



*George B. "Diamond Dick" McClellan*

# DOCTOR DIAMOND DICK

## Leavenworth's Flamboyant Medicine Man

by L. Boyd Finch

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**K**ansas was the stage on which a remarkable Victorian-era character strutted for nearly a third of a century. George B. McClellan was equally at ease in small midwestern cities and towns, and in the salons of St. Louis and Denver. He knew the inside of a jail as well as the plush accommodations of a private railroad car. One newspaper writer labeled him “a long-haired quack,” another praised him for “such wonderful cures in this city and surrounding country.” He was an itinerant peddler of questionable medical cures, one of hundreds of pitchmen (and a few women) who crisscrossed America, usually living on the fringes of society, going wherever they could find customers. Most hawked nostrums with unique names: Indian Sagwa, Seminole Cough Balm, Hindoo Patalka, Ka-Ton-Ka, Modoc Indian Oil. George B. McClellan sold himself. He became “Dr. Diamond Dick.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. Wayne (Neb.) Herald, October 18, 1888; Leavenworth Times, November 8, 1887.

Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 26 (Spring 2003): 2–13.

Evidence of his expertise in self-promotion is found in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Nebraska, as well as in Kansas. McClellan enjoyed particular success in Leavenworth in 1887–1888. His promotional methods there were memorable; in reporting his accidental death many years later, the *Leavenworth Times* did not mention McClellan's medicines or his healing techniques; instead, it was his methods of attracting patients that were recounted.<sup>2</sup>

On December 14, 1911, the *Kansas City Journal* fairly shouted: “DIAMOND DICK IS DEAD / Picturesque Kansas Character Succumbs to Ry. Accident.” The paper reported:

George B. McClellan, who advertised himself as “Doctor Diamond Dick” and who was known in every Kansas hamlet by his costume, which was copied from that worn by the hero of the old-time “dime novel,” died yesterday at the Bell Memorial hospital in Rosedale [Kansas City, Kansas]. He was injured in a railway accident at LaCygne, Kas., December 5 [sic], the injuries causing his death. The body . . . will be sent to Ogdensburg, N. Y., tonight for burial. The doctor was 54 years old. His picturesque figure attracted

2. Gene Fowler, ed., *Mystic Healers and Medicine Shows: Blazing Trails to Wellness in the Old West and Beyond* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1977), 5–6; *Leavenworth Times*, December 15, 1911; N. T. “Nevada Ned” Oliver, “Med Show,” *Saturday Evening Post* 202 (September 14, 1929): 12–13, 173. Dr. Oliver actually was E. O. Tilburn, and his is the most detailed account of the American medicine show by a participant.

attention in all the towns, which he visited at stated intervals.<sup>3</sup>

The era from 1880 to 1910 included the peak years of three then-ubiquitous elements of American popular culture—medicine shows, dime novels, and Wild West shows. McClellan is noteworthy because he was a part of all three. In his prime role as a medicine show principal, he shared the name of the hero of several hundred dime novel Westerns and was himself the star of the first dime novel that featured a hero named Diamond Dick. A friend of William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody, McClellan polished his own Wild West image by exhibitions of his firearms skill, and he frequently copied Cody’s appearance: wavy hair flowing to his shoulders, a slender mustache, and the broad-brimmed hat, boots, and buckskins of the frontier scout.

**T**oday it is difficult to imagine how pervasive medicine shows, Wild West shows, and dime novels were at the time. In their bonanza years, medicine shows “numbered in the hundreds.” Since then, as historian Arrell M. Gibson has noted, they have become “an elusive subject.” The Wild West show remains well documented, thanks to the showmanship of Buffalo Bill who gave form to what popular culture student Joseph Schwartz calls “the profound myth of the West”—profound and persistent. Wallace Stegner observed that much of what passes for western history “isn’t history at all, but myth, the Diamond Dick kind of stuff.” In a publication of Fort Worth’s Amon Carter Museum, Ronnie C. Tyler drew attention to “the close association of dime novels with the Wild West show business.” In the words of veteran pitchman Dr. N. T. “Nevada Ned” Oliver, “America’s contributions to the med show were two—the show and the Indian.” A Yale University School of Medicine exhibition linked the European and early American traveling purveyors of medicinal products with the late-nineteenth-century flowering of the medicine show that provided “free concerts, vaudeville and Wild West shows as an inducement to buy . . . Kickapoo Indian Sagwa and a host of other curealls.” It is fascinating to discover George McClellan’s significance as a player at the intersection of the three elements of a simpler American past and to gain insight into the character of the man through his promotional methods as recorded in old newspapers,

3. *Kansas City Journal*, December 14, 1911.

