Born in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania and growing up in southwestern Iowa, my grandfather Robert Clendenin McClymonds became a Kansan and Harvey County resident in 1903. Having completed his medical studies at the Omaha College of Medicine (newly affiliated with the University of Nebraska), the doctor planned to establish a practice in California or Oregon. Traveling by train, he stopped by the Harvey County farm town of Walton to visit family friends known through the Presbyterian Church. He was almost immediately asked to set the broken arm of a local man (a service for which, according to family lore, he was never paid a fee). He also met the Gilchrist family -- parents Andrew Bryson Gilchrist and his wife Mary Catherine, with son Will and sisters Gertrude, Laura, Harriet, Golde, and Beulah, who lived on a farm east of Walton which they had homesteaded in the 1880s.

Given the fact that Doc McClymonds, as he came to be known, was in search of a new practice and that Walton was in need of a doctor, he decided to settle in the community. Four years later (1907) he married Beulah Buchanan Gilchrist, who would bear five children. The second child (Elizabeth Vance McClymonds, 1913-1998) was my mother.

The doctor's patients lived in Walton, in surrounding communities such as Goessel and Burrton, on farms, and in Newton, the county seat. In the early days of his practice he visited patients via horse and buggy, a transportation mode that he eagerly replaced with one of the first automobiles sold in Harvey County (it is fortunate that he did not become a veterinarian because he found horses cantankerous and generally useless).

Doc McClymonds also served his patients as pharmacist, providing custom-compounded medications to cure aches and pains. As children in the 1950's, my cousins, siblings, and I would marvel at the mysterious-looking jars and bottles of brightly colored liquids and pills in our grandfather's office. We learned never to disturb anything. (Although I do not recall now, more than 50 years later, ever being punished for violating this rule, I do vividly remember the severe implied consequences of such misbehavior.)

Fire struck Dr. McClymonds and his family twice -- once before World War II, when his office in downtown Walton burned, and in 1951, when the family's gracious five-bedroom frame home and personal mementos collected over decades burned to the ground on a bitterly cold Kansas Day (January
Following the office fire, his father in Iowa -- also a medical doctor -- sent a replacement rolltop desk and chairs.

Doc McClymonds celebrated the 50th anniversary of his Walton medical practice in 1953. Scores of patients, relatives, and well-wishers joined him and his wife to recognize his service to the community. John Watson, a reporter with the Wichita Eagle, covered the event in an article published August 10, 1953. My siblings and I continue to cherish brief 8-millimeter movies from this event, showing glimpses of our parents and their contemporaries at a time when everybody was enjoying post-World-War-II prosperity. Although the Cold War presented a dangerous threat, life seemed to us Kansas children simpler and happier in the pre-Sputnik, pre-assassination, and pre-Vietnam-War period.

As a 14-year-old living in Walton in 1957-58, I drove Doc McClymonds on rounds to patients. I learned how to wait quietly for him - - sometimes for an hour or longer -- as he visited with families whom he had served for generations. Perhaps economic realities cause patients today to complain about rushed service in a physician's office or hospital, but my grandfather would probably consider such treatment rude, if not unethical. He continued to make housecalls to patients until about six months before he died at Axtell Hospital in Newton on October 17, 1962, at the age of 83.

In addition to caring for those suffering illness and injury, Doc McClymonds delivered more than 4,000 babies during his long career. My sister, a cousin, and I were the last grandchildren he delivered in, respectively, 1938, 1941, and 1943. We entered the world at Axtell Hospital in Newton. I am proud of this heritage and still regard myself as a native of Harvey County.

For information on Doc McClymonds’s patients in 1911, please see this site in the online Kansas Collection: http://www.kancoll.org/articles/mcclymonds/rm_main.htm

For information on the Gilchrist family genealogy (with many photos and other images from Harvey County) please see: http://www.todroberts.com/gilchrist/gilchrist_reunion.htm

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