

Notice of Copyright

Published and unpublished materials may be protected by Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S. Code). Any copies of published and unpublished materials provided by the Western History Collections are for research, scholarship, and study purposes only.

Use of certain published materials and manuscripts is restricted by law, by reason of their origin, or by donor agreement. For the protection of its holdings, the Western History Collections also reserves the right to restrict the use of unprocessed materials, or books and documents of exceptional value and fragility. Use of any material is subject to the approval of the Curator.

Citing Resources from the Western History Collections

For citations in published or unpublished papers, this repository should be listed as the Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

An example of a proper citation:

Oklahoma Federation of Labor Collection, M452, Box 5, Folder 2. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

INDEX CARDS

Physicians--Creek Nation
Fite, Francis B.
Muskogee
Transportation--Creek Nation
Outlaws--Jennings, Al
Bennett, Leo E.
Ledbetter, Bud
Robb, A. W.
Banks--Indian Territory
Telephones
English, A. Z.
Severs, F. B.
Turner, C. W.
Bixby, Tams
Wright, J. George

March 1, 1937

EXPERIENCES OF A PIONEER PHYSICIAN AS TOLD BY DOCTOR JESSE LEE BLAKEMORE. 1.

Given to Miss Ella M. Robinson
Field Worker. W.P.A.

386

I was born at Greenwood, Arkansas, May 26, 1868. I attended private schools in my native town until I was old enough to enter college. When I entered Emory & Henry College in Virginia. Having decided on my life work I entered a medical hospital and training college at Memphis, Tennessee. On completing the course there I entered Vanderbilt University at Nashville, Tennessee where I graduated in 1889. Coming back to my native state I joined the staff of physicians at the Little Rock Hospital for the insane where I stayed for five years. Then I was obsessed with the idea that my services were greatly needed in Indian Territory and that the people there would be the loser if I did not go to their relief. I no doubt was led by attractive stories told of the undeveloped Territory and the possibilities for a young doctor. I decided to try Muskogee as a future location. That was in October of 1892. As Muskogee had had no occasion for a building boom it was impossible to secure an office. I at once called upon Dr. Francis B. Wite, who was a young doctor then and had established a fine practice, both as a surgeon and a general practitioner. He cordially invited me to share his office, which was located on Second and Edwy. on the ground floor. He was my friend then and has been during the years since. He extended me every courtesy and I assisted him in his work accompanying him on his visits and attending his patients when he was called away. I took my meals at different restaurants for a while and then joined the Bachelor's Club. That was an organization composed of young men who were compelled to board. The building in which we took our meals stood where the English block now stands and was under the supervision of Miss Emma Parson. I roomed at the office where I was on duty at night as well as day. Our office hours were 24 hours a day. In April of 1893 Dr. Wite and I formed a

over their father's work and the Fife Clinic was formed in 1919. I have continued in practice alone since that time.

It's a long journey from those days up to the present time when the doctors have high powered cars that go at 60 miles an hour over hard surfaced roads, well equipped hospitals, and the latest improved instruments with which to work.

The streets of Muskogee were really of mud and ~~the~~ a team hitched to a buggy could bog down on Main Street. There were no bridges over the streams, and in times of high water we rode horse back and plunged in and swam across the creek to visit our patients often getting wet to our waists. Often the country roads would become impassable and we had to travel in a light two wheel gig and carry our instruments as a buggy was too heavy for the frozen muddy roads. There were no nurses here none nearer than Ft. Smith. All assistance in cases of illness was given by the families and neighbors. There were no hospitals so all surgical work was done in the home. The patient stretched out on the kitchen table, by flickering coil oil lamps held perhaps, by the unsteady hands of some member of the family. Our practice extended to a radius of 60 miles. The long trips often necessitated staying all night at the homes of the patient, sleeping, or trying to, on cold uncomfortable beds. Such a thing as considering it a hard life never occurred to either of us. Pneumonia, malaria, typhoid fever were the most common diseases. Epidemics of all sorts came periodically. Small pox being the most dreaded. There was no board of health then and unruly people who persisted in spreading the disease had to be handled by the town marshal. Babies persisted in making their advent into the world under the most seemingly unfavorable conditions. In tents, covered wagons, squalid huts they gave their first cry. However they all lived and did well ~~xx~~ regardless of the fact they had only a thin canvas between them and the cold world. Doctor Fife, at that time, was appointed surgeon for the M.K.&T railroad and I was his assistant. Calls came from end of the division at Parsons, to the other end at Dennison.

