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Article Summary: The daughter of a pioneer country doctor found among the contents of his old wooden trunk "tangible memories" of hard-won success. Her memoir cites letters dating back to 1883, newspaper clippings, diplomas and programs. A list of the memorabilia follows the article.

Scroll down for complete article.

Cataloging Information:

Names: John Wesley Thompson, Alice E Clark Thompson, John Clark Thompson, H S Lehr, John Williams, William B Price, Joseph Plummer, Emil Stover

Schools Dr Thompson Attended: Ada Normal School (now Ohio Northern University, Ada); Starling Medical College (later absorbed by Ohio State University, Columbus)

Towns Served by Dr Thompson: Cridersville, Ohio; Belvidere, Hendley, Strang, Sutton and Lincoln, Nebraska

Key Words: County Coroner (Furnas County)

Photographs / Images: Thompson as a medical student, 1881-1885; Glee Club at Belvidere, Nebraska, 1887-1888; Thompson in his office at Sutton, c. 1914

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A PIONEER NEBRASKA DOCTOR: JOHN WESLEY THOMPSON

BY EDITH THOMPSON HALL

MY father, John Wesley Thompson, was a pioneer country doctor in Nebraska. He didn't altogether measure his success in life by his tangible property but by the deeper satisfaction of his service to others.

An old, battered, round-top, wooden trunk, decorated by metal strips and papered in now faded brown—smelling deeply of moth balls—revealed the beginning and the ending of the country doctor's life in the state of Nebraska. His trunk was his sole possession when he came into the state. It was full of the tangible memories of his forty-one years of practice when he died. It knew how little he had in the beginning; it knew how rich he became in material goods and in deeds for which there is no pay.

After his death in November 1926, the round-top trunk yielded only bundles of letters tied with old-fashioned blue and yellow ribbons, beginning with the date of 1883. There

Edith Thompson Hall, a resident of Lincoln, has written many historical articles which have been published from time to time in Nebraska periodicals, as well as in national magazines such as Ford Times, Tradition, and Names.

were faded, brittle newspapers, telegrams, diplomas, certificates; programs and badges. In these the characteristics of the man, his inherent loneliness, his struggles and his successes were made known.

To be a country doctor's daughter and know intimately the life such a man led is to know what a community did not realize—that the country doctor put the lives of others, the families of others, before his own. He usually paid the price by dying younger than men in other professions or trades.

Born near Ada, Hardin County, Ohio, January 2, 1860, John Wesley Thompson was old enough to have vague memories of uncles killed during the Civil War. He knew post-war privations. He frequently described the fireplace heat of the log house in which he was born. He always said if you stood in front of it you roasted your face but your back was still cold and vice versa.

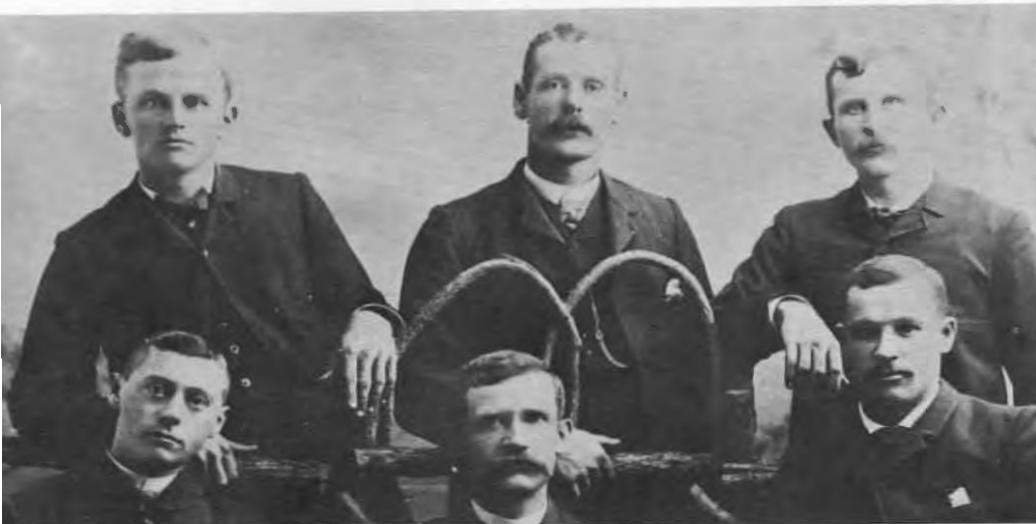
The Thompson land had to be cleared of debt as well as forest. The only luxury food was what the farm itself produced, food indicative of Ohio, apple butter, maple syrup, hickory nuts and many varieties of apples. There was no wheat flour—only cornmeal. Even clothing had to be home produced. Young John's mother carded and spun the wool from their own sheep, making all the suits for her husband and sons. Apologetically, he later admitted he never liked the homemade suits.