especially the *Leavenworth Times* and the *Leavenworth Standard*.<sup>4</sup>

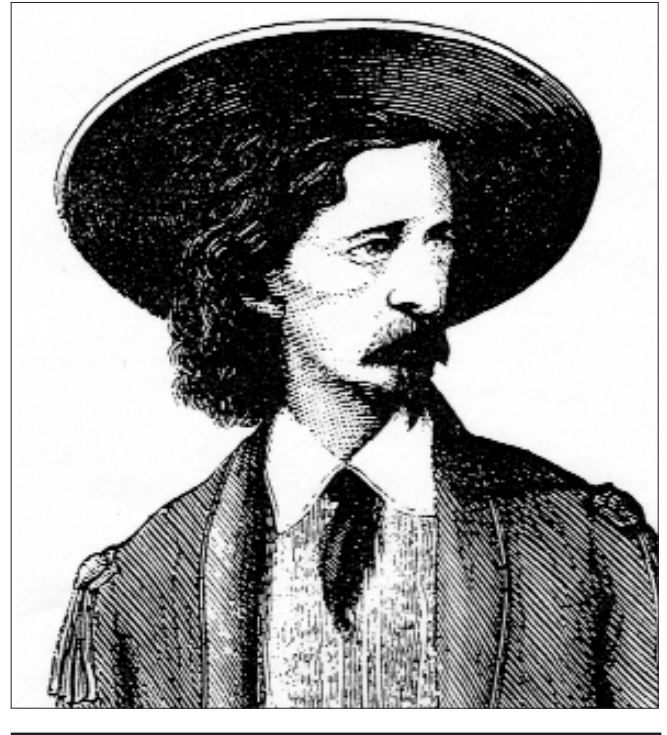
In 1882 a dime novel, *Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver; A True Story of the Mines of New Mexico*, introduced a handsome young hero named Diamond Dick. The author, Major Samuel Stone “Buckskin Sam” Hall, stated in a footnote that his hero’s real name was George McClellan, “a living character of to-day.” The novel was in the format common to dime novels: approximately forty-thousand words in small type on twenty-four pages of cheap paper. The cover illustration showed the dapper Diamond Dick standing over the barroom bully he had just floored for molesting an Indian.<sup>5</sup>

Although no record of McClellan attending medical school has been found, Hall’s novel provides a clue about McClellan’s knowledge of natural medications. In a brief flashback near the beginning of his novel, Hall demonstrates that he knew the real McClellan, imagining a scene in Ogdensburg with George’s mother and grandmother discussing young George who was absent, hunting and fishing in Maine. “I fear he will never again be contented at home,” his fictional mother says. “On all these long expe-

4. Albert Johannsen, *The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Dime and Nickel Novels*, vol. 1 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), 124–27; Oliver, “Med Show,” 12; Arrell M. Gibson, “Medicine Show,” *American West* 4 (February 1967): 15, 35, 79; William P. Burt, “Back Stage with a Medicine Show Fifty Years Ago,” *Colorado Magazine* 19 (July 1942): 127; Joseph Schwartz, “The Wild West Show: ‘Everything Genuine,’” *Journal of Popular Culture* 3 (Spring 1970): 656–57, 664; James R. Hepworth, *Stealing Glances: Three Interviews with Wallace Stegner* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 39; Ronnie C. Tyler, ed., *The Wild West or, a History of the Wild West Shows . . . Which Created an Unrealistic Image of the American West* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1970), 100; [William Helfand], *The American Medicine Show* (New Haven: Yale University School of Medicine, 1954); J. C. Dykes, “Buckskin Sam, Ranger and Writer; or, The Life and Sub-Literary Labors of Samuel Stone Hall,” *American Book Collector* 10 (n.d.): 15; J. Edward Leithead, “The Derring-Do of the Diamond Dicks,” *Dime Novel Round-up* 16 (April 1948): 25–30. In addition to the aforementioned citations, basic sources on the three subjects include: N. T. “Nevada Ned” Oliver, “Alagazam: The Story of Pitchmen High and Low,” *Saturday Evening Post* 202 (October 19, 1929): 26–27, 76, 79–80; Fowler, *Mystic Healers and Medicine Shows*; Gerald Carson, *One for a Man, Two for a Horse: A Pictorial History, Grave and Comic, of Patent Medicine* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961); Ann Anderson, *Snake Oil, Hustlers and Hambones: The American Medicine Show* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 2000); James B. Trefethen, “They Were All Sure Shots,” *American Heritage* 13 (April 1962); James Monaghan, “The Stage Career of Buffalo Bill,” *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society* 31 (December 1938): 411–23; J. Randolph Cox, *Dime Novel Companion: A Source Book* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000); *Dime Novel Round-up*, published intermittently for collectors since the late 1920s. Two unrelated tales with a Diamond Dick character appeared in 1875 in the *New York Weekly*, a “story paper.”

5. Sam S. “Buckskin Sam” Hall, *Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver; A True Story of the Mines of New Mexico* (N.Y.: New York Dime Library, August 26, 1882), 2.

Major Samuel S. "Buckskin Sam" Hall (right) introduced a handsome young hero named Diamond Dick in his 1882 dime novel, *Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver*. Major Hall stated that his hero's real name was George McClellan, "a living character to-day."



ditions . . . he has kept up his favorite study of botany, and I'm sure has gathered a great deal of information in regard to the medicinal uses of herbs." No further mention of herbal medicine appears in the novel; it was not essential to the plot. The tale, set in the immediate past, told of the hero's harrowing but ultimately satisfying chase for two villains who had murdered his fictional sister and her children in Ogdensburg. The novel probably contained a germ of truth about McClellan's education in natural medicines and, moreover, Hall provided a promotional plug for the real McClellan's herbal medicine practice.<sup>6</sup>

Hall's fictional McClellan received the name Diamond Dick when, newly arrived from Denver, he entered a New Mexico saloon wearing a large diamond on his neckerchief, a huge silver belt buckle, buckskin suit, high-top boots, and gold-mounted six-shooters. Jim Jams, the local barfly, at once christened the ostentatious newcomer Diamond Dick. When McClellan adopted the name, and with what inspiration has not been discovered. He, like others of his trade, adorned himself in diamonds, real and paste. Before Hall wrote the novel, he probably knew that McClellan was calling himself Diamond Dick.