There were no ambulances here and in case a patient had to be moved a bed spring in the bottom of a farm wagon with a mattress on it was the means by which they were moved. I recall one instance of successful surgical work done under rather unpromising conditions. Mr. Tom Smith of Muskogee, (afterwards Mayor) and some friends, started to Vann's Lake a popular fishing resort at that time, to spend the night and fish. On the way over, driving through the woods in the dark, they ran over a stump and overturned the surry and broke Mr. Smith's leg. They carried him to the nearest farm house and came for me. On the way over, driving in the dark, I struck a stump in the middle of the road and broke a singletree. A little thing like that was nothing to worry about. The horse had a nice long tail and I simply tied the horse's tail to the doubletree and went on. When I had completed setting the bone, the question arose as to how to get him to town, without the injured leg being put in a cast. Not being able to supply a cast at that time, I took a paling off the farmer's yard fence and fastened the broken leg to it. The plank was left on until the bone was thoroughly knitted. In 1899 when a terrible smallpox epidemic swept over the Creek Nation, I was put in charge of the quarantine work in the western part of the Creek Nation. In 1896 we brought the first X-ray machine to Muskogee and did several operations ~~xxxx~~ ^{under} it. In 1897 we opened a private hospital in the 200 block on South Main in a dwelling owned by Mr. Conell Rogers. We had 8 rooms for patients and often had to place cots in the hall for fever patients. Mrs. Ferguson, a practical nurse, managed the hospital. Dr. Milton Thompson, then beginning his medical career, roomed there, and was on duty in case he was needed. In 1897, after Mr. Geo W. Bennett had been appointed U. S. Marshal, a report came to his office that Al Jennings, a noted and much wanted train robber, had taken refuge in the ranch house on the Spike S Ranch several miles west of town owned by John Harlin. Marshal Bennett ordered Bud Ledbetter and a posse to the scene. Upon refusing to come out when ordered they fired into the house. A bullet struck the stove and then struck Jennings' leg

taking a piece of the stove with it. He was brought to the hospital and we operated successfully with the aid of X-ray. The operation created intense interest due to the machine and also the patient. He was held under guard at the hospital until he was able to stand trial. That x-ray machine wouldn't recognize its descendant today in the perfected machines now in use. ~~xxxx~~ We closed the hospital after the disastrous fire of 1898, then ~~xxxx~~ a hospital board was organized and the Martha Robb Hospital was established on the old Kendall Campus in one of the dormitories on South 12th. Street. It was called the Martha Robb Hospital in memory of the wife of Mr. R. M. Robb a prominent merchant here. We rented the hospital from the city at \$1 per year and it was known as the Physicians and Surgeons Hospital the last years of its existence. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Then the city sold the ground and ~~xxxx~~ erected a new building on Agency Hill which they afterwards sold to the U. S. Government and is now a unit of the Veterans Hospital.

Although I have been interested in numerous business enterprises in Muskogee, and have always worked for the up building of the city, I have never, for a day, deviated from my life work, the practice of medicine. The all absorbing interests in my purpose was to relieve human suffering and save life. In 1896 George H.

Williams, John Hill, J. C. Pettigrew and I organized the Commercial Bank. George Williams was elected president and I was made vice-president. The bank afterwards became a national bank and is now one of the two strongest banks in Muskogee.

In 1898 W. M. English, Captain F. B. Devers, W. M. Rutherford, C. W. Turner and myself promoted the Pioneer Telephone Company and had rural lines to Wagoner, Checotah and Okmulgee. The lines were sold later to the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. I was a member of the school board when the first brick school buildings were erected. The Washington, Jefferson and Sequoyah buildings. And the Dunbar and the Douglas schools for negroes. In 1901 Mr. Tams Pixby, J. George Wright, Frank Hubbard, Mr. William Overly and I organized the Town and Country Club

and secured a building on Garrison Hill at Ft. Gibson for a Club House. As the club soon outgrew the small quarters we purchased from Mr. Sim Garland, the location where the Muskogee Country Club is now located. In 1907 Mr. Tams Bixby Dr. Fite, John Hall and myself organized the first Fair Association, that had been in existence for a number of years, and gave it to the state. A doctor's life in early territory days was far from an easy one from a physical standpoint.

In retrospect of my life it is a satisfactory feeling to know that I did to the best of my ability, the work that I had chosen and will continue to do as long as it is possible. Notwithstanding the handicap under which we labored this was a happy life. Our friends were real friends. The question of money never entered our minds as we were completely engrossed in our work. People paid us when they could and we were happy and not at all worried when they couldn't. We took no notes or mortgages.

All in all it was a happy life and if I were given my choice I would take the same course/