1862 and originally served as Lake Forest’s first

public school before the Quinlans converted it back into a residence. Many years later, this home was moved to 334 E. Westminster, where it now stands.

The Quinlans decided to rebuild their home on Deerpath. A new three-story house, brick with a mansard roof and dormers, was completed in 1870 – this is now 404 E. Deerpath. The matching carriage home would in the future become 361 E. Westminster, the current home of the Historical Society. By the 1930s, the former Quinlan property included a church, the library, and the Masonic Lodge.

The family never moved into their newly built French Empire-style house, which was sold to Simeon B. Williams in 1870. Perhaps funded by the sale, in 1874 Dr. Quinlan acquired a hotel in Evanston at the northeast corner of Chicago Avenue and Davis Street, which he called the Avenue House. The next year, the Quinlans relocated to Evanston. Dr. Quinlan was residing at his hotel when he passed away in 1897.

For more on Dr. Charles Quinlan and the history of his home, including a photo gallery, visit our website: www.lflbhistory.org/about-building