Although Hall produced more than fifty dime novels, *Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver* was his only Diamond Dick story. During the following three decades, however, other authors wrote several hundred Diamond Dick novels. Their hero thwarted villains and rescued damsels after overcoming many hazards; his fictional name was Richard Wade, not McClellan. In later issues, his son Bertie Wade was featured as "Diamond Dick Jr." As far as can be ascertained from the titles, none of the authors followed Hall's lead in suggesting that Diamond Dick had a special knowledge of medicine. The stories occasionally placed their central character in circuses, stage plays, and Wild West shows, but not in a traveling medicine show.<sup>7</sup>

6. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

7. *Ibid.*; Howard R. Lamar, "dime novels," *New Encyclopedia of the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 305–6; Dykes, "Buckskin Sam, Ranger and Writer," 15–18; *LaCrosse (Wisc.) Morning Chronicle*, May 19, 1885; Leithead, "The Derring-Do of the Diamond Dicks," 25–27.

The continuing output of the novels kept McClellan's "Diamond Dick" persona in the public eye. It is not known whether hack writer E. Z. C. Judson (Ned Buntline) wrote any Diamond Dick tales, but he became so closely identified with the dime novel genre that in the 1890s the *Kansas City Times* observed: "Diamond Dick is a remarkable character. He has the remedy that may save you if troubled with some chronic ill. Ned Buntline, the dime novel historian, will vouch for him." For McClellan it was another welcome bit of free advertising.<sup>8</sup>

Both Hall and McClellan performed in the western stage plays that Buffalo Bill and Buntline premiered in Chicago in the 1870s, the decade before Cody launched his Wild West arena show with its exhibitions of marksmanship and horsemanship, Indians attacking the Deadwood Stage, and buffaloes and longhorns. McClellan's hometown newspaper said he left Ogdensburg at age sixteen, about 1873, and joined Buffalo Bill in Chicago. McClellan sharpened his firearms marksmanship and, after five years with Cody he formed a medicine show, hired some Indians, and toured New England before heading west. He was in the mainstream of medicine show culture when he capitalized on the widespread belief that American Indians knew the secrets of the healing arts. McClellan an-

8. "In Kansas City Forty Years Ago," *Kansas City Star*, January 21, 1930, quotation from the *Kansas City Times*, January 21, 1890.

nounced variously that he learned from living with a Comanche medicine chief, or that he studied with a part-Mexican, part-native-Peruvian doctor in Boston and then added remedies based on his own observations.<sup>9</sup>

**M**cClellan did not always travel with a troupe of entertainers; he could attract attention by himself, as he demonstrated in April 1884 when he set up shop in the parlors of the International Hotel in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. His mode of operation was known in the trade as “office consultation.” In his newspaper advertising, McClellan announced that he “treats his patients by Indian Methods alone!” Along with testimonials from patients elsewhere in Wisconsin, he proclaimed: “The children of the prairie and of the forest instinctively know what herbs and roots of medicinal qualities to use in their cases of sickness, and the Doctor, long a resident of the villages of the Red Men . . . learned the ART OF HEALING, and the correct use of over Two Hundred Indian Medicines.” To further make known his presence in LaCrosse, McClellan proceeded to a shooting gallery where he shot ninety-eight birds out of one hundred and announced that he would shoot one hundred birds in succession on the coming Saturday.<sup>10</sup>

LaCrosse, however, was the home of Dr. David Franklin “White Beaver” Powell, a medical-school-educated half-Seneca Indian who claimed to be the “Medicine Chief of the Winnebago Indians.” He and his physician brothers, George “Night Hawk” and Will “Bronco Billie,” operated a clinic in LaCrosse. White Beaver Powell was a veteran of Buffalo Bill’s theatrical productions, too, and a Cody buddy and business partner for years. McClellan must have known this, and it is curious that he chose to take his “Indian methods alone!” to compete with the Powells on their home ground. In his advertising, McClellan’s head-and-shoulders sketch resembled that of White Beaver in *his* ads—broad-brimmed hat, flowing hair, mustache—although McClellan’s thin nose and more delicate features gave him the refined appearance of a ladies’ man.<sup>11</sup>

9. James Monaghan, “The Stage Career of Buffalo Bill,” *Journal of the Illinois Historical Society* 31 (December 1938): 411–16; *St. Lawrence Republican* (Ogdensburg, N.Y.), December 20, 1911; Robert A. Carter, *Buffalo Bill Cody, The Man Behind the Legend* (New York City: John Wiley and Sons, 2000), 221; *LaCrosse Morning Chronicle*, April 10, 1884; *Standard* (Leavenworth), December 10, 1887.

10. *LaCrosse Morning Chronicle*, April 10, 1884.

11. Eric V. Sorg, “Buffalo Bill’s Crony, Dr. Frank ‘White Beaver’ Powell, Brought the Art of Self-Promotion to New Heights,” *Wild West* 8 (Oc-

tober 1994): 88–94; Mary Hardgrove Hebbard, “Notes on Dr. David Franklin Powell, known as ‘White Beaver,’” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 15 (Summer 1952): 306–9. White Beaver Powell was elected mayor of LaCrosse in 1885.

Within a week after arriving in LaCrosse, McClellan was charged with “assuming the title of Doctor (and) prefixing . . . Dr. to his name.” His ads ceased the day that the district attorney dismissed the case. Three days later police again arrested McClellan, this time in the hotel dining room, for “disorderly and boisterous conduct.” He resisted and faced still more charges. After a night in jail, he admitted in court that he had been drunk. His fine was minimal, but he was ordered to post two hundred dollars’ bond to keep the peace. The newspaper reported Drs. George and Will Powell put up the bond; the next day McClellan denied that the Powells had done so. After that, McClellan dropped out of sight in LaCrosse.<sup>12</sup>

In April 1885 he turned up in St. Louis claiming to have amassed a fortune practicing medicine in Dakota Territory and Montana. The LaCrosse paper reprinted an item from an unidentified St. Louis newspaper that described McClellan

in a velvet shooting suit worn alternatively with a faultless suit of cadet gray with a long Prince Albert coat. A cluster of diamonds as big as a hen’s egg sparkled from his shirt front . . . he presented all the breeziness of a border scout . . . with all the refinement of manner and grace of a parlor knight. . . . Dr. McClellan caused quite a flutter among the Ladies whom he chose to encounter in his wanderings.