When it came to an education, it was obtained by literally lifting himself by his bootstraps. John's schooling began at a country school where he stayed "in the spelling book" for five or six years. He, therefore, hated spelling. He often spelled a word as it sounded though he could recite every rule of orthography. Even his eight year old sister, Hattie, wrote him in 1883, "Wess . . . it is g-e-t, not gett . . . and i-t-s-e-l-f, not itselfe." Sugar was "shugar" and Sophia was "Sofa." After his death a list of his most flagrant violations were found on his desk in his



Above—John W. Thompson as a medical student at Columbus, Ohio, 1881-1885.

Below—Glee Club at Belvidere, Nebraska, 1887-1888. Dr. John W. Thompson, front row center.





Dr. John W. Thompson in his office at Sutton, Nebraska, Circa 1914.

own handwriting, spelled correctly. The copy was well-worn.

Once out of the spelling book, John followed his eldest sister, May, to the Ada Normal School—known today as Ohio Northern University, located at Ada, Ohio. There he had to furnish his own room, including heat, at times cooking for himself. His father, Thomas Kelly Thompson, assisted his children by bringing in their wood from the farm.

The Thomas K. Thompson family were religious. When they named their second son John Wesley after John Wesley the Reformer, it was with the hope this boy would be a preacher. That the boy had thoroughly absorbed their religious training he proved by his life. It was a disappointment to the parents to learn their son wanted to be a doctor.

"I want to study medicine," John W. told his father.

"You will never make a doctor," his father replied. "You do not talk enough."

"A doctor doesn't have to tell everything he knows," the son answered.

The young man entered Starling Medical College at Columbus, Ohio, a college later absorbed by Ohio State University. Starling Alumni received new diplomas from Ohio State, automatically including all its alumni privileges.

On March 20, 1883, the father died. The night of his death the boy declared he felt a strange wind sweep through his room, waking him from sound sleep. The ensuing death message didn't surprise him. His mother and the younger children, still working at the farm debt, always managed to loan him money, as did faculty members including Dr. H. S. Lehr, founder of Ohio Northern, as early as 1880, until his coveted doctor's diploma was placed in his already toil-worn hands, March 4, 1885.

He had earned the money he had not borrowed the hard way. He dug ditches for the railroad. He taught school near Ada, Ohio riding horseback through the marsh on cold, dark winter mornings for the now famous Scioto marsh was then covered with dense woods and shook for rods under a horse's hoof. His clothes were thin, his trousers not long enough to cover his skinny shanks. Owls hooted derisively at him.

It was at Cridersville, Ohio, a small town in a county adjoining Hardin county, where Dr. Thompson hung up his shingle for the first time. Practice was dull, the pay poor. Five dollars was the obstetrical fee in 1885 and covered two calls as well as delivery.

The impetus which brought John W. Thompson, M.D. west was the glowing pictures his cousin Dr. Frank B. Thompson painted for him from Fairbury, Jefferson County, Nebraska where the older man had located earlier. "The fields of practice are wide open with little competition and too much to do." The idle young man at Cridersville was tempted. It was, moreover, an excuse to get away from insinuations that he was a failure.

The year was 1886. The month was August, hot and searing that year, the forerunner of ten years of drouth and crop failure. It was strange land to the six-foot, slender young man with the blue eyes and black hair from the Scioto Marsh country. In the marsh many died of tuberculosis. Its people commonly carried quinine in their pockets to combat the ever present ague. In fact, Thompson himself needed a dryer climate.

Dr. John Williams, later a partner of Dr. W. L. Dayton, eye, ear, nose and throat specialist of Lincoln, was the first friend Dr. Thompson made in Nebraska. They met on the train coming into Lincoln that August of '86. Dr. Thompson always carried a pocket knife Dr. Williams had dropped on the seat—a memento of their friendship which continued over forty years.

