

Dr. Walter W. Miles

The Last of the Country Doctors

Dr. Walter W. Miles was born in Allegheny County near Traphill, North Carolina in December 1896. He was the son of Reverend George and Ellen Gentry Miles. He grew up in a very nice family. His father was a preacher and a teacher; his mother was a housewife.

When Dr. Miles was a boy he had a job hauling crossties. This was done by placing them on a cart and rolling them on rails similar to railroads.

He attended school in Traphill and finished high school there. He then furthered his education at Fairview College. After finishing college, he taught for three years in Allegheny County. Then he moved to Wilkes County and taught school for several years, and was principal of Mount Pleasant High School.

While teaching at Mount Pleasant, he met Anna West and they started a courtship which ended in their getting married.

He taught for several years after his marriage, but he wanted to be a doctor. But his family did not want him to be a doctor. They said that he could not make an honest living that way. They did not believe a poor country boy could do very well in that kind of work. They said people would talk about him and would not like him. But, his wife backed him and said he could succeed and Dr. Miles proved he could.

In September of 1924, he decided to go to Chapel Hill to do his pre-med. He finished at Chapel Hill but there was not a medical school in North Carolina, so he went to the University of Tennessee at Memphis. He graduated in 1931 and served his internship at Memphis General Hospital. After he finished at the hospital he went to Traphill and practiced medicine awhile, then he went to Mount Pleasant where he continued his practice.

When Dr. Miles went to Mount Pleasant he purchased twenty-two acres of land and he and his wife lived there until 1946. Then he bought a larger farm on Naked Creek. He did most of his general practice there. At first, Dr. Miles had his office in the upstairs of his house but later he moved it downstairs. Mrs. Miles jokingly said her only objection was that she would lose her beautiful figure by not getting to run up and down the stairs.

Many times people would go to Mr. Miles but they would not have enough money to pay him. In these cases he would only put their debt down in his book and not say a word about it. Sometimes he would receive payment and sometimes he would not.

Children were never afraid of Dr. Miles. If they were he would gladly take time to talk to them and explain that he was not going to hurt them. He would not give a child a shot unless it was absolutely necessary because he thought that it would make the child scared and unwilling to go back to a doctor. If children would not take their medicine their parents would tell them that Dr. Miles sent it to them, then they would take it without fussing. All children liked him and enjoyed going to him.

Dr. Miles never got in a hurry. It has been said he moved so slowly a self-winding watch would not run on him. But if anyone was sick and could not get to the doctor, he would come to their house just as soon as possible and stay until they were better.

He never turned down but one patient and that was drunk man who came into the office and said some bad things about Dr. Miles and his medicine. Dr. Miles made him get out of his office.

If someone lived close by and moved away they would always remember him. Often they would come back just to visit him. Many people would go to Dr. Miles rather than go to other doctors nearer them because they liked him so well and he was very reasonable in his prices. Another reason was that he could give them the medicine at the office rather than making it necessary for them to go to a drugstore. Also he would talk to them and make them feel better. Through his counseling, he saved many couples from dissolving their marriage vows.

Dr. Miles did not keep records like other doctors. Instead, he had a book where he put down each patient's name and what medicine he gave them. In his book, he had what happened each Sunday, because he liked to look back and see where he was and what he did. When he treated a patient for high or low blood he had card on which to record this. He kept these alphabetically in a file.

Dr. Miles had his own medicine code. No one knew what it meant except him and his wife who was his nurse, too. He did not have a professional nurse but he taught his wife all that was necessary and she helped him.

He was a member of Mount Pleasant Baptist Church and was ordained a Baptist minister in 1954. He preached and lectured in many churches in the Wilkes County area. He also preached many revivals in Wilkes and surrounding counties. Many people filled the altar on request. He married several couples, too. Before he was ordained a preacher he was a church clerk at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. Mrs. Miles often said that first she married a teacher, then a doctor, then a preacher.

Although he was doctor and a preacher, it did not interfere with his sense of humor. It has been said that when he delivered a baby he would tell the other children that he found it in a hollow log. So one day he took a group of children to Dunkirk Church. There he let them out to go baby hunting. Dr. Miles stood by the car watching and laughing at them. They hunted for hours and hours but they did not find a baby.

Dr. Walter W. Miles, at the age of 68, died Friday, August 27, 1964 at 2:40 AM. He was stricken ill at his home in the Champion Community at Ferguson, Route 1, and was dead on arrival at Wilkes General Hospital.

The last entry of his records was not complete. The last complete entry was a follows: \$1.50 pd. Woman – 76 tab. = 92 w. t. = 43 B.

Dr. Miles was survived by his wife, two children, a son, Bruce Miles, and a daughter, Iva Dean Pennell, five grandchildren, and one great grandchild.

The death of Dr. Miles has proved to be a great loss to everyone who knew him, not only as a doctor, but as a preacher, friend, and neighbor. His passing away ended an era of “The Country Doctor.” Modernization determines no other beginning of this type of doctor.

Dina Church

Seventh Grade

Millers Creek Elementary School

1969 Wilkes Historical Society Essay Contest

1st Place

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