

Recollections of a Doctor's Wife

By MARY KING WELBURN

Dr. Williamson Crothers Welburn was born October 5, 1874, in Nashville, Tennessee, the son of Samuel Kendrick Welburn, who was in the publishing business, and Martha Crothers Welburn.

The Welburn family, formerly spelling the name "Wellesbourne" had been prominent on the Eastern Shore of Virginia since an ancestor, having survived the wreck of the "Sea Venture" on the Island of Bermuda, landed in Jamestown in 1610. He had taken up a land grant in Accomac, Virginia. The doctor's grandfather, Drummond Welburn, a Methodist minister, had left Virginia for Kentucky, later going to Tennessee.

W. C. Welburn was educated in Nashville's public schools and Vanderbilt University—first receiving a degree in pharmacy and in 1899, an M.D. degree. He interned at the Polyclinic Hospital and the Mothers and Babies Hospital in New York. The summer of 1900, he was Resident Physician at Sea Side Hospital. In the fall of 1900, he returned to Nashville and began the practice of medicine and taught in the Department of Pathology at Vanderbilt University.

On October 6, 1902, we were married. I was the former Mary Lavinia King, daughter of William M. King, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Margaret McLouth King, a writer, of Glencarlyn, Virginia. We lived in Nashville until 1903 when we moved to Watonga, Indian Territory of Oklahoma. This move was because of the doctor's health; we remained there for two years while he practiced medicine there.

In 1905 we came east with our baby daughter, Mary Mc. We enjoyed a visit with my parents and the Doctor returned to Sea Side Hospital as Resident Physician for the summer.

Here I mention a habit I formed of referring to my husband as the Doctor as I had not known him before he was one.

Returning to the then Alexandria County, Dr. Welburn considered Ballston on the Electric Railway near Glebe Road and the highway to Georgetown an ideal location for an office. He rented space in a small building at the corner of Ballston Avenue (now Stuart Street at Fairfax Drive). This building also contained a barber shop and a shoe repair shop.

He was encouraged by Dr. Corbett of Columbia Pike, Dr. Tunis Quick, and Dr. Fadley of Falls Church to start a drug store as all prescriptions then had to be filled in Georgetown.

In 1906 he built a building which is still standing in the 900 block of Stuart Street. The first floor contained the store and his offices with the



Combination Ballston Pharmacy, Post Office and Railroad Waiting Room

living quarters above. In front of the building he had laid the first sidewalk in the County; it is still there.

In putting in a septic tank he realized that a well would be an impossibility because of surface water on those lots. To solve the water problem he had a large rain water cistern built and filtered water was used there until the County Water System was installed.

Dr. Welburn referred to our early days in Arlington as our "horse and buggy days." There were no telephones and most of his practice consisted of house calls. He was often forced to go by horseback when roads were too muddy for a buggy. He carried his supplies, as did my great-grandfather McLouth in New England, in saddle bags.

The work in the drug store was not hard in those days. Eldon Leath, a schoolboy, helped by sweeping the floor and attending to the soda fountain. I made all the ice cream in an old-fashioned freezer which Eldon turned by hand. We bought our fruit syrups but I made chocolate syrup a gallon at a time. The Doctor, of course, filled all the prescriptions, using supplies bought at Gilman's which is still in business on Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D. C.

Dr. Welburn's first automobile was like a buggy with large rubber-tired wheels. The engine was back of the seat, so much of the weight was in the rear. However, since the front was just a low dash-board, I was mortally afraid of falling out, especially when riding down hill. It made a great deal of noise and when we met a horse we had to stop and let people lead their frightened horses by. He soon sold it and went back to horses himself. Later in 1910 he owned one of the early Model T's.

The Postmaster at Ballston was killed in a tragic accident on the Electric Railroad between Rosslyn and Clarendon. Doctor was asked if he could make room for the Post Office in the drug store. We decided to try it and boxes were built and supplies moved in. I passed the Civil Service examination and was appointed Postmaster, a position I held until 1917 when Doctor volunteered for service in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Army in World War I and sold the drug business.

In the meantime, we had bought an acre of land between Glebe Road and Georgetown Road (Wilson Blvd.) and remodeled the long-vacant farm house into offices and dwellings where we moved in 1912. When we moved out in 1941 the Red Cross used it as its Headquarters and now Hecht's store stands on the site.

With the influx of more people into the County after World War I, the Post Office Department officials wanted to start a Rural Delivery Service and insisted on our moving to the old railroad ticket office on what is now Fairfax Drive. (The Garden Market is now at that location.) I worked more hours at the Post Office and as the Doctor's practice was now larger he had to employ a pharmacist.

My long time friend, Grace Stephenson White of Herndon, Virginia, was glad to move here, rent our former house, and help in the Post Office. She later bought this house and the drug business and became Postmaster.

Dr. Welburn told me that his life as a physician in general practice had been "very satisfactory." Having the love and confidence of his patients and their families had meant a great deal to him.

The first County duty he had was assisting the coroner in his work, especially on reports in court. He later was appointed Medical Examiner for Arlington, a position he held for more than 30 years until a few years before his death in 1964.

Together we were active in helping to start St. Georges Church, Arlington Hospital, and Mary Washington Chapter of the Eastern Star. We also worked in the American Legion and Auxiliary, the County Medical Association and its Auxiliary.

While Arlington Hall was a short-lived junior college for girls, many local girls were students there and remember Dr. Welburn as the college physician.

During World War II, he was active in Selective Service and Civil Defense work.

In 1940 we decided to build on a wooded lot at 3408 North Glebe Road. We had owned this land for twenty years and had looked forward to a country home but in a few years we were surrounded by many houses and almost all of the big trees were cut down. My daughter, Mary Welburn Mann, and I now make our home there.

THE SMITH MINOR PETITION (Continued from page 50)

cannot award compensation to Mr. Minor under the act of April 16. The overt act of giving 'aid and comfort' to the rebellion, though committed in a moment of weakness, and apprehension of evil, and against his uniform sentiments of loyalty before and since, lacks the essential ingredient of being the effect of compulsory threats of immediate personal violence, which alone can take it out of the general rule of law, which makes every rational being responsible for his actions. The Commissioners, nevertheless, feel they cannot discharge their whole duty in the premises without recommending the case of Mr. Minor to the charitable judgement of Congress, the tribunal which may, without transcending its authority, mitigate the rigor of the emancipation act in his behalf."³

Following the cessation of hostilities, Smith Minor returned to his farm, and as shown on the map of Alexandria County (Arlington) for 1878 (*Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 3) he was still in residence in that year near what is now Lee Highway.

³ The Library of Congress was unable to locate any reference to corrective legislation for the relief of Mr. Minor.