

THOMAS FAMILY PIONEERS

Roe Thomas

My grandfather, James Smith Thomas, was an early resident of Mayfield, arriving there before 1850. This article is about two of his eight children. One of them, John Thomas, was an uncle of mine. Some of the information here was in the *Mayfield Messenger* of January 27, 1935.

The other part of this article was written by my father, Edmund Gibson Thomas, M.D., a pioneer physician in the Purchase. This was a speech he delivered in the spring of 1923 before either the Kentucky or the Southwest Kentucky Medical Association. At that time he had been practicing medicine for fifty years, and these are some of his reminiscences. My father's speech was transcribed from his writing on tablet paper. He lived from 1852 until June 1933.

JOHN THOMAS OF MAYFIELD

If you would live beyond the allotted span of "three score years and ten", get plenty of exercise, spend much time out of doors and hunt or fish. This is the philosophy of John R. Thomas, Mayfield's oldest native born citizen, who observed his eightieth birthday yesterday. He is the son of the late Smith Thomas, pioneer Mayfieldian.

Mr. Thomas, custodian of the First Christian Church for the past fifteen years, has lived through the age of grease lamps, candles, kerosene lamps and incandescent or electric lights. He has seen Mayfield grow from a few hundred to a thriving community of eight to ten thousand and has watched the progress of the community from the days before the railroad to the present with its railroads, bus routes, airplanes, radios, telephone, telegraph and talking pictures.

Mr. Thomas, giving a few highlights of history of Mayfield, said today: "I was born in Mayfield January 26, 1855, on the corner of Seventh and North Streets, now the site of the Fuller-Gilliam Hospital. Soon afterwards my parents moved to the east corner of the same square on Sixth and North streets and later they moved to South Sixth and Backusburg road where my mother lived the rest of her life. She died September 1, 1905. My father died in 1917 at the age of 90.

"I attended my first school in the old red brick building now surrounded by the Curlee clothing plant, the place then being owned by John Eaker. My teacher was James Coulter, who afterwards moved to Tennessee. Then I went on short term on North Ninth street about where Gus Greene now lives. We also had a schoolhouse about the center of the present Merit clothing factory and during those days we were taught by Jasper Mason and Gabe Wilkerson. Then I attended one term of school over the First National Bank and that school was taught by John Harvey, who sometime later moved his school out on North Twelfth street. But my school days were

finished at the old brick seminary that stood on North Eighth street at the top of the hill. The school property there ran from the railroad east to Seventh street and was about 100 yards wide. The school was taught at that time by Campbell Greenup.

"My first recollection of Mayfield was when I was about six years old, when I attended the burial of Kick Mayes in Anderson cemetery. When I was about 12 or 14 years old, the first mill to weave cloth in Mayfield was started by Jim Eaker, James Breckenridge, Zack Thomas and Smith Thomas, my father, and my first work during my school days on Saturdays and Sunday [was] handing warp for the looms to weave jeans cloth and blankets and they also made knitting yarn; later it was my job to double the yarn and twist and put in hanks ready for sale. I have done many kinds of work. After I left the mill, I was a clerk in the hardware store owned by George Bolinger and my father. The store was on South Sixth street about where Will Dunn's Cafe now is. I farmed ten or twelve years later and ran for city marshall and was elected by the people. I recall many funny incidents while serving as marshall and holding court upstairs over the market house on the east side of the square. Most of Mayfield's business district was then on the east and north sides of the square and farm crops grew on much of what is now residences in all directions from the courthouse.

"When W. S. Cook [was] sheriff, I was with him as deputy through his term and also a part of the term of Sam Douthitt. When Gus Coulter was state auditor, I was clerk in the land department of the auditor's office and was also with Judge Hager his four-year term as auditor. At the close of Judge Hager's term, I was elected doorkeeper of the Kentucky Senate for the 1908 session, then the Republicans took over the state offices and we all had to come home. Since that time I was sexton at Maplewood cemetery and my last fifteen years have been spent in taking care of the First Christian church.

"When I was a small boy, there were only four brick buildings around the court square, one where Newberry's store is located, one on the north side of Sixth and Broadway, one used as a residence between Sixth and Seventh and where the First National Bank now stands. On the west side of Seventh street, now occupied by the Hall Hotel, a frame building was used as a hotel by Charles McDonald and on the south side where the Mayfield drug store is located, a frame building was used as a hotel by John Bailey Anderson, who soon moved to Texas. On the south side of the court square there were two residences owned and occupied by William Beadles and John Bolinger. Where the Nochlin and Charles stores are now, were a stable and horse lot. The first brick courthouse in Mayfield, court was held on the ground floor. I think the first church building was put up by the Baptists and it was located where the city hall is located now. All the children attended Sunday school there. The next church was built by the Methodists on South Eighth street.