The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* said the doctor was in the city to arrange a match with the world champion rifle marksman, W. F. “Doc” Carver, but the challenge was “unnoticed.” However, “The Doctor made many pleasant acquaintances while in the city, and has been royally entertained.”<sup>13</sup>

A significant part of his public relations success was based on his clothing, whether western buckskins and boots or somewhat more cosmopolitan. He impressed reporters, as was proven again when he entered a hotel in Denver:

12. *State of Wisconsin v George B. McClellan, alias Diamond Dick*, Criminal Docket, 1862–, 1883–1895, Police Justice Court, LaCrosse, 73–4; *LaCrosse Morning Chronicle*, April 16–18, 1884.

13. *LaCrosse Morning Chronicle*, May 19, 1885, quoting an unnamed St. Louis newspaper; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 14, 1885.

According to his hometown newspaper, McClellan left home at age sixteen to join Buffalo Bill Cody in Chicago. After five years with Cody, he formed his own medicine show but continued to claim a close friendship with the Wild West showman. His plan to again join Cody's show in London a decade later did not materialize.

Dr. G. B. McClellan, or "Diamond Dick," as he is familiarly known in the towns along the Missouri river, arrived in the city yesterday and wrote his name across the page of the Windsor register. The visitor created a sensation as he walked gracefully across the rotunda . . . attired in a faultlessly fitting light yellow suit and overcoat with black satin front, his long wavy locks being topped off with a broad brimmed white hat. Colonel Cody and Jack Crawford, the "Poet Scout," are not to be named in the same breath with the latest windfall from the Prohibition town of Leavenworth, Kas. "Diamond Dick" is credited with breaking more susceptible female hearts and going "busted" oftener than any other man west of the Mississippi.<sup>14</sup>

The doctor had flush times and lean times, possibly because he could not escape his reckless nature. Johnny Baker, Buffalo Bill Cody's "foster son," was present when McClellan entered Guy Laing's saloon, a Cody hangout in North Platte, Nebraska. McClellan was wearing thirty thousand dollars worth of diamonds on his clothes. He insisted on playing pool for big stakes, and someone took him on. One by one the doctor tore the diamonds from his clothes until his opponent won them all. The angered doctor smashed his billiard cue in two. Baker was standing nearby and McClellan handed him the pieces.<sup>15</sup>

When he was prosperous, McClellan acquired an orchestra and a railway palace car. A photo, "Dr. Diamond Dick's Orchestra 1886," now in the Library of Congress, depicts seven white men wearing gold-braid-decorated military-style tunics and pillbox hats (like that of a hotel bell-boy). In a newspaper interview, McClellan claimed that the railroad car had been built to his order with laboratory, consultation parlors, and reception rooms. Frontier scenes adorned the portals and, inside, the patient found luxurious ormolu and plush decoration. According to McClellan,

**TOPEKA ONE DAY ONLY, OCT. 1**  
**MONDAY,**  
**A TEACHER OF HISTORIC FACTS**

**AND CONGRESS OF ROUGH RIDERS OF THE WORLD**  
REPRODUCE MILITARY TACTICS, AND SHOW THE WORLD THE  
**ROUGH RIDERS FROM EVERY CLIME AND COUNTRY**  
Shows and Shows Them Free - Call for Tickets (Reservations at Once recommended)

**REAL-ISM EXEMPLIFIED** **WAR-LIKE ACTION SHOWN**

**THE GREATEST OF MILITARY SPECTACLES THE BATTLE OF SAN JUAN HILL**  
A REALISTIC REPRODUCTION OF THE FAMOUS EVENT, FULL OF EXCITING SCENES.

**ROOSEVELT'S ROUGH RIDERS**  
Will Participate in Each Performance thus Making the Picture One True to Nature

panels in the reception area displayed the herbs from which his remedies were extracted, with the Indian name of the plant at the top and the Latin below. He told the interviewer that he had traveled "nearly all the railroad territory of the United States" with five attendants, first and second chefs, and a press agent. Perhaps the band members did double duty.<sup>16</sup>

A Sioux City, Iowa, reporter remembered him favorably as "the physician who traveled through this country several years ago in a palace car." A journalist in Davenport, Iowa, recalled him in a different light: "a traveling quack doctor who came here on his tour in his most elegant private car which afterward proved to be someone else's car, and who traveled this and other states in high feather till misfortune and the Iowa medical law quieted him for a time." Because he was "tiring of the road and with other arrangements in prospect," the doctor disposed of the car in May 1887.<sup>17</sup>

The next month an item in the *New York Clipper*, a national weekly paper of theatrical and sports news, report-

16. Collections of the Library of Congress, Z62 / Z19657 / 105808; *Standard*, December 10, 1887.

17. *Sioux City (Iowa) Journal*, October 4, 1888; *Davenport (Iowa) Evening Democrat Gazette*, February 4, 1888; *Leavenworth Times*, June 29, 1887.

14. *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), December 7, 1891.

