

PERRY'S FIRST DOCTOR

By Clarence Cullimore*

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Thomas McIntyre Cullimore, born in Carrollton, Illinois, on November 22, 1849 to James and Catherine Cullimore, married Mary Pearce Joy of Joy Prairie, Illinois. Thomas Cullimore was educated at Surtleff College at Alton, Illinois, and was graduated from the College of Medicine at the University of the City of New York in 1877.

Dr. Cullimore practiced medicine in Jacksonville, Illinois until 1893 when he participated in the Cherokee Run and on September 16, 1893 established his office in Perry. Dr. Cullimore brought his wife and two sons, Allan Reginald and Clarence to Perry and established them in a house that he had built at the corner of 13th Street and Ivanhoe. This was the first two-story residence built in Perry.

Allan Reginald Cullimore later became the President of Newark College of Engineering at Newark, New Jersey. Clarence was honored by a Fellowship in the American Institute of Architects.

Dr. Thomas McIntyre Cullimore died at the age of forty-nine years, in Jacksonville, Illinois, where he was taken for special treatment by his friends in the medical profession.

Father¹ was feeling poorly. His practice in Jacksonville, Illinois, took almost more hours of the day and night than there were to go around. Dr. Prince insisted that father slow down. He told Mother², as we sat in the parlor, that father must get into the open if he wanted to live. Father delivered one more baby, lowered his shingle and put it into his valise along with his nightshirt. He said goodbye to my mother, brother³ and me, and boarded a train for Oklahoma and the Cherokee Strip. Uncle

* Clarence Cullimore is the author of *Old Adobes of Forgotten Fort Tejon, Adobe Architecture, Old Adobes of Santa Barbara*, and other works including articles and drawings in newspapers and magazines, besides publications of the American Institute of Architects. Mr. Cullimore is a specialist in scientific design and construction of adobe buildings made fireproof, waterproof and earthquakeproof, and has been a teacher of architecture in the Junior College of Bakersfield, California, where he has made his home for many years.—Ed.

¹ Dr. Thomas McIntyre Cullimore, who came to Perry, Oklahoma, in 1893.

² Mary Pearce Joy (Cullimore), born on September 29, 1857 at Joy Prairie, Illinois.

³ Allan Reginald Cullimore, born on March 2, 1884, in Jacksonville, Illinois, served in the First World War as Major, President of the Newark College of Engineering for twenty-five years. Granted an honorary Doctorate by Rutgers College on June 14, 1943 at the same occasion when Dwight D. Eisenhower was granted a similar honor. Dr. A. R. Cullimore, speaker and educator of national renown died on September 20, 1956. Until his death he was listed in *Who's Who in America*.

Grant⁴ and a patient of Father's, named Arthur⁵, went with father. It was this way about Arthur. He was a lad of seventeen, recuperating from a tough attack of typhoid fever. It had been all Father could do to pull him through, and he still needed care. Father could not "run-out" on Arthur, so he took him along to Oklahoma. There, Arthur's recovery was full and complete.

Father, Grant and Arthur sat in line on camp-stools at Orlando, waiting to get their certificates for the Run. For four dust-choking days they sat and inched forward, and for three nights they listened to liquor-lubricated renditions of "After the Strip is Opened."⁶ Federal soldiers burned the brush on the forbidden side of the starting line. A breeze blew back the ash into the soup that Arthur and father were eating. Father bought a bottle of beer for a dollar and split it three ways, the foam making a first rate dust-catcher to brush off before drinking. Soldiers brought in a fellow who had got across the line ahead of time. Everybody jeered and called him a "sooner."

The starting pistol cracked at precisely high noon on that eventful 16th day of September in 1893. At the signal the Cherokee Run was on. Thousands upon thousands of human beings burst into the Strip in frantic disorder, all classes, all kinds, on foot, in wagons and carriages and in railroad trains, hanging, ten deep, on the rear platform and bursting out of the windows. Father, Grant and Arthur, who had picked up a preacher⁷ as a traveling companion, made it in a spring-wagon with canvas on top. They literally plunged into the treeless waste, bounding from one prairie-dog mound to the next. Father gripped the reins, shouting "Gidap! Gidap!" Grant cracked the whip and Arthur and the minister held themselves ready to apply the brakes. The dust was so thick that father barely missed taking off a wheel when they grazed a Cottonwood tree near Cow Creek.

Tents were going up when they reached the square in Perry, but there were 6,000 city lots available and father got the one he wanted facing the square, and Grant got another several blocks away. Soon Perry was bursting and spilling over into the uncharted outskirts. Father set up his tent and hoisted his shingle on its pole—"Dr. Thomas M. Cullimore—Physician and Surgeon."

⁴ Dr. Grant Cullimore, a specialist in ailments of the eye, ear, nose and throat, practiced in Oklahoma City. Here he married Virginia Lois Sharp and they had one child, Donald Grant Cullimore, born on October 7, 1907. Dr. Grant Cullimore died of typhoid fever on July 29, 1909 and was buried in Fairlawn Cemetery in Oklahoma City.

⁵ Arthur Fairbanks did not remain in Oklahoma but returned to Jacksonville, Illinois where he still resides in (1960).

⁶ Parody on "After the Ball is Over."

⁷ The author does not remember the minister's name or the church denomination.