"They later built on the corner of Eighth and Broadway and still later on South and Seventh then to the present location. The First Christian church

was built in 1868 on North Ninth street about where Gus Green now lives and the congregation then built where the church is now in the year of 1907. The Presbyterians, I think, established their first church on North Eighth street and later moved to the present church. The first bank in Mayfield was started by William Beadles on the east side of the court square. He later moved to Paducah and operated a bank there. Among the early families of Mayfield were the Andersons, McNutts, Gardners, Canters, Rodgers, Cargills, Eakers, Whitmores, Tolberts, Boones, Mayes, Hamlets, Boyds, McElwraths, McDonalds, Mathis, Ridgways, Reynolds, Bolingers, Thomases, Robbins, Lochridges, Johnsons, and Mellons.

"There was a well in the northeast corner of the court square, the well being very deep and scores of families depended on it for their water supply. The first circus exhibited in the block south of Water and Seventh streets and I remember Joe Hamlet and I watered the elephants on a lot where the Noble Gregory residence now stands. The first "flying jenny" merry-go-round I remember was operated at the corner of Seventh and Water. Tobacco industry was among the first in Mayfield, there being two stemmeries near the railroad and also John Eaker put up plug tobacco in the early day. These are just a few of the things I recall during my 80 years in Mayfield."

E. G. THOMAS, M.D.

Having graduated in March 1873 at the University of Louisville with W. W. Richman of Clinton and others none of which I can now remember, I went home to Mayfield for a month, and then to Marshall County, aiming to stay there for a year to rub off some of the Green and then go back there or somewhere else, but I am still there rubbing off Green, and have some to spare yet, and have never lived any-where else and don't want to.

I reckon I am what you would call a country Dr., as I have never lived in a town or city since and never did anything but practice medicine, and I have seen some changes in theory and notions in that time.

I now have Three rather complete libraries that differ one from the other, as to make the reader believe that they were not all written by Drs but by tyroes of someother profession or at least by someone very poorly advised as to the theories and facts in the great healing art of cure and prevention of disease.

I began with the then accepted theory of the gifted T. S. Bell of Louisville, Miasmatic causes for all malarial infections, first vegetable matter in a state of decay with moisture and a continuous temperature of sixty degrees for Sixty days, to be breathed at night while asleep. Five minutes sleep being long enough for its effects to be felt but no danger whatever if awake all of the time from sunset until sunrise.

But this is some what changed as you all know, to the more spectacular

theory (but a true one) of the mosquito idea of transportation from one to another by her bite for food and sustenance having first bitten an infected person and taken up the Plasmodium with the Blood consumed, to be left with the next victim as she lubricates her Bill for action in a Skin puncture.

Malarial infections when I first began practice were the most frequent ailments, so much so that some Drs always diagnosed intermittent, remittent or pernicious fevers of Malarial origin, and they were nearly always right, as that was before the idea of the wire screen that has prevented so many million infections and saved so many thousand lives, but there has been no specific discovered, that is better or equal to the old reliable quinine, in an absorbable shape and sufficient quantity and long enough continued, but the wire screens have cost lots of us largely our job, as we see but little of the Malarial diseases now comparatively.

When the Mosquito lost her teeth the La Grippe came to our rescue and we had a new cause for all unusual complications, there were Drugs of the Grippe, and when that had worn thread bare and become too common to be used the accommodating Influenza (or Flue) as it was familiarly called, and we are riding that hobby now and will be for some time to come.

When I began to practice it seems to have been the gass age as we had no Germs then to lay every thing to, such as Microbes, Bacteria, Plasmodium, Cocci of the numerous strains as to his shape, staining qualities or mode of travel whether in groups, pairs or alone, we now try to find a special Germ for every disease (and often for each complication) and a Vaccine or Serum for its extermination, and some surprising successes have been the result but oftener failure after due trial is all that we have left for our efforts.

The country Dr does not cultivate the acquaintance of the Germs as much as the city Dr does (through the Pathologist) but I have often thought that he gets along just as well and is just as successful as his city Brother considering the scattered location of his patients and the distance he has to cover to see them and the lack of equipment, and the [lack] of help in times of need.

I distinctly remember my First case of labor. It was in July 1873, the Baby came into the world without help (as babies so often do) without help from the Dr and in spite of so many unnecessary reputed helps, and more the woman that I then attended is still living, my Second baby is living and will be fifty years old Aug. 1923 and is a Grand Father.

I have one family in which I have attended Three generations in child birth, and have several families that I have served as Family physician for Five generations.

