

Mayo Oral History Project  
Interviewee: Dr. H. F. Helmholz, Jr.  
Interviewer: Dr. Carolyn Stickney Beck  
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Helmholz: It's hard to know where to start. I suppose I could start when I became aware that this was sort of a different community. That was probably when I was in high school and I used to walk to high school with my father as he walked to the Clinic.

Beck: Where did you live at this point?

Helmholz: We lived, you know where the Love's used to live? Father built that house in 1922. That's where we lived. We originally had a tennis court down below, which father also built when we built that house. I remember walking with father and saying something about what he did and this kind of thing, and I noticed a folder he had. I asked what that was and he said, "That's my Malthus folder." And I said, "Well what's Malthus?" "Well," he said, "this is population trends. You realize what it is to be a pediatrician, because we save children that were supposed to die and that adds about sixty, seventy, or eighty years on. So we're the most guilty of increasing the population."

Beck: So this would have been about what year?

Helmholz: Oh, '27 or '28. We came at the end of '21. I became aware that father was in the business of saving lives of children. I sort of knew that he was a pediatrician, but this sort of brought it to a head. It was then that the Plummer Building was planned and built so it was before '29 anyway, because it was finished before '29. I really didn't pay much attention to what the institution was like until I got into medical school. When I got to medical school this relative of mine, who was a class ahead of me, said, "Why is it that the Mayo Clinic people lie?" I said I didn't know they did. He said, "Those surgeons out there, they can't have the kind of results that they're telling us about." I was at Johns Hopkins. It's very interesting. For your information, you may remember Al Uihlein?

Beck: I sure do.

Helmholz: Well he was the guy who was at Hopkins who asked me why it was that they lied. Well anyway, when I got home for Christmas vacation or something I remembered this and I said to father, "I had this question asked, 'Why do the people at the Mayo Clinic lie?'" He said, "You have to realize that Al was talking about Omar?. You remember those people who were in the park out in front of where you lived in Baltimore? Who would be put in jail and they'd come out

looking fairly healthy and in about six weeks they'd be skin and bones and so forth. Those are the people they have to operate on. What do we get? We get the healthy farm people from around here and of course we're going to have better results." This sort of made me think about what the population surroundings were for the Mayo Clinic as against Johns Hopkins in Baltimore, to say nothing of Massachusetts General where I went next, you see. I became aware that there was something special about the area in which we lived, and the more experience I had out here the more I realized how important this was. Now when Henrietta Cranston, who was one of the technicians who worked in the laboratories where I worked, when she died I sent five-hundred dollars to the foundation and said, "This is in memory of Henrietta Cranston who was one of the people who made the Mayo Clinic great in spite of the doctors." Because I wanted just to express myself, for once, how important the desk girls and all of these girls who have come off the farms, how important they have been in this institution. They're the ones that have more contact with the patients, probably, than the doctors do. That's one side of this. The other thing that comes to mind is after Mary and I were married, I still have the cutout from the paper which says, "Four Grandmothers Attend Wedding." Paragraph after paragraph about the grandmothers. The last line says, "Mary Balfour marries..." The interesting thing was that both Doctor Will and his wife were still alive at the time we were married, so I did have a chance to go to the Wednesday night dinners. The men would get up and go to the staff meeting, and later on I asked Mrs. Mayo, Hattie, I think I asked her whether these Wednesday dinners were something that she liked or whether Doctor Will liked. She says, "I like them. We get rid of the men." At these, from time to time, I had an opportunity to question Doctor Will. I asked him one time why he thought this institution got to be the way it is here. He said, "You know, most of the people who came to Minnesota came from the east." I had never thought of it, but that's right, they came from the east. He says, "In the east if you put a shovel in the ground, you hit rocks and the rocks keep appearing, so they pile them up around and between the fields and so forth. They came out here and put a shovel in the ground all they got was black dirt. So they came out here, but they didn't bring their doctors with them. A lot of people got out here and didn't have any doctors and they needed some doctors. Probably the one really good thing I did was see to it that Henry Plummer's ideas were carried out." About now I began to be a little suspicious of this man because I remember when a friend of mine came to see me one time in Rochester, he said, "Do you think that Doctor Will and Doctor Plummer and these people realized that they were great people?" I said, "I'll take you around and show you their houses." I think Doctor Will, he must have thought about this and so on, and he thought of Doctor Plummer immediately when I asked him why the institution got going, because Doctor Plummer had obviously been terribly important in the way things went. On the other hand, Doctor Will probably had some ideas of his own and in that regard I remember in 1975, I think it was, about when I was getting ready to

