

Deloraine's Dr. Thornton

In Deloraine, in the first part of the twentieth century, if someone mentioned "The Doctor" it could refer to only one person: Dr. Thornton.

Rollert Thornton, born in Edinburgh, and educated at the University of Edinburgh, came to Deloraine in 1887, the first medical doctor in the new village. For over forty years he served the town and the district.

He was everything that a rural doctor should be. From earliest years the people of the community had affection and loyalty for this man who braved the hazards of winter storms, poor trails and hard travel, to attend those who needed his help.

His interest in medicine ranged far beyond his own practice, and for years he was the Health Officer for the Municipality of Winchester. He was prominent in medical circles, having been president of the Medical Council of Manitoba, and later president of the Medical Council of Canada. He had a keen legal mind, and was regarded as 'the lawyer of the medical profession.' He was internationally known for his familiarity with medical jurisprudence to the extent that Queen's University conferred the Honorary Degree of L.L.D. (Doctor of Laws) upon him.

His influence was felt across all walks of community life, where he was

active in the leadership of cultural and recreational pursuits, debating and literary societies, and just about

any community endeavour available. If a committee needed a chairperson, Dr. Thornton was there. If a community meeting needed a speaker or organizer – he was their man.



Political Life

The Doctor's first foray into public affairs was through the local School Board, and that signalled an enduring interest in youth and learning. He was elected to the



▲ The Park in Deloraine that Dr. Thornton established.

▼ Dr. Thornton was an avid sports enthusiast, participating in tennis and curling. The Deloraine tennis courts are pictured below.



Manitoba Legislature in the 1908 election and in 1916 became Minister of Education under the Liberal administration of Premier Norris.

Among his many achievements was the physical transformation of the town site of Deloraine.

A Sense of Community

The pioneers often chose scenic sites, close to water and trees, for their first small settlement efforts. They were far from immune to the pleasures of the natural world. Consider the location of Newcomb's Hollow, where the first Land Titles Office was located, or Sourisford, home of the first post office and store in that part of the country.

But when the railway lines finally arrived and it came time to establish "real" towns, those towns often ended up on a treeless prairie.

Thus, the beautification of the site was something all towns went through. In Deloraine it was Dr. Thornton, whose love of nature, and wide knowledge of horticulture, made him perfectly suited to the task.

Under his leadership the citizens planned the park that remains in the centre of the town, and Dr. Thornton spearheaded the renovation of the cemetery.

He is fondly remembered as a man who gave much to medical, political, educational, fraternal and religious circles of his chosen community. He died in Victoria in 1936, and rests in the local cemetery.

Source:

Deloraine History Book Committee.
Deloraine Scans a Century 1880 - 1980: Altona. Friesen Printers, 1980.

Photos: The Canadian Album: Men of Canada or Success by Example, Vol. III, Bradley, Garretson & Company, Brantford, Ontario, 1894.

Town of Hartney Photo Archives