Father was the first M.D. to actually open an office in Perry. His preacher friend was anxious to build the first church. He told Father that on the coming Sunday he was going to conduct a Union Service for several denominations and at its conclusion he was planning to ask those who had ties to his particular brand of Christianity to join in donating their labor to put up a church building. He suggested that Father buy the lumber. Father was a religious man but not that religious. Furthermore, he did not have funds to put into anything without prospect of immediate earthly returns; but Father had a brainstorm. He had already made a dicker with Grant to buy his lot for a residence, for Grant had decided to go back to Oklahoma City. "No larger than a barn," the preacher continued, "And it could be placed on the back of a lot when the front is to be used for some other purpose." In his mind, Father was already formulating plans and specifications for a barn. "We'll soon outgrow such a small structure," the preacher pleaded, "and the church will revert to you."

Father knew that he must have a barn for the two horses that had made the run, and he planned to get two Indian ponies for my brother and me, and of course there must be a cow. "Well," he replied, the design of the barn now well laid out in his mind, "If you fellows will build a church on the rear of Grant's lot, only about forty feet by forty, gable roof, not more than six windows, plank benches and a box pulpit, I will furnish the lumber." Father bought Grant's lot and soon had a church on the back of it; but the minister's predications of church growth did not come true. The membership dwindled and in a few weeks the flock folded-up. The few remaining members threw in their lot with the flourishing Baptists. It was then that James Kaypolk Madison, Father's colored handy-man, removed the benches and the pulpit, and put in stalls and a manger. There was a place to keep the buggy, the surrey and the buckboard.

When the Perry situation had sufficiently simmered-down, my mother, brother and I joined Father. He had built a house for us on the front of Grant's old lot. It was not much of a house to look at, but it was the first two-story house in Perry, and the only one that had a green lawn around it; you see, James Kaypolk planted some barley seed, and it looked wonderful when it first came up.

It was pretty strenuous practicing medicine in Perry. Some of Father's patients were Indians⁸ who had despaired of cures through their medicine men. One poor fellow, who had a hole bored in his head through which to blow magic powder, died soon after Father arrived, and Father got the blame. Right after

⁸ Osage, Pawnee, Oto, Iowa and other neighboring tribes.

the Run there was an occasional shooting. The people in tents lay close to the ground at night, not wishing to stop stray bullets. Father was called after several affrays.⁹ Sunday afternoons when he had to visit patients in the country, he sometimes took my mother, brother and me in a surrey and drove two horses. There were no fences and wheel tracks were liable to run every which-way. Getting lost was exciting. We generally took a picnic lunch. We were not permitted to go along when Father knew that any of his patients had smallpox or scarlet fever, and this was not infrequent.

Last summer, when visiting Perry after an absence of almost sixty-five years, I was surprised to find our old house still standing, green lawn, cyclone-cellar, pump and all, but the barn was gone. The old house is on the corner of Ivanhoe and 13th Street, its side facing the school. The window in the front gable, how tall it had seemed! Its sill was not much above the floor and its top reached almost to the low ceiling.

There was one occasion when that window's placement had distressed our mother no end. It was bedtime on a July evening. Mother had sent my brother and me upstairs to bed. At the precise instant when we had shed all our clothes, and before we could possibly get into our nightgowns, a volley of rifle shots cracked the livery stable on the other side of the street. This was Perry's way of sounding a fire alarm. Father, who was a member of the volunteer fire brigade, rushed out of the house and across the street, toward the bucket which stood on one of the two barrels that every place of business was supposed to keep full of salt water. Mother followed him as far as the street, stopped and looked back at our house as if thinking of flying sparks. There, in the red glare, framed in full-length in that window, stood her two darlings, stark naked. Mother flew back and upstairs, more concerned with the proprieties than the conflagration.

For a time the Oklahoma climate seemed to help Father's health. He remained in Perry for three years and then tried Colorado and Beatrice, Nebraska, but he never was well again. Finally he could not carry-on any longer and we took him back to Jacksonville, Illinois for treatment under the care of old friends of his profession. One chance for life was offered him by an operation. This he bravely accepted. He died shortly after it on March 3, 1899. The funeral was held from the old home in Jacksonville and he was buried in Diamond Grove Cemetery of that city. The physicians of Jacksonville were in attendance in

⁹ "Hell's Half Acre" was filled with a bursting mass of incongruous humanity on the block bounded on the north by "D" Street and on the west by the alley running through the block north and south and on the east by the Santa Fe tracks, and on the south by "C" Street.

a body, and with bared heads on that sleety morning, lined the walk on each side from the house to the carriages as an honor guard while the casket, covered with red roses, passed between them. It was their tribute of friendships formed by an unselfish professional life and honorable citizenship.

Soon after our father died, Mother took my brother and me to California to live, fearing that I might become subject to Father's ailment in need of a better climate. I have now crowded into the seventies.

Last summer, when my wife¹⁰ and I motored back to childhood haunts, we headed straight for Perry, and then up to Jacksonville, Illinois. It was there that I talked to an elderly gentleman of about eighty-three, who said that he had known my father. He told me that as a lad of seventeen, Father had seen him through a siege of typhoid fever. It was Arthur Fairbanks. I talked with Arthur about the Cherokee Strip run. His eyes sparkled, almost boyishly, and I detected something like a tear coursing down his wrinkled cheek. He spoke endearingly of my father, who had died so many years ago, and of their Oklahoma adventure.

¹⁰ Rosemary Thelen Cullimore.