

Dr. Walter G. Sexton, Marshfield Clinic Founder
Nominated by Brian Finnegan, MCHS History Archive

Born June 2, 1886 in Madison. His father Andrew, only 50, died from pneumonia leaving his mother, 30-year-old Maria, to raise four boys. Five years later, tragedy struck again and Maria was afflicted and died from pneumonia.

Eight year old Walter was raised by a cousin, William A. Sexton, a pioneer pharmacist in the town of Marshfield. The Sexton cousins took a lively interest in their adopted son and provided a healthy environment for his development. In 1904, he graduated from McKinley High School and entered University of Wisconsin.



Life with a pharmacist contributed to Walter's interest in medical science. Dr. Karl W. Doege, Marshfield's prominent surgeon, suggested that he should consider Johns Hopkins for his medical education. In 1908, it was the best medical school in America.

He graduated in June of 1911 and was resident house officer at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He then became assistant resident surgeon in general and gynecological surgery at Hebrew Hospital in Baltimore and chief resident surgeon there in June 1914.

Just before completing his residency, Walter received a letter from Dr. Doege who was sorely in need of an assistant. Dr. Doege invited this young doctor to join him in practice in Marshfield.

Walter met Ethel Morgan while in Baltimore and they were married August of 1915. They settled at 313 East Third Street and raised five children.

Sexton was a man of high visibility. A bright, friendly personality made him well liked. Physically he was short and stocky. He moved with a quick energetic step and a twinkle in his eye. His intelligent, well-organized mind was unidirectional. He was a man of opinions and ideas and who had them firmly in mind. When he made a diagnosis or had an opinion, he stubbornly held to it. Yet he respected the thoughts of others and carefully considered them.

At home, Dr. Sexton was low-key. He was a jovial, devoted husband and father. He loved his five children and influenced them by example. He took time to listen to them and was always accessible to them. His hobbies included model shipbuilding and reading history books.

Besides being a superb physician, Walter Sexton was the most community oriented of all physicians in Marshfield. He was the most sought after public speaker and committee member in town. There were few organizations on which he did not serve.

Walter Sexton was secretary of Saint Joseph's Hospital medical staff from 1914 to 1936. He served continuously in this role longer than anyone in the history of the institution. In January of

1935, Walter Sexton was elected vice president of the clinic, and Roy Potter was elected president.

Sexton gave his life to medical practice, clinical research, education, teaching, writing, his family, the Marshfield Clinic, the community, the state, and his country. He was an effective, intense, driven man. Dr. Walter Sexton passed away of malignant hypertension and severe arteriosclerosis in July of 1942 at the age of 56.

Taken from the writings of Stanley Custer, MD, first historian of Marshfield Clinic
Submitted by Brian Finnegan, MCHS History Archive