retire, I got sued for two million dollars. I could see myself being in debt for the rest of my days. I got to know the lawyer here because he had told me, "After all, you live in Minnesota and these people who are suing you are in Wisconsin and so forth." I said, "I'm sorry, I own some property in Wisconsin." The point is I got out of that all right, but in the process of this, in discussing suits and this kind of thing with this lawyer, he said, "You know, it's quite interesting, Doctor Will started a fund back in 1909 to take care of malpractice." He did it, I understand, because he was bothered by somebody having something go wrong and then have to sue about it. He said, "If we do something wrong, we ought to fix it right away. So let's have a fund." The interesting thing was that that fund also made it possible for them to tell people who brought tiny suits, who said, "I'll sue you for a couple thousand dollars." and so forth, insurance companies end up by saying, "Two-thousand dollars, it will cost us ten-thousand dollars...go ahead and pay it." Not the Mayo Clinic. No sir, if you wanted to try and collect two-thousand dollars from the Mayo Clinic, you're going to have to sue them, because they have this fund which if we do do something wrong, we take care of it right today. Now, we burned part of a fellow's ear off one time. Within twenty-four hours we had a letter, we had all sorts of statements and so forth to take care of him for the rest of his life. We broke off a catheter in a fellow's pulmonary artery in his lung, and within twenty-four hours we had x-rays so he could show any other doctors what had happened and then we followed him for several years to see if anything happened. So when there was malpractice we took care of it right away. You can bet that when somebody sues the Clinic that the chances are that the Clinic is going to win in court, because if they'd been really responsible in any way, they would have taken care of it.

Beck: So what you're saying is that if there's a problem you follow right up on it, you don't pretend it doesn't exist, you acknowledge it and you deal with it.

Helmholz: You take care of it right now. I remember being called to the BMR lab one time and the girls said when I got there, "There's a lady in here that says that we've deformed her face." Have you ever had a BMR?

Beck: No.

Helmholz: Well, they tie a mask around your face real tight to collect your expired air. This lady said we had deformed her face. So I went up to see Mr. Lobb who was the lawyer in those days. I said, "I've got a lady down there who says we deformed her face." He says, "Well did we deform it?" I said, "No, we didn't." He said, "By the way, what's her name?" So I gave him the name and he said, "Oh, she's back again. Tell her to sue!" She was going to try again. The reason I brought all that up was that this is the kind of thing which Doctor Will was doing, now whether he got the idea from Henry Plummer I doubt, because Henry Plummer never thought about

things like that.

Beck: Do you think it was sort of unusual in 1909 for a medical institution to be doing that sort of thing, to be thinking about malpractice? Does that strike you as sort of unusual?

Helmholz: Well I think it was unusual. In the first place, there weren't many suits going on and actually, that wasn't what Doctor Will was worried about. He was upset by the fact that if they did do something wrong, he hated to think that somebody would have to sue them to get it taken care of. He wanted it taken care of right now. This worked out to the benefit of the Clinic in the long run. This was what he was thinking. Those are some things that come to mind. Do you have a question?

Beck: Without my prompting, you went right away to talk about women, you went right away to talk about Mrs. Mayo, Hattie Mayo and then you talked about Cranston. The role of women in the history of Mayo has been kind of invisible as far as what's been collected in the archives and so we're trying to go back and do some reconstruction. You went right to that without my prompting, which shows that within your mind that's really an important thing to be talking about.

