

Doctor



Ida and Dr. Lloyd E. Noble

Dr. Lloyd E. Noble

Dr. Lloyd E. Noble was the only doctor in Rhodes for forty-two years. When he came here in June of 1903, he was newly married, and had just completed a four year course in medicine at Keokuk Medical College, Keokuk, Iowa, graduating in a class of fifty-two men and five women.

The new M.D. degree had not come easily. With no family wealth behind him, he had earned his own way. He had worked for the two Brimhall brothers in State Center, both in the drug and furniture stores, and at the Mortuary. Investing in a good camera, he also worked as a free lance photographer in Keokuk. Very independent, he did not like to accept gifts he had not earned, yet he remembered all his life the friend who gave him a much needed warm overcoat. Most of the time he lived by himself in a small room and did his own cooking. When money ran low, he used to say, he subsisted almost entirely on oatmeal! In his last year he grew a beard, hoping to begin practice looking older than his twenty-five years.

His first office was on Main Street. House calls in town were made on foot, but when he was called to the country he rode a horse. One horse was so unmanageable it had to be blindfolded while the Doctor mounted; then as his wife jerked the blindfold away, horse and rider plunged out the door and down the street at a fast gallop. Sometime later he had a horse and buggy, and much later, an automobile.

The Doctor had one of the first cars in Rhodes, a

1911 model Brush. There were no doors and room for only two people. A small stool was placed on the floor so four year old Donald could ride safely between his parents feet. The next car was a two cylinder Maxwell, followed by a big Hupp in 1916, and the first of four Dodges in 1918. His first sedan was an Essex, and after that, as we remember, came an Overland, Star, Durant, Gray, several Plymouths, and finally, a Dodge that he kept until 1963.

His second office was part of the house he built in 1906. There were two rooms, with an outside entrance, and doors opening into the living quarters.

Iowa roads were long noted as being difficult after a light rain, and impassable after a heavy rain or a spring thaw. When a call came from the country and the roads were bad, he often hired a driver and a car, wagon or buggy, whatever would get through. Charley Dewey was his most frequent driver, but there were others. Snow-blocked roads were another problem. Sometimes he would go as far as the roads were open, to be met by the farmer with a team and bobsled. In winter weather he wore a sealskin fur cap with ear flaps, a muffler, a long sheepskin lined overcoat, high shoes and four buckle overshoes. As the years went by, some roads were graveled and later paved, snow plows came into use.

Before there was a telephone switchboard in Rhodes, several party lines from the country were connected to the Doctor's home. This was convenient,

but noisy, with so many phones ringing, and they were glad to get a private line. The Doctor never left the house without telling his family where he could be reached. Now, if there would be no one at home, he called Central, told her where he would be and the approximate time he would be home, and she relayed this information to those who called.

He was the Milwaukee Railroad physician for that area, and was sometimes called to the station to treat a passenger with a sudden illness. A young woman in labor was once taken from the train to the Doctor's home, and she and her child were cared for there until she was able to travel.

In an emergency he had the authority to stop any train, and he sometimes sent patients east to Pickering, where they transferred to the M & St. L for Marshalltown. On one occasion when the roads were blocked, he made a diagnosis by phone of acute appendicitis and arranged for a train to stop at a crossing near the man's home. The patient was taken to Marshalltown, had surgery at the hospital, and made a good recovery, without ever seeing his own doctor.

He was a busy man. He practiced in both Marshalltown hospitals, consulted with other doctors, recommended surgeons and specialists, sent, and sometimes accompanied difficult cases to Des Moines, Iowa City or Rochester. He administered the anaesthetic, ether or chloroform, when one of his patients was in surgery.

Most bedfast patients who did not require surgery were cared for at home. For typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, cancer, pneumonia, polio, and other serious diseases, the doctor was called and the doctor went to the patient, sometimes returning day after day, or week after week, as he was needed. In each household he decided which family member would be the best nurse, and gave her his detailed instructions.

Some minor surgery was done in the homes, by two doctors working together. Dr. Lloyd and his brother, Dr. Earl of Clemons, often assisted each other. But for the most part, he worked alone. When another pair of hands was needed in the office, he called on his wife, one of his sons, or anyone else available.

About 1911, he had a number of polio cases that did not seem to be connected, but were in the same general area. After the epidemic was over he did some investigating and discovered there were some connecting links between all these cases. He found pasture fences where the cattle from two farms would often gather in the heat of the day and hordes of flies would move freely from one herd to the other. In the evening the cattle returned to their own barnyards. He drew a map and wrote a paper which he presented at the County Medical Society. The doctors there listened politely, but showed no interest. Disappointed, but not a crusader, he went no farther with the matter. Years later it was established that flies were indeed responsible for the spread of this disease.

The Doctor was in his yard one day when a neighbor, Mrs. Hix, was passing by on the sidewalk. They exchanged a few words and the Doctor recognized the very early symptoms of deadly tetanus, or lockjaw. He took her immediately to Marshalltown and he and Dr. Keyser saved her. Such early symptoms are rarely noticed.

We do not know what he charged for his services in the early days of his practice but we have been told that at one time it was a \$1.00 for a country call, "but if it seemed to him that they were in poor circumstances, he would say, 'this is on me', and forget it." About this time he got 25¢ for pulling a tooth. Later he had a price schedule of: office call - 75¢, town call - \$1.25, country call - \$1.50 to \$1.75. The cost of a baby gradually rose from \$10 to \$30. A broken arm was \$9. Other physicians in the area protested his low prices and repeatedly tried to persuade him to raise them, but he refused. He thought higher rates would impose a hardship on many of his patients, and accused the doctors of enriching themselves at the expense of those they had sworn to serve. On occasion he reduced prices, or accepted produce, meat or grain as payment.

Dr. Noble was best known as an obstetrician. His early records were not complete, but he was sure he had delivered around 1000 babies, a large number for a country practitioner. And in those thousand cases, he never lost a mother, a very unusual record. He never knew anyone who could match it. It was probably due to his meticulous care to avoid infection. Women who had been told by other physicians that they could not live through another birth came through in good shape. Through long hours of pain and waiting, all day and into the night, or all night and into the next day, however long it was, he stayed with those mothers. Calm, quiet, competent, he never left them and they never forgot him. Among his cases were his own three children and his three oldest grandchildren.

All but two of these cases were home deliveries. He did not trust the maternity wards in hospitals, aware of how difficult it was to control infection there, and knowing of some careless incidents. In the late years of his practice, when he was beginning to give up the obstetrical work, Luther and Louise Hix asked him to deliver their baby in the hospital and he agreed and on November 9, 1939, Matt Hix became his first hospital baby. The very last baby he delivered, also in the hospital, was Miriam Hix on September 18, 1944.

In 1943 he sold his home, moved across the street to the Gray property but retained the office rooms. In 1944 he moved to Marshalltown, coming back to the office two days a week. The office was closed in 1945, and Dr. and Mrs. Noble moved to Loveland, Colorado, where they both died in 1963.

*Submitted by
Carrie Noble*