

Interview with Dr. V. Duane Thysell

Interviewed by Dr. John R. Holten for the Heritage Education Commission

Interviewed on February 1, 1985

Duane Thysell - DT

John Holten - JH

JH: This is Dr. John R. Holten, Chairman of the Medical section of the Northwest Heritage Society on Oral History. This is being recorded at the Board Room, St. Ansgar's Hospital, February 1, 1985. I am interviewing Dr. V. Duane Thysell, now of Moorhead.

Dr. Thysell, will you start by telling us about your vital statistics--where you were born, your education, and your training leading up to your return to Hawley to practice medicine?

DT: I was born in Hawley, Minnesota, on December 6, 1908; and I went to school in Hawley, first grade through high school--graduated in 1926 from Hawley. I went to Concordia College two years, and I had an idea I was going to be an accountant. I was pretty good in arithmetic, and I went two years to Concordia and my advisor there was Mr. Elliason [spelling] in the Chemistry Department and he advised that I should go into medicine because I had an uncle, Dr. Fred Thysell, who was doing well in Moorhead. I still had to take biology the next year--the second year--and then Dr. Fuglested, the teacher--I believe it was his first year at Concordia--he was such a good teacher and biology came easy for me and I just stuck with a pre-med career--a third year of pre-med. I went down to the University of Minnesota; that was 1929 and I went into the University of Minnesota Medical School, was there from 1929 to '33 and then attended Minneapolis General Hospital and then I came to Hawley in 1934.

JH: Dr. Thysell, will you talk about some of your professional education--things you remember about the University of Minnesota in those years, where you interned, some things that you recall of your internship at Minneapolis General Hospital, and any anecdotes you can remember of your education in those years?

DT: I finished in 1933 in June at the University of Minnesota Medical School and went to the Minneapolis General Hospital for one year of internship; it was a rotating internship, a month on each service over 12 months. And I started out on fractures--I remember this was real difficult. We had a rainy weekend, and I happened to be on call over the weekend and my first exposure to internship, I thought how was I ever going to take it because we were up all night and gone about 36 hours and it seemed like real rough, but I guess I got used to it. Then it followed with OB and GYN and a month on Surgery and then some Internal Medicine--I can't recall any real amusing incidents, but I enjoyed that year in the hospital.

JH: You decided to go into general practice, as it was called in those days. Did you ever consider specializing, or were there specialties available at that time? How did you happen to end up in Family Medicine in Hawley?

DT: I really intended to go into a specialty and I was thinking of Internal Medicine. I did have a 10% deficiency in hearing because I had a double mastoid operation at age 7, and I didn't think I was inclined towards Surgery. I was going to specialize in something--either Medicine or probably go into research because in my own mind I didn't really feel I was cut out to be a general family doctor. But when I had about two months left of internship, the druggist in Hawley, Minnesota, I. W. Swenson, urged I should come to Hawley. There were already two doctors in Hawley--Dr. Burgheim [spelling] from 1921 and Dr. C. W. Carlson's [unclear] father was there from about 1909. But Dr. Bergheim was periodically ill so he was laid up sometimes for three or four weeks at a time, so the druggist encouraged me to come to Hawley. Also, my uncle Fred Thysell who was in Moorhead--a very busy practitioner in Moorhead, Minnesota, just 22 miles from Hawley, urged me to come too. And Hawley was my hometown and I stayed with my folks when I got there. I decided to come to Hawley for awhile and I really didn't think it was going to last a lifetime, but I have spent my lifetime in general practice. I always thought I was going to go back to specialize.

I met a girl in 1935 after I was in Hawley for a year. She sang at my brother's wedding in Minneapolis, and she was a good singer and I got kind of struck with her and finally convinced her to marry me. But we didn't get married until 1938 because she was a singer and singing with groups and I couldn't ensnare her to become married until 1938. That kind of changed my life quite a bit because I became more satisfied. I was pretty dissatisfied being single and lonely, and we had three children in the next five years and I guess I got tied to general practice and had to support this growing family, so I stayed in general practice and I might add that besides the three girls born in '39, '41, and '43, I had a boy born in 1950. My wife was from Minneapolis, but she adapted herself real well to the small town and kind of made good things for the children--got them into this and that event--and we had lots of young kids over at our house all the time and my wife also adapted herself real well to things in the community. She led this and led that and sang for funerals and weddings and our social life--she kind of kept me going socially. I was rather quiet and didn't get much social life, but she kept things going pretty well, so I stayed in general practice. I was in Hawley for 26 years from 1934 to 1960 and then I moved to Moorhead and was in the building across from the hospital--the same building as Dr. Holten, Carlson, and Rice were in. And I was there for 22 years and just retired the first of January 1982.

