

## REMINISCENCES OF A COUNTRY DOCTOR

*By O. C. Newman, M.D.\**

Since a lad of eight or ten years of age it had been my ambition to become a Country Doctor, yet I had received no special encouragement from my parents or had my associates been other than students from the country school where I had attended since entering my first year of schooling, at that time consisting of "A, B, C's" which was preliminary to McGuffey's First Reader. Our years of education did not consist of grades but enumerated to McGuffey's Sixth Reader, which, perhaps, consisted of, and was, equal to the Sixth Grade. After this was reached, so far as I was able to determine, we were advanced students.

The summer of 1893, I attended the Adams County Normal at Peebles, Ohio and the following winter taught the country home District School. During the summer of 1894, I attended Manchester Normal in Adams County, Ohio, and at the close of the term I entered the National Normal University at Lebanon, Ohio, conducted by Professor Alfred Holbrook as President.

Returning to Adams County, I taught another winter term of school at Mineral Springs Station, again consisting of eight months. At the spring term of school in April, 1896, I entered the Fayett College, in Fulton County, Ohio, remaining until September, 1897, at which time I entered the Medical Department of the National Normal University at Lebanon, Ohio.

In 1898, I registered in the Medical Department of the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, graduating in 1900. After financial circumstances would permit, allowance was provided for advancement in education in my chosen profession which will be enumerated at intervals during my career at the time of occurrence.

My family lineage, so far as I have been informed or able to determine, the paternal genealogical tree shows no general by which I can be boastful of being a descendent of some outstanding colonial character. Contentment is sufficient to recall with pride to know that my descendents were God-fearing, patriotic, law abiding citizens, the descendents of Christopher Newman who was born in Virginia in 1769 and married Sarah Rose in the same state, coming to Ohio

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in the year of 1799. They located in Scioto County in the southern portion of the state, selecting a farm as their homestead, where they became the parents of twelve children, my grandfather, John Newman being the 9th child, born in 1814 and at the age of 24 married Anna Herdman who was born in 1819, to whom ten children were born. The second child was my father, Nescheck Herdman Newman, born September 18, 1840, and in 1860 married Sarah Johnson, born December 25, 1839. She was of Irish descent and her mother's maiden name was Scowden, also of Irish descent. My father's mother was of German descent and came to Virginia from Germany. My father's paternal lineage was English and came from England to Virginia. My father and mother were the parents of ten children and, at the time of my birth, I was the 623rd descendent from the marriage of Christopher Newman and Sarah Ross.

The tradition of my ancestral lineage so far as I have knowledge has never in any way been radical or fanatical on any particular event or occurrence, simple in habits, honorable and honest, giving me perfect content and satisfaction and creating no special desire, from past events, to induce me to become interested in past family genealogical tracings and superbly content with the event of December 29, 1876, when my twin brother, Edgar and I were born on the old homestead in Adams County, Ohio, he being the 8th and I being the 9th child, both living.

Our chosen professions were entirely different. Events and accomplishments of myself will only be enumerated. The ambition of my childhood days were entirely changed before the completion of my medical education, at the time of graduation from medical school, entitling me to become legalized to follow the career of my choice. My father's youngest brother, Dr. A. M. Newman, a practicing physician, located at Canadian, Texas, informed me of the opportunities for a young doctor in the West and in 1899 I made a visit to consult with my uncle, observe the possibilities and opportunities.

The encouragement, hospitality and contact with people who were coming from all parts of the United States and accepting the opportunity on equal social status was very impressive. The expansive country was inhabited only by a few ranchers along the streams, was now opened for settlement and people were rapidly making claims to homesteads. This location was in a county in the western portion of Oklahoma adjoining the Panhandle of Texas. There being no physician and no competition for miles away, I accepted the opportunity, staked my claim at a citizen in the small county seat, returned to the University of the South in Tennessee where I graduated in the Medical Department in 1900, and then returned to the choice of my selected location by overland in a mail

back from Higgins, Texas, to Grand, Oklahoma, then the County Seat of Old Day County in the Territorial days.