Helmholz: When I was here as a fellow I was working out at the Institute and then I worked in pathology, so we did autopsies in the various places around town. Randy Lovelace was a friend of ours, we lived near each other and so forth. He's the one who got me, since he left here when we got into the war and went to work in the Air Surgeon's office. This was when the army had an air force, the navy had an air force and so forth, and this was the Army Air Force Surgeon's General. He got him to ask me to go out and take charge of the laboratory that was being built in consolidated aircraft in San Diego. Well, in order to get more training having to do with aviation, I worked for a while in Walter Boothby's laboratory. There was where I really began to appreciate women, because Lucille Crohn (spelling?) took me under her wing and taught me how to do gas analysis with Halding apparatus.

Beck: What was Lucille's position here?

Helmholz: She was a technician in the BMR lab.

Beck: Would you suspect that she was someone that was probably trained here from the ground up?

Helmholz: Oh, yes.

Beck: Was she off a farm or from somewhere nearby?

Helmholz:She was off a farm east of Rochester. I always remember her so well because I, what we call, ran her machine over. That means I ran concentrated sodium hydroxide solution over into the burette, which is the measuring burette. What she said to me you wouldn't believe. She really let me have it. We had to very quickly take the whole machine apart and wash it out so it didn't get etched and change the calibration. But I never forgot that and I never ran one over again either! Lucille was the salt of the earth. After the war, she worked in the Medical Sciences Building in what was the aviation laboratory over there and then after the war when Earl Wood started developing cardiac catheterization and so forth and we were all working, she became the chief laboratory technician and she more or less trained us. She had learned from Walter Boothby that you must learn how to do the analyses and you do the analyses and if Doctor Boothby doesn't like the results you get, you look him straight in the eye and say, "But that's the way it is." There was none of this business of saying, "Well the doctor doesn't like that, he doesn't think that's quite right." They would say, "I'll do it again if you want, but it won't be any different."

Beck:Do you suppose she had just a high school education?

Helmholz:Yes. Henrietta Cranston, who was the same type of person, also had a high school education.

Beck:It's my understanding that we have little if any documentation of what people like that have done here.

Helmholz:Any of us who worked in the Medical Sciences Building after the war, there was no such thing as pulmonary function tests until that time, so we were developing pulmonary function tests. The way cardiac catheterization was done was very primitive until Earl Wood got started, instrumenting and so forth. Lucille and her gals were the ones that were keeping us all on the track by making us realize that what you do is make measurements and that you try and deal with the measurements, you don't worry about the ideas you originally had, you change them when the measurements change.

Beck:So you're saying that she had an important role in keeping you honest in that regard. Do you think among your physician male colleagues that there was a uniform degree of respect for her and others like her or were they looked down on because they were women?

Helmholz:Well, it's interesting, of course we had lots of people come through here to study, some Mexicans, some Irish, English, Australians and so forth. I think that those of us who grew up in the laboratories here had a different attitude than some of the people from elsewhere. The people from elsewhere might say, "Well, she's

not a doctor, we don't have to pay any attention." This, of course, I learned from Walter Boothby as well. He was very anxious to pay attention to the measurements that were made and "Let's see what they mean," rather than having an idea of what it was going to be and having the measurements fit into that. That's why Lucille and the people trained by Walter Boothby were such good laboratory people. When they moved into the aeromedical laboratory, Walter Boothby retired and Earl Wood and Ed Lambert and Charlie Code, they all, I think, appreciated the attitude of these people.

Beck: Would it be safe to say that in that limited setting, there was a kind of collegiality, even though you had the M.D.'s and they weren't formerly educated?