JH: Dr. Thysell, you came to Hawley in 1934 which was the pits of the Depression. Will you tell us what it was like practicing medicine during that financially troubled time and how that impacted your hospital work and what you remember of your house calls and office charges of those years?

DT: I've got [unclear] written up and I've got this pretty well documented on my oral tape, but I did come in 1934 and it was in the Depression. We didn't charge much at those times;

I think sometimes a dollar or two for office calls, and I made house calls for \$2 and \$3, too. I can remember it was during the government regulation days of Franklin Roosevelt and it wasn't WPA (it was some other initials), or you had to get paid by people who didn't have any money through the government and we got \$7.20 for six office calls; that was \$1.20 apiece. And \$9 for six house calls--\$1.50 apiece or \$1.60, whatever. I am almost embarrassed to say what I paid my office girl for a week; it was very minimal because I didn't have much income myself. I remember even the third year, 1936, was quite a bad year; that was probably the only crop failure we had in western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota; and I remember in September of that year I think I took in \$125 in the whole month and I didn't pay much rent, though. Before I was married, I stayed home and paid minimal rent at home. I had to buy a car the first year; it was really kind of rough in those days. I think we got \$20 or \$25 for an obstetrical case if we could collect, and sometimes we didn't collect. I had one fellow got to owe me about \$400 and I never did collect from him. He said he had to build a house and was paying for a house. He could pay for the house but he couldn't pay my medical bill, so right off I can't think of anything that comes to mind; maybe it will come up later.

JH: Your tape that I listened to describes your obstetrical experience--an obstetrical introduction to Hawley--why don't you tell us about the first four deliveries you had out there?

DT: It was kind of unusual; I didn't think I was ever going to get a normal delivery. I was in my office two days when a fellow from 3 or 4 miles out in the country came along and wanted me to come out and deliver a baby. Well, I really hadn't a very good idea of what I wanted to get together yet to go out there, but I went over to the druggist, I. W. Swanson, and he says, "Oh, you better take a scale along. I'll give you some cotton; I'll give you some chloroform" (or ether, I don't remember which we used at first) "and some umbilical tape and a few other things." And I had some instruments, so I went out there; this turned out to be a 7-month, premature baby and lived less than 24 hours. Well, that was Case No. 1. Case No. 2 was in town; it was a home delivery and this newborn had a very evident enlarged cerebellar tumor and died. The third one was about 13 miles out in the country southwest of Hawley--happened to be a cousin of mine. It happened to be a breech. So that was three cases that were not normal. And the fourth one was twins. I delivered a set of twins in Hawley and I talked with one of these twins just about a year ago, who must be close to 50 now. I started in '34; yeah, she would be 50 years old. And I thought, "When am I going to get a normal delivery?" The first four cases were first a premature baby that died, and a cerebellar tumor that died, and a breech delivery, and twins. But things got more normal after that.

JH: Every time we see movies of deliveries at home, we see the expectant father carrying pails of water. Could you tell me what purpose this hot water serves either them or you?

DT: Well, I used to get my instruments and forceps and put them in. Well, first we boiled water and then I used Lysol. I think I went out with my uncle, Fred Thysell, in Moorhead, on one of his deliveries near Hawley when I first came to town, after I'd had one or two, and I was going to use ether; but he said, "I was taught that chloroform was dangerous to

use. But," he said, "if you do it very sparingly, it's all right." So I used chloroform all the time; he thought ether where we didn't have electric lights--we just had lamps in those days--he thought ether was kind of dangerous. Anyway, Dr. Holten, you ask about the boiling water. We boiled water and we had a sterilized a clean dish as well as we could and used Lysol solution and put boiling water mixed with Lysol in the dish and put the instruments in there and I used cotton. I'd get a pound of cotton at the drugstore and soak that up with the solution. And I never had any infection. I didn't have any prepared sterilized equipment to bring along, but we got along as well as we could with that kind of antiseptic and I never did have any infection, I guess, because each patient was in their own home and wasn't in contact with other patients. I had about 2500 deliveries in about 26 years and I didn't have a hospital delivery until about the 47th one; all the others were home deliveries and they were all over eastern Clay County--quite a few in town and Hitterdal and Ulen and many of the townships around there--Spring Prairie, Highland Grove, Eglund, Cromwell, Keene--some deliveries in Glyndon. I think I even did one or two in Dilworth. Anyway, the early days were days when people didn't like to go to the hospital, so most of the deliveries were in the home. There got to be more and more hospital cases through the '40s when Blue Cross and other insurances started coming into play; and I divided my practice into the first 500 cases where the majority were rural deliveries and the next 500 were getting to be more hospital cases, and the third 500 got to be more hospital cases because their insurance paid. The last 200 cases of those 1700 in Hawley were practically all in the hospital--just an occasional case when labor was so fast she just couldn't make the hospital. That's all I can think of.