I arrived at my destination with \$2.50, amongst strangers but friends, in a new country, sparsely inhabited. By the next two years, the influx of habitation was reaching full capacity, with families seeking homesteads for new locations and on arrival, a regrettable situation amongst the majority, as myself, financially embarrassed but determined to face the consequences and trust to destiny.

On arrival at my place of location, I had no means of transportation other than walking. A friend loaned me his horse and saddle to make my professional calls, which was readily accepted, yet the broncho always entertained by a round of pitching when first being mounted, and being a tenderfoot at this, it required two to get me started, someone to mount the horse until it ceased pitching and then I could mount until again unsaddled.

In two months my number of calls increased and the liberality of my friend decreased and it became necessary for me to purchase a horse which was procured on time payments. A farmer sold me a saddle and I was independently equipped for transportation with all the essential necessities. The stipulated time of payment was not specified and after a short time, I was weekly reminded of my failure to pay. Fortunately for me they both had sickness in their families and the charges for my medical attendance surpassed my indebtedness.

I was given board and room by two kindly old people for the next two years with little recompense to the old folks, not on account of my extravagant living but the honest people I attended were financially stranded. I arrived in the County during the epidemic of small pox and was appointed superintendent of Public Health but the County Commissioners insisted that I was young and might take small pox and die, therefore, this remunerative practice was given to a physician from another county.

I drifted along with the times for another year, still imposing on the good old people at the boarding house, who would frequently remind me of my unpaid board bill but always with the encouraging assurance that better times were ahead. During the winter of 1901 and 1902, smallpox again became an epidemic in a different portion of the County and the County Commissioners gave me the contract of attending to all cases and vaccinating every person that was willing for the sum of \$1.00 each. I had also received an appointment as deputy County Treasurer for half the salary. During the day I would ride horseback and attend smallpox patients and at night I would post the County Treasury Books. This continued until March, 1902, when at the meeting of the County Commissioners I was given \$555.00 for services rendered the County. My first obligation was payment of my board bill which was in arrears to the extent of

\$152.00. I recall no occurrence of events in my life that gave me more profound contentment than when I informed my landlady my desire to pay this account. She asked at once the amount I wanted to pay, since my credits had never exceeded \$5.00 payments and they few and far between. When informed that I would pay the account in full and a month in advance, she seemingly was as greatly surprised as I was pleased. At the noon day meal, I was conscious of the fact that for the first time during the past two years it was not at the expense of the good old landlady.

I proceeded by horseback to the nearest town on the railroad in the Panhandle of Texas, a distance of twenty six miles, where I owed a drug account of \$53.00 which gave me a clearance receipt of my financial obligations and then I deposited in the bank the balance of my earnings. I then fully equipped myself of wearing apparel to replace those I had personally mended since leaving the comforts of home and Mother.

Since I was free from indebtedness and had a surplus of finance, it was convincing that I was entitled to and could feel at ease to invest in other than the extreme necessities, which had never been my privilege. I had the great desire to become a Mason since my father was always proud of belonging to this Fraternity. My application for membership was accepted in the Masonic Lodge at Texmo, Oklahoma, in 1902 and each degree taken required the travel of 70 miles on horseback. The Masters Degree in Masonry inspired my incentives for advancement and in 1912, I was inducted to and including the 32nd Degree of Scottish Rite Masonry at Guthrie, Oklahoma. By a special dispensation for a meeting at Woodward, Oklahoma, in 1915, I became a member of the Shrine Lodge—Indian Temple, Guthrie, Oklahoma.

I was never unmindful or ungrateful for the sacrifices given for the necessary sustenance of life and willing to deny myself the comforts for the sake of economy and during the summer months I slept on the ground or in my office on the floor and during the winter months I slept on the counter in a store provided by a friend during the first two years of my pioneer days as a country doctor. During the first two years of my experience there was sometimes doubt and skepticism relative to the possibility of retaining the honor that I had been religiously taught by ancestral tradition, since my inability to pay for the necessities of life, however disappointing and unavoidable, but which was all eventually overcome by stability and determination.