Helmholz: Oh absolutely. In other words, Rita Smeltzer, who was the chief when I was developing the pulmonary function testing and so forth, I remember one day Rita called me down to the lab and she said, "You know this is an unusual patient." I looked at the data and so forth and said, "That's just a regular, severe case of emphysema." Well, Rita was right. It wasn't. When I really got around to looking into it, this was somebody who had a tumor of the trachea and it was giving obstruction like an emphysema, but Rita had realized it was different.

Beck: What was Rita's position there?

Helmholz: Well, she was in charge of the technicians who were working in the pulmonary function area.

Beck: Did she have a high school education and had been trained?

Helmholz: That's right. Again, these were people who were making measurements, paying attention to what was going on and didn't worry about theoretical ideas and so forth, they just said, "This is the way it is."

Beck: Do you think that kind of collegiality in that situation would be unique to Mayo in that time period, or do you think that kind of thing was happening in other medical centers, in so far as you might know?

Helmholz: I think that happened all over. The people who were working in laboratories and so forth, the M.D.'s and the Ph.D.'s, they had to depend on people for the day to day routine kinds of things. There are examples of people who have not been critical of what their people are doing. That's trouble. Then there are others, like me and the patient. I said, "That's simply emphysema," instead of paying attention when she said this was different. There are two aspects to this. If you let the technical people do all the work, you're in trouble, but if you don't pay attention to them you're in trouble too. For example, at the Massachusetts General there were

laboratories that had good people working in them and at Hopkins too there were laboratories that had good technicians. The thing that comes to mind is the fellow who was in charge of the bodies in the anatomy laboratory at Hopkins worked with the anatomists and all sorts of things and got to be pretty good. He fell down and broke his leg one time and so the anatomists came at him like this and he says, "No, go get me a real doctor!" He was this kind of a person too. Happened to be a man. I think we were very fortunate here in that a lot of the girls that came to work here with high school educations, maybe some of them not even that, were off the farm, they were solid citizens, they weren't out of the slums and so on. I think some of the people that I've trained who have gone down to Jacksonville have found that it's not easy to get this kind of a person to work in these laboratories, because the people who are looking for jobs are not solid citizens. They weren't brought up to be necessarily honest and so on.

After I got out here to work I worked with Essex out at the Institute for a while. It was interesting, right after the war, Charlie Code wanted to form a physiology section, there had been no such thing. There was the dog farm or the Institute for Experimental Medicine. There were those of us who could see why we might want to have a section like that, but it wasn't until we all agreed that Hy Essex should be the first head of this that we all got behind it. Hy Essex was what you would call a completely unselfish investigator. He loved to investigate things. He always said, "Come along. If you're interested, come on along." Nobody ever felt jealous of him, everybody trusted him completely. Now Frank Mann, of course, had been in charge of the Institute. The question was whether animal work should be brought in town or should be left in the country. Frank Mann said it must be left out in the country, in no uncertain terms. I understood why that was. I don't know if you know the history of the Institute. The 1914 Building which was here had kennels and a laboratory up on the roof, so the Kahler goes up next to us and the people could look down on that, so they moved it out in the country. The point was, after the war was over, air conditioning and ventilation had been developed to the point that no longer did the dogs have to be outside. They could be brought in; which was one thing that worried us. The air that went through the kennels had to go out on the opposite side of the Medical Sciences Building and we wondered whether some animals might gather a couple of blocks away when this smell came down again, which never did happen. Anyway, there was a big argument for a while. Tom Magath, he was on the Board of Governors or on some committee, sided with Doctor Mann, but amazingly enough he changed his mind and Doctor Mann was overruled and everything was brought into the Medical Sciences Building. Gradually the Institute, the big white building that used to be out there where all the labs were, was finally taken down.

Beck: That would have been definitely post-World War II.

Helmholz: Post-World War II, yes. That was when the Medical Sciences Building was enlarged, right after the war. Bringing up Doctor Magath, I might as well tell you some stories about him. There is a classic article by Bolman, Mann, and Magath, which was the first one that really described the way the liver is involved in carbohydrate metabolism and so forth.

Beck: The first one ever.