JH: Sometime later on, you had a maternity home in Hawley. Do you want to talk about the maternity home?

DT: Well, actually, I had four different places in Hawley that I delivered patients. The first one was a Mrs. Nick Nelson; and Dr. Burgheim, who preceded me in Hawley, and Dr. C. W. Synneson, Dr. Carlson's father [unclear] were in Hawley when I came, and they used Mrs. Nick Nelson's, so when I came in 1934, I used her for some home deliveries. She took very good care of the patients. She wasn't a nurse, but she had a nice, clean place and I did 90 deliveries there. Later on, I had a Mrs. Emil Anstonson [spelling] who took patients in and I didn't have a lot of them there, but I had several over those next few years. Also, a Mrs. Ida McDougall had cases. And the fourth one had a little bit more like a maternity home than the other three in that she advertised herself in taking care of these cases and did a very good job of it, too--Mrs. Hazel Torgerson. I had many deliveries there and I did maybe more deliveries there than out in the country during the early '40s and mid '40s and late '40's until I started getting more and more in the hospital; but there was actually four different places I had in Hawley that I brought patients in to deliver in Hawley.

JH: Dr. Thysell, you told me a story some time ago about the delivery during the winter. The traffic and the transportation wasn't very good in those days, so why don't you tell us about that delivery up by Hitterdal?

DT: Well, actually, I was stalled in the country three different times--twice in 1939--the first was for a delivery 6 miles west of Ulen and about 17 miles northwest of Hawley--and

that was February 1, 1939. I brought my cousin with me so I had somebody because the weather wasn't very good. We waited all day and into the evening for that baby, and we went back to Hawley and went back to the Hitterdal-Ulen road and he drove in the ditch--he was driving. We walked about 3 miles with the winds on our backs; it was rather mild, not cold. We got to Hitterdal and the roads were blocked from Hitterdal to Hawley, so we stayed all night at I. K. Neal's place. Eight days later I was stalled again south of Hawley and this wasn't for an obstetrical case; this was just a flu. If I had known the man wasn't any more sick than he was, I don't think I would have made the house call. But that time we were stalled in the country 27 hours and we had to wait for the rotary plow to come out the next night to open up the road. I did ski over about a mile in 20 below zero weather to a farm that had a telephone because I wanted to tell my father that I was out in the country. My wife happened to be in Minneapolis, being nauseated with pregnancy with her first baby, so she wasn't around to call; but I called my dad and he said the mail deliverer started out to get us but went about 3 miles out on a snowmobile, but he had to turn back. We finally got out of that place after 27 hours out in the country. We had bread and cream for three meals because I had my uncle along with me and he liked that so well and I liked it too. So we had three meals of bread and cream.

I guess the case that Dr. John Holten was talking about that I probably told him about was in 1946; that was the third time I was stalled overnight in the country. I had a fellow with me then, too, because it was bad weather. We got 3 miles east of Hawley on Highway 10 and turned north on Highway 32 and right away we went through a snowdrift that was longer than my car, and I didn't think we were ever going to get out of that snowdrift and I was glad that nobody was coming from the other way or we would have had a collision. Well, we went north of Hitterdal, which was about 9 miles northeast of Hawley, went 2 miles north, then turned to go east about a mile, and my car went in the ditch. And it just happened there was a farmer right there waiting for me with a Hitterdal school bus driven by horses, because we couldn't have gotten any farther with a car anyway. So we went straight east about a mile or so in a school bus driven by horses and then we went north, and the driver, the father-to-be, and the man I had with me, and myself--none of us could see where we were going--but the horses knew where they were going, I guess; they drove us right into the yard. We stayed there all night. The baby didn't wait until I got out there because it took quite awhile to get there, so the baby came by itself and I finished up the other--some suturing had to be done--and then I took care of things and the patient and the baby were fine. I remember that we played cards--the new father and his father, and the fellow I had with me and myself--we played cards for awhile and then I lay down on the davenport (that was the bed they made for me) and the driver was upstairs, and I could hear the wind whistling and whistling, and I thought--this is a heck of a place to be; I'd rather be home in bed. I tried to call my wife and the phones were out, so I couldn't tell her that we were safe. But I did hear on the radio--Dr. Fred Thysell and Reverend Wendel Olson of Moorhead were out fishing on Pelican Lake and we wish to report that they are fine and at so-and-so's house. And I thought, "I wish I could tell my wife that I was safe, too, but I couldn't reach her." Well, anyway the next morning, we got a pair of horses and a wagon again and went about three miles back to where my car was hopelessly stuck in the ditch, so we didn't bother with the car. I got that 3 days later. But anyway we went back to another brother-in-law's farm of the place where I delivered the baby, and that was

