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## [Occupational and Medical Lore]

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Title Occupational and Medical Lore

Place of origin Oreg[.?] Date 1/19/39

Project worker [A.?]C Sherbert

Project editor

Remarks Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

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Works Progress Administration

### OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker A. C. Sherbert Date January 19, 1939

Address Project Office, Elks Building, Portland.

Subject Occupational and Medical Lore.

Name and address of informant Ross M. Plummer, 1202 S. W. Third Street.

Portland, Oregon.

Date and time of interview January 13, 18, [19?], afternoon and evening.

Place of interview Plummer's Drug Store, 1202 S. W. Third Street.

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant None

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying, you None

Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Old-fashioned drug store, no fountain or lunch counter. Old building, slightly run down. Conducted interview in back room, where prescriptions are compounded. Sat facing shelves filled with various drugs in bottles and cans of all sizes and shapes. Clientele seems to be mostly from the poorer classes. District in which store is located was once prominent and respectable but is not now very desirable.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

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Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth
3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities

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9. Description of informant

10. Other points gained in interview

1. Father, O. P. S. Plummer; mother, Martha Kelly Plummer (of the Kelly family, for whom 'Kelly Butte' was named).

2. San Francisco, California, November 3, 1879. (Mother was visiting in S. F. at the time of his birth. Spent entire life in Portland).

3. Two daughters.

4. Portland since infancy.

5. Portland Academy. Graduate of U. of O., class of 1903.

6. Druggist and pharmacist - no other accomplishments.

7. Interested in gardening.

8. None.

9. Slender, well dressed; professional manner and appearance, and younger looking than age given; well educated, pleasing and willing talker.

10. None of value to this work.

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

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Text:

My father, Dr. O. P. S. Plummer, was born in Missouri and came to Oregon in 1860, while a young man in his middle twenties. My father seemed to have been born with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, which trait fitted him for, and led him into, many fields, each of which he pursued with a great deal of energy.

As a youth he took up the study of medicine and surgery and at what today would be considered an early age, set himself up in practice as an allopathic physician. He had not practiced the art of healing long, before he discovered an alarming lack of uniformity in the manner in which various druggists, or as they were then called, apothecaries, filled prescriptions. He concluded that since the ultimate aim of medicine was to render the ailing well, it was of the utmost importance that the apothecary fill a prescription exactly as prescribed by the doctor. With this thought in mind, my father then engaged in the study of pharmacy and chemistry, quickly attaining a degree of proficiency far beyond his years.

While still a student of medicine, father took time off from the study of materia medica and the contemplation of anatomical charts, to woo and wed a Missouri girl of long

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acquaintance. His first matrimonial venture, however, proved an unhappy one. The girl of his choice, though a satisfactory sweetheart, became a jealous, nagging wife who offered him little or no comfort or companionship. After a number of years of constant domestic turmoil, father and his first wife decided to divorce - not a common thing in those days - and upon coming to Oregon, father married an Oregon-born girl, who became my mother.

At about the time my father was a young practicing physician in Missouri, Samuel Morse's electric telegraph was becoming an increasingly useful and important new development. A net work of lines was being extended in all directions. My father, much as he loved his work in medicine, chemistry and pharmacy, was fascinated by this new art, and, with characteristic energy and curiosity, set about the task of mastering its intricacies. Compounding medicines with a mortar and pestle in one hand, his other hand held such meager [phamplets?] descriptive of telegraphic instruments and procedure as were available at the time. He pored over these books, until shortly he had perfect theoretical knowledge of the new art. Most professional men would have been satisfied to have ceased further study of it at this point, but not my father. He was determined to know telegraphy practically, as well as theoretically. The miracle of electricity as applied to the slacking telegraph key and sounder, so absorbed my father that he felt he could not make of telegraphy a hobby. He knew that he could never be fully satisfied until he had, for awhile at least, devoted his entire time to the telegraph. His office and laboratory soon became a jumble of wires and a storage place for electric batteries, rather than a pharmaceutical workshop cluttered with bottles, retorts, pipettes and decanters. Few persons understood telegraphy, so it wasn't long until my father was known throughout Missouri as an expert and soon his services were in demand. When the Western Union Telegraph Company thrust their history-making first transcontinental wire through the Rockies, my father was on the payroll as an installation engineer and operator.

