

## Dr. R. J. Woods -- Recollections by C.F. Kindred

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Dr. R.J. Woods was a prominent physician and an admired and revered citizen in the Smithville area for many years. He practiced in Trimble for a short time before establishing his practice in Smithville sometime after 1900. He related many amusing stories to my father, C.C. Kindred, during their long friendship, a few of which I will relate.

In order to appear older to his patients, he grew a beard. He would drive his horse at a fast gait out of Trimble, stop for a time where he was not visible, return to his office and then start out in another direction, then repeat the pattern. He boosted the perception of his increasing practice by purchasing a second horse.

His first office in Smithville was in Mitchell & Iden's Drug Store, now the Main Street Mill. Having a doctor's office in a drug store was a common practice during this period. He later moved a few doors east, to a building now occupied by the Town Tavern. He performed some surgeries in his office.

Dr. E.C. Hill and Dr. Calvert, the other physicians in town, were in the service during World War I. This placed a heavy patient load on Dr. Woods during this time. My father, who was the postmaster, would help by driving him on calls at night.

One night after returning from a difficult case, they stopped at a local restaurant which didn't have a reputation for cleanliness. When Red, the proprietor, asked them for their order, Doc remarked, "A hard boiled egg and a coconut, I want something you can't get your damned dirty hands on." Red had often been observed wiping off customer's plates from the counter with his apron then putting them directly on the shelf, especially if the plate had only been used to hold another dish.

Dr. Woods' right hand man was Artie Logan. Artie served in WWI and, after his return, became Dr. Woods' receptionist, assistant in the operating room and lab technician, as well as his driver. We have a picture of Artie with Doc's mud-splattered car called Jezebel, which attests to the terrible road conditions.

Jennie Lou Silvey Crow told of how Dr. Woods coped with bad roads when making home visits on the road now called KK. Doc would call the Silveys (now Littrells' farm) and have them bring a saddle horse to a house just east of them so Doc could make his call farther west. I imagine he made similar arrangements to get over other hills and bad places.

On a very cold night, my father drove him to a home where a baby was expected. They arrived early in the evening. While waiting, my father got some sleep by sitting on the floor with his back to the wall near a wood-burning stove. About one o'clock he heard a baby cry, and Doc came out of the room and told the father, "You have a fine baby boy." When the father asked what he owed, Doc gave him a figure of no more than five dollars.

The man said he didn't have any money, but offered him a sack of potatoes. Doc told him to keep his potatoes and pay him when he could. At times he brought chickens home in payment for house calls. He often took his pay in turnips or sausage or whatever patients had to offer, as ready cash was difficult for many.

A few years later, Doc would see someone driving a new car or an upgraded car and they still owed him money, he would remark, "There goes \_\_\_\_\_," naming the car for the baby he had delivered.

Times were tough. Doc was an excellent doctor, but a poor collector. He came to my father to borrow \$35 because the Ford Motor Credit Co. was planning to repossess Jezebel. Doc told my dad he'd rather buy Chevrolets, but if he did, Artie would "divorce" him.

Dr. Woods was an excellent diagnostician and certainly more knowledgeable than most country doctors of that era. My brother became seriously ill and had an extremely high fever. He treated him for undulant fever, even though blood tests had come back showing typhoid fever. A second sample confirmed Doc's diagnosis.

He treated all of our family. My father had a huge carbuncle on his back that required lancing. My dog, Bob, and I were in the operating room. I was observing the procedure too closely and the strong odor of chloroform made me dizzy. I was

weaving when Doc grabbed me and took me to a chair in the next room. When he asked me if I was sick, I answered him, "No, but my dog is." For years he would ask me, "How's your dog?"

My sister, Fran, fell at school and broke her leg. It was very painful, but Fran insisted that Doc set it without giving her a shot - reluctantly, he did this, and the broken bone mended well. He operated on my sister, Joan, on our kitchen table while my brother and I steadied her.

Dr. Woods always wanted a hospital in Smithville, but financing was not possible during this period. He did have some facilities for a mini-hospital by renting the upstairs rooms of the Bud Ecton house (Jane Jones and Joyce Halferty's grandfather). He cared for patients there for a short time. This home is still on Commercial between Woods and Meadow Street.

During the 20s a man came to Smithville selling stock in a zinc mine in southeast Kansas. He must have had a good sales pitch, because several of the townspeople invested in it. When months passed and no report of progress was forthcoming, the investors got together and asked Doc and my father to go to the area to investigate. They took the train to the vicinity of the mine. On the trip, whenever a cemetery was sighted, Doc would comment, "There are a lot of doctors' mistakes out there." A man in the compartment with them said, "Excuse me, but your friend calls you Doctor, but you say there are doctors' mistakes in all the cemeteries we pass. Are you a veterinarian?" Doc answered, "No, I'm just an honest M.D."

Doc Woods' social consciousness was evident by other quotes such as "Do you know why black people can't have appendicitis? They can't afford it." His political views were the same as most of the people of Smithville, which was Democratic. I don't believe there was a Republican county ticket until the 1950s. So Doc was on safe ground with his following political statement, "A working man with a Republican ballot in his hand on Election Day is like a Jewish man walking the streets of Smithville with a ham under his arm during Lent."

Dr. Woods loved to joke with other men in Smithville and the extent to which this was sometimes carried is apparent in the following happening.

Bill, Doc's buggy driver, was bringing him into town when Bill noticed a man named Woods standing on the corner. Bill commented, "I don't believe he ever did a good day's work." Although the man was no kin to Doc, he turned to Bill and commented, "My father didn't have the advantages of most men in Smithville." Doc got out of the buggy in front of the drug store and tipped everyone off while going to his office in the back of the store. When Bill returned to the store, they confirmed Doc's joke. Bill stated, "I guess I had better be looking for another job." My father often referred to Dr. Woods as the Irishman. I found in the 1900 census that his father had indeed been born in Ireland. Doc's wife's name was Sarah, and she was an avid horse racing fan. She attended the races in Smithville and in Riverside. They had a lovely daughter named Ethel, whom we called "Toots." She was an excellent pianist and literally bounced as she played in the balcony in the Mitchell & Iden Drug Store where young people could dance. Toots taught school in Kansas for many years, and her husband was a state legislator.

In addition to paying tribute to Dr. Woods, I want to tell more of Artie Logan. He was one of Smithville's most dedicated citizens. Artie was our Scout Master during the 1930s and continued in that capacity for many years. He worked with us in Dr. Woods' reception room. We shared chairs with the patients, yielding to them when necessary. He was the mainstay of our original volunteer fire department, serving as the assistant chief from 1929 to 1949, then as Chief until 1957. In wintertime he kept a coal burning stove going day and night when necessary to keep the fire station warm so the Model T fire truck would start. Dr. Woods and Artie Logan were the epitome of service and dedication to the people of Smithville.