Members of his family in Ohio claimed that Dr. John entered the state having but one penny left in his pocket. With this penny he purchased a postal card to write his mother of his safe arrival. Besides the trunk he brought with him he owned a team of horses he had left at Ada with his family. He still owed on notes he had given to finish his education. His family loans were always fully repaid, a statement later verified by his sisters.

Dr. Thompson's first location was at Belvidere in Thayer County—not far from his cousin at Fairbury. His intimate friends were young men like himself, alone and ambitious. Social life consisted of group and quartet singing, bean suppers on tin plates even for celebrities such as Governor John M. Thayer with "singing by the Belvidere Glee Club"; a concert by Blind Boone; a travelling ventriloquist; gay political rallies. New towns sprang up between old settled towns with railroads connecting them all.

At Hebron, September 28, 1887, J. W. Thompson, M.D. was made a member of the Southern Nebraska District Medical Society. This certificate issued to him had been signed by J. M. Bradshaw, M.D. President, and his cousin, F. B. Thompson, M.D. Secretary.

In the January 13, 1888 issue of *The Era* published at Belvidere was an item: "We are sorry to learn that Dr. J. W. Thompson has decided to leave Belvidere for Hendley, Furnas County, the first of next week. The doctor has many warm friends here who regret very much his moving away. He has proved to be a careful and successful practitioner, is an upright and deserving young man in every sense of the word. We can cheerfully recommend him to the people of Hendley."

Another item in the same issue read, "Dr. Thompson has charge of the drug store during Mr. Sperling's absence at Seneca, Kansas." The drug store advertised everything from jewelry and books to a "good Accordeon . . . for \$2.00 and "A good pair of Spectacles for 25c."

When Dr. Thompson left Belvidere, his friends, Harry Hole, George A. Bruning, W. F. Walker and William B. Price, presented him with a red plush autograph album dated January 17, 1888. Other names signed in the album were Stephen Hole, Julius Rosenblatt (Cashier of the State Bank of Belvidere), E. W. Hooper, W. J. Mayford, J. E. Gaffany whose path crossed with Thompson's in two more towns, T. C. Marshall (Notary Public and Real Estate) and F. J. Birss. Mrs. Hole, as his landlady, also wrote her name in the plush book.

Many of the men were lodge friends of Dr. Thompson since he had joined the A. O. U. W., a benefit lodge popular in Nebraska for many years. At least one of these men became a state figure, William B. Price, a lawyer. Price vowed "eternal friendship" keeping up a desultory correspondence for several years. But meeting in Lincoln thirty-five years later Price's political career and his exceptional resemblance to the Great Commoner, William Jennings Bryan, whom he aped in dress and hair style, had gone to his head. Then, too, Thompson was as strong a Republican as Price was a Democrat.

A newspaper, yellow and fragile with age—another treasure from the round-top trunk, explains the story of Dr. Thompson's second Nebraska location. *The Hendley Rustler* Volume 1, No. 20, December 31, 1887, was issued with several hundred extra copies to "send one or more to eastern friends and let them know what we have and can do in this part of western Nebraska." Dr. Thompson had received one of the papers. (a) This was the come-on method employed by many boom towns still unplatted, together with the glowing brochures and pamphlets broadcast in this country and abroad by the railroads.

The special edition of *The Hendley Rustler* printed the history of Hendley, which had been surveyed in the spring of 1887 with high hopes of the usual bright western future. It started the rumor that Hendley, inhabitants 100, would have the second railroad. Biographies of first settlers were

included. The town boasted eight stores, a livery barn, a lumber yard, a grain and stock market, a hotel, two banks and a drug store. Hendley needed other things! These they listed: First, "Hendley wants—a doctor." Second on the list was a milliner and last, a canning factory.

Evidence thus points to the fact that Dr. Thompson was the first physician to practice at Hendley, Nebraska. The wildest tales he often told came from this territory, located in the most desolate country he had ever seen.

There were no roads in western Nebraska in 1888. Buffalo grass covered the hills while the canyons were chasms to avoid. The coyotes howling and howling at night added the final dismal note to the vast loneliness of Furnas County.