just right next to Highway 32 north of Hitterdal, and I'd never seen a horse perspire so much. The horse went through snow up to his hips and then we went about a half-mile of that and they had to change horses; the horses were [unclear], so we got another pair of horses and drove into Hitterdal about three miles and I thought I could call Hawley and get a ride into Hawley. That was 9 miles from Hitterdal. But they said that the roads were blocked, even Highway 10 is blocked. But anyway, they said you could get down to the junction which is 5 miles down south of Hitterdal, so we went on a train--a railroad snowplow, I guess you'd call it. And we got to the junction, which is still 5 miles from Hawley and the fellow I had with me, Eugene Swenson, and I had two grips--I carried a regular grip and he carried an old B [?] grip and we walked 2 miles down to Highway 10, east of Hawley, and 3 miles into Hawley; and there was so much snow on the pavement that you were just going over hills of snow all the way into Hawley. I wasn't very old in those days, only about 37 years old, so I think I made one house call after I got to Hawley and then I went over and played volleyball because I still wasn't out of pep, I guess.

JH: Dr. Thysell, tell us about your office. Tell us about what it contained, where it was located, what you did in those days that was just before the antibiotics came in. What were the patients coming to see you with? What did you refer? And anything you can remember of your office practice.

DT: I started out--Main Street in Hawley runs north to south, and I started at the south end of Main Street on the west side of the street, almost across from the drugstore, and that was upstairs--had so many steps and turn and then so many steps--up to second floor. I had a large waiting room and a small office which was one of the handicaps. I didn't need that big waiting room, and I could have used more space in the office. I thought a little bit about dividing a room because I was going to start examining for glasses, too; I did that a few years before I quit doing that. But then we had another doctor; I should mention that Dr. Burgheim who came in 1921 died in 1938, after I'd been in Hawley 4 years; and Mrs. Burgheim got another doctor in there--he was there only about 10 months; that is, from about February 1939 to November 1939. And he decided to pull out; he went to southern Minnesota; I guess he decided that Dr. Synneson [spelling] and I were established there and he wasn't getting many o.b.'s and I was getting more and more o.b.'s and he thought Hawley wasn't big enough for three doctors, so anyway when he left, I went to the north end of Main Street, upstairs again over the dentist's office. And this was the second place I was in. I had more room there; I had a pretty good waiting room; I had larger examining room and a second room that I used for examining and had a cot in there and a little laboratory was a third room, so I had really more space there. I used to do the usual things that we did in private practice--fix up lacerations. I did some reduction of fractures, [unclear] fractures. I remember I put them to sleep then with chloroform or ether, and reduced the fractures. And I put on casts for fractures of the leg. I didn't have an x-ray machine of my own. I used a dental x-ray when I was in the south end of Hawley and also the north end of Main Street in Hawley. And that was quite a job. If we had a fractured leg, we had to get them first up to my office, and they were carried up by some people with them, and then we went down the street to the dental office, which was upstairs over the bank and most of his stairs were straight up except the last three or four stairs we had to go around the corner. We had to carry this man up there to the dental office--he had a Ritter

x-ray machine--and then we had to carry the man down again and he had to go to my office, up the stairs again. I counted those 22 steps many times to the upstairs office. We finally found out what the x-ray was, how the fracture was, and put the cast on. Of course, more severe fractures we got to the hospital. I remember the dentist himself, where we had the x-ray, he was crippled to begin with. He had some major surgery on the leg. He was a very good dentist and played real good golf, but he was putting on the storm windows where he lived and fell off the front entrance and had a fractured patella (knee cap) and I had to bring him to the hospital to have that wired by Dr. Swanson, who was the orthopedist in town at the time. Well, I did have some fractures in the country. I had an old lady about 80 years old that had an obvious fractured femur--fracture of the hip--and I couldn't get her to the hospital. You couldn't get many people to the hospital in those early days, and so I had weights on this and it finally healed. And I was out several times to adjust weights and I don't remember whether we used a bail or frame--something with some extension--and she got to walking around again. We didn't get any x-rays. I can remember another lady about 4 or 5 years later who was about 79 or 80, too, and we treated her the same way, with weights. I finally did get her in the back of my car and took her to what was then Sand Beach Sanatorium, a t.b. hospital east of Lake Park, and we got x-rays there and back home again. And she got along fine, too, and walked and lived a few years after that. But I did bring the most serious cases to the hospital that seemed to obviously need hospital care.

