



KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

The Original Dr. Daniel Hiebert, M.D.

A Provincetown Legend



When one begins to write an article on Dr. Daniel Hiebert, Provincetown's General Practitioner for over half a century, it can easily become a continuous column for this entire 2000 season. The numerous stories, the personal testimonies, even the stale dry facts of history could support the season. So for those of you who knew Dr. Hiebert and those of you who missed the opportunity to meet an original, here is one person's effort to depict a life.

Their earliest family records from Holland refer to a Mennonite family by the name of Huegebere. Through skill and hard work, they had rehabilitated poor soil into productive and enviable land. Life was good, good until the Mennonites were conscripted into military service. Since they

continued on page 14

opposed war and were conscientious objectors, their refusal to serve in the military led to their loss of land, citizenship and any welcome in Holland. Consequently the Huegeberes and other Mennonites moved to Germany where they changed

ment in Germany and once again they were forced to accept an offer of a "great land" from Catherine the Great. Once again the great land-conscription scenario played out leading to Grandfather Hiebert's migration to the United States and finally to Kansas and an overdue life of prosperity and comfort.



their names to Hiebert. They were promised good land, but they were given poor land that also needed rehabilitating.

Once they succeeded, conscription became a require-

Daniel Hiebert was born in Hillsboro, Kansas of his father's third marriage to a well established Mennonite family. Both his father's earlier wives had died and he returned to Russia to assure a strong Mennonite wife to continue the culture and tradition in the new world. There were twins, a boy and a girl, as a blessing for the future along with Daniel. The siblings from the first marriage were like parents because of the age differences, providing many strong individual personalities from which Daniel could learn.

Rather than farm, Daniel wanted to study medicine. Teaching provided the step he needed to finance his move to Boston and Medical School at Boston University. Church was part of his life and probably the only social life of a young med student. His half sister from his father's second marriage was married to a minister and it was at one of their church meetings that Daniel met

Emily Seigler of Swiss parentage, a lady who was to become a lifelong daily partner.

continued on page 16

*Influenza killed
more people than all of
World War I. Doctors were
not to leave the hospitals and kept
gruelling schedules trying
to save lives even when
doom seemed imminent.*

Ruth Hiebert showed me a post card dated 1915 from Portland, Maine. "Best wishes," it read, "for a very Merry Xmas, Emily."

This card was addressed to Daniel Hiebert, 96 Paul Gore St, Jamaica Plains, Mass. Mary Lambrou,

who worked for Dr Hiebert for 35+ years and who still works for Ruth at Captain Jack's Wharf, received it from her cousin who found the post card at a yard sale in New Hampshire. "Probably stuck in a book and so travelled," thought Ruth. At 96 Gore St., Dr Hiebert's roommate was Eugene O'Neill, and their friendship continued into Provincetown. Dr. Hiebert delivered Eugene's son Shane O'Neill. Through the years O'Neill received prodding encouragement from his doctor friend.

The life of a doctor was so different in the second half of the second decade of the Twentieth Century. World War I and an influenza epidemic, both impeded by a lack of antibiotics, even penicillin, equipment and techniques. Influenza killed more people than all of World War I. Doctors were not to leave the hospitals and kept gruelling schedules trying to save lives even when doom seemed imminent.

A young intern working with Dr Hiebert was desperate to visit his sick wife at their home. He was granted permission but by the time he arrived, his wife had died. Despondent over his loss of love and future plans, he offered to turn the practice he was about to take over to Dr. Hiebert. That was how Dr, Hiebert came to Provincetown where he would practice medicine as a family doctor, a Town doctor, and a noted and celebrated general practitioner.

The year was 1919 and the young doctor settled into Mrs. Perry's Boarding House at the corner of Pearl and Commercial, now the Somerset House. His office was east of the Mayflower Restaurant. Emily Ziegler would visit weekends, dutifully chaperoned by a sister or other female members of the family. The couple was married after Christmas 1919. They bought Dr. Campbell's practice and moved in with the Campbells, broke and waiting for patients.

Daniel wanted to be a surgeon and in those days, it was necessary to go to Germany for studies. That would have happened except for Emily becoming pregnant and she did not want her child born in a foreign country. So Ruth was born on American soil—Provincetown sand. The Hieberts bought the building which presently houses Dorian Studios, Golden Gull and Dakit Jewelry when Ruth was in first grade.

Daniel and Emily lived there the rest of their lives.

Fortunately Dr. Hiebert never regretted staying for he was here for a long time—1919 to 1972—and his work was his life: country doctor, fishing village doctor, end of the peninsula doctor. He met all the challenges and we were lucky he was such a hard worker of long and dedicated hours, days, years, his life.

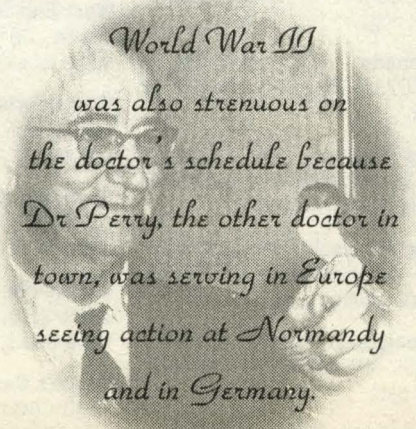
The doorbell started to ring at 8 AM with office calls until 10 AM. From 10 AM to Noon it was house calls. Then he at dinner, his main meal—thin walls away from the anxiety of the afflicted waiting to be seen and tended to. In the afternoon the office was open to all and in the evenings he returned to house calls. Dr. Hiebert was especially adamant about sick children not having to travel to his office when they needed the comfort of their beds and family. Supper occurred whenever the rounds were finished. All three ate together every night. Once asked about his diet, Dr. Hiebert replied, "I eat what my wife gives me, just plain simple food.

Besides all the town patients, there were calls to Truro and Wellfleet. A driver took the doctor out of town ever watchful to be flagged down. Either Emily had received another out-of-town call or there might have been an accident forcing him to return to town. Of all these varied calls, his favorite was delivering babies. Some 1,500 babies entered life through Dr. Hiebert's ministrations. Ruth wanted a baby brother "so bad." Santa kept saying no. So Ruth contented herself by visiting every new baby with her father until the yearning passed.

Besides all of Provincetown, the fishing fleet and up Cape towns, Dr Hiebert was physician to the Basic Training Camp for the Coast Guard held at the Provincetown Inn. Every four weeks there were new recruits. Examinations and shots from 10 AM to noon with the help of two yeomen. This grueling part of the schedule finally ended when the Coast Guard brought in their own doctor—Dr. Fowler.

World War II was also strenuous on the doctor's schedule, because Dr Perry, the other doctor in town, was serving in Europe seeing action at Normandy and in Germany. Add to this the summer tourists who so often need attention from over-indulgence of food, drink, sun, athleticism and accidents.

PART II of this story on Dr. Daniel Hiebert will appear in 2 weeks—the week after Memorial Day.



World War II was also strenuous on the doctor's schedule because Dr Perry, the other doctor in town, was serving in Europe seeing action at Normandy and in Germany.