To guide him on night calls on those trackless hilltops and deep canyons, the doctor had a small brass lantern which swung back and forth from the underside of the buggy. Many of his patients lived in sod houses and dugouts. One night he failed to find his patients though he had driven for hours. He finally got out of the buggy hoping to find a guiding landmark. A man appeared from nowhere, frightened children crowding his elbow.

"Get out of here," shouted the man angrily. "What do you think you're doing! Get off my house!"

Dr. Thompson had stopped his team on the roof of his to-be-patient's home. It was a partial dugout and sod house.

Distances between patients were counted in dogged miles. A forty mile drive was all in the day's work. While many a western doctor covered his territory on horseback, Dr. Thompson always drove a buggy and his team, Jim and Old Black.

Bills were difficult to collect for a man of Dr. Thompson's temperament—his gentleness and his religious beliefs—a man who never in his lifetime sent a statement to any minister of the gospel.

At Hendley he once took a lien on a man's hogs. The man, a bully, owed him a debt. One day a friend of Dr. Thompson's tore into his office and excitedly told him that the debtor had loaded the hogs to run them over the state line into Kansas to sell. Dr. Thompson hurried to the livery stable where he harnessed his black team. At a mad pace he lashed the horses, he had to reach the Kansas line before the hogs could be taken across.

The two men met near the line on the Nebraska side. They recognized each other from a distance—and halted. Dr. Thompson scrambled out of his buggy first and, unarmed, walked steadily toward the man on the wagon. The other man got slowly off his wagon, taking up from the front seat beside him a heavy leather whip with loaded handle and long leather thong known as a blacksnake or bull-whack whip. This he coiled and recoiled as he strode toward the doctor. Never flinching or moving a step the doctor stood his ground, his eyes relentlessly fastened on the face of his opponent. He waited for the lash of the snapping leather. Closer and closer the man came. He suddenly stopped. Dr. Thompson began talking to him in his moderate, soft, easy voice. At last the man broke into tears.

"Get back on your wagon. Take the hogs back to Hendley," ordered Dr. Thompson.

The man mounted his load, turned it around and drove north. He didn't try the trick again.

August 1888, Dr. Thompson was listed as a candidate for County Coroner on the Furnas County Republican ticket. Captain J. M. Lee of Oxford, A. Y. Wright of Arapahoe and Samuel L. Farmer of Edison were running for the offices of Representative, County Attorney and Commissioner of the 1st District respectively on the same ticket. It was a Republican landslide in Furnas County with General Benjamin Harrison elected President of the United States. So Dr. Thompson became county coroner.

The first telegram of record in Dr. Thompson's coroner's capacity was from Beaver City, March 9, 1889. "Man found dead six miles west of Arapahoe. I'll be there. Come." Signed J. H. Knowles, Sheriff. This suspected murder turned out to be a sudden death from heart disease.

The stark austerity of the area made the inhabitants murder conscious. The famous murder case of Furnas County was that of Joseph Plummer which occurred "between the hours of 12 midnight and 1 A.M. June 23, 1889." Dr. Thompson and Sheriff Knowles of Beaver City reached the scene about noon Sunday and immediately impaneled a jury to hold an inquest. J. W. Thompson, coroner, decided that Joseph Plummer came to his death by a shotgun wound and that the shooting was felonious. State papers carried the story as well as papers of small neighboring towns, each of which published a weekly newspaper.

In Dr. Thompson's scrapbook, the story came from *The Hendley Rustler*—E. A. Carpenter, Editor and Proprietor, Friday, June 28, 1889. Dr. Thompson and Dr. Aiken of Cambridge conducted a post-mortem examination of the body. After some testimony had been taken, George Plummer, the brother, who had had a falling out in the partnership with his brother Joseph, and John Jones where George had gone to live after the quarrel—were arrested.

Joseph Plummer's funeral was conducted at the home of Joseph Wolfe under the auspices of the Farmers Alliance, an organization popular in western Nebraska at the time. The sermon was preached by Rev. A. B. Chapin, pastor of the M.E. Church of Cambridge. Several hundred people followed the remains to the Meyers cemetery—the Meyers being among the earliest settlers in the county.

The sheriff, J. H. Knowles, had notices printed at Beaver City, Nebraska, June 28, 1889, offering \$600 reward "For the arrest and conviction of the murderer of Joseph Plummer, who was shot on the night of June 22, 1889, 8 miles southeast of Cambridge, Furnas County, Nebraska." No one ever claimed the reward.