15. Clarence Reckmeyer, letter to the editor, recounting a 1929 conversation with Johnny Baker, *ibid.*, July 11, 1943,



*A reckless spender, McClellan indulged himself in expensive gems, fine clothes, an opulent private rail car, and his own Dr. Diamond Dick orchestra that traveled with him in 1886–1887.*

ed that “the handsome Diamond Dick (Dr. G. B. McClellan)” had been a guest of the Pain-King Company which was playing in a tent at Atchison, Kansas, and that on July 10 he would sail for Europe to join “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show in London, where he has the medicine privilege.” McClellan probably was the source of that report. Soon after, he told the *Leavenworth Times* that he would “join Buffalo Bill with whom he is upon terms of the most intimate friendship.” But McClellan did not join Cody, and he did not explain the change of plans. Perhaps he had not realized at first that White Beaver Powell was in England with Cody.<sup>18</sup>

Instead, in that summer of 1887 McClellan brought a medicine show to Leavenworth. On a lot between the high school and the courthouse, not the usual show ground, he pitched tents, presenting a free show: his fancy shooting demonstrations, several Indians, a troupe of trapeze artists, and a band. Leavenworth’s initial reaction was mixed. A letter to the *Leavenworth Standard* complained that “sixteen bawdy houses could not create as much disturbance” as the “hoodlums” whose “howlings” were “an insult to the genteel, quiet and orderly citizens” of the neighborhood. The show was “in front of the residences of two ex-governors, one ex-secretary of state, a county attorney, and a retired merchant.”<sup>19</sup>

The fuss, of course, played into McClellan’s plans; he told a reporter “the novelty of the plans I adopt to secure at-

ention may, in some cases, prejudice people against me.” Leavenworth knew he had arrived in town.<sup>20</sup>

Both local newspapers carried McClellan’s ads. Although the critical letters appeared in the *Standard*, the paper announced, “The free show is not bothering

the *Standard* any.” Later, as McClellan prepared to move on, the *Times* commented:

it was a pleasure these quiet summer evenings to listen to the music of his band and see his slow procession, with himself seated in the elegant six-horse barouche. . . . The people enjoyed the novel scene, the music and the quiet manners of Diamond Dick. They believed in the virtues of his medicines, they were astonished at his wonderful shots with the deadly rifle, and they learned to listen to his voice. . . . [He is] a wonderful character, a genial gentleman, and a genius in his way . . . [who provided] one of the most entertaining entertainments perhaps ever given in Leavenworth. . . . He did more. He cured hundreds of persons of diseases.<sup>21</sup>

The doctor was thirty years old. Marriage is not mentioned in any of the information uncovered about him. Once, however, he was joined by a well-endowed showwoman: “Mrs. Dr. Lighthall,” as the *Standard* called her. She was the widow of Dr. Jim Lighthall, “The Diamond King,” another young and flamboyant herb, root, and bark doctor who died of smallpox in 1886. She inherited his caravan, “tents that rival the alleged luxurious cavaransaries [sic] of the Arabs,” and jewels, including “a sapphire the size of a pigeon’s egg.” The press reported that McClellan would travel with her and sell his medicines while she extracted teeth. They were said to be heading for Chicago. Again, plans changed. McClellan returned two months later; there

18. *New York Clipper*, June 18, 1887; *Leavenworth Times*, June 29, 1887.

19. *Leavenworth Times*, June 24, 28–29, 1887; *Standard*, June 21, 24–25, 27–28, 1887.

20. *Leavenworth Times*, August 25, 1887.

21. *Ibid.*, July 12, 1887; *Standard*, June 28, 1887.

*During his stay in Leavenworth, McClellan advertised in both of the town's newspapers, touting his healing successes with proper use of plants, herbs, and roots by "skillful chemistry." This ad appeared in the July 5, 1888, Leavenworth Times.*

was no further mention of her, and he announced that Leavenworth and Kansas City would be his headquarters for the winter, evidently without his tent show.<sup>22</sup>

A full-page ad in the *Times* featured a two-column best sketch of Dr. McClellan, bordered by testimonials, some from Leavenworth residents with names and addresses and others from Des Moines and Ottumwa, Iowa. Much of the page contained "Hygienic Rules" and "Dietetic Rules," most of which would not seem out of place in a health magazine today. With the rules, the doctor slipped in a disclaimer: "These rules must be complied with, otherwise I will not hold myself responsible for any failure of my medication." He continually kept his name before newspaper readers with items—some as short as three lines—in the columns of local happenings; most items probably were paid for but not identified as advertising. He offered free vaccinations and made certain that his gifts of five dollars to each resident of the Soldiers' Home were noted in print. Interviews were granted readily; in one he explained that as "a progressive herbal physician," he used no minerals because "the art of healing consists merely in proper selection and applying of proper portions of plants, herbs, roots, flowers, seeds, etc., by skillful chemistry."<sup>23</sup>

At Christmas, patients sent him presents until his hotel rooms "were a sight to see. . . . The doctor is in a quandery [*sic*] as to what to do with all these articles." After a big snow that winter, "the merry jingle of bells" sounded as "bobsleds, rockaways, cutters [and] gigs" created "a jolly stream that glided up and down Delaware street. . . . Diamond Dick's long hair waved on the breeze as he sped along behind a pair of fine dapple grays."<sup>24</sup>

McClellan announced that he was leasing the second floor of the Shoyer building at Fifth and Delaware Streets for a dispensary and laboratory where, with six assistants, he would produce his "kidney and liver and lung remedies." He said his large collection of Indian relics would be

## Dr. DIAMOND DICK!

(DR. G. B. McCLELLAN.)



on display. At an open house on January 25, 1888, a reporter was impressed by the suite:

fitted up magnificently, with no limit as to expense. . . . With the dividing doors thrown open[,] the apartments have more the appearance of a grand salon than the consultation room of a physician, and were it not for the laboratory . . . a stranger might be justified in believing he had strolled into a palace unawares. The ceilings of the rooms are frescoed and a famous painting by an Italian master graces the ladies' consultation room. . . . Resting over the top of [an] arch, amid rolling clouds of vapor, is the northern hemisphere. The mists rolling downward on the left hand side of the arch disclose and frame an Indian summer scene. . . . On the other side . . . a winter scene is depicted.

