

THE LIFE & TIMES ON RAILROAD AVENUE IN

SAXTON , PA.

DR. MILLER's MONKEY DOODLES

by

ELI EICHELBERGER WITH THE

COORABORATION OF

R. RICHARD EICHELBERGER

And

ROBERT A. EICHELBERGER

Dr Miller's Monkey Doodles

In our town of Saxton, the Eichelberger family lived next door to the brick home of one of the town's doctors, C.O. Miller and his wife Tillie. Dr. and Mrs. Miller had no children of their own so it fell to their lot to help entertain and raise the Eichelberger kids next door. Dr. Miller was quite a loveable character, balding, tobacco chewing, poker-playing, verbose, and he loved children. He called the Eichelberger boys, his "Monkey Doodles."

He had a barn at the rear of his home where he kept his big white horse and the buggy in which he made his country wide home visits. The doctor did not like to ride alone on these trips so he would seek permission from mother to "borrow" one of his "Monkey-Doodles" and take him along. Often the trips started in the morning and would last until late afternoon before the Doctor would get back home again.

I was one of the fortunate ones often chosen for such rides with Dr. C. O. Miller. We rode over dusty, rut-filled country roads with the big white horse trotting along at a lively pace with the Doctor and me bouncing along in the buggy. There was always available a big lap robe to keep one warm on chilly days. Also, Doctor had a charcoal burning foot warmer for use in the winter. It was kept on the buggy floor and would radiate its warmth up under the lap robe to keep one fairly comfortable.

Upon arriving at the home of a patient, he would tie the horse to a fence post or hitching post while he made his visit. I would wait patiently in the buggy, or often in the patient's home while he examined the patient. If it was near noon, the family would invite the Doctor to stay and have a meal with the family. Of course, this

included one of his “Monkey-Doodles.” The farmer and his helpers, mostly members of his own family, had terrific appetites. The noon-day meal at a farmer’s house was never-to-be-forgotten event. The farmers and helpers had worked from 6:00 a.m. and by noon were a hungry bunch. Dinner, as it was called, was the big meal of the day. The menu consisted of home-made bread, home-churned butter, several kinds of jellies and jams, country-fresh milk and cream in big pitchers, fried potatoes, several kinds of meat, generally pork, beef or chicken. There was always fresh fruit and vegetables when in season, or home-canned ones during the winter months. Home-baked pies and cakes were always available to top off the meal. Nobody went away hungry from a farmer’s dinner table.

After eating, the Doctor would pick up his little black bag, thank his host, and drive off to see the next patient on his list of home calls.

The Doctor had an aversion to paying bills, and was constantly in trouble with the establishment about this. The electric lights in our Saxton homes were furnished by the “shops,” the Huntingdon and Brad Top Railroad repair area. Doctor Miller had been feuding for some time with the H & B. T. regarding his “exorbitant electric light bills.” After many months of futile negotiations, the Railroad finally cut off the electric service to his house. The doctor retaliated by promptly purchasing a Delco Power system, generating his own electricity with a noisy kerosene generator. It would keep the power batteries fully charged, and would automatically start when the power got low in the batteries. It made a putt-putt racket which was right disturbing at night. This did not endear him to the immediate neighborhood.

In the 1916 election campaign, the Doctor, a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat decided to organize a “rally” for Wilson. He circulated word to the kids in the neighborhood that he was going to lead a parade through the Town which was to end at Barnett’s “Nickelodeon” the Town’s movie house, and we were invited as his guests. All we had to do was to keep cheering, “ Hurrah, for Wilson, he kept us out of War.” This was a bit unusual, for most of us were sons of staunch Republicans. The parade went off as planned, and we trouped through the streets cheering for President Wilson as instructed. Just prior to entering the movie house as the Doctor’s guests, some fearful of repercussions for our actions got together and shouted, “Three cheers for Teddy Roosevelt.” We felt that would right any wrong we had done by cheering for Wilson.

The Doctor had a Fox-Terrier dog which was named Kaiser. On the Miller’s Christmas tree, there would be strings of bologna hanging from the branches of the tree. As the Doctor would walk by the tree, he would take his pen knife and cut off a hunk of bologna for his dog. It was always a delight to see this performance and Kaiser loved it. When the U.S.A. entered World War I, the Doctor changed the name of the dog to Snapper. It was the patriotic thing to do.

