

Grant County, Account Book of Dentist Charles A. Priest, 1920

Geneil Breeze

Charles A. Priest was a dentist in Marion, Grant County, Indiana, in the early part of the twentieth century. Little is known about Dr. Priest and how long he practiced dentistry in Grant County or elsewhere, but Charles Priest is listed as a Grant County dentist as early as 1912.¹ The Indiana Historical Society's William Henry Smith Memorial Library holds records pertaining to Priest's dental practice dating from 1920 to 1937.²

The account book for 1920, which was examined for this article, consists of loose-leaf papers about 3 inches by 5 inches in size. The binders that held the three-hole-punched papers are not part of the collection. Priest kept detailed handwritten income and expense records. The account book is divided into a monthly Receipts section and an Expenses section. In the Receipts section Priest entered the day payment was received, the name of the person submitting the payment, and the amount received. At the end of the month, the total receipts were tallied.

Dr. Priest generally did not record what service a payment was for, although occasionally the note "XR," for x-ray, or "clean" appears next to a person's name. It is also unclear whether payments were for services rendered on the day of the receipt or whether some patients, listed frequently, were making installment payments.

We can learn some interesting things from Priest's records. It appears that he had more women patients than men. January, the busiest month of 1920, is a good example. Of the sixty-three entries for January 1920, forty entries are for women. Other months have a similar female-to-male patient ratio.

Dr. Priest's total income for 1920 for his dental practice was \$6,721.50, making his monthly average gross income for the year \$560.13. Charges for x-rays range from \$3.00 to \$18.00, and Priest appears to have provided services for patients of other dentists or, perhaps, medical doctors. For example, on February 2, he makes this entry: "X Ray for Dr Gra[----] 3.00." On May 3, he enters "Hiatts patient 2.00." This may well be a reference to Newton Hiatt, also a

Grant County dentist, who authored the article on dentists included in Whitson's *Centennial History of Grant County, Indiana, 1812 to 1912*.

Dr. Priest's expenses also provide some interesting insight into his life and his dental practice. He rented his home for approximately \$22.00 per month and had his laundry done for about \$3.00 per week. He renewed his state license for \$1.00 in January and paid \$23.00 for "Infection protection." A big expense was a February payment of \$188.04 to the White Rafert Company for gold, presumably for dental fillings.

On the back side of the page from his regular expenses, Priest recorded miscellaneous expenses for the month, and we learn that he was charitable throughout the year. In February he gave \$1.00 to "church." In April he made two payments totaling \$15.00 to the Boy Scouts. In October he records giving \$2.00 to charity, and in December he donated \$5.00 to the Salvation Army. Other expenses recorded were \$16.07 in city taxes and \$22.51 in farm taxes, both paid in October. His recorded regular monthly expenses for the year totaled just over \$1,800.00 At a time when the average annual income for an American was \$1,236.00 Priest's net yearly income of nearly \$5,000.00 indicates a successful practice.³

The names recorded in Dr. Priest's account book for the year 1920 have been indexed here, and the month(s) in which each name appears in the account book is given in parentheses. Names or letters that were unreadable are indicated by [---]. Likewise, square brackets around names or letters indicate some doubt about those names or letters.

Notes

1. Whitson, Rolland Lewis, *Centennial History of Grant County, Indiana, 1812 to 1912* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing, 1914), vol. 1, p. 345.
2. Account Book of Charles A. Priest, Dentist, Marion, Grant County, Indiana, 1920–1937, SC 1657, Indiana Historical Society.
3. American Cultural History – Decade 1920–1929 Web site, Kingwood College Library, <http://kclibrary.nhmccd.edu/decade20.html> (accessed Sept. 4, 2007); EH.Net Encyclopedia: US Economy in the 1920s, <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/Smiley.1920s.final> (accessed Sept. 4, 2007).

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