Nor was that all. In the reception room, "a beautiful Chickering upright [piano] reposes in a corner . . . and the curtain draperies are expensive and elegant."<sup>25</sup>

The reporter chatted with the doctor who revealed that "since his sixteenth birthday he has amassed several fortunes which he has crystalized in diamonds, his one absorbing penchant," and he showed the reporter "a wealth of beautiful gems." Early in the article McClellan mentioned

22. *Standard*, July 23, 1887; Oliver, "Med Show," 169, 174; Fowler, *Mystic Healers and Medicine Shows*, 61–62; *Leavenworth Times*, September 30, December 15, 1887.

23. *Leavenworth Times*, November 13, 1887.

24. *Standard*, December 27, 1887, January 14, 1888.

25. *Ibid.*, December 10, 1887, January 25, 1888.

“his sixteen years of his professional career;” later on he told the reporter he had “just turned his 28th birthday.” Perhaps he considered that his “professional career” began with collecting medicinal plants as a youth, thus supporting the essence of the tale in Buckskin Sam Hall’s dime novel. When Dr. McClellan was seeing patients in his parlors, the paper learned, his long hair was tied in a knot on the back of his head. In one morning, he said, he prescribed for over fifty persons “and was somewhat exhausted from his labors.”<sup>26</sup>

When spring arrived, McClellan advertised:

The singing of the birds, the budding of the trees, the opening of the flowers, the shooting of the grass proclaim that spring has arrived and the season is upon us when all nature renovates, purifies, arouses and cleanses herself from the elements of death and decay. So the human system requires cleansing, strengthening and invigorating to endure the coming oppressive summer weather. The public of Leavenworth hail with delight that the talented doctor will again appear in public before his numerous friends and admirers . . . next Saturday evening and dispense to the afflicted his . . . Indian remedies.<sup>27</sup>

For once, McClellan publicized some of his products by name, although not revealing their contents. He advised that his “Indian Sure Kidney Cures,” “Celebrated Cough Elixer,” and “Spring Blood Purifier” were for sale at his infirmary. A few weeks later the doctor advertised that his remedies “May Now Be Had at All Druggists.” His “Cough Elixer” sold for fifty cents and the other nostrums cost one dollar. From Leavenworth he traveled afield, seeing patients in McLouth and Onaga; a testimonial appeared from a patient in Easton. Dates when the doctor would be at his infirmary were published: “Call early to avoid rush of patients in the afternoon,” he advised.<sup>28</sup>

The press noted that “as the hero of many wild western novels. . . under the name of ‘Diamond Dick’ he is already familiar to the thousands of readers of that class of fiction.” Moreover, the real McClellan was becoming a local celebrity: “He certainly is a wonder in his way. He rides gracefully, shoots a gun with astonishing skill, and talks as well as any platform lecturer in the country.” Mc-

Clellan found Leavenworth a fertile field, and the town remembered him for years. At his death in 1911, the *Times* reminisced:

Every afternoon a victoria, drawn by four of the finest horses in the city and driven by a colored coachman, would dash up to the entrance to the stairway [of the suite he acquired in 1888]. Dick would take his place in the back seat of the open carriage. His hair was long and curly, he wore a white felt hat with a very broad brim and he was dressed in a black silk velvet suit. Probably no more striking figure was ever seen in Leavenworth. . . . As soon as Dick had taken his seat the equipage would go dashing through the principal streets, followed by a crowd of boys. At intervals Dick would fling a handful of coins out to the boys which, of course, made a great scrambling . . . and created the impression that he was a man who made money easy and a lot of it.<sup>29</sup>

**B**eginning in mid-summer 1888 McClellan hit the medicine show trail with a new attraction: Kate Baker’s Ladies’ Silver Cornet Band. (The author’s grandmother and great-aunt were members of the band.) After dates in Topeka, Kansas City, and elsewhere on the way north, McClellan and the nine-woman band arrived in Sioux City, Iowa, for the Corn Palace Festival. “The band is in the city,” the *Sioux City Journal* reported, “in the interest of the famous Dr. Diamond Dick, who takes this way of advertising his infirmary at Leavenworth, Kansas. The doctor is stopping at the Booge [Hotel] with his band, and will be remembered by many in this section . . . and he says he wants to see his old friends.” After an impromptu performance in front of the hotel, the musicians marched to the Corn Palace where, the newspaper said, the band would play twice a day during the festival week. [That would be time enough for the “old friends” to call at the hotel and buy more medicines.] According to the paper, the musicians were “the only female band in America with a lady drum major [and] the ladies are fine musicians, all young and quite attractive. . . . He gives the Corn Palace free use of his elegant band.”<sup>30</sup>

Two weeks later the editor of the *Wayne (Nebraska) Herald* was less favorably impressed: “Diamond Dick and his

26. *Ibid.*, January 25, 1888; *Leavenworth Times*, June 29, 1887.

27. *Evening Standard* (Leavenworth), April 5, 1888.

28. *Ibid.*, April 3, 5, 20, 28, May 15, 23, June 1, 14, 1888; *Leavenworth Times*, July 4, 1888.

29. *Leavenworth Times*, July 12, November 8, 1887, December 15, 1911.

30. *Aledo (Ill.) Democrat*, July 6, 1888; Lenore Boyd to Charles Finch, October 11, 1888, collection of L. Boyd Finch, Tucson; *Sioux City Journal*, October 4, 1888.