Dr. Thompson always said the murder was so unmistakably premeditated that in spite of the fact a conviction was not obtained, old-timers could but would not name the murderer. Dr. Thompson had gone over the scene so thoroughly with the sheriff he could reconstruct the shooting. He said someone with restless feet had waited for hours behind a knoll, smoking and beating down the grass. Joseph Plummer, who had attended a meeting of the Farmers Alliance that night, would have to pass this knoll to reach home. Also, Plummer had been shot at close range leading him to believe the victim had been killed by someone he knew. His horse with its empty saddle had gone on home where it was found early the next morning by Plummer's widowed mother.

Another favorite story of the canyon country was that of a would-be-suicide. The man, whose name cannot be recalled, finished with life by drinking a deadly poison. Friends discovering his plight sent for Dr. Thompson. The young doctor prepared an emetic at once. There his troubles began. The man was having no emetic—he still wanted to die. Assisted by the other men, the doctor managed to pour all the antidote down the man's throat. The patient threatened constantly: "I'll get you for this, Doc. I'll get you if it's the last thing I do. You make me live and you'll pay for it. I'll get even."

Dr. Thompson's story did not end with his saving the man's life. The man got to coming to town with his wagon, not alone, but always accompanied by his shot gun. If Dr. Thompson got the first look at his reluctant patient, he stayed off the street until the ingrate had driven home. After that whenever the man came to town the doctor sat in his office up one flight of stairs, straining his ears for the sound of ponderous footsteps which never came. By that time the young doctor had no illusions concerning western civilization. Once Dr. Thompson did inadvertently walk on the streets of Hendley not knowing his threatener had come in. There he was sitting straight and stiff on his high wagon seat holding the inevitable shot gun. Dr.

Thompson's back crawled as he passed the vehicle. According to his story, he walked calmly, as he always did, about his business—all the time expecting to be shot in the back.

One quiet day the footsteps did come. Dr. Thompson knew the man was in town. The steps thumped relentlessly up the stairs and down the hall to the doctor's office. The doctor looked up. There stood the man who willed to die—and couldn't. Whether he was armed the storyteller never told. The doctor rose fearfully. The man came close, grasped his hand tightly and, in a voice hoarse with emotion, he thanked the doctor for his life.

"I've come to pay my bill," he said.

In the meantime, back at Belvidere, a report had gone the rounds of the town that a young doctor who had gone from Belvidere had been killed in the west. "Fears have been entertained for the safety of Dr. J. W. Thompson, who went from here to Furnas county some time ago Perhaps we may be able to give our readers some information in regard to it, next week." (From *The Era* published at Belvidere, Thayer county.)

The May 25th, 1888 issue of the same paper stated: "Word has been received from Dr. J. W. Thompson, in the wilds of Furnas county, to the effect that he is alive and well. The rumor mentioned last week has not been substantiated."

It was at Hendley Dr. Thompson received word of the second break in his large family circle. The gay yellow pieces of note paper, written in a round childish hand abruptly ceased, leaving a thin bundle in the trunk. Hattie, the little sister of Dr. John, died of typhoid fever. The childish news of the eggs she gathered, the meagerness of Christmas without their father, the stupendous excitement of possessing a few pennies, was over. It was a time of sadness and defeat for the lonely brother.

Then a telegram came from Belvidere, July 27, 1889 to Dr. J. W. Thompson at Hendley stating: "Mulvain is

dead. Strang is left without a doctor. Come." Signed McCaw, Birss, and Marshall.

Dr. Thompson's life could be mapped by pieces of paper for the next chronological evidence turning up in his old trunk was a yellow sheet of Wells, Fargo and Co's Express, dated at Hendley, August 13, 1889. It read: "Received from I. A. Pierce 1 Trunk. Valued at: asked—None given. Addressed J. W. Thompson, Strang, Nebr." Charges \$1.25. There could be no value set on a trunk filled with memories.

By this time Nebraska was definitely growing up. March 1891, the State Board of Health was born regulating the practice of medicine in the state. Dr. Thompson received certificate No. 217 entitling him to practice medicine, surgery and obstetrics, August 21, 1891, five years after he came into Nebraska that hot August day.