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When they had completed the line to San Francisco, a line was projected from San Francisco to Portland, and father participated also in the construction of this extension.

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His experiences while helping build these lines through wild land infested by belligerent Indians, were among the most colorful of his life. I regret, however, that no single incident of that period, told to me as a boy, remains vivid enough in my memory for recounting.

The first telegraph coming to Portland, then, brought my father with it. He became the first Western Union telegrapher and station attendant and manager, in Portland. One incident of this period I do remember, however, for as a boy I heard my father tell it many, many times: My father was a staunch friend and admirer of Henry Pittock, then publisher of the Oregonian. At the time of Lincoln's assassination there were several daily papers in Portland and rivalry was keen, each trying to be first with the news. When the shocking news of Lincoln's murder came over the wire, not a single soul in the city of Portland knew of it but my father, who took the message from the sounder as it came into his office. Now this probably was not ethical behavior on the part of my fathers but so anxious was he to give his friend's paper a 'beat' or 'scoop' that he held back the news of the assassination until the Oregonian could get ready to set it up and be the first on the street with it. My father always considered the incident quite a joke, but it's not likely the rival newspapers did.

Subsequently tiring of telegraphy, my father returned to his first love - medicine. He established a very lucrative following, comprising most of the best families of Portland and nearby towns. During the Civil War, men enlisting for service were given physical examinations by doctors who were not connected with the military forces. These doctors were paid "so much a head" and were 4 called, "contract doctors". My father was a contract doctor.

After the Civil War was over my father began the operation of a drug store, carrying on this business in conjunction with his medical practice. A drug store, or apothecary shop, in those days was not the bazaar that it is today. There were no "double chocolate malteds" in those days, and if one wanted a ham sandwich he had to ask for one at a restaurant. In those days a druggist dealt chiefly in drugs, though proprietary, or patent remedies

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were beginning to become quite a profitable side line. The old time druggist kept a supply of leeches always on hand. These he rented out to suffering citizens whose doctors prescribed that the sufferer be bled. Bleeding with leeches was considered a veritable panacea for all ills in that day. "Remedies" is hardly the word to use in describing the patent nostrums of that period. The purveyors of pills, plasters and poultices of that gullible era made no half-way boasts concerning the merits of their respective medicaments. There were no "remedies". They were all "cures". Consumption (now called T.B.) cures, rheumatism cures, heart trouble cures, and even cancer cures. Happily, the passage of stringent drug laws has abolished use of the word "cure".

My father's first drug store was situated on the southwest corner of First and Main Streets. A mortar and pestle of heroic proportions surmounted a post in front of the entrance to his shop, calling the passerby's attention to the fact that a compounding chemist kept shop there. The first Oregon State Directory, published in 1880, carried his advertisement, as follows:

O.P.S. Plummer, M.D.

Proprietor of Drug Store southwest corner First and Main streets. His residence is southeast corner of Third and Madison. He can usually be found at the Drug Store during business hours.

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Note that the residence was at the southeast corner of Third and Madison Streets. This was the old home, where I spent my childhood, and was razed in 1891 to make way for the building which my father erected on the property in that year. The building has been continuously occupied by the Plummer drug store - first by my father, and later by myself.

My father's medical practice and other enterprises made him a man of considerable means, but he was never 'sporty' or given to 'show'. In the 'eighties and 'nineties it was quite the regular thing for persons financially successful to own and drive fine horses and

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personal carriages. My father, however, to my knowledge never invested a penny in any such display. His hobby was fruit raising and he came to be considered an authority in the cultivation of the Italian prune. He and Colonel Dosch - for whom Dosch Road is named - jointly operated a fruit farm southwest of town, Colonel Dosch and my father are credited with introducing the Italian prune to Oregon where previously only the French Petite prune had been grown to any extent. Aside from fruit raising, my father's principal interest centered around politics. He was an ardent Republican and liked nothing better than to take part in any discussion of men or issues. He was a member of the State Legislature in the 70's, representing Multnomah County. In the 80's he was a member of Portland's city council. He was a member of Oregon's first State Board of Medicine. He was Dean of Portland Medical College and for many years was medical examiner for the Federal Pension Board. Though of an earlier generation and of a different political stripe, my father was a close personal friend of Dr. Harry Lane, who later became Mayor of Portland. Lane did not become mayor until my father was in his declining years. Lane's administration was a hectic one marked by many bitter political battles, and, though he counted his friends by thousands, he incurred undying enmity of a great many influential Portland people. During the trying episodes of Lane's administration, my father stood staunchly by Lane's side, believing him an honest, fearless, trustworthy public servant even though a Democrat.