Beginning in mid-summer 1888 McClellan hit the medicine show trail with a new attraction, Kate Baker's Ladies' Silver Cornet Band. Among other places, they appeared for one week in October at the Corn Palace Festival in Sioux City, Iowa.

female band packed up their things and left yesterday for a new sucker field. According to reports Dick left town a thousand dollars richer than he came. The public dearly loves to be humbugged by some long haired quack, who happens to be a good shot, and is accompanied by a she band.<sup>31</sup>

That November as the season ended, McClellan and the band went their separate ways. He then may have visited Buffalo Bill Cody who had just returned to Nebraska from England. Nebraska author Nellie Snyder Yost's biography of Cody quotes a November 24, 1888, North Platte newspaper about a reception at nearby Wallace, attended by Cody "and a large party of friends" that included "Diamond Dick." According to the article, there was singing, speech making, and "Diamond Dick gave a rousing discourse on 'Prohibition in the South Sea islands.'" The newspaper described him as "a noted character of the plains. A sometimes preacher, doctor and man of many callings, . . . an old friend of Buffalo Bill's [who] had acquired his nickname because of the many diamonds he habitually wore." In her book, Yost identified "Diamond Dick" as Richard Tanner, a fellow Nebraskan who used the name later as a circus performer, but her identification may have been in error because Tanner had just turned eighteen, seemingly an unlikely old friend of Cody.<sup>32</sup>

If the "Diamond Dick" who lectured about prohibition in the South Seas is correctly identified as McClellan, then there remains much more to be uncovered about his life. Despite the evidence that his career had its financial ups and downs, McClellan lasted a long time on the medicine show circuit, suggesting that he was representative of the



best in his field. Typically, the medicine show proprietor was a fleeting presence in the towns he visited, not likely to be remembered in local histories. Because no known correspondence of McClellan survives, the columns of innumerable midwestern small-town newspapers may be the only source to uncover more details of his career—a task this author will leave to others.

From scattered sources, a few bits of his later life emerge. In 1889 "The Diamond Dick Medicine Co." played Humboldt and other towns in southern Kansas. From there McClellan may have joined the rush into Oklahoma; he was said to have been the first doctor in Oklahoma City. The territorial department of health called him a notorious "traveling quack whose only desire is to fleece the people." A physician wrote the health department, saying that Diamond Dick lived in Chickasha and charged sixty-five dollars for a sixteen-ounce bottle of medicine. In the physician's opinion, Diamond Dick "ought to be . . . punished to the full extent of the law."<sup>33</sup>

Possibly McClellan was the Diamond Dick publicized in El Reno, Oklahoma, as arranging to exhibit the Apache Geronimo at the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha. Geronimo, a prisoner at Fort Sill near El Reno and Chickasha, did appear in Omaha; there is no record that

31. *Wayne Herald*, October 18, 1888.

32. Quotation from *Lincoln County Tribune* (North Platte), November 24, 1888, in Nellie Irene Snyder Yost, *Buffalo Bill: His Family, Friends, Fame, Failures, and Fortunes* (Chicago: Sage Books, Swallow Press, 1980), 214–15. After his circus days, Tanner became a licensed physician and late in life used the name Diamond Dick in advertising his remedies.

33. *New York Clipper*, August 3, 1889; Grady F. Mathews, "History of the Oklahoma State Department of Health," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 27 (Summer 1950): 137–38; Bobby H. Johnson, "Doctors, Druggists, and Dentists in The Oklahoma Territory, 1889–1907," *Arizona and the West* 19 (Summer 1977): 121–34.

Diamond Dick was involved. However, there is no reason to believe that McClellan had substantially changed his methods. As a Leavenworth reporter once noted, “He would do anything for an advertisement.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1903 McClellan was photographed with Crazy Elk, Big Horse, Big Horse’s unidentified “squaw,” and an Indian child and a dog, outdoors in front of a tipi. Neither the Indians’ tribal affiliation nor the location was given. McClellan, standing, wears the requisite fancy western attire and holds a rifle. He is in profile; the onset of a pot belly can be detected. In two studio photographs McClellan appears to be older and more fleshy than in the 1903 photo; he is wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a cloak over a three-piece business suit. His hair is long in one photo, but not in the other. He may have posed for one in Ogdensburg in 1910 during his first visit home in many years.<sup>35</sup>

Writing as Dr. N. T. Oliver, “Nevada Ned,” a former medicine show doctor, in 1929 recalled the past glory days of medicine shows. His two articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* reveal that McClellan’s seasons of “boom and bust” were not unusual. Both essays mention McClellan, and his photo with the Indians is featured in one. Oliver described McClellan as “the original Diamond Dick,” referring to his

dime novel appearance. The *Post* also published a South Dakota photo of Doc Percy Hudson, a stylishly dressed young man wearing a wide-brimmed hat, and identified him as “the first Diamond Dick.” Oliver did not explain the difference between “the original” and “the first.” Efforts to learn more about Hudson have been fruitless.<sup>36</sup>

The three elements of popular culture represented in McClellan’s career began fading from the American scene in the second decade of the twentieth century. New forms of entertainment—phonograph records, pioneering motion pictures, organized sport, and then radio—caught public favor. The advent of the Model T Ford created a demand for better roads, roads that led to population centers with more sophisticated forms of diversion. Buffalo Bill’s great spectacle slipped into bankruptcy, and his death in 1917 signaled the inevitable demise of the Wild West show, *per se*. Dime novels and medicine shows shared elements of the Wild West show and they, too, declined for much the same reasons. In his reminiscences, Nevada Ned Oliver cited the constrictions of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 and the Narcotic Act as additional causes for medicine show decline. Writer/editor George Jean Nathan wrote the obituary for the medicine show, declaring that “one of the most curious and least chronicled of typical American in-

34. *El Reno (Okla.) News*, August 12, 1898; *Leavenworth Times*, September 9, 1897.