On October 28, 1891, Dr. Thompson married Alice E. Clark of Sutton, Nebraska. Miss Clark was the eldest daughter of Dr. Martin V. and Mary D. Henry Clark, originally of Cleveland, Ohio, Clay County pioneers of 1871.

Miss Clark's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Shaffer, of Strang introduced the two young people. Shaffer was the druggist at Strang and liked John Wesley Thompson M.D. as soon as he saw him. His wife Sarah was Allie's (nickname for Alice) blood relation and Allie was her aunt's and uncle's favorite. "We have a promising young doctor in Strang," wrote Aunt Sarah. "Jake thinks you had better come down and meet him. Come for a long visit."

Before his marriage, in a letter he began to his cousin John Mahan in Ohio, December 29, 1889, but never finished, he wrote: "Last week I drove almost night and day. I booked over \$60 during the week. It makes more work than I like. If I were like you I would perhaps like "lots" of work and money but as it is I have no one to whom to —" There the letter ended.

While in Strang the high wheel bicycle appeared. Dr. Thompson tired of carrying on a heavy practice besides taking care of his horses thought the bicycle would lessen his work. He purchased the new style wheel and took to the country roads. After arriving home on hot days red-faced and winded, his wife told him she thought the wheel took too much effort. He agreed. Dr. Thompson went back to horses.

Even life with horses wasn't too easy. The pair which had pulled the buggies those hard years at Belvidere, at Hendley, at Strang, were named Jim and Old Black. Dr. Thompson had to part with them in Strang. Because of his mother's illness in Ohio he had left a Strang man to look after the horses during his absence. On his return he discovered his faithful team had been ruined. They had picked up two bad traits! They shied at everything they saw—they cut all corners at top speed.

Dr. Thompson accommodated the swing of the buggy on the corners by leaning far forward over the dashboard. One neighbor woman seeing the doctor negotiate a corner in such fashion for the first time forgot she was holding her baby, threw the baby in the corner of the porch and ran toward the road screaming. The buggy righted itself. Once coming in late at night the weary doctor had bedded down his horses, gone up the ladder to the hay loft to throw down some hay when Old Black reared up, grabbed the seat of his pants and pulled him back down the ladder. He expected to be struck by vicious hoofs when he found himself on the floor. Old Black, however, made no further movement.

In 1899 a clipping again tells us that Dr. Thompson moved. This time to Sutton, Nebraska where he bought the practice and residence of Dr. J. M. Birkner who was moving to Lincoln. This move, too, was made in August, a fateful month for the doctor.

With this deal went a private telephone system, poles and wire—but no central. Two houses and the office were

on the circuit with each having its own number of turns of the crank. Number one was the office ring, two the doctor's home and three, the home of the driver. Emil F. Stover, age 23, a young German boy who supported his mother and two younger brothers, who had driven for Birkner for years, was also in the deal. Since Sutton had become essentially a German community, a new doctor with a non-German name would be shut out by the German clan. Dr. Thompson needed Emil Stover. Stover, skeptical of the young man from Ohio, hired himself out to another German doctor by the name of Benning. Thompson's progress was nil. He just couldn't break the shell of the clannish German people.

In the meantime, Emil Stover who had ridden all the country miles with Birkner, watching and probably assisting when necessary, had his own ideas of practicing medicine. It wasn't Benning's methods. So one day Emil strode into Dr. Thompson's office begging for the job he was supposed to have taken in the first place. Thompson gladly accepted him. The big, over six-foot Stover with the slouching, purposeful gait, eyes slightly askew but gimlet eyes that were steady and steadfast, at times tender, and Thompson became friends over which time had no control.

Together the men rode in a small buggy—on wheels in summer and often on runners in winter. Pulled by the team of broncos the men were sometimes thrown headfirst in snowbanks on the turns. It wasn't unusual for the doctor and his driver to stagger in at midnight or later after hours on the road with such heavy icicles and hoar frost eyebrows that their eyes were almost invisible.

The horses at Sutton, now numbered four, plus an old Indian pony called Barney, the only horse brought from Strang. The horses were named Pet and Doc, a phlegmatic pair; Teddy Roosevelt and Mark Hanna, broncos, tough as barbed wire and as mean. It took a leviathan to hold them, which Emil Stover did, with feet braced against the

dashboard and lines wrapped several times about his capable hands.