I was in a third office, too, when Dr. Synneson, who was there from 1909 to 1943. He got a stroke in '41 and died in '43. That place was used for residents for awhile and then I finally bought the building which was a wood-frame building and then I had an office downstairs, which was better; and I had quite a bit of space in that building. It was an old building, but it was kind of handy being on first floor. And then in 1954 there was kind of a feeling in Hawley that they should have a medical center, so that's when they started Hawley Medical Center and the graduating class came that year. Dr. Bentley, who was still a dentist in Hawley--he stayed. But the doctor I got for a partner, Dr. Arnold Berg, stayed only one year--1954 to 1955--and he was coerced to go up to Roseau and join Dr. Berge who was in Roseau; and they had a hospital in town and Dr. Berge did some surgery and I guess I wasn't doing any surgery because I was in a small town without a hospital. And so Dr. Berg didn't stay. He was in Roseau and later went to Thief River, where I think he is now. And that was the fourth place, so I was in four different offices in Hawley.

JH: You saw antibiotics come into medicine. Antibiotics have been described as one of the greatest advents that medicine has ever seen. Can you remember anything from your experience--

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

of antibiotics and before that the sulfa derivatives? Can you recall any treatments with either the sulfas or the early use of penicillin?

DT: Well, I started in 1934 and we didn't hear about antibiotics until at least a year or two later; and the first one we heard about was sulfanilamide. I guess before I go into that I

want to mention--well, this was '37. There used to be nothing for pneumonia except then they had some pneumococcic serum that was out from the University of Minnesota. You had to call in for it and then get it the next day. Well, I had a couple of brothers--one 18 and one 19--three miles north of Hawley who had pneumonia with 104 or 105 fever; and I got some pneumococcic serum, type 1 I think they both had, and I don't remember how we [unclear] to know what types they were; but anyway, I gave them the serum and the next day their temperatures were down to normal. I thought that must be due to that pneumococcic serum. I gave that serum to two or three other cases--I had four or five cases--and they got along real fine with their lobar pneumonia; the temperature came down right away and they were clinically better. Well, anyway, 1935 or 1936 we had sulfanilamide--the first one we heard about. And I think we heard about neopronasil [spelling]; I can't ever remember prescribing it. And then there got to be sulfapyridine and then sulfadiazine, and I think through the late '30s, they were just using sulfa drugs. I can't remember very specifically much about it except that the cases did get better much quicker after we started using sulfa drugs for upper respiratory infections and urinary infections.

But, anyway, as far as penicillin is concerned, I think that came in in World War II, between 1941 and 1944, and it was about that time, 1944 or 1945, that I used it first in Hawley. I can remember the man I gave it to; I think it came in 100,000 vials and we went down to my office. I think he thought he had venereal disease--gonorrhea--and we gave him a shot and then I had him come back in 4 or 5 hours for another shot and I think I even gave him about three, because we didn't have long-acting penicillin in those days. Well, I think within a couple of years we got long-acting penicillin, so a shot once a day was enough. Well, anyway, that surely changed a lot of things. There used to be a lot of cases--well, all the otitis media, the ear infections were controlled pretty well so you didn't get any mastoid cases. We used to see mastoid cases once in a while, and they got to be almost non-existent; and, of course, for a lot of sore throats, it took care of it right away; and also pneumonia, lobar pneumonia--we used to get a lot of cases with complications--empyema, pleural effusion and what not; and after penicillin was used I think we had less of those complications and the pneumonias got better. Instead of about 7 or 8 days until you'd come to the crisis, they'd get clinically better within 2 or 3 days and rate of death from pneumonia was way down after the antibiotics came into play. And, of course, later on--I think in the late '40s and early '50s--we started getting all the other branches of antibiotics that came later.

JH: Now, I'd like to know something about your recollections of the hospital in the 1930s and 1940s. You've mentioned some of the physicians from Hawley. When did you start using the hospital routinely or even more than occasionally and who did you come into contact here with? Tell us something about the early St. Ansgar Hospital.

