The Common Touch

Dr. Claud D. Davis was a man of many accomplishments. His activities were numerous, yet in all the busyness of his life, he never lost the common touch. During an afternoon in 1982, "Doc," as his close friends commonly called him, could have been found laughing and talking with a group of men in the front of his optometry and osteopathic office. They might have been discussing medicine or hunting. "Doc" would probably have told a joke. He was tall and well-built, one who seemed no stranger to the outdoors. He would be wearing a white lab coat, glasses, and a bow tie, which he was rarely seen without.

Claud Davis was born December 9, 1890, on a farm near Perry, Missouri. Young Davis was the last of four children born to Franklin and Kitty Davis. Growing up on the farm gave him an appreciation for the outdoors, and as a young boy he bought his first gun. The gun became his closest companion. William Cundiff, who shared an office space with Dr. Davis, commented, "I suspect he wore two or three barrels out on that (first gun)." Dr. Davis continued to collect and trade guns for the rest of his life. He was an excellent shot both in regular hunting and trap shooting. If there was a shooting match in the area, he would attend and often win. He could use a variety of shop tools and often repaired his own guns.

In 1912, young Davis left home to attend Bradley University in Illinois, where he majored in optometry. In 1914, before he completed his schooling, he returned home to marry his sweetheart, Ethel A. Wells. June Morgan, Dr. Davis’ great-niece, said, "If there ever was a real lady, it was Ethel." Their marriage lasted over 50 years until her death in 1967. It was at Needles University in Kansas City that Dr. Davis continued his optometry studies in the years 1915 and 1921 when he graduated with a degree in optometry.

In the past an optometrist was also a jeweler; therefore, a few years after his optometry training, Dr. Davis and his wife Ethel opened a jewelry store in Perry, Missouri. Because times were hard, he found it difficult to keep the store open; he closed the store in 1923 and enrolled at the American School of Osteopathy in Kirksville. He continued to work as a jeweler at the Kirksville Optical Company on Washington Street and then Miller Jewelry Company on Franklin Street. He also worked with Ray Gardner after 1925. In 1927, he graduated from the college with a degree in osteopathy.

Dr. Davis went to Texas to begin a practice, but he found it "too sandy" for his liking and returned to Kirksville within

By Cathi Fredricks
five months. In Kirksville, he worked both as an optometrist and osteopath. His first office was at 104 E. McPherson in the store behind Troesters Clothing. His second office was at 117 S. Franklin. Then in 1944, he opened his office at 110 S. Franklin where he remained until his retirement in July 1984. During the earlier years of his optometrical practice, he often ground his own lenses. In the past, osteopathic doctors were trained to use both the stool and table when giving treatments; Dr. Davis used both. Mrs. Mabel Willbanks, owner of Rinehart’s News Agency, said, “He gave a very thorough treatment.” He knew at least 90 percent of his patients on a first name basis, and many of his patients had been coming to him for 30 or 40 years. No exact records were kept of the number of patients he served.

Not only did he work full-time in his office, but during Dr. Davis’ first few years as a doctor, Mr. Cundiff said, “He was an anesthesiologist for a number of guys who used to practice at the old Bigsby hospital.” Dr. Davis also did numerous tonsillectomies for those who could not afford to pay.

Never again did Dr. Davis work full-time in a jewelry store after he opened his office on Franklin Street, but occasionally he was asked to repair watches or glasses and to do some free-hand engraving. His work was requested because of its quality.

No matter how busy “Doc” was, he always found time to read. He took the St. Louis Globe Democrat daily, and he never missed an article in either it or the Kirksville Daily Express. He subscribed to countless magazines and medical journals, including the U. S. News and World Report and the National Rifle Association’s magazine. He read each of the medical journals and kept up with medical advancements. For light reading, he bought detective stories from Rinehart’s News Agency. Very few people were as well-informed as he.

If he were not working, reading, or hunting, Dr. Davis involved himself in a number of other hobbies such as violin making, cabinet making, and music. Intrigued by violin making,

Dr. Davis received a human interest prize of $25 from the General Motors Chevrolet Company. These pictures of Dr. Davis in his violin workshop appeared in their national magazine.

Revisions such as the use of a medical antiseptic to improve the violin’s finish and the use of wooden swabbing applicators as pegs to strengthen the neck were done to violins such as this one made by Dr. Davis.

As an alumni, Dr. Davis received the Golden Medallion Award from the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine for over 50 years of medical service.
he was determined to make a violin of his own. He continued to make violins for a number of years, adding a few revisions to give an improved sound. Often he would give the violins to young people who could not afford to buy one. One recipient was a girl who lived in North Carolina; she went on to major in music in college. In addition to constructing musical instruments, he also played the violin, alto horn, and trumpet. He played the alto horn for the Fair Band, local talent that played at the Northeast Missouri District Fair. The other two instruments were played for his own pleasure.

Dr. Davis, with his innumerable abilities and knowledge, always had time for the little pleasures of life. He enjoyed driving his car, which he continued to drive until he was 95. Also, he loved a home-cooked meal, playing cards with his close friends, and feeding the fish, squirrels, and birds. He would wear his overalls over his dress shirt and bow tie when he would count the cows at his friend’s farm. Mrs. Lena Tuggle, a close friend, said, “He had a strong but pleasing personality.” Others mentioned that he had the respect of all who knew him.

Mrs. Morgan said, “What really stood out to me was that he never was one to dwell on the past.” This outlook on life made him an impressive man. Dr. Davis enjoyed life by living one day at a time, accomplishing all that was necessary but taking time for a daily walk and sharing with friends. He gave of himself one hundred percent and encouraged others to do the same. He was responsible for encouraging one young man to finish his education. Because of “Doc’s” influence, that young man went on to be an excellent lawyer. People like Dr. Davis take charge of their lives but never lose the common touch that encourages others to be their best and enjoy all that life has to offer.

Even after his official retirement from his optometry office at the age of 93, “Doc” continued to practice until he was 95 in his home located at 1312 S. Highland.

"Doc" Davis (second row, third person from the right) played the alto horn in the Northeast Missouri District Fair Band. The band was local talent that played for the Fair when it first began.