All sorts of stories about incidents occurring during the country practice of the doctor, some in his early Sutton career, likely helped to establish his reputation. These stories have been revealed by older residents from time to time. One man, the late O. W. Fenske of Sutton, told of his first meeting with the unknown from the east.

"A bachelor living southeast of Sutton became critically ill. Young fellows in the locality took turns caring for him. He grew steadily worse. Whatever they were doing to alleviate his suffering only caused him to sink deeper into violent delirium."

"There's a new man at Sutton. He's taking Birkner's place. Let's send for him," suggested Fenske, an admirer of Birkner's. Birkner had been known as the ruthless, hard, handy-with-the-knife type having been a German army officer, but he was the type the Germans knew best and respected.

Fenske was astonished at the demeanor of the meek, deliberate doctor who swung his arms as he walked, his medicine case also swinging in a semi-arc. He was an odd type to take bluff Birkner's place. The sick man on his pallet on the floor had slammed more than one nurse friend against the opposite wall.

"Be careful, Doc," warned Fenske. "He'll suddenly roll back, draw up his legs and kick hard enough to put you across the room."

"I've been kicked before," said Doc. He knelt down beside his patient.

"He wasn't kicked. The man got well, too," told Fenske in admiration.

In 1906, Dr. Thompson purchased his first automobile. It was a second hand Cadillac with a chain drive. It was early automation spelling the end of the close companion-

ship of the doctor and his friend Emil Stover. Gradually Emil began a dray line as he drove the car less and less until he had his own business established.

Drifting roads in winter made early car travel hazardous. Once, following an unusually heavy blowing snowfall, Dr. Thompson was called out to see William Stoldorf living southeast of Sutton. He was having an attack of gall stone colic, a serious malady for him. Farm neighbors knew the roads were impassable and invisible. At the first drift Dr. Thompson was met by a group of men on horseback and in lumber wagons. A road was tramped in areas where drifts had covered roads and fences. It took all day to cover twelve miles, make the call and return. Dr. Thompson told afterward that when he did reach Stoldorf, the colic had subsided. Smiling the patient was sitting weakly on the side of his bed.

It was during this period that Dr. Thompson's family scarcely knew him. He came home to dinner when his children were in bed and left before they were up. During epidemics of quarantinable diseases the fumes of carbolic acid and formaldehyde he used as disinfectants brought streaming eyes to his family and cracked, dry, bleeding hands to himself. A long, black overcoat protected his clothing when he made a call in a quarantined home.

His specialization was obstetrics. Of record he listed names of 1259 children and their parents. 858 were born between 1903 and the fall of 1920, an average of 50.4 births per year for 17 years. He was proud of his record of babies saved and he lost almost no woman in childbirth. \$10 was charged for obstetrical cases during most of the period. This included needed repair work and return calls. The top fee later became \$25.

Among Dr. Thompson's effects were many cases of instruments. One particular roll indicated he had been a pioneer physician. This roll held a complete set of dental forceps as removing an aching tooth was the only dental remedy in those early days. A doctor in a frontier town

had to be able to extract teeth—without the aid of local anesthetics, not mentioning antibiotics. Until about the turn of the century Dr. Thompson had use for these dental instruments. Later Dr. Thompson refused to extract even one tooth whether the patient was a good friend or a family member. He referred all to dentists.

The nights without sleep, the irregularity of meals, or no meals at all, took their toll. If a family where he was making a lengthy call did not offer him food, he would ask for none. No argument of his wife to the contrary would change his habit. Once after many hours without food he went to a restaurant for hot soup. He became so dizzy he had to go outside for fresh air. There he slipped down beside the building almost unconscious, too worn to stand.

He began to think of retiring. In the fall of 1920 he opened an office in Lincoln. His daughter was attending the University of Nebraska. His son, John Clark, was a house physician in the employ of Drs. Harry and Oliver Everett of the Lincoln Sanitarium, located for many years at the southeast corner of 14th and M Streets in Lincoln. (O'Shea Rogers' used car and truck department stands above the capped artesian well where many a patient's health was mended by salt-saline baths.)

Twice returning to Chicago for post-graduate work, Dr. Thompson had become imbued with the idea that if his son decided to become a doctor he wanted him to attend Rush Medical College in Chicago. His son had just been graduated from Rush not only with high honors but with the distinction of being the Number 1 man of his class.

