

Country physician used horse, buggy to care for patients



Dr. Henry O. Hardesty

Jennings doctor delivered babies, practiced surgery

By MARY LOU OLSON

The life of Dr. Henry O. Hardesty, a country doctor at Jennings for over 50 years, is told in the book, "From Patches to Plenty," which includes his memoirs.

Although the doctor was born in Frankfort, Ind., on Sept. 10, 1868, his family moved to Kensington when he was a boy.

He married Elsie Jane Reith on Sept. 8, 1890, and she operated a small drug store in Reamsville while her husband worked his way through college.

He received his degree from Washburn College in Topeka, where he also studied and was registered in pharmacy.

After receiving his degree, he was told that a small town in western Kansas needed a doctor and a drug store, so he moved his family to Jennings. He established his office with living quarters in the back, and began to practice medicine.

His original diary was edited and typed by the late Pearl Chenoweth. Last year, Harwood Kolsky of Saratoga, Calif., a former resident of the Jennings area, put the book on the computer for printing.

In those days, the territory was large, with long drives to the country. He usually drove a team, but if the snow became too deep, he rode horseback.

Most all babies were delivered in country homes and in an emergency, he often performed surgery on the kitchen table.

He was a horse and buggy doctor and always went when called regardless of the weather, through mud, snow, blizzards and dust storms.

He never refused his services, whether his clients could pay or not.

In 1903, a fire destroyed his office and rooms at the rear where his family lived. It was replaced by the Hardesty Drug Store, which still stands on Main Street.

His son John became a druggist and he and his wife, the former Jessie Faris, operated the business.

After his death, Mrs. Hardesty kept the store open for many years.

Dr. Hardesty served overseas during World War I with the 338th Remount Squadron and was later assigned to the Base Hospital staff in Bordeaux, France, where he served until the Armistice.

In 1952, he was honored by the Rock Island Railroad for having been their local surgeon for more than 50 years.

The book relates many interesting events of his life when he was a boy, including episodes with his brother, Frank, and his love for his grandfather.

He said that his grandfather was the only person he ever confided in about becoming the doctor.

After thinking it over awhile, his grandfather said, "Henry, if you do become a doctor, you be a good one, — the very best" and he said that he strived for that throughout his career.

The doctor wrote about many of the things he experienced while serving families in the area.

In an interview in later years, Dr. Hardesty said, "I was just another doctor doing what I had to do. Any of the things we did then could be done by most young doctors today."

"With modern facilities available, they just do not have to operate under the early-day handicaps.

"About the only thing the modern doctor can't do is tie the reins to the whipstand and let old Dobbin bring him home from a tough trip."

His daughter, Florence (Hardesty) Wood and daughter-in-law, Jessie Hardesty wrote in his biography, "Dr. Hardesty was devoted to the practice of medicine.

"He loved people and afforded much comfort and understanding throughout his lifetime.

"He was considered by other doctors who knew him to be one of the finest diagnosticians.

"He continued active practice until May 1954, when he suffered a light stroke.

"He was not physically impaired too badly, but felt it best to retire.

"He had given 55 years to medical service.

"In 1955, he suffered a severe stroke following major surgery and died on Aug. 17, 1958."

In the final chapter of his diary, he said, "It is the 28th day of September 1956. Eventide. A flock of brown thrushes, as though just escaped from worldly restraint, has alighted in the tall cottonwood trees my dear wife planted so long ago.

They are singing their hearts out. Across the street a few molting crows

are cawing bass while a flock of chickadees sing soprano. Even the sparrows are chirping little notes of praise. It is also the eventide of my life and my heart sings with them. The burden of our song is, 'Tomorrow will be better than today.' Omega."

Dr. Hardesty said in the final chapter of the book, "It was on a hot day in June in the year of our Lord 1954 that a notice was printed on the front page of our little local newspaper.

It said, "Due to ill health I am discontinuing the practice of Medicine. For 54 years I have performed the duties of a general practitioner.

"Many of you I welcomed into the world on the day of your birth. I have shared the joys and sorrows of almost everyone in the community.

"And now I wish to thank every patient whose loyalty, confidence and kindness made it possible for me to work as long as I did.

"I regret my inability to serve you further." H.O. Hardesty, M.D.

Copies of the book, which sells for \$25, may be mailed by sending \$30 to cover postage and handling to Jennings Heritage Association, Box 104, Jennings, Kan., 67643. For questions, call Neoma Tacha at (785) 678-2470 or e-mail heritageassn@netscape.net.

All proceeds from the book will go to the Czech Museum in Jennings, which plans to use them to help build an addition to house school memorabilia from the Jennings School and add a handicapped entrance.



SHARING THE DUTIES at the Hardesty Drug Store in the 1950s were Joyce (Tacha) Ryan (below left), with owner Jessie Hardesty. Mrs. Ryan worked in the store when she was attending high school in Jennings. The booths (above) in the drug store were a favorite gathering place for Jennings young people, who enjoyed ice cream sodas and other treats from the fountain.

—Photos courtesy of Joyce Ryan



THE OLD HARDESTY DRUG STORE still stands in Jennings as a reminder of the many years it served the town with prescription drug and fountain services. It was also home to the Hardesty family for a time.