Then there occurred an event which shaped the destiny of my future career, when I met Miss Della Smith who was born on April 25, 1884, at Uvalda, Texas, and whose parents were traditional pioneers who knew the country when inhabited only by Indians. She

was born and reared among Western and Pioneer settlers and her Southern Hospitality was more inherited than acquired. Having been taught the necessities by virtue of environments, our acquaintance became more than a mere friendship and, like students of economy, we decided that we could live as cheaply as one and we were married September 18, 1902.

I had made arrangements to take another year in medicine but on the anniversary of our wedding our eldest son Roy, was born and this was also the opening date of the Medical College I had selected to attend in the East. As our responsibility increased we were more thoroughly convinced that our former reasoning of financial economy was correct, for at this time I was able to purchase a team of horses and a buggy which gave me the highest quality of transportation.

The elements of our arid country had become more favorable to vegetation and crops adapted to our country. The farmers who had acquired their homesteads were becoming more prosperous and those less fortunate in gaining a livelihood sufficient for financial existence had lived long enough on their farms to obtain a title to their land which could be mortgaged, which invariably caused an unforeseen disaster and would result in the loss of their farms.

The occurrences of events can be recalled which can never be eradicated from the memory of those that witnessed the determination of the early day settlers of Oklahoma. On one occasion I had ridden horseback for a distance of 12 miles to see a sick patient, arriving at the house about sundown and the patient's son informed me that his mother felt better and we would eat supper before examining her. I sat down to the table containing a dish pan filled with clabber milk which was sliced off to serve for supper. I was asked if I preferred salt or sugar on my clabber. There were not apologies or excuses in those days.

On another occasion I was detained until after supper to see the sick wife of a farmer. A neighbor lady was preparing supper and after taking the sour dough biscuits from the oven and placing them on the table, the husband said, "sit up and have supper" and the only other eatable on the table was a can of molasses. The husband made a remark while eating that he had just learned that day that his neighbor beyond the Canyon, his wife and child were living on chops and if he had known of it before he would have taken him something to eat. I refrained from expressing the thought that he might have plenty of what he had but there was not much of a variety. I could recall that I would have been in a worse dilemma were it not for a kind landlady.

The small village of the County Seat of Day County where I was located was on the bank of the South Canadian river, a very treacherous stream, which, on one occasion, gave untold grief and it

was possible only to ford by well trained horses that knew how to swim and the art of rapid goose stepping for transporting across the quicksand. On one occasion I was thrown from my horse, and during the short interval of experience, occurrences were happening rapidly. The horse stepped on something while under water but I readily made my way to a sand bar and the horse continued to ford the stream to the other bank of the river. I was divested of everything including my hat, with the exception of my wearing apparel.

During the first four and a half years after being legalized to practice medicine, I had gained the confidence of the people. I had shared the hardships, pleasures and at times the grief stricken families, and many times, no doubt, they had employed me professionally through necessity rather than choice and I was self conscious of how little I was giving in return.

In the summer of 1905, I decided to spend another year in Medicine and applied to the Medical College of Ohio for admittance in the Senior Class for graduation. After all my past schooling was accumulated and approved by the State of Ohio, I was admitted to the Senior Class. I notified my clientel of my intention and their financial assistance was asked, that I might be able to defray my expense. They responded cheerfully beyond my expectation and I enrolled in the University on September 18, 1905.

At the mid-term our second son, Floyd Smith, was born on January 20, 1906. And in June, 1906, I graduated again in Medicine in the oldest Medical College west of the Allegheny Mountains. It was a year well spent and enabled me to be conscious of the fact that I was more capable of being equal to the occasion of the confidence the people had shown and my efforts of trying to become qualified as well as legalized to be worthy of their confidence. I had promised the people, at my own personal sacrifice to remain with them one year for the loyalty they had shown. Another memorable event during this year was the birth of our youngest son, M. Haskell, on September 20, 1907.