35. Oliver, “Med Show,” 169; *St. Lawrence Republican*, December 20, 1911.

36. Oliver, “Med Show,” 12–13, 169–74; Oliver, “Alagazam,” 26–27, 76, 79–80.



Lenore Boyd

#### DR. DIAMOND DICK AND GRANDMOTHER by L. Boyd Finch

Grandmother died when I was seven. She always had big sugar cookies waiting for me when my family visited on vacation. A tall, reserved, gentle woman, a pillar of the Presbyterian church who kept a large photograph of Woodrow Wilson in her library, she was hardly one you would associate as a musician with a traveling medicine show.

A few years ago I came upon family papers showing that she—Lenore Boyd—and her sister, Bertha, played in Kate Baker’s Ladies’ Silver Cornet Band that traveled in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa in 1888 with Dr. Diamond Dick. Lenore, age twenty-one, and Bertha, eighteen, were from Aledo, Illinois, and previously played in that town’s ladies’ band, Lenore on valve trombone and Bertha on drums. With the papers were photos of Kate Baker’s band and

individual musicians, as well as an October 4, 1888, *Sioux City (Iowa) Journal* with an item about the arrival of the band and Dr. Diamond Dick (his real name not given). An October 11 letter from Lenore in Wayne, Nebraska, to her future husband, Charles H. Finch, noted that the band had been in Topeka in September.

On the reverse of the group photo, grandmother named the musicians and their homes: Alice and Nellie Richolson and Anna Burroughs of Kansas; Lotta Derose and Stella Combs of Kansas City; Mina Hallett of Iowa; Alice Bennett of Missouri; Mrs. Kate Baker and husband/manager Al M. Baker, and “Little Dan” Baker (five years old), of Laclede, Missouri. The individual cabinet card photos, from studios in Washington and Wellington, Kansas; St. Joseph, Missouri; and Sioux Falls, Dakota Territory, reflected the band’s travels.


The only clue to the identity of Dr. Diamond Dick was the Sioux City newspaper’s

This 1903 photograph of McClellan with Crazy Elk, Big Horse, and two unidentified individuals appears in an article about medicine shows in the September 14, 1929, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*.



stitutions of two or more decades ago" had been "routed by the forward-marching force of science and education." Illustrating the change in public taste in entertainment, from words printed on paper to images projected from film, the reign of dime novels ended with an ironic twist: motion pictures, silent at first, adapted dime novel stories. The last Diamond Dick novel—No. 762—appeared on May 20, 1911.<sup>37</sup>

At a railroad crossing in La Cygne, Kansas, on Thursday night, November 30, 1911, Dr. McClellan's buggy was struck by a fast Frisco train. He was carried on the front of the engine, and one of his two horses was killed. The *La Cygne Weekly Journal* noted that visibility

at the crossing was poor and that trains had been passing through the small town at a higher than legal speed. However, "The Doctor, we understand, had been drinking considerably, so therefore the blame cannot be attached to the railroad entirely." On December 5, after four days of treatment locally, he was taken by train to Kansas City where, as the *La Cygne* paper reported, "they can take better care of him and can compel him to be quiet." The paper said "his chances were good for recovery." Nonetheless, on December 13 his pelvic injuries led to his death. For George B. McClellan at age fifty-four, his was an untimely death. For Dr. Diamond Dick perhaps the timing was right.<sup>38</sup> 

statement that he "takes this way of advertising his infirmary at Leavenworth, Kan." Eventually, that became enough to discover the identity of Dr. Diamond Dick.

I never learned firsthand about grandmother's adventure; she died when I was seven. My aunt lived longer; she could have told me about the band and its sponsor, but I did not know to ask. I have not determined how the two young women met Kate Baker; microfilm of the *Aledo* newspaper shows that they had been at Sweet Springs, Missouri, before they joined the Baker band in July 1888 in Kansas City. When they returned home in mid-November the newspaper reported they had played in a "ladies' cornet band which has attracted much attention and been received with great favor in the west." Diamond Dick and his medicine show were not mentioned.

37. Oliver, "Med Show," 174; Schwartz, "The Wild West Show," 664; Lamar, "Wild West shows," in *New Encyclopedia of the American West*, 305–6; "dime novels," *ibid.*, 1216–17; Arthur N. Carter, "Movies Featuring Real and Fictional Characters Made Famous by Dime Novels," *Dime Novel Round-up* 45 (August 1976): 91–95 (Carter does not identify any pictures based on Diamond Dick); George Jean Nathan, "The Medicine Men," *Harper's Weekly* 55 (September 9, 1911): 24; Leithead, "The Derring-Do of the Diamond Dicks," 29. In the late 1920s Diamond Dick made a brief comeback in twelve dime novel reprints with color lithograph covers. For additional reading, a good place to start is Henry Nash Smith's classic, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1950). For Buffalo Bill, see Yost, *Buffalo Bill*. Edward Pearson, *Dime Novels: or, Following an Old Trail in Popular Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1929), is old but worthwhile. Stewart H. Holbrook, *The Golden Age of Quackery* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), and James Harvey Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America before Federal Regulation* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), provide background on medicine showmen and their concoctions.

38. *La Cygne Weekly Journal*, December 8, 15, 1911; Certificate of Death, signed by attending physician John R. Worley December 13, 1911, Office of Vital Statistics, Kansas State Department of Health and Environment, Topeka.