

Mayo Clinic Heritage Films

Dr. Archibald Wright (Moonlight) Graham and his Connections to Mayo Clinic

A documentary film to premiere in July 2014

Most people are at least somewhat familiar with the name “Moonlight” Graham as a character in the book “Shoeless Joe and” and the film “Field of Dreams.” Fewer people know that “Moonlight” Graham was an actual person, not just a fictional character. And even fewer know what kind of person he was, what type of physician he was, or that he had strong ties to Rochester and Mayo Clinic, all of which made him the beloved town doctor in Chisholm, Minnesota.

Some background on the timing:

- During Heritage Days 2013, we premiered a new film, *A Cheerful Heart: The Dave Madden Story*. Dave was a polio patient who lived in an iron lung for 16 years at Saint Marys Hospital in Rochester. In spite of the limitations placed on him, Dave lived a victorious life, inspiring others and bringing joy to all who met him. One of Dave’s regular visitors was his uncle, Archibald Wright Graham, M.D.

Some highlights of the story:

- Doc Graham made numerous trips to Rochester to observe surgery and attend continuing education courses at Mayo Clinic. The Mayo Historical Unit has many attendance rosters showing his signature: A.W. Graham, M.D., Chisholm, Minn.
- Graham diligently conducted blood pressure studies of children for 15 years. He made 25,000 determinations of blood pressure on 3,580 children from 5 to 16 years of age inclusive. He was primary author of the article “Blood Pressures in Children Between the Ages of Five and Sixteen Years” published in the American Journal of Diseases of Children, volume 69, no. 4:203-207. His co-authors were from Mayo Clinic: Edgar A. Hines, Jr., M.D., and Robert P. Gage, M.S. Walter C. Alvarez, M.D., was

acknowledged for providing advice and guidance. This publication became the definitive work in children's blood pressure for many years. Dr. Paul Mueller, Chair of the Division of General Internal Medicine at Mayo Clinic, has copies of newspaper articles and photographs about this milestone work.

- Graham had other friends and colleagues at Mayo Clinic, including Dr. Hamner Irwin, who was an assistant to Dr. Emil Beckman. In correspondence Graham refers to meeting "Irwin" while at Mayo Clinic in the spring of 1915. Graham was here to seek a diagnosis and treatment for a long-standing ailment related to respiratory problems that started during his baseball playing years.
- Dr. Graham married Alecia Madden in Rochester on September 29, 1915. Because Dr. Graham was not Catholic, they could not be married in the Catholic Church but were probably married in the church rectory. We have a scanned copy of their marriage license from the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Rochester. Alecia Madden was a Rochester native who taught 6th grade in the Chisholm schools.
- The city of Chisholm had an outstanding educational system, of which Dr. Graham, as school physician, was an integral part. Graham was a staunch supporter of the school's activities and athletic teams, conducted physicals, immunization clinics, educated the citizenry about public health, advocated for city improvements that would result in a healthier community, supported civic groups such as Chamber of Commerce and Masons, served on village council, school board, and as public health officer.
- Dr. Graham's years in Chisholm were extremely important in terms of illness and advances in medicine. He advocated dental hygiene, hand-washing and cleanliness, sewer and street repairs, and proper disposal of garbage and manure. During his years as school physician he had to deal with the flu epidemic of 1918, measles, diphtheria, typhoid, tuberculosis and polio.
- He conducted "Baby Welfare Days" and educated mothers on the care of their children.

- Graham was involved in Red Cross blood drives, mobile x-ray units, and the Heart Council. He was an advocate for public health and had many interactions/collaborations with the Minnesota Department of Health.
- Dr. and Mrs. Graham were highly regarded citizens in Chisholm. They were often listed as guests of honor at various dinners and events.
- In May 1947, the Grahams were honored by the Chisholm Chamber of Commerce. Attendance at the event set a record. Letters of commendation and congratulations were received and read from Dr. Frank P. Graham (brother who was President of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, U.S. Senator and a mediator at the United Nations), Dr. Walter C. Alvarez of Mayo Clinic, Steve O'Neill (manager of the Detroit Tigers and former minor league teammate), numerous judges and physicians, and professional associates from all over the country.
- Alecia Graham was recognized for her many contributions to the community as well. She directed amateur plays and was very active in the church and various women's organizations. Newspaper clippings also list her as a supporter of "Liberty Bonds" which were issued to support the war effort.
- Dr. Graham was hospitalized in Rochester several months before his death. Chisholm newspaper articles in April 1965 state he was confined for several weeks at Rochester Methodist Hospital, then moved to Saint Marys Hospital room 305 on the 6th floor. By mid-April he was in Room 4127 at SMH. He returned to Chisholm by about April 20.
- Dr. Graham died in Chisholm on Wednesday, August 25, 1965. The funeral was held at Chisholm Community Methodist Church at 1:00 p.m. on Friday, August 27. Graveside services were conducted at 10 a.m. Saturday (August 28) in Calvary Catholic Cemetery in Rochester.
- Doc Graham's gravesite has drawn people from all over the country. The director of Calvary Cemetery and its groundskeeper can share many examples of the mementoes (particularly coins and baseballs) that are placed there in his memory.
- The Grahams are buried near their dear friends, J.P. and Leithe Vaughan. (J.P. Vaughan was the superintendent of Chisholm Schools.)

- The Grahams are also buried within a few yards of their nephew, Dave Madden.
- The Chisholm newspaper lauds Chisholm as “The Physician Cradle for America” and lists names of Chisholm natives who have pursued a career as physicians. Names listed in the article include Robert Avant and James Pluth (both Mayo physicians).
- Other Chisholm natives who became physicians include Dr. William Rupp, current CEO of Mayo Clinic in Florida, and Dr. Charles C. Gornick of the Minneapolis Heart Institute and Abbott Northwestern Hospital.
- The world knew little of Doc Graham until publication of W.P. Kinsella’s book *Shoeless Joe* in 1982 and the premiere of the film *Field of Dreams* in 1989. Our film will premiere in 2014, which is the 25th anniversary of *Field of Dreams*.
- Target Field will host the 2014 All Star Game on Tuesday, July 15.
- On June 29, 2005, the Minnesota Twins commemorated the 100th anniversary of Moonlight Graham’s one appearance in the major leagues. Mayo Clinic now has a collaborative relationship with the Twins.
- Dr. Paul Mueller, Chair of the Division of General Internal Medicine, is collaborating on a medical biography of Moonlight Graham with Robert Reising, Ph.D., from the University of Central Arkansas. Dr. Reising is co-author of the book “Chasing Moonlight” published in 2009.