The Doctor’s office was in his home, but was located right next to the Eichelberger household.. It was on the street level, and our house was elevated somewhat from his. We could peek right into the office windows from the outside porch, unless he pulled down the blinds. He had a large front porch, the entire width of his home. He had two big swings, one on each end of the porch, plus numerous wooden rocking chairs. There was always somebody around willing to occupy the swings or

the chairs, generally the Eichelberger kids.

In his office he sat in front of a roll-top desk with a large wooden chair in which he would rock back and forth, while interviewing his patients. One side of the room was made up of many shelves which held large bottles filled with fascinating multi-colored pills. From these the Doctor would dispense his wonder drugs he felt were indicated by the patient's symptoms. He had a stethoscope for examining the heart or chest of patients and a monometer for taking blood pressures. Also thermometers for taking temperatures. That was about the extent of his office equipment. When a prospective patient approached the Doctor while he was sitting on his front porch and say he wanted to see him; he would say, "Step into the box," meaning his office.

The introduction to the Model "T" Ford changed the character of the nation as well as the mode of the Doctor's home visits. He was the proud owner of one of the town's first Fords. He had no trouble getting riders for company from then on. Often he would load up his Model "T" with all the kids he could get aboard and take them for a ride around town. One of his favorite activities was to get all the kids in the neighborhood and tell them he had a prize for the one that could yell the loudest. He would take a couple of pennies from his pants pocket and then say "start." The Doctor would be the sole judge of the contest. The winner got the pennies. Then he would announce the contest was over for the day.

When the Doctor was feeling real generous he would have one of us run over to Joe Burry's for a quart of ice cream. Of course he gave us the money to pay for it.

He would have his wife, Tillie, dish up the ice cream in deep cereal dishes, and then, add

milk to fill the dish. A quart of ice cream could be stretched to feed four or five guests plus Tillie and the Doctor.

The Doctor loved to chew tobacco and it was seldom he did not have a mouthful of chewing tobacco, except when he ate. He carried a coal bucket with him when he sat on his front porch so he would have something into which he could spit his tobacco juice. The Doctor's "Monkey-Doodles" thought it would be nice to get him a big brass spittoon for Christmas. It would be more fitting for the Town's doctor to use than the disreputable coal bucket. The spittoon was duly purchased and presented to him with much pomp and ceremony by the Eichelberger clan on Christmas. He received it with pride and placed it on the mantle in his living room. It never did replace the coal bucket as the Doctor's favorite spittoon.

The Doctor built a small wooden building at the rear of his yard. It had no windows and just a small door on one side to enter. We all wondered just what this small house was to be used for; it was just about the right size for a child's playhouse. But it was not built for our entertainment. It turned out to be a "smoke house." The Doctor would collect about a dozen or so fresh country hams, and hang them on hooks in the "smoke house." Then a wood fire was lighted in an iron grate and the door to the "smoke house" was closed. Soon smoke came billowing out from the cracks around the side and the door and it looked like the place was really on fire. But the lack of air in the "smoke house" kept the wood just smoldering. Additional wood was added as needed to the grate. It took several days to really "smoke-cure" a ham. The end result was some of the most

delicious cured hams that one could ever imagine. The flavor of those “smoked” hams were never duplicated by modern-day packers, who inject them to cure them.

Among his many varied enterprises, the Doctor owned an old flour and grain mill on the outskirts of East Saxton. Just how he ended up in this venture was never quite clear. The mill was run by water power. The source of the water was a nearby stream. To divert its flow to the mill stream, a rock dam had to periodically reinforced to get enough water to flow to the mill. When the dam needed repaired, the Doctor would load up his Model “T” with neighborhood kids and drive out to the mill. The kids would take off their shoes and stockings and under the Doctor’s supervision would pile rocks on the dam from the bottom of the creek. It did not take long to reinforce the dam and it was fun and excitement to be splashing around in the water. For our efforts, the Doctor would pay off in nickels and dimes. We felt we were the richest kids in the world. We really were without knowing it.