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# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A KANSAS HORSE AND BUGGY DOCTOR AND HIS RECOLLECTIONS ON THE CARE OF CHILDREN

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Arthur Emanuel Hertzler was born on July 25, 1870, in West Point, Iowa. His education in a one-room schoolhouse fostered an interest in academics, especially medicine. He attended Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas, and graduated from Northwestern University Medical School in 1894. Upon graduation, he returned to Moundridge, KS, to care for his ailing father.



The story of how Hertzler came to call Halstead home is a typical Kansas tale. A tornado hit the town on May 1, 1895. Hertzler drove from Moundridge to help, found the town to his liking and decided to set up his country practice there.

In 1899 Hertzler began a period of study in Berlin with Hans Virchow and Wilhelm Waldeyer. During his two years of study of anatomy and surgical pathology, Hertzler became proficient at a wide variety of surgical as well as medical specialties, including dermatology and optometry. He would later write that "no American teacher ever showed me the many favors that many of these German professors did."



"House Call" by Mary Selfridge  
Used as the cover for Dr. Hertzler's bestselling book, *The Horse and Buggy Doctor*, originally published in 1938. Photo courtesy of the artist.



"Give me a three-year old child and a penny lollipop, and I will buy myself a million dollar smile, a light that comes from the eternal stars. The love of children transcends all other concepts to me."  
AE Hertzler Speech to Parent Teachers Association, Burlington, IA. From the AEH papers collection, Clendening History of Medicine Library, University of Kansas School of Medicine.

"To answer the call eight miles from town I battled mud for three hours. As I entered the sickroom I saw a boy fourteen years of age half sitting up in bed in deep cyanosis, with grayish-blue skin and heaving chest, his mouth open and his eyes bulging. It seemed that each gasp would be his last. I threw down my instrument roll, sat flat on the floor with my legs spread under the bed. Grabbing a scalpel I made an incision in his chest wall with one stab—he was too near death to require an anesthetic. As the knife penetrated his chest, a stream of pus the size of a finger spurted out, striking me under the chin and drenching me. After placing a drain in the opening, I wrapped a blanket about my pus-soaked body and spent another three hours reaching home. The patient promptly recovered and is now a useful citizen in his town and recently voted for Landon, but I have never recovered from the memory of that pus bath. Bah!"

- *The Horse and Buggy Doctor*  
1938

"I went away out into the short-grass country not knowing what I was going to encounter. I was led into a bedroom where a wonderful black-eyed girl lay.... I saw at once that she had an enormously distended abdomen; her pulse was running and so was my own.... The abdomen was so distended with gas that I knew if it was a general peritonitis, operation would be worse than useless; if not, operation was urgently demanded at once. The risk had to be undertaken. I made the incision under local anesthesia.... The moment the peritoneum was incised there was a gush of pus and gas. It was a localized abscess. She made a prompt recovery.... When it comes to operating on children I am a coward at heart. I want to run away, but I never have."

- *The Horse and Buggy Doctor*  
1938



One of the last pictures taken of Dr. A.E. Hertzler.

Hertzler frequently traveled long distances by horse and buggy, automobile and train to reach his patients. He fought blizzards, thunderstorms, mud, bad roads, no roads, overwhelming fatigue and his own bouts with typhoid fever and other illnesses. When the horses and mules gave out, he walked. He often found a shovel, a pair of wire cutters, a hammer, lantern and a Colt six-shooter at least as important to reach his housecalls as his instruments and medications were once he arrived.

Hertzler accepted a teaching position at the University Medical College of Kansas City until it closed in 1907. He then taught as an assistant professor of Surgery at the University of Kansas School of Medicine, but always maintained his practice in Halstead. On June 17, 1902, he opened a hospital in Halstead with 5 rooms for medical patients and 5 rooms for surgical patients. Hertzler resolved to charge no more than \$4 for a patient's room and nursing care and no more than \$150 for an operation. The facility was successful and continued to be expanded until, in 1933, Hertzler sold the 178-bed hospital to the Sisters of St. Joseph for \$1 due to rising taxes and Hertzler's increased workload. The hospital filed for bankruptcy, unrelated to its profitability, in 2002 and was forced to close.

Photographs courtesy of the Kansas Learning Center, unless otherwise stated.



Dr. Hertzler, sitting at his desk at the Hertzler Hospital, 1939, courtesy of Kansas Historical Society.



Hertzler Hospital, Halstead, Kansas, 1936.

"When I hear of underprivileged folks I recall one experience I had which did not get into the book. To reach my patient I went to Woodward, Okla., fare \$9.60. From there I went by Ford 75 miles. This Ford was a sort of bathing beauty. It had neither windshield nor fenders. In fact all it had was running gears – and of course a seat. Somewhere along the route we reached a long incline. On one side was a high hill or low mountain. On the other side was a steep bank down to a creek some 75 feet down. The driver remarked as we increased speed down this incline: 'Two fellers run offen this road night-afore last, both killed.' 'Aren't you going pretty fast?' I asked somewhat nervously. 'Yeah, I know Dock but this Lizzie haint got no brake.'"

- "A Horse and Buggy Doctor Presents His Balance Sheet to His Employees"  
1938



2 miles of Kansas State Highway 89 north of Halstead has been named for Dr. Hertzler.

*The Horse and Buggy Doctor*, Hertzler's autobiographical account of his education and early years as a physician on the prairie, was published in 1938. It became an international bestseller, a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and was adapted into a radio play. Hertzler wrote hundreds of papers, 20 medical textbooks and several in popular literature, but none achieved the renown of the "hoss book," as he called it. Dr. Hertzler finally retired on March 1, 1946, after more than 50 years of 18-hour days. He died in his hospital in September of the same year due to heart failure and uremia. His legacy includes the Hertzler Research Foundation, Agnes Hertzler Memorial Clinic, and the Kansas Learning Center.

Research conducted in the archives of the Kansas Learning Center, Halstead, Kansas.