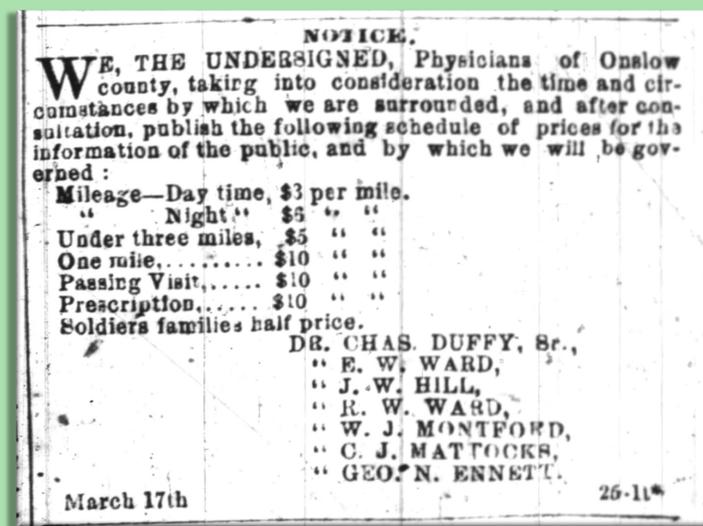


# The Country Doctor

Doctors in Onslow during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were also known as country doctors because of the rural nature of their practice. Most of these early doctors did not maintain an office in a town or city and made visits to their patients at their homes. In 1850, the first year the US census recorded occupations, nine doctors practiced in Onslow County. By 1940 that number had fallen to six, but a rise in nurses and pharmacists meant that overall medical practice had grown. Unlike many earlier physicians, doctors during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries trained in medical schools. In spite of this, medical care remained basic and many patients died from disease and infection that would be cured with vaccines and antibiotics today.

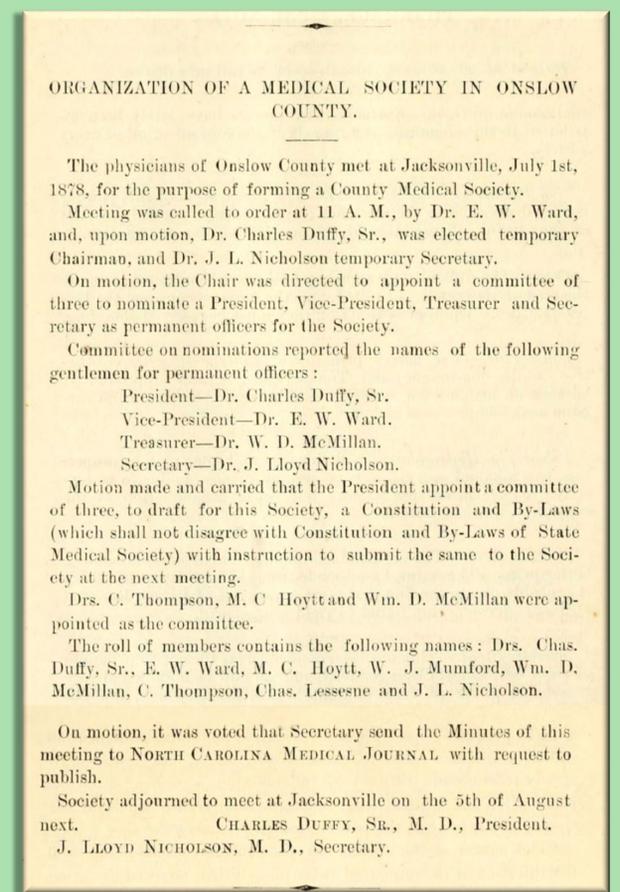


Wilmington Journal, May 17, 1864

During the Civil War the physicians of Onslow County set prices that were deemed fair during economically tough times. Traveling to see patients was a large part of being a country doctor, and the standard equipment for a doctor included more than just

their bag with instruments. One country doctor listed a shovel as an essential tool, should their carriage become stuck. Local anecdotes relate that in one Onslow community during the early nineteenth century, a log was kept across the road to keep outsiders away, and was only removed when residents heard the doctor's car approaching. This highlights both the importance of physicians in the community, but also the sometimes dangerous nature of rural roads.

After the General Assembly mandated that each county appoint a Superintendent of Health, the physicians in Onslow formed a medical society to better promote and encourage professional growth in the medical field. Members routinely held office and presented at the North Carolina Medical Society meetings. At meetings doctors from around the state shared cases that presented problems or new solutions.



North Carolina Medical Journal, 1878

