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Dr. John W. Ellis.
Photo courtesy of
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Dr. Ellis

The Country Physician of Kennesaw

BY ANDREW J. BRAMLETT

On Dec. 20, 1950, an article appeared in the Marietta Daily Journal about the recently deceased “Doc” Ellis. In this memorial, the late doctor was described as someone who “saw humanity in all its facets, and often at its worst, and still he loved humanity.”

Dr. John W. Ellis’ tale is a rags-to-riches story that begins with his birth in Forsyth County on June 11, 1868, to Samuel J. and Sarah A. Ellis.

The young John Ellis attended school in Cherokee County and spent seven years at Reinhardt Academy in Waleska. He had to pay his way through Reinhardt, so he worked as a janitor. After graduation, he accepted a scholarship from Southern Medical College (now Emory University). The scholarship covered his tuition, but nothing else, so Ellis had to work on a farm for a year to pay for two years of school. He returned to the farm for another year to pay for his final two years. After graduating, he worked as a cotton picker for 50 cents a day and used this money to pay for two years at the Georgia College of Eclectic Medicine. When he finished in 1900, he was ready to open his own medical practice.

Why Ellis chose to open his medical practice in Kennesaw is unknown. Regardless, his original office opened on April 4, 1900, in a wooden building at the corner of Main Street and Watts Drive, across the street from what is now Trackside. Back in 1895, Ellis had married Carrie Boring of Woodstock, and the couple lived in a wooden house next to his office.



Ellis' office. Photo courtesy of Carolyn Kemp.

Ellis was one of several doctors living in the community at the time. Dr. Charles H. Fields practiced in Kennesaw until June 1900. Dr. J.T. Gault built an office in Kennesaw in 1901, but he relocated to Atlanta before 1912. Dr. J.E. Lester opened an office in 1903, and stayed until 1928. When Ellis fell ill in 1907, Dr. T.J. Van Sant served in his place in Kennesaw, and stayed for 18 months.

Despite this large number of doctors in the area, Ellis emerged as a community leader. By 1903, the Marietta Journal already was saying "a more honest, upright gentleman never lived here than John Ellis." The next year, he was elected to the City Council, where he served until 1906, and was elected mayor in 1916, 1917 and 1923.

The doctor also began expanding beyond his medical practice. In addition to being a physician, he owned a drugstore, opened a blacksmith shop in 1904, and had farms across the area. He was a founding director of Kennesaw State Bank and served with the bank until his death. He was a member of the Meyerhardt Masonic Lodge and the

Kennesaw lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, and was part of the Farmers Union.

Many stories about Ellis' personal life were recorded in newspapers. While playing pin the tail on the donkey at a Valentine's Day party hosted by the Hill family, it was the "surgical skill of Dr. Ellis [that] enabled him to re-tail the donkey." In 1911, he purchased a car that he used to visit patients, and his Ford soon was a familiar sight. Later in life, Ellis bought a television set and "watched constantly. Milton Berle was his favorite entertainer."

In 1909, Ellis moved his drugstore to the first floor of the new Kennesaw Hotel (which sat in the middle of what is now J.O. Stephenson Avenue). In the 1920s or '30s, he constructed a small building next to the Hill Store building (now Eaton Chiropractic).

The small white structure currently is vacant. In 1936, his wooden house was torn down and replaced by a brick bungalow that was the home of By-Gone Treasures antique store.

Ellis was very involved with the medical community in Cobb County. In 1935, he hosted a meeting of the Cobb County Medical Society at his house. The chicken pie he served was so large, it made the front page of the Marietta Journal. He also was a stockholder in Marietta Hospital until it closed in 1950 and was replaced by Kennestone Hospital.

The doctor continued serving his community until his death on Dec. 16, 1950, at the age of 83. He was a staple in the community for 50 years, and it was hoped "the people of Kennesaw, where he spent his life as a physician, will keep his memory green through the years."



Andrew Bramlett is vice president of the Kennesaw Historical Society and an honorary member of the Kennesaw Cemetery Preservation Commission.