

Country doctor remembered

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"Monroe Arthur Thomas, 84, prominent physician of Houston County, died at his home

in Crockett May 12, 1950. Services were held May 13 at 2 p.m. at the First Christian Church of Crockett"

These words began the obituary column that was printed in the Houston County

Courier about Dr. Thomas, Houston County's own country doctor who is credited with delivering over 4,000 babies, "enough to populate a small Texas town," according to another Courier report by C.C. Springfield in a July 5, 1949 article.

Springfield also wrote, "That's almost enough to populate Crockett, listed as having 4,536 residents."

Monday, Dr. Thomas' grandson James Whitaker Thomas, 81, of Dallas, visited this east Texas community, specifically to donate documents, photos, a black medical bag and other sundry articles that represented the life and profession of his beloved grandfather, to the Houston County Visitor's Center located in the old railroad depot on East Goliad.

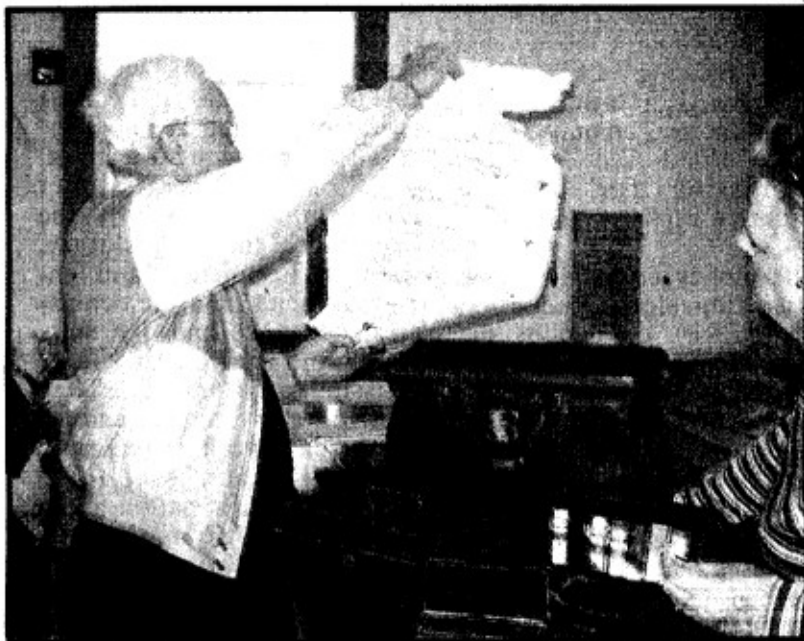
Dr. Thomas was born June 10, 1864 in Marshall County, Miss. He always wanted to be a doctor and succeeded in getting a medical education by saving his money earned from manual labor and later teaching school.

He graduated from Tulane University Medical School on April 1, 1891. He came to Houston County and resided with the family of David Blalock Webb of Kennard, fell in love with Webb's daughter Narcissa (Nollie) Frances and was married Dec. 2, 1892.

The couple had three children Arthur Elliott, Milton Gayle and Leona. The Thomas family eventually built the big, home on East Goliad (which has so recently been renovated), that later became the site where grandson Jimmy visited from Dallas during summer vacations, holidays and other special occasions.

The grandson has many fond memories of his granddad, his grandmother, boyhood excursions and experiences in the country, plus the friendships he's maintained through the years.

So at the Visitor's Museum, Judy Ostler, Polly Morris, Dorothy Harrison and Dr.



James Whitaker Thomas, of Dallas, grandson of Dr. M.A. Thomas, beloved Crockett physician from 1901-1950, views his grandfather's 1891 degree from Tulane University, which will be displayed along with other articles he's donating to the Visitor's Museum and Depot. Polly Morris looks on. Photo by Sharron Randall

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Thomas' grandson skimmed through the 20-some birth memorandum booklets listing the vital statistics of infants Dr. Thomas helped bring into the world, seeking recognizable names of county denizens, either those he had helped bring into the world, or the names of the infants' fathers and mothers.