DT: Well, I used the hospital I think almost right away in 1934. Every doctor would get a certain amount of appendicitis cases and I would see them and diagnose them as appendicitis. I think I got a white count in the office--brought them to the office and did it--and brought those cases up by car. We never used an ambulance in those days. We brought them up and didn't charge for transporting the patient either. We always used, most always used, my uncle, Dr. Fred Thysell--he and Dr. Duncan were together. Dr. Fred

Thysell started out in Hawley in 1916 to 1918. He was there during the flu time; then he went to Moorhead in 1920 and was with Dr. Humphrey until 1930 and from 1930 on Dr. Duncan became his partner. And so I used Dr. Thysell and Duncan--they did the surgery and I did the assist. So I assisted on all these cases, but I didn't particularly care for surgery enough to get involved in my own appendectomies, but I would always assist on my own cases; so I brought appendicitis cases in and sometimes you'd get gall bladder patients. They would do that. We didn't use any specialists in those days. Dr. Fred Thysell, Dr. Duncan, and Dr. Humphrey all did regular general surgery, even caesarean sections, you know, you had a case that couldn't be delivered from below, they would do caesarean sections. And I would assist on those. So, I suppose we got into more surgical cases that would come to the hospital more than medical cases, although I would have heart patients that wound up in the hospital and I would call--a lot of times I would just call Dr. Fred Thysell or Dr. Duncan to help me out because they were in town and I was out in the country. With fracture cases--we had a lot of those--and Dr. Duncan got pretty good at hip fractures--fractures of the neck of the femur, the long bone of the upper leg--so I would assist on those. Dr. Duncan or Dr. Thysell would do the work, mainly Dr. Duncan on those, and I would assist. And I can't recall--I suppose mostly surgical and some medical and there got to be more and more o.b.'s as the years went on. And once in awhile I'd have a delivery in St. Luke's or St. John's in Fargo, but I used chiefly St. Ansgar's. St. Ansgar's--their old hospital came into existence about, oh, I guess, we've got a picture on the wall here that says 1907--Northwestern Hospital and the Sisters of St. Ansgar took it over in about 1920 or 1921, and when I came in 1934 they were running it and still are running it. The old hospital was used until 1958 and then the new hospital where we are doing this dictation came in 1959 and that was the first emergency room that we had. We didn't really have an emergency room in the old hospital, but accident cases and things that required suturing went up to the regular surgery room on third floor. But the new hospital, in 1958, has always had an emergency room since that time. The hospital used to be run mainly by nurses. There would be about twelve or fifteen Sisters who would take care of most of the work; in fact, we had one Sister, Sister Bernice, who took care of x-ray and took care of lab, and she took care of medical records, and sometimes worked in the office; she was kind of a jack of all trades. And some of the sisters would give anesthetics, and they all had their specialties; some were head of the floors and whatnot. I think it was a 50-bed hospital, and now the present hospital has about 120 or more beds.

JH: In addition to infectious diseases, you saw some changes in other very serious medical problems. I've been in practice for 25 years and I've never seen a case of polio. What do you remember about polio in the years you were here?

DT: I can't remember seeing very many--I can't specifically remember a polio case; I'm sure I had some. I didn't have a very real serious one, but I can remember from my internship days that we would have patients in iron lungs down in Minneapolis and I don't recall what we did in early life here--whether we had an iron lung in the little hospital in Moorhead or not. But anyway polio was a thing to be feared in those days and finally we got the Salk vaccine, it must have been--I'd just be guessing--it must have been in '50 or '51 or so; and there got to be much less polio at that time; and about the mid-'50s, Sabin vaccine, the oral vaccine--you'd give drops and you'd swallow it and I think there was Type

1 and Type 2 and Type 3 of polio vaccine--I think they had to come three times to get all three varieties. Anyway, originally the vaccine by injection in the mid-'50s and early '50s was delivered to our office by Fred Rustad in Moorhead. He was pretty good at doing a lot of volunteer work and one of the things was that he'd deliver vaccine to all of the doctors including we in Hawley and Barnesville. And then oral vaccine came along and we used to do that in the schools; Dr. Holten, I think, remembers that; or maybe he came after that, I'm not sure. And then polio got to be practically non-existent. Now they're using the funds for polio for something else--birth defects, I believe.

JH: Dr. Thysell, you, yourself, were a victim of mastoiditis, something else that I have never seen. Why don't you tell us about the mastoid problem--how it came to be--and in your case, what was done to treat it?