Helmholz: That's right. This is in the literature. This is a classic article that they even quote in Boston and Baltimore. Well, I wanted to know how Bolman and Mann and Magath got together. So I called up Doctor Magath after he retired and I identified myself and asked if I could come to see him. There was this silence for a minute, and he said, "Well, since you're Henry Helmholz's son I'll see you, but you worked with Walter Boothby and because of that I may not see you!" It so happens that Doctor Will got Doctor Magath here to take charge of clinical laboratories. Henry Plummer got Walter Boothby here to start the BMR lab to work on metabolism and so forth. Magath thought that BMR should be under him and not under Doctor Boothby...both he and Walter Boothby were little people and when they developed an animosity...they never did get along. Actually, Magath's laboratories were upstairs and Walter Boothby's were in the basement. When I was working at San Diego, I was taking care of ferry pilots among the other aviation people I was taking care of. One of the ferry pilots, when he came back from Australia, this was during the war, he says, "By the way, weren't you from the Mayo Clinic?" I said, "Yes." He says, "Did you ever know a guy by the name of Tom Magath?" I said, "Sure, I knew him." "Well," he said, "he's coming back from out there because Haltze (spelling?) said, 'if that fellow doesn't go back to the United States, I'm going to send him back in chains.'" You see Magath went out there and I'm sure that he really saw horrible conditions and he said, "By God, you've got to clean this up and so forth." and he would go right to Halze (spelling?) and say, "Here come on." and Halze (spelling?) was going to send him back in chains. That was the kind of fellow he was. Anyway, I found out that when Magath first arrived here, Frank Mann, who had been hired as a pathologist, was working with dogs up on the roof here and he was collecting materials and so forth and he needed some chemical analyses. Magath had just arrived so he didn't have anything to do because his laboratories weren't ready, so he says, "Ok, I'll do them for you." Then when he started getting busy and wasn't able to do as much of them, by this time Frank Mann had gone to Doctor Will and said, "We need a chemist." and so they hired Bolman, who Magath had known and so forth. So this is the origin. Of course, Mann then went out to the Institute when they moved. You knew that the Institute burned down? You heard all about that, how Doctor Will and Doctor Charlie thought it over a long time before they rebuilt that. I can remember father saying something about that.



Beck: In 1936 were you a fellow here?

Helmholz: No, I was in medical school. I graduated in '37.

Beck: We had discovered a little, I suppose you could call it poetry, that Doctor Mann wrote. Did you know him very well? Was he a difficult person to work with?

Helmholz: Yes, I knew him. Yes and no. He was a fairly strict guy in that you had to be willing to take a certain amount of criticism, but if you were willing to do that he was fine, he was great.

Beck: We discovered this. Don Pady was down in the basement going through some things and he came across this which had Frank Mann's name at the bottom. I don't know whether he composed it, read it, or whatever, but it refers to the "1936 institute spree," which must have been some kind of party. Do you remember anything about that?

Helmholz: I remember that each year there was a party around Christmastime.

Beck: I just wondered, it sounded from that like they must have had a pretty good time together. That's a pretty long thing...it's got a lot of detail in that. That's an extra copy if you'd like it.

Helmholz: Well, I can read it. I can tell you about one of the parties. I guess it was a Christmas party and we decided that we would put on sort of a medical conference and this medical conference was to discuss nervous indigestion in the flea. Al Uihlein, who was tall, took the part of Watercloset Alvarez. These pictures are in the physiology department, I drew pictures of the staff, Frank Mann, Hy Essex, Bolman, and so forth. They're not cartoons exactly, I'm not good enough to do caricatures, but anyway, they're recognizable. Then we made slides out of this and after Watercloset Alvarez got up and described nervous indigestion in the flea, Khalil Wakim, I think, got up and said, "Well, really, it's all very well to describe this new nervous indigestion, but this flea was on such a lousy diet..." and he flashed the pictures of the staff. I'm sure this was in the same idea.