The present Plummer drug store, which is the same brick building my father built in 1891, now has a central heating system. In early days, however, the store was heated by a big wood burning heater. As a boy, I never remember having seen the store deserted on a winter day. Gathered around the stove at all times could be found aging telegraphers, Civil War veterans, stagecoach drivers, pony expressmen and steamboat men from as far away as the Cowlitz river country. The telegraphers made it their headquarters because my father talked their language. The Civil War veterans made it their headquarters because my father was on the Federal Pension Board. The others made it their headquarters because they liked my father and because the stove was hot.

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A few years ago, because of a feature article in the Sunday Oregonian regarding Portland's first telephone and telephone exchange, a spirited controversy arose over the question of where and by whom the first telephone instrument in Portland was installed. Personally, I had no part in the argument, primarily because I knew little or nothing about it except by hearsay. However, Colonel C. E. S. Wood, and George Hines, Curator of the Oregon Historical Society, insisted that my father installed in his office the first telephone to come to Portland. Others claimed that the first instrument was installed in the office of the Woodward and Clark Drug Company. Who will ultimately gain indisputable claim to the honor I do not know, however, since Colonel Wood and George Hines were close observers of the Portland scene at that time. I am naturally inclined to accept their statements as veracious and to believe that my father actually was the first telephone user in the city of Portland.

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Be that as it may, this much I do know: When my father gave up telegraphy as an occupation and returned to medical practice the Western Union installed a "courtesy instrument" in his office. Thus while my father examined a patient and listened to a recital of symptoms with one ear, he had his other ear cocked to hear what interesting bits of intelligence came over the Western Union wire. When Bell's telephone became a reality, my father installed one, attaching it to the wires of the telegraph company. Obviously, the nature of a telephone being what it is, there must have been two "firsts". Since my father's instrument was in connection with the Western Union office, and since the Western Union Telegraph Company was a national institution rather than an individual, I contend it is logical to eliminate them from consideration as a "first" Portland telephone user. Since my father was so well versed in the mechanics of telegraphy, and the early telephone was an uncomplicated adaptation of the telegraph, knowing my father's bent for experimentation with telegraphic innovations it seems plausible and highly probable that he should have been the first private individual in Portland to install a telephone.

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My father's office - the building in which the first telephone was installed - is a small frame store building which faces on Madison street, and is situated directly behind my present drug store building. As mentioned before, the brick drug store building was built on the site of our old home. The little frame building which my father used as an office was situated on the end of our lot in our backyard, you might say. If you are interested in pioneer Portland business architecture, the building still stands, quite as my father built it, and is at present occupied by a lady barber shop. The only change in the building since it was erected by my father was the installation of plate glass windows. In the early days only ordinary glass was in use. The little building is typical of modest Portland business places of seventy-five years ago. I know of no other structure in Portland that is quite so old and I have frequently wondered why this building excites so little interest on the part of those interested in historic Portland buildings.

Form D

Extra Comment

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### Comment:

At the rear of the Plummer drug store is an ornate, old fashioned partition which screens the back room from the store proper. On this partition there hangs a picture of old Dr. Plummer, about whom the text is written. While I was interviewing Ross Plummer, an elderly doctor came into the store to cash a check and to buy some sleeping tablets. He was obviously in a state of high intoxication. While Plummer cashed the check the elderly doctor, a Scandinavian, took off his hat reverently and stood in front of old Doctor Plummer's picture. He began to cry, became maudlin, tears ran down his cheeks, "Dar vas a man," he cried. "Oh my Gott I luffed dot man. He vas der best docktor Portland effer hadt." Then he turned to me, and noticing that I still had my hat on, he angrily commanded me to "Take off dot hat! Who in de Hell do you tink you are to stand in front dot man's picture mit your hat on?" I didn't take my hat off so he grasped me roughly by the arm and I believe would have removed it for me had I not taken my hat off to humor him before he could try to. Ross Plummer quieted the drunken doctor and in friendly manner urged him to go home.