DT: I was 7 years old when I got bilateral ear infection--infection of both ears--and my brother was 4. It started out that I got scarlet fever and I gave it to him and he got mastoid following scarlet fever and was operated on one side. Then he got the measles while he was in the hospital--that was in St. Luke's Hospital in those days--and then I got the measles from him and got a double mastoid. So he always felt like he was paying me back because I gave him scarlet fever and he got a mastoid and I got measles from him and I got a double mastoid. Anyway, I landed in St. Luke's Hospital; I can still remember sitting down in the Waldorf Hotel in Fargo waiting to get in the hospital. I couldn't hear a thing. I went in the hospital and I couldn't hear the elevator right next to my room. It was 1916, and I was operated on the next morning and I could hear the elevator going up and down. Well, anyway, my mastoid was a result of measles followed by infection of both ears; then I got mastoid. My brother's was following scarlet fever; he got an ear infection and mastoid. My surgeon was Dr. Cocklemacher [spelling]; he used to be in Fargo about those times during the 1900 teens and twenties. He also operated on an uncle of mine in 1924 who died following the mastoid operation; he'd developed a brain infection and died from complications. Anyway, this Dr. Cocklemacher operated on my brother and I; and I can remember that was when they installed the elevator. I read later they installed the elevators in St. Luke's Hospital in 1916; before that they just had stairways.

JH: You, for almost 50 years, were a member of the Clay-Becker Medical Society and I guess now you have been awarded a certificate as a 50-year participant of the Minnesota State Medical Association. Why don't you tell us something about the County Society--how you remember it in the early years, what was its purpose, what did you have for meetings, and anything else that would be of interest?

DT: Clay County Medical Society has always, since I knew about it, since '34, consisted of doctors from Moorhead, doctors from Detroit Lakes, doctors from Hawley, Lake Park, and in between, and doctors from Barnesville. I guess we got together--usually had a speaker on a medical subject. Once a year they'd change officers. I can't remember much about the non-medical problems; but anyway, some of the old members used to be Dr. Rutledge, Sr.--he had started practice in Detroit Lakes in 1921; and there were two Dr. Larson's--Dr. Arnold [unclear] Larson and an older Dr. Larson. All these three are dead now. And then there were Moorhead doctors--Dr. Humphrey, Dr. Fred Thysell, Dr. Duncan, Dr. Vottleson

[unclear], Dr. Gosley, and Dr. Thornby in Moorhead. I can't remember the two doctors in Ulen attended very much--Dr. Bossey and Dr. Meagan. The doctors in Hawley were Dr. Burkheim, Dr. C. W. Synneson, and myself; and later on, of course, from '37 on, we had Dr. Carlson and Dr. Sites in Barnesville. We used to trade off having meetings, sometimes at Detroit Lakes and sometimes in Moorhead and sometimes at Sunnyside Nursing Home east of Lake Park (used to be Sand Beach Sanatarium)--we sometimes had meetings there, which was halfway in between. I think we met about four times a year; we didn't meet every month.

JH: When you were in private practice in a small town, you were pretty well married, not only to your wife, but to your work. Will you tell something about your free time, or the lack thereof, by practicing medicine in a small town in the early years?

DT: When I first came to Hawley, there were two doctors there--Dr. Burgheim was there; he'd been there before. From '34 to '38 after I came [he was there]; he died in '38. Dr. Synneson, Sr. (Carl's father) died in '41, and after '41 I was alone in practice except for one year in '54 and '55, I had Dr. Arnold Berg with me and he didn't stay; so you might say about 18 or 19 years I was the only doctor in Hawley from about 1941 to 1960. It involved getting up at night quite a bit. I remember one night I had two ob's, two confinement cases, we called them confinement cases (the birth of a baby)--anyway, I had two of them north of Hawley. I went out and checked on the one and then I went about 6 miles to check on the second and to deliver that baby and then went back and delivered the first one, all out in the country. And I worked all day the next day after being up most of the night. This happened quite often, that you would lose a lot of sleep at night. As far as social life, there wasn't a lot; but my wife was pretty good at organizing friends and so on Saturday nights we'd have a bunch over or go to somebody else's house; and I was glad I had somebody who could do that because I wasn't very good at making social events happen myself. We'd go down to Detroit Lakes quite often and go to Sevard's or some other place, got in a little dancing and sometimes a couple of drinks, too, which I probably got involved in, too, but not in a very big way. I can't think of much right now.

JH: It has been said that you had a cottage down at Melissa for many years and you didn't spent many nights there. You'd go back to Hawley. Why don't you tell something about that?