I had the benefit of the best teaching in the College at the time but had never seen obstetrical Forceps used in actual practice, in the case of a woman until 1882 operated by D. G. Smith of Benton then, but afterward at Spring Hill.

The first time that I used Forceps was in 1885 and the subject of my manipulations is still living. The next week I got Forceps of my own and have used them frequently since, one woman Five times and Two other Three times each.

I always used the help on hand at the time and never called consultation as Drs were scarce and some times hard to get when wanted, but take the responsibility of both ends of the patient with ordinary success.

On one occasion all the women present backed down and asked to be excused if possible and I called Two men that were at hand and there was no woman in the room but the patient.

I used to employ Forceps only for the Mothers benefit and comfort until some Ten or Fifteen years back a boy by the name of Rhudolph was brought here to see a Specialist, the boy was afflicted with incoordination of the Muscles of his entire body at the age of Seven years and is so yet, the Specialist from Louisville after history and examination he said the cause was prolonged intense pressure of Uterine contractions for Thirty six hours, and since then I have used Forceps for the benefit and comfort of the child as much as the Woman.

Although I have always used Forceps alone and without help I would not advise anybody to make a practice of it, it is not best for Dr or patient and is not now necessary to take such risk.

Obstetrical cases were attended in a very Slip Shod, careless, and unscientific and ignorant manner with no thought of cleanliness or fear of infection, (something that they knew not of in an early day) but went in with no care of Hands or Instruments (often not washing their hands at all until they were through and going home most of them did then), and they used any old article about the lying in bed for protection of the bed, an old baby quilt or sometimes a Saddle blanket and no change of clothes for ten days, with no thought or dread of after trouble from the unnecessary risk, such Puerperal peritonitis, Phlegmasia Alba Dolens, or Puerperal or child bed fever, (as called then) and nearly always carried from patient to patient by the Dr on his Hands or instruments from carelessness through ignorance.

But the Technique is so different now with clean clothes of Patient, and a clean bed, and a fresh Towel with plenty of hot Water for the Dr without his calling for them and his Toilets is as careful as can be made under the circumstances, with directions to Keep everything as clean as possible with the results that Puerperal infections are now seldom met with in the country and Puerperal Fever is almost unknown.

But the biggest Knocker we backwoods fellows had to contend with was the Startling tales of the importance of the Appendix Vermiformis (that little and seemingly useless appendage at the juncture of the Large and Small Bowel) as we had always regarded these symptoms as, and so called it congestion and inflammation of the Bowel, and treated with Purgatives or Astringents as suited our fancy, with very indifferent success.

I can now recall my first case of Appendicitis and I made a very accurate and prompt diagnosis a year or more after the Funeral, But we are now on to the racket allright and turn them over to the surgeon and insist on a prompt and thorough operation in a Hospital if possible, as there is no medical treatment of value and much risk to life and comfort in delay.

But light has not only dawned on the Drs but the laymen have learned their lesson equally well and are not so hard to convince of the necessity of an operation, or to remain well by use of the (still few) reliable Vaxines and more intelligent living, and last but not least the Keeping of the wire screens intact and well adjusted, and listen to the advice of the county health officer and obey him.

Thanks to the Medical Societys or rather to the brave men who organized them and made them popular in the face of so much opposition as they had to contend with at the start, as they were considered by most of the people as times and places to raise prices and work dire calamities on the suffering people, and were condemned and slandered by some Drs in their ignorant prejudice.

The Society in its operation brings us to a One-ness in thought and action of the newer discoveries in Surgery, Medicine and Allied Siences and we can act as one man through exchange of ideas and experience in a friendly and earnest manner, just as anxious to learn as to teach.

The Society begets a fellow feeling a Brotherly Love that is unknown to the Stay Away, a polish in his Ethical treatment of another that is always noticeable in the regular attendant there are members here today and were in the past that so seldom are absent as to cause earnest inquiry as to the cause of their unavoidable absence and they are the fellows that make it so pleasant and profitable when they are in their usual places to the whole bunch of us.

I can recall quite a number of the ones who have gone to their long home and last reward, Peace to their Souls for they tried to help others as well as themselves and I can see the result of their conduct example and teaching in others that has rebounded to the general good of the layman, as well as the profession.

Some of the most notable are Brooks, Murrell and Rivers of Paducah, Dismukes, Landrum and Boyd of Mayfield and Coleman and Hart of Murray, and D. G. Smith and J. R. Trout of Benton, and Beeler of Clinton and some more from Paris, Tenn., Fulton and Pryorsburg, Ky. and some more that I cant name.

O please excuse me I have forgotten myself and run this out too long but where there is so much that is of interest it is so hard to exclude so many interesting points and people that we get lost but I can only beg your pardon for my long windedness and promise not to be guilty again.