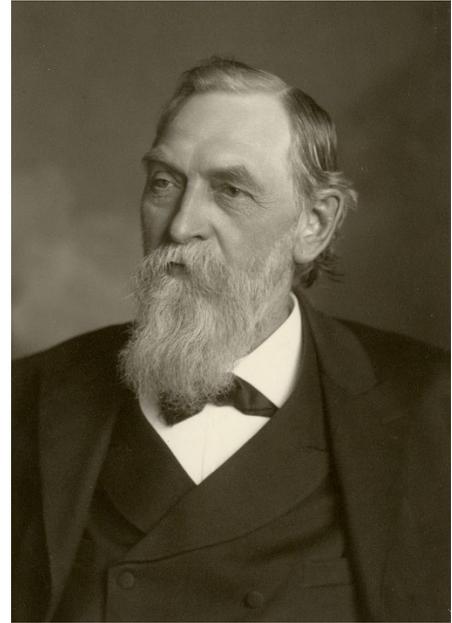


ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: DR. FREDERICK J.T. FISCHER

Frederick John Thomas Fischer, born to German immigrants on a family farm in Addison Township on July 30, 1842, was a noted Elmhurst resident, physician, public servant, and veteran. His legacy loomed large in the footprint of the Fischer Mansion, which stood for more than a century at 203 S. York Street, as well as through the papers he accumulated throughout his life. These papers, including several dozen Civil War-era letters of family correspondence and medical ledgers from Fischer's practice as a general physician, are important historical documents maintained in the Elmhurst History Museum's archive.

Fischer grew up on a farm at Grand Avenue and County Line Road as the third of ten children born to Henry Dietrich and Anna Fischer. When the Civil War broke out in 1861, 19-year-old Frederick was the first in Addison Township to enlist in the Union Army, making the trip to Bloomington to enroll and serve in the 33rd Regiment of the Illinois Infantry. He served a full enlistment term through October 1864, fighting in the Western Theatre of the war and most notably in the Vicksburg campaign. During this time, he received letters from his parents and siblings, including correspondence from his younger brother Augustus, who was also serving in the Union army. These letters vividly piece together what life was like on a home front farm as well as the front-line experience of Augustus, who was sadly killed in action near Atlanta in August 1864.

Following the war, Frederick stood for the DuPage County Clerk position at the age of 23 and subsequently won the election, an office he held for three years. His term ended in resignation due to the notorious controversy surrounding the removal of the county seat from Naperville to Wheaton. After an 1868 referendum that awarded the county seat to Wheaton, officials in Naperville refused to turn over all county records in their possession. Rather than become further embroiled in the conflict, Fischer regrettably resigned his post, "I am leaving this unpleasant situation with the remark that," he wrote in his resignation letter, "if everybody's first official experience were as bitter as mine, very few people would seek office." In the ensuing legal battles between the municipalities, the papers were turned over to a court in Chicago. The records were eventually lost in the fire of 1871, which settled the issue.



*F.J.T. Fischer c. 1900, photograph,
EHM Collection, M2014.1.375*

Following this experience, Frederick undertook a years-long journey as a student, studying at Wheaton College and Oberlin College and graduating from both institutions in 1874. In September of that year, he married Martha Struckmann of Elmhurst and then moved overseas to Germany to study medicine at the Universities of Heidelberg and Leipzig before returning to the United States to finish his physician's training at the Ohio Medical College in Cincinnati in 1878. After the death of his father-in-law in 1879, Frederick and his family returned to Elmhurst, where he established a longstanding medical practice. Fischer served on the District 46 Board of Education, helping to establish a high school in Elmhurst. He also became involved with his alma mater, Wheaton College, serving on its board of trustees.



"York Manor" at 203 S. York Street in Elmhurst c. 1900, EHM Collection, P73.1.8

Frederick and Martha lived in an imposing home that they built in 1891 at 203 S. York Street, known as York Manor. Fischer ran the practice from his home, and he worked as a doctor until the day he died in 1906. Frederick's passing was mourned countywide as his obituary was printed in several local papers and both the Elmhurst Village Board and the District 46 Board of Education passed resolutions of condolence to mark his death. York Manor was sold by the Fischer family in 1916 to Dr. Milo Crane, and over the years the building served as a sanitarium, dental office, and extended-stay hotel until its demolition in 2003.

By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum, Curator of Collections, July 2020