

THE INFLUENTIAL ROLE OF OUR DOCTOR

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With pride, we present our Doctor; who belongs to us, the community of Thomas.

Scanning thru' the pages of history, important dates are noted. The year 1809 brought many geniuses. It is alleged that every country in the world brought forth a genius in that year. The Honorable Phil Conley, state historian, has made quite an extensive research of that date. Our own literary genius Edgar Allen Poe; our immortal Abraham Lincoln were born in 1809. Time marches on! When the lives of geniuses born on that date, reach their zenith some other genius must be born--some one to take their place. Poe lived until 1849--President Lincoln lived until 1865.

In 1875, it was destined that another genius come into the world. On the banks of the Great Kanawha River, (so great that in an effort to form a new state from the state of Virginia, the ordinance provided that the new state be called Kanawha) in Mason County, eight miles from Point Pleasant, on the south side of the Kanawha River where the valley is a mile and an eighth wide--this person first opened his eyes and peered into this world. Nowhere in the world, as in this valley, did the sun shine more brightly, no where the song bird's tiny throats attuned to such harmonious tones. The negro, at work, hummed a softer, a more melodious tune. The corn grows taller, the white corn grew much sweeter--it was taken to the mills, ground for luscious corn pone, corn dodgers and "hush puppies". The yellow corn was fed to the hogs, not for people to eat, not even the well fed negroes.

In this family of nine, the one in whom we are interested graduated from the ~~Medical College of Virginia~~ ^{University College of Medicine}, at Richmond. On the eve, of his finding a location, he heard the tall oaks whisper, (nowhere does the oak grow larger than in the Kanawha Valley) "Go to the Wilds, Joe, "Go to the Wilds".

On May 10, 1900 this man arrived in Thomas--the crossroads of the world--where twenty to thirty emigrants of varying nationalities arrived daily. It was a spectacle, a riot of color, customs, language--an international situation where the Doctor was to play an important part in the lives of all of them. The Russian men wore high boots, sheep-lined coats, tall fur caps. The women with white handkerchiefs tied over their heads, white sacks filled with personal belongings, (the women did the toting) feather ticks on their back. The Italians gayly dressed in beautifully hand embroidered costumes. They have arrived in a new world--Thomas, West Virginia--to become what we now look upon as our most useful and influential citizens--without the guiding hand of this Doctor, maybe today, of this we could not boast.

Thomas became a Gala Day. The "Marriage Brokers" worked over time. Every single man must have a wife. By pictures, personal references, a little cash, brides arrived from across the sea. Presto! few days after the arrival--the wedding--a weeks celebration, eating, drinking, and dancing. Let us watch a procession on their way to the Church, walking up "Tony Row"--a high board walk, dirty, dusty, difficult walking--the bride in a white satin gown, floor length with a train; bridegroom with

many attendants, all wearing brilliantly colored artificial flowers. The procession accompanied by an accordion or violinist playing the Wedding March. The wedding festivities--one custom of the men throwing silver dollars on a heavy plate, if broken, he danced with the bride. Often several dollars were thrown before the plate was broken--then the man danced with the bride. One beautiful bride--Queen of them all, shrewd--purchased a hogshead of heavy plates. She received eleven hundred dollars in the plate breaking game. At this wedding, the guests consumed a quarter of beef, fifty cured hams, fifty chickens; donations of fruit, bread, cakes from every family of her nationality, last but not least, fifty gallons of whisky, one hundred gallons of wine, five hundred gallons of beer. The Doctor really played a part in the after-math of this hilarious event--headaches, stomach-aches had to be reckoned with, didn't they?

Following, in due time, came the christenings, possibly not as elaborate, but quite a celebration. Because of pre-natal care, careful attention, care which they had never known--the Doctor received a spiritual reverence from these people, many boys named -- Joe. The mothers never dreamed there could be such kindness--when she went into the region of the "valley of death" or such care for a human life--her child.

Every event was not a gala one. One morning, in the small hours, a hushed knock came on the door--a small, dark eyed, beautiful woman, crying softly, "Oh Mister Doctor, you will have to help me. I haven't slept for nights". Two months previously, she had buried her husband--the love of her choice. She had two small sons who had to have a living. Her only knowledge of bread earning was to keep "Boarders"--the custom was "full

board" or a life of prostitution. "Oh, Mister Doctor, I can't live a life of disgrace, because of my sons. A man has proposed marriage, I can't marry so soon. I grieve so for my Tony". The Doctor advised her to marry again. The next week in an all black dress—a long black mourning veil, weeping every step of the way, wiping the tears with a black bordered handkerchief—the wedding party slowly wended it's way to the Church. To this marriage, more children came. The family has prospered. This family bows reverently and worships with honor at the feet of their counsellor—the Doctor. He has not been only the adviser of physical needs, but morals, how to invest money, where to send my child to college? patching of marital affair—diminishing the divorce rate, and the most difficult task of all to be selected to go in the middle of the night to tell a woman her husband had met with a tragic and fatal accident. This has happened numerous times.