For those folks born between 1929 and 1947, if Dr. Thomas officiated at the birth, a record written in the physician's own handwriting: first in very readable script and as his age increased, a less legible entry might be found.

No birth memorandum booklets were available prior to 1929; however, Pete Julian said that Dr. Thomas had delivered his father, Roy Julian Sr. in 1903, shortly after the country doctor established his practice in Houston County.

And in 1943, Winston Whitehead's birth is recorded along with his birth date, weight, length, sex, race, place of birth, father's and mother's name, their occupation, and finally the date filed with the county registrar.

Also in the batch of memorabilia that will be on display at the Visitor's Museum was the doctor's black bag, still half filled with pills, powders and potions and other tools of the trade of this attending physician.

At one time, the contents of the doctor's bag must have contained the instruments that a country obstetrician needed, such as a scalpel, sutures and needles, ether mask, stethoscope, forceps, umbilical cord clamp, curved scissors and such.

The traditional leather bag would have once held miscellaneous supplies and chemicals, which would indicate that the doctor delivered babies at home and was also, prepared for other general emergencies.

From 1901 when Dr. Thomas established his practice until as late as 1949, he was delivering babies in Houston County, first calling on pa-

tients on horseback, then in a buggy, then a Model T and finally in a coupe.

In the July 5, 1949 Courier article, Springfield writes, "Where he used to deliver around 100 babies a year, his confinement cases have slipped to where 50 or 60 per year is tops."

Since he was in practice for a long time, he came full-circle; delivering babies of parents and even grandparents that he had ushered into the world years before.

Springfield describes Dr. Thomas as "quite stocky, with broad shoulders; not tall but of average height; and wears thick-lensed glasses.

"He is also distinguished by one of these extremely narrow ties that some people call a "shoestring" tie. Black."

It was a well-known fact that Dr. Thomas did not care for publicity. He had a desire to do something for somebody else and he believed that medicine would be the best way to do that. He carried on his charity work and philanthropic activities quietly and without fanfare.

Springfield reported that Crockett had named Doctor Thomas its No. 1 citizen and had desired to do him honors at the Fiddlers' Festival, which took place on Dr. Thomas' 84th birthday. The modest and unassuming doctor didn't go; he said, "He wasn't going to take advantage of his old age."

When Dr. Thomas died in 1950, letters to the editor poured in from the citizens of Houston County. One such letter from Sarah Jones of Kennard wrote to tell the people that "Dr. Thomas did so many good things for the poor, the half cannot be told. He went to his patients, rain or shine. Oh, we miss him."

In 1958 Attorney at Law Joe Bailey Humphreys of Dallas wrote a commemorative letter to the University of Texas in Austin lauding Dr. W.A. Thomas.

In describing the general practitioner, he said, "In my opinion, he devoted a lifetime



Dr. Monroe Arthur Thomas takes respite in his favorite chair at his old roll top desk in his home office on Goliad Street. Circa: 1949

to the exemplification of the highest standards of citizenship and those embraced in the Hippocratic oath. No person feeling the need of medical attention was turned away by him for any reason and no person was ever in his presence without having been benefited."

And the editor of the Crockett Courier, W. W. Aiken, added a word of personal praise regarding the life of Dr. M. A. Thomas at the bottom of the obituary notice which was published in the newspaper; this practice is quite rare.

"His natural bent was a helpful sociability. Those of us who had the privilege of his friendship knew of many

things that rounded out a full and useful life. He possessed a generosity that was as useful as generous--his charities were placed where most needed, but only spoken of by his friends.

"No glamorous acclaim followed his philanthropics. He was the friend of all, the benefactor of all in need, without thought of race or color."

Finally, in remembrance of this country doctor's lifetime contributions and to the descendants of those he attended Humphreys' commemoration sums up Dr. Thomas' life in one sentence. "This great citizen, medical doctor and humanitarian will live forever because he gave to society a lifetime of service."