Beck: So it was an annual thing around Christmastime?

Helmholz: Yes. I think it is probably genuine. This is Esther Peters here.

Beck: Do you suppose Doctor Mann, his name is at the bottom, would he have been the one to have read that? Would he write anything like that?

Helmholz: I just don't know. I didn't know that he wrote this kind of thing.

Beck: Well it could have been just in his files or something and someone wrote his name at the bottom. We have no way of knowing. But that was a tradition that had gone on many years, probably.

Helmholz: This would have been before my time. I would say, having been at Johns Hopkins, being a member of the so-called Pithotomy Club, "pith" meaning the center of and "otomy" meaning to cut into, this meant to open a barrel of beer. The dean of medical artists did the coat of arms for the club, Max Bredal (spelling?). This is a keg of beer on a table, which is obviously the kind of table on which a woman is put when she delivers, with dogs and cats sitting around. This is the coat of arms of the Pithotomy Club. Well anyway, each year in the spring the Pithotomy Club puts on a show in which the faculty of the medical school is unmercifully taken to task. Some of them would never come back again, whereas some of them, the more you razed them, the more they would come back and so forth. It was very interesting to see the difference in the people. Well anyway, having come from this I was delighted to take part in this thing at the Institute because this was fine to be able to lightly deal with some of the faculty. That kind of thing, except for the Institute, was fairly rare until sort of in the late 20s and 30s a few areas had started. Even some of the surgeons got involved in this. Mrs. Walters described to me when the Walters surgical service put on a show at a Christmas party. Doctor Walters could not remember names, ever, and he always called his residents and assistants and so forth by the wrong names. Mrs. Walters told me this story some years ago, that at one of these parties they were putting on sort of a mock surgical thing and the fellow who was taking Doctor Walters part was calling these other fellows by the wrong names and she said, "Walt, who is that?" and he said, "Oh, that's so and so and so and so." and using the wrong names. That I'm sure is what this came from. The other thing I wanted to tell you about Doctor Magath, he evidently became fairly tolerant of somebody who worked with Walter Boothby and so I stayed around and he told me some stories and so forth and the one I remember well was, he said, "You know, when I first came here I was looking around for things to do. My training was clinical chemistry and bacteriology. So I thought I'd look around and see what was going on. So I went to St. Marys and I was watching the surgeons operate and the surgeons would get their gloves bloody and it would sort of dry on there and so they would go over to the faucet, turn the faucet on and rinse them off and I said to Doctor Will, "You know, that doesn't seem to be keeping asepsis." and Doctor Will said, "We have tested the water and it is sterile." Doctor Magath said, "But it will splash." Doctor Will said, "That's nonsense." So Doctor Magath goes out early one morning and puts methylene blue in the bottom of the sink, so Doctor Will goes over to rinse his hands off and when he comes back the sister who's assisting him says, "Oh, but Doctor Will, you're all blue down the front!" Magath was in the spectators section and he said, "Those blue eyes looked at me like that and if

they could have killed they would have." He said, "He never mentioned it again." That was the origin of pans of alcohol. He was furious but he did the right thing. I thought that was sort of a nice side-line story. That's what I got from Doctor Magath.

You're going to have to ask a question. As you know, there are things about any family that are probably not for publication, although they are of considerable interest.

Beck:I have a certain bias in my interpretation of the history here, like any historian or anthropologist does. I think it would be hard to deny that the Clinic is grounded in the relationship between Will and Charlie in a very important way. Whatever else there is about the Mayo family, I think that that's central and I see that, their brotherhood and their closeness, whatever their differences were, maybe because of their differences, as a real seed here in sort of a sociological sense apart from their specialty in medicine. I am very interested in the term "Mayo Family," not in the sense of those of you who were born or married into the Mayo family, but as a reference to the group of people that work here. We've traced that back to about the early 40s to mid 40s. We've seen it in print in the 1949 Christmas Program brochure. It just seems to me that the capacity of a group of people to take over the identity of what is a biologically based family, it's not just fascinating sociologically it's a really critical thing. I am very interested in understanding the persistence and the uniqueness of this institution. Whatever the difficulties have been, there is a genius in the Mayo family that has been passed on to all of us who work here. I'm just really interested to know from you, as a person who's part of that family through marriage, how you feel about that and why you think it's happened. I don't want to pry into the things that are difficult for you. I just want to give some background for my question about the Mayo family.

