

## Edwin L. Thirlby, MD: 'Michigan's Foremost Family Physician'



Edwin L. Thirlby was a good friend of James Frederick Munson, son of James Decker Munson, MD. He spent a lot of time as a young man in the Munson family apartment in Building 50.

Both he and James graduated from Traverse City High School in 1898 with 26 other classmates.

Encouraged by Dr. Munson, they

both went on to graduate from the University of Michigan Medical School in 1903.

In 1904, the young Dr. Thirlby traveled to London, where he received additional training with physicians at a hospital there, accompanying them on rounds and taking notes in a small notebook that can be found today at the History Center of Traverse City.



As a physician, Dr. Thirlby was among the local practitioners who lobbied with Dr. Munson for a community hospital, and then spent his lifetime practicing at the hospital, serving in many roles. He was named Michigan's "Foremost Family Physician" by the Michigan State Medical Society in 1960. He also received a University of Michigan Regent's Citation for his 35 years of sponsoring post-graduate medical education in the Traverse City area.

The Traverse City Record-Eagle published an editorial following the University of Michigan recognition, praising the physician for his service to his profession and the community: "It is a tribute well earned and richly deserved."

In 1921, Dr. Thirlby was co-founder of the Collier-Penberthy-Thirlby Medical Conferences in Traverse City. Thirlby Clinic

represented one of the first group practices in the state, formed to bring better medical care to patients. Dr. Thirlby's son, Richard L. Thirlby, became a urologist and also practiced in Traverse City.

### Artist's Depression-Era Letter to Physician: 'Let's Make a Deal'

The following letter to Edwin L. Thirlby, MD, dated Feb. 26, 1931, illustrates the impact of the Great Depression on medical care and payments in Traverse City. The letter was written by Maud Miller Hoffmaster, who became an internationally renowned landscape artist and who organized the Art Department at Interlochen Center for the Arts.

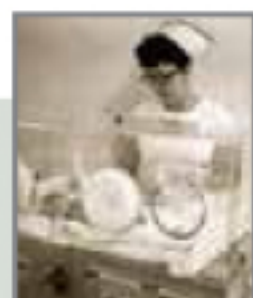
*Dr. Thirlby,*

*If I need your help, will you please trade work with me? I am interested in a girl, 18 years old, who tells me that she has a small hernia which troubles her. She wants to have it sewed up, but she hasn't any money; neither has her father who is a farmer with four children. I would like to help her with this matter, but these aren't such good times for an artist, either.*

*I am considered just as expert in my line of work as you are in yours, and I will give you a painting that took weeks and months to finish if you will do this work for me. This painting has been appraised at \$1,000; I am asking \$250 for it. This painting is a big wave just at the point of breaking as it appears from the side of a ship out in the middle of the Atlantic. I thought it would make a nice gift for your wife, as she could show her friends how the Atlantic looks when it gets restless. Of course, your diagnosis of this case may be different than the one the girl gave me and you may not consider an operation necessary, but I know I can trust you to do whatever is right, and I'd rather have you do it. I put this girl through high school and now I would like to see to it that she isn't handicapped with ill health or a big debt hanging over her head. A girl has it hard enough when she has to earn her own living and this is a good little girl and deserving of your and my help.*

*Please telephone me as soon as you read this letter and if you will cooperate with me, and if the girl will accept, I will send her to you for an examination. I want this attended to right away, so she will be ready for the summer work, whatever she does.*

*Very sincerely yours,  
Maud Miller Hoffmaster*



**1972**

**A FIRST:** A six-bed Neonatal Intensive Care Unit was opened.

**1973**

**A FIRST:** First cardiac catheterization lab opened at Munson Medical Center, called the Cardiac Diagnostic Unit. In its first year, 120 catheterizations were performed and 25 permanent pacemakers were placed.