The culmination of his manhood's dream, which began when the boy was born, came in 1926 when his son decided to do post-graduate work at the University of Wein in Vienna, Austria. That year the Federal Trust Building was being built in Lincoln on the northeast corner of 13th and N Streets. Dr. John C. Thompson contracted for floor space in the building as it would be completed before his return from Europe. In the blue print there was a room

designated as an office for his father, Dr. John W. Thompson. The legend put up like a sign on Dr. John Wesley Thompson's office door in Strang by J. A. Shaffer the first morning after John C. was born read in awkward letters: "Dr. Thompson and Son." After thirty years it was to be "Dr. Thompson and Son." But

"The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it."

The son had just reached Vienna to begin his work when he received a cable that his father had died of lobar pneumonia November 13, 1926.

Dr. Thompson was a sincere, faithful Christian and student of the Bible. He believed faith and prayer helped his profession. He thought prayer only had saved some of his patients as he felt their recovery was out of his hands. He was a deacon of the First Congregational Church of Sutton for many years. He was a Mason and an Odd Fellow. He was buried at the Sutton Cemetery. His friend, Emil Stover, stood by, superintending the digging of the grave for *his* friend and watching until it was closed. John W. Thompson was not the only member of that Ohio family buried in Nebraska soil—an uncle, Wesley K. Mahan, a forty-niner, lies in an unknown grave somewhere on the north fork of the Platte River.

So ended the life of the pioneer country doctor. Fulfillment of a man's dreams oftentimes has a habit of skipping a generation for Dr. Thompson's grandson, the grandson he never saw, John Secord Thompson, has been in medical practice with his father at his father's clinic in Lincoln, Nebraska.

MEMORABILIA OF J. W. THOMPSON, M.D.

NEWSPAPERS — HENDLEY RUSTLER, December 31, 1887, THE ERA (Belvidere) January 13, 1888, THE KALEIDOSCOPE (Cambridge) August 17, 1888, STRANG REPORTER, August 4, 1899.

Clippings from THE ERA, May 18 and May 25, 1888, THE HENDLEY RUSTLER, Friday, June 28, 1889.

Autograph Album of Dr. J. W. Thompson with comic valentine—Belvidere, 1887.

CERTIFICATES—Starling Medical College 1883-1884, Southern Nebraska District Medical Society, Sept. 28, 1887, State Board of Health No. 217, August 21, 1891, Nebraska State Medical Society, May 12, 1892, Clay County Medical Society April 17, 1903, 2 Teacher's Certificates, Feb. 28, 1880 and May 20, 1882.

Contract—Dr. J. M. Birkner and Dr. J. W. Thompson, Sutton, Nebr. June 28, 1899.

Other papers—A.O.U.W. Membership, January 30, 1892, Questions in Surgery, Starling Medical College 1884-1885, Note, Lehr, August 10, 1880, Part of letter to Cousin, J. A. Mahan, December 29, 1889, Sheriff Knowles' Reward posting, Beaver City, Nebr., June 28, 1889, 3 old programs, 2 Telegrams—Knowles to JWT, March 9, 1889, From Belvidere, McCaw, Birss and Marshall to JWT at Hendley, July 27, 1889, Note from law offices of McClure and Anderson, Beaver City, April 4, 1889, Wells, Fargo Receipt—Hendley, Verifax copies of old stationery and Chattel Mortgage for hogs, Furnas County, Nov. 27, 1888.

Original copy of chattel mortgage.

Photographs—J. W. Thompson in early eighties attending college, J. W. Thompson Belvidere, October 23, 1887, J. W. Thompson about 1891, Alice Clark Thompson (Mrs. J. W.) a pioneer coming into state in 1871—about time of marriage Oct. 28, 1891, J. W. Thompson, Sutton, about 1908, Clay County Medical Society—date about 1914 or 1916, J. W. Thompson—office in Bankers Life Bldg., 14th and N Sts., Lincoln, Sept. 1920-Nov. 1926, 3 old western photos from Hendley 1888, (a) Heartwell Hotel where Thompson had his office at Hendley?, (b) and (c) Sod dwellings.

Edith Thompson Hall photos—The brass lantern and a later model attached to buggy; the old trunk which came into the state in 1886—76 years old.

Sign on Dr. Thompson's office door the morning after his son, John Clark Thompson was born.

"Diary"—Very small, dated May 26, 1886.