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**Gangster In Our Midst**—available at local bookstores, [Amazon](#), [Walmart](#) & [Barnes & Noble](#)

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## *Gangster* Blog

### Hoping there's an end in sight to the coronavirus lockdown...

Nothing is more important right now than following the Coronavirus emergency protocols put in place by health officials to stay home to save lives (and wash hands).

That said, I remain hopeful the June 6 Author Workshop: "Writing a Memoir" at the **Bremer County Historical Society** will happen. Read the attached [press release](#) and you'll understand why I am looking forward to my trip to Waverly, Iowa.

A **July Book Tour** remains under development to include the Stuart (MN) Public Library on July 16, with stops at Perry, Winterset, and Adel libraries.

I've received confirmation another article I've written, "The Train," will appear in the upcoming **WINK: Writers in the Know magazine**. I guess by now you all know my infatuation with trains.

### **Dr. Lorain W. Ward and The Tuberculosis Epidemic in America (1860-1940)**

Fairbank, Iowa has had its share of physicians over the years, particularly Ward family doctors.

Dr. A. B. Ward (1832-1879) arrived from Ohio sometime around 1855, when the small village, initially named Alton, was growing up along the Wapsipinicon River with Fox Indians roaming the area. That was the year the village was organized as a separate and independent township, with about 400 inhabitants.

His obituary recalls the years he set about "doing the dangerous business of sick calling in the countryside...when Indians and bandits and chicken thieves were his patients and enemies."

He quickly learned to always carry a revolver.



'Three Fingers'

**COMING!**

**Sequel to  
Gangster in Our  
Midst:  
Summer 2020!**

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## Tuberculosis (cont.)

A. B. Ward's son, G. "Griffy" B. Ward (1856- 1923), carried on the profession and served the town for 45 years, doing pioneering work in surgery in the state—the first in eastern Iowa to do an appendectomy—until his death...when Loraine took over, though in reality three of A. B. Ward's sons followed him into the profession.

Dr. Loraine W. Ward Sr. (1885-1969) took the reins as physician during the final years the nation was inundated with tuberculosis.

His education included attending Drake and the University of Iowa medical school, receiving his degree in 1913, then interning at Montreal General Hospital, Canada.

His first office was in a space above the old grist mill next to the Wapsie. He was also on the payroll as company doctor for the Chicago Great Western Railroad in Oelwein.

On Oct. 21, 1933, he married Grace Edwards (1906–1977), a school-teacher from Blainstown. The couple had two sons, Loraine Jr. and Robert—the first becoming a physician, the second a dentist.

In the years that followed, from all accounts, Dr. Loraine Ward was well revered and happily engaged in doing the work for which he was trained as a physician and surgeon, though in all likelihood his professional skills matured when he cared for the wounds and scars of soldiers returning from the Great War; and during the decade of the Great Depression, the Hippocratic Oath surely took on new meaning while caring for impoverished and rich alike.

Most country doctors during those years accumulated a drawer full of I.O.U.s that never got paid. It's probable he received his share of eggs, chickens, or pieces of a freshly butchered hog in lieu of cash.

When conducting research for the historical novel, **Gangster in Our Midst (2017)**, Fairbank historian Howard Durham drove me around the township to point out the homes where people inflicted with tuberculosis had lived.

Tuberculosis first became a major disease in America around the 1860s, believed to have been brought about by increasing urban populations living in close proximity, from consuming unpasteurized milk, and by eating infected raw meat.

While many locals survived the disease, Howard said, they often remained bed-ridden...watching life go by through a windowpane or from a chair on the porch.