One of his most interesting anecdotes is, "The Battle of the Bridge". One Fourth of July, our sister town Davis sold liquor, "Thomas didn't) Thomasonians, transported by horse drawn hack—free ride furnished by Saloon Keepers—to obtain the "Old Fighting Liquor"—at Pendleton Run Bridge, Lithuanians, Polish, Austrians met—latter demanded a "swig"—denied—"The Fight is on, oh, Christian Soldiers" there was blood from that point to the Doctor's office—situated some two miles—heat, dirt, dust, blood, cussing in every tongue, many languages,—arms to be splintered, broken collar bones, broken ribs to strap—general settling of disputes, an unbiased referee—Poor Doctor! He didn't have trouble s and worries?

The Doctor has ushered into this town—as brand new citizens—thirty

five hundred, red faced, squawking infants, representing eleven states of the United States, twenty one European nationalities and two from nations of the Near East.

In 1931, the Medical College of Virginia conferred upon him a Doctorate of Literature, Litt. D. (honorary degree). He has written several articles of National repute, "The Healing Gods or Medical Superstitions" gathered from his own experiences". "Folk Medicine" in which is developed "Preventatives" and "Therapeutics", "A Collection of Medical Silhouettes". This collection of Silhouettes--seventy two--is unique in that no other medical collection can boast of as large a collection. Every silhouette is a physician. This collection took thirty years of authentic knowledge to collect.

The Doctor has lectured numerous places--Mayo Clinic, Vanderbilt University, American Medical Libraries, Baltimore and Richmond, College of Physicians and Surgeons; at Philadelphia, Medical Societies at Kansas City, Birmingham, Alabama, North and South Carolina, and Tennessee.

In 1932, nearing the twilight hour, arousing the curiosity of the natives, a huge truck and an armed convoy--two cars, one to precede, one to follow the truck--state police--a gift to the ~~Medical College of Virginia~~ ^{The Richmond Academy of Medicine}--the donor? the Doctor--a collection of invaluable rare medical books, portraits, prints, autographed letters, silhouettes, and medical instruments. The new home, for these gifts was a new fireproof library, in a gorgeously furnished room in whose furnishings, in minute detail, even to type of wood work had been chosen by the donor.--A beautiful dark red plastic leather used for the upholstering. This person who has contributed to ~~his Alma Mater~~ ^{Medicine} a priceless collection has educated three

sons at the leading Colleges and Universities of the country: Mercersburg, University of Pennsylvania, Yale and one who graduated in Medicine at Medical College, Richmond--"These are his Jewels" as Cornelia--mother of Gracchi replied when asked why she was not costumed in satins, expensive furs, and jewels. Today, it is doubtful if he would have enough money to replace the disreputable 1935 Oldsmobile which occupies space outside his office door. He could have commercialized--reaped an untold harvest from three drug formulas alone--a salve for burns, a concoction for sick stomach, a never fail sore throat mixture. Not interested in money--.

In his busy life of professional interests, he has served as Mayor of the town, Health Officer, Councilman, member of Board of Education.

He has not been interested only in Medicine, but Art, Music. He is connoisseur of linen, china, silver, and good food; he possesses many antiques including a rare piece of Belgium rose point lace--a wedding veil of his grandmother.

One of the popular young matrons of the community, affectionately brags--the Doctor has given her a bath--her first one--the Nurse had left the patient for a few hours when little Miss, red, ugly, wrinkled, bald headed, mass of black hair on her face instead of head, decided to usher herself into this big world. The Doctor said, "Oh, give me the clothes I'll take care of her". The kindness has been acknowledged many times. Every holiday the Doctor is invited to participate in a sumptuous meal--in the preparation of which she is a "Past Master".

In 1948, the Firemen of Thomas celebrated "Home Coming Week" with a "Dr. Miller Day" when old-young, ranging from infants to forty-eight years-olds paid him homage, many came from afar--Not every one, even the great, can boast of a respect such as this. Admirers brought flowers to him not for him.

In 1949 in the same room which harbors his priceless collection of medical antiques,--amid pomp and ceremony--a portrait was unveiled of our Beloved--Do you not think that the buttons of his admirers fairly "pop" when these well-earned honors are heaped upon him? The information is not received from him. It is read in the newspapers--Never once has he said, "Behold me! The great I did it." The community is proud of him--Does he not belong to us? Who has more right to own him? He came fifty years ago--1900--Our own Beloved Joseph Lyon Miller.