On October 30, 1907, I came to Shattuck, Oklahoma, my present location, transporting all my professional worldly effects in the back end of my buggy. On my arrival I became the partner of a progressive doctor and invested all my financial savings in a hospital which had been constructed in this progressive town, which proved the most disasterous investment of my career. At the end of one year, the institution was closed through the lack of funds sufficient to defray expenses, not from crowded competition, for it was the only hospital in the expanse of a large territory. It was conclusive that it was before the people were educated to the advantages of care and treatment received in an organized hospital. Again I was thrown on my own personal resources with an insufficient bank account to meet my monthly expense for the support of my family.

My acquaintance in the community became more extensive and the confidence of the people in my integrity, honesty and ability as a physician gradually increased until I could again boast of a hard earned practice which, by the spring of 1913, I had acquired sufficient finance that I could spend three to six weeks each year in some Eastern institution taking post graduate work which has been my custom each year expecting 1918 when I was in military service as a First Lieutenant in the Medical Corps and the outbreak of World War II when my services were badly needed at home.

The closing of the hospital caused denial of many conveniences at an inopportune time, but did not lessen the determination to overcome inconveniences under adverse circumstances and for several years, necessary and emergency surgery was done in private homes in my own town, in the country or neighboring villages, in rooms most appropriate for the occasion whether it be the living room, the dining room or the kitchen. Eventually a practical nurse furnished five rooms in her home which gave convenience to patients that were from a distance. In a small way the organization was a success, managing to meet the situations even under extreme difficulties and the environments were accepted as a matter of necessity and apparently appreciated.

In 1920 the Old Hospital which had caused my financial embarrassment in 1908 was remodeled, privately owned and again opened to the public who had observed the necessity and value of hospital care. The patronage increased until it was made possible to build a 39 room, fire-proof hospital in 1927 at the present location and two years later an addition of 24 rooms were added to the institution. During these years I had been too busily engaged in the duties required of my profession and the progress of my accomplishment to realize until informed by my wife, that she had sponsored the literary education of our three robust sons and had advised impartially and consulted carefully as to the choice of their career and each had chosen the medical profession.

Roy Elsworth completed his premedical and received his literary degree at the University of Oklahoma. He married Miss Virginia Gossett of Balko, Missouri, on September 27, 1928, graduating from the Medical Department of the Baylor University at Dallas, Texas, in 1932, taking his internship at St. Joseph, Missouri.

Floyd Smith attended one year at the University of Oklahoma, two years at Westminster College for Boys at Fulton, Missouri, and two years pre-medical at Baylor University at Waco, Texas, graduating in Medicine from the Medical Department of the University of Tennessee in Memphis, in 1932, taking his internship at Plainsview, New Jersey.

M. Haskell attended two years of schooling at Westminster College for Boys at Fulton, Missouri, and two years pre-medical at the Baylor University at Waco, Texas. He married Miss Cornelia Bridges from Mississippi on September 29, 1929, and their family now consists of Jo Ann and Haskell, Jr. M. Haskell graduated in Medicine from the Medical Department of the University of Tennessee in Memphis in 1932, taking his internship of 2 years at Duvall, a charity hospital in Jacksonville, Florida. Receiving his Fellowship in The American College of Surgeons at the age of 33, the same which I had previously had the honor to obtain.

During the course of the internship of each of the younger doctors, they became more interested in some particular branch of medicine or surgery and decided to specialize in the branch of their choice and remain in the old home town where they had been raised before entering college which had been an elapse of from 10 to 12 years. Their returning home in 1933 and 1935 required more office space, which was provided during the preparation of their specialities by an addition of 20 rooms adjoining the Shattuck Hospital for examination rooms, laboratories and accessories necessary to complete a modern Clinic which was dedicated on August 24, 1937.