DT: Just before I mention that I should mention that my wife and I were going to celebrate our third wedding anniversary, I think, in Detroit Lakes at Edgewater Beach (I believe that's the name of the place) and we were out on a nice summer evening, June 18, and we had a nice meal outside at a little place by the lake and we were going back to Edgewater Beach. We were just going to check in for the night when somebody said you are wanted on the telephone, so I found out I had an o.b. in the country in Hawley and so we couldn't stay overnight; we had to go back to Hawley and give up celebrating our anniversary--at least staying overnight. We had our meal, but we had to go home after that.

Anyway, we had a cottage. We rented a cottage in 1942 in Detroit Lakes for a couple of weeks and rented one on Lake Melissa in 1943. In 1944 we bought a cottage on Lake

Melissa, 8 miles out of Detroit Lakes; and we were there from 1944 until 1958 and then we moved. We had just gotten a big boat that last year, and it was kind of inconvenient to have a big boat on Melissa because there was nobody to bring it to when you had trouble and also the lake got kind of weedy and the kids were about the age where they like to water ski. We moved over to Pelican Lake and we had a cottage on the west side of Pelican Lake from '58 to '75 and now in '75 we moved to the north side of Pelican Lake because I wanted a cottage that you could use in the winter although we don't go down there much in the winter. Anyway, I didn't stay overnight very much while I was in Hawley from 1934 to '60 because I was the only doctor most of the time; but I did enjoy going down there for a few hours like on Saturday and go back on Sunday and sometimes some of the summer evenings. My kids liked to water ski when they were teenagers and I did a little bit of it myself. But my wife liked the lake; she liked the lake very much, and I think one reason we had the cottage was she and the kids enjoyed it so much.

JH: You retired from active practice three years ago now in 1982, and since that time you've had your moments of joy and moments of sorrow when you lost your wife and partner of these many years. How would you describe your retirement and what are you doing with your retirement years?

DT: Oh, I think the best part of my life was when my wife was living because we did so many things together. We got along pretty well all the time. We took many trips together--went across the water to Europe six times--three times to England and Ireland and Scotland and three times on the continent besides that. We traveled around on Eurail Pass. We'd visit Switzerland because that's where her first cousins were. Her father had come over at age 22 from Switzerland; her father came from Basil, Switzerland. She had a lot of first cousins there. My wife died May 7, 1983; and since that time it's been very lonely. I feel the best when I'm a little busy, so I've taken on a few things. I go down to the Clay County Historical Society in Moorhead and look at pictures. They develop about 50 pictures at a time of previously unidentified photos by S. B. Wang who was a photographer in Hawley for over 50 years, from 1893 to 1940--some and it's fun to identify these pictures. Also, I'm on a committee at Moorhead State University--Oral Heritage--that's partly what we are doing right in the project--to get oral histories of several different categories--to get the history from Moorhead from 1930 to 1975. And I belong to the Swedish Society--I've got a job there too, as literary representative this year. We pick out books and donate them to different libraries--Moorhead State University Library, Moorhead Library, Fargo Library. We donate so much money each year so they can buy books with a Swedish content for people interested. I belong to the Elks Club; I go over frequently for steam baths and eat there sometimes. I play in the Shrine band and sometimes in the Legion band. I can't think of much else. I bowl a little bit.

JH: Finally, let's recap this whole long and interesting life and ask you, "Was your life enjoyable?" and "Would you do it again?"

DT: I don't regret a thing that ever happened. Some things were probably uncomfortable at the time--there's always something uncomfortable in medical life, I think, especially waiting for OB's--but everybody felt so good when the deliveries were over that it really

recompensed a person for all the misery you went through waiting for an OB that sometimes never happened. Also, there were other things that were probably not so pleasant at the time but looking back, I'm glad things happened the way they did. I'm glad I was a family doctor all these years, and I've got so many experiences to look back on that it's fun to recall. Also so many pleasant experiences that happened in my married life with my wife and children, so I guess I'm glad it turned out the way it did. I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't been a doctor now.

JH: Dr. Thysell was honored by the Minnesota Medical Association two years ago after completing 50 years of membership in the Minnesota Medical Association. Also, he had a 50-year class reunion in which he was one of the honored guests.

We've been visiting with Dr. V. Duane Thysell, an early practitioner in the village of Hawley from 1934 until 1960. After that, he moved to Moorhead and joined the Moorhead Medical Center and retired in 1982. We share many of his common interests and it has been a privilege to know Dr. Thysell and we are amazed at his intellect and knowledge and we've always appreciated his association in the Clay County Medical Society and St. Ansgar's Hospital.

[End of Interview]