John Sebastian Helmcken —
From Pharmacist to Canadian Pioneer

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The focus for the front cover of *CJHP* in 2004 will continue to be important Canadian medical institutions and discoveries. In future issues we will cover topics ranging from the first college of pharmacy to the history of the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada.

Dr John Sebastian Helmcken is widely viewed as the first physician to establish regular practice in British Columbia. He practised medicine in Prince Rupert and then Victoria from 1850 until his death in 1920, at the age of 96. His early practice in British Columbia was notable for the skill with which he used chemicals and tinctures brought with him from England. He developed this knowledge of pharmacognosy and pharmaceutics during his apprenticeship as a pharmacist in London before entering his medical apprenticeship. Upon his arrival in Victoria, Dr Helmcken provided medical services far and wide, and was responsible for supplying medicines, advice, and treatment to Hudson Bay Company posts throughout the interior of what was to become British Columbia. His training as a pharmacist was instrumental in his care of new immigrants and the native peoples of the wild Canadian frontier.

Interested historians, amateur and otherwise, are encouraged to read H.M. Kidd's description of Dr Helmcken's life in the article "Pioneer doctor: John Sebastian Helmcken", published in the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*.[1]
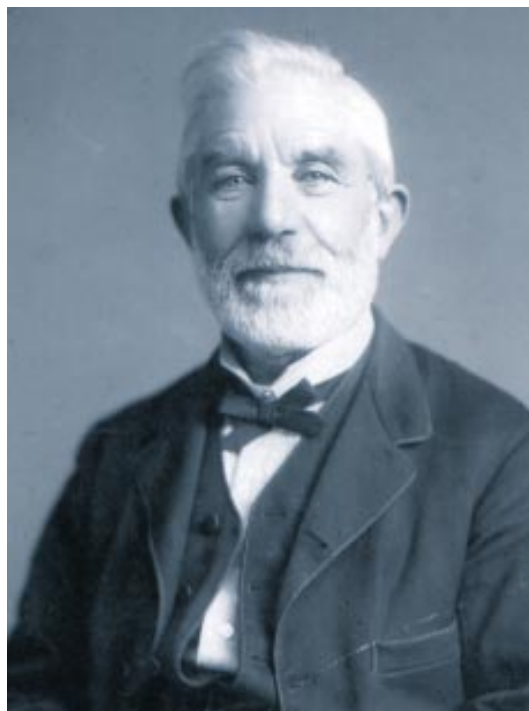
John Sebastian Helmcken, 1824–1920.

Reference

1. Kidd HM. Pioneer doctor: John Sebastian Helmcken. *Bull Hist Med* 1947;21:419-61.

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