Helmholz:Well, I think in what I know of Doctor Charlie and Doctor Will, actually I knew their wives better than I knew them, because they were two very unusual people. Edith Graham Mayo was just a wonderfully warm person who everybody liked.

Beck:So she's like her pictures? She's such a magnificent looking person and that's how she was as a person?

Helmholz:Yes. I knew her very well because I, for quite some time, went with Esther Mayo who was Chuck's sister. Esther was just a delightful person. I'll tell you the story about when she was dying with cancer. I made recordings and tapes of the things we used to play together and sent them to her. After she died her son sent me a letter saying, "You perhaps would be interested to know that my mother maintained her sense of humor right up until she died. For example," he said, "about a day or so before she died she called me and my brother and my sister in

and said, 'You know, I've been thinking about what you ought to do with me. I suppose I should be buried next to your father but I worry about worms and I've always sort of thought it might be nice to go up in a cloud of smoke. But I decided, surprise me.'" Now that, the day before you die, is maintaining your sense of humor. She was a crazy gal. Well anyway, when I was engaged to Mary, Mrs. Charlie Mayo called me up and said, "Well, I'm glad you're at least going to be in the family." Nice person.

Beck: So you knew both the Charlie and the Will families then.

Helmholz: Yes. I'm sure you've heard about the Rankin problem.

Beck: Actually, I haven't in any detail, I don't want to get you into anything that's difficult or controversial here.

Helmholz: Well, it's of interest because I think it's an important story to indicate the solidity of that relationship between the brothers, because Doctor Will was the one who had to fire Fred Rankin. Now Fred Rankin was probably as good a surgeon we ever had here.

Beck: He was Charlie's son-in-law.

Helmholz: Their oldest daughter married Fred Rankin. He really wanted to see patients directly, without going through the internist. Plus the fact that in order to further his surgical career, he did things like send his first assistant to the x-ray department to watch for interesting cases coming through and the first assistant would go put his label on the histories so that he would be called. Along the line what he was doing and what he believed in came into obvious conflict with what Doctor Charlie and Doctor Will had decided. Here's a couple of surgeons who decide that the practice of medicine should be medical practice and that surgery was just a form of treatment. This is a remarkable thing. They decided that and if that's the case then patients should be seen by a physician, a medical, practicing physician, and if he thinks surgery is indicated he will call the surgeon. Now this is pretty remarkable. Plus the fact that it is obvious that they really had decided this, because probably the best surgeon they had they fired and he was part of the family. That's why I think that's an important story.

Beck: You don't care whether that ends up in the archives and people see it?

Helmholz: Well, I can't remember whether this is in Clapesattle's book or not, but it ought to be.

Beck: In interpreting the history here we need to portray some difficult moments to show the genius of the decisions that were made, If you don't think this is too

uncomfortable for the family...

Helmholz: Well, many, many people know about it and Edith, who was Mrs. Rankin, she said she would never come back to Rochester again and she never did. When Doctor Charlie died she didn't appear.

Beck: Where did they go when they left?

Helmholz: Lexington. He started a clinic there and was very successful.

Beck: Did they call it the Rankin Clinic?

Helmholz: I don't know.

Beck: Do you know approximately what year it was that he was let go?

Helmholz: Well let's see. I don't know but it would have been in the early 30s or late 20s. Unfortunately, I know too much about the one family, because as in any family there are always difficulties.

Beck: (Checked in 1937 Physicians of the Mayo Clinic.) It just says he left the Mayo Foundation in whatever year and there's no controversy, obviously, there.