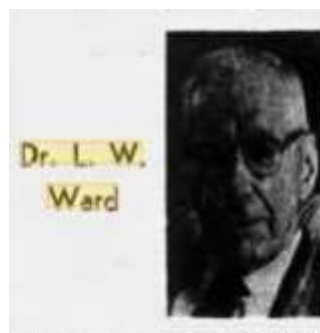


Photo: Oelwein Daily Register, 1969

## Author Events

(January--July)

### Writing Workshops:

— **Sat., June 6, 1 pm**,  
(Author Workshop: Writing a Memoir, We Are Eight),  
Bremer County Historical Society, 402 W. Bremer Ave,  
Waverly, IA, 319-352-1309

### Author Talks/Book Signings

— **Mon., June 8, noon/5:45 pm**, (Author Talk: Gangster in Our Midst)  
Rotary Club/Lions Club, Decades, 25 South Frederick, Oelwein, IA, 319-504-1464

— **Sat., June 20, 1 pm**,  
(Book Signing: Gangster in Our Midst) Sweet Reads Books and Candy, LLC 407 North Main St., Austin, MN, 507-396-8660

— **Sat., June 26, 5-9 pm**,  
(Book Signing: Gangster in Our Midst) Friday Night History Cruz, Paperbacks Plus Bookstore, 2539 7th Ave E, No. St. Paul, MN, (651) 770-0384

— **Thurs., July 16th, 6:30pm**, (Author Talk: Gangster in Our Midst) Stuart Public Library, 119 E Front Street, Stuart, IA, 515-523-1455 (& Perry, Winterset, and Adel libraries)

## Tuberculosis (cont.)

Dr. Ward's grandfather—Dr. A. B. Ward—had died at age 47 of consumption, from which he suffered a long time, as was noted in the Fairbank newspaper March 31, 1879.

In 1928—the year the novel begins—the tuberculosis pandemic was killing one of every four adults in Europe. In America it was the #1 cause of death, and an estimated 450 Americans were dying of TB every day, most between ages 15 and 44.

The best Dr. Ward was probably able to do was check in on his friends and neighbors from time to time as they succumbed to—then died from—‘consumption,’ named so because of a general wasting away of the victim.

Emma Bierkoff is a fictional character in the novel created to capture the historical experience of individuals in the township who became infected with TB.

Her symptoms are external fatigue, night sweats, coughing up blood. Dr. Ward recommends she go to the Oakdale Sanatorium near Iowa City, where care is primarily custodial, focusing on rest and nutrition. In 1928 the number of patients at Oakdale grew to 804.

Emma spends her first months—which turn into years—in a bed in an outdoor porch, where, in the winter months, heated bricks placed beneath her blankets are all that warm her body. The sulfa drug she's given makes her horribly sick.

Dr. William Spear arrived at Oakdale in June 1927 and began to do novel surgeries: pneumothorax (collapse and rest of diseased lung) and thoracoplasty (removal of ribs to facilitate lung collapse). Neither cured TB, but prolonged life—often lifesaving. From 1928-1942 surgery became the primary treatment for TB in the U.S, when the percentage of deaths finally began to significantly decline.

Emma has one lung deflated, which is never reflatd. Throughout the book she writes letters to her husband Walter and their two young sons about her care and treatment—an idea I took from reading the letters by William O. Aydelotte, number RG 99.0093, archived at the University of Iowa.

Penicillin was discovered in 1928, though it wasn't until the early 1940s drug therapies became the mainstay of curing TB.

Fairbank's old mill burned in 1943 and Dr. Ward moved his office to the top floor of the Farmers State Savings Bank at the southeast corner of Main and First streets—then in 1945, at the end of WWII, he relocated his practice to Oelwein, the last time Fairbank had a resident physician. He worked right up to his death in 1969.

If alive today Dr. Loraine Ward might be shocked (but perhaps not) to learn tuberculosis is again on the rise across the globe.

The main cause for the resurgence of TB is immunodeficiency, as a result of HIV co-infection or, less commonly, immunosuppressive treatment such as chemotherapy or corticosteroids, according to one source. The disease is also particularly difficult to manage and treat if there is substance abuse, incarceration, or homelessness involved. The active TB virus remains highly contagious.



Seated: Mrs. Ward and Dr. A. B. Ward. Standing: Dr. “Griffy” Ward

Photo: *The Courier* (Waterloo, Iowa), Sept. 29, 1946

I would have liked to have interviewed Dr. Ward for another reason: What did he think of Louie La Cava, the gangster who came to town in the early 1920s — and never left.

— BBP