Helmholz: He left the Mayo Foundation January 1, 1923 to become Professor of Surgery at the University of Louisville and Chief of the Surgical Staff of the City Hospital of Louisville. Then in January 1, 1924 he became a surgeon to the Lexington Clinic, Lexington. He returned to the Mayo Clinic as head of a section of surgery July 1, 1926. He was also associate professor of surgery in the Mayo Foundation. He left the Clinic January 1, 1933.

Beck: The Historical Committee would like to present some of the more difficult moments in history to make it more real, but we don't want to do it in a way that is uncomfortable for anybody associated. You can see what this looks like in print and then decide. That is, despite all the pain, a magnificent story. That says volumes about this place.

Helmholz: Sure it does. You see, there were really hard feelings between the two families at that time, but they gradually disappeared.

Beck: That was '33, this was six years before they died.

Helmholz: Actually, Doctor Will got a trailer with a kitchen and everything and so forth and because he was afraid to travel as much as he wanted to, because he had such a

terrible allergy to cottonseed oil...

Beck:I had read about this, but it really was true? What sort of reaction did he get?

Helmholz:Well, he damn near died several times when he even ate a roll that had been cooked in a pan that had been lubricated with cottonseed oil, he was exquisitely sensitive and he had a regular anaphylactic shot.

Beck:So he wanted to make sure that he took his cook and everything with him.

Helmholz:Cook and everything, yeah. Fred Dahley (spelling?) was the driver and his wife was the cook.

Beck:It probably was one of the reasons that they spent so much time on the river boat where they could get away but everything was controlled.

Helmholz:That's right. Plus the fact that he told Charlie that he should get a trailer too. When Doctor Charlie finally did he named the trailer *Edith's Surrender* because Edith didn't want it.

Beck:In that episode when Doctor Rankin was fired, do you think there was kind of a breach in their relationship?

Helmholz:I'm sure there was a breach all right, but, you see, I asked Doctor Will one time, I said, "Who was the best surgeon, you or Charlie?" "Oh," he said, "if Charlie got into a tight spot he would invent a new way of doing it. I did it out of the book."

Beck:From what you said about him, he strikes me as modest. Was it a feigned modesty do you think?

Helmholz:If you can say that a man who knows his own strengths and his own weaknesses, and is not at all worried about his weaknesses because he knows he's so damned strong, then you could say he was modest. He was not modest in the sense that he knew he was important and he was determined that what he was doing was going to be important.

Beck:Did he have an air of arrogance about him?

Helmholz:No, not an air of arrogance. At the same time, you see, if you wondered why all this business with the university went on and so on, this was part of his responding to Doctor Plummer's saying to him, "Will, if you want your institution to last, you have to connect it with an educational institution."

Beck:So that was the Plummer idea.

Helmholz:That was the Plummer idea. It's educational institutions that last. This, I'm quite sure, was behind all that. Now, on the other hand, if you read the account of the fellow who wrote the medical school book, Wilson, he really takes Doctor Will to task. My brother-in-law Howard Burchill (spelling?) showed me this and said, "Isn't that awful that he said that!" What he said was that it was a conflict of interest for Doctor Will to be chairman of the trustees at a time when the University of Minnesota Medical School needed increased clinical facilities. He saw to it that the increased clinical facilities were in Rochester and not in Minneapolis. At the same time, he also takes Doctor Will to task for not being willing to contribute to the Mayo building at the U of M. Criticizing him saying, "Here he was, he wouldn't give any more money even though he had a great big house and a yacht on the Mississippi!" I said to Howard Burchill, my brother-in-law, "Yeah, he did have a big house, and he had a yacht on the Mississippi and that, I think, is a just criticism." What Wilson didn't understand was that it was right at that time that Doctor Will had gotten Doctor Charlie, Doctor Balfour, Doctor Plummer, Doctor Judd, Doctor Graham to give up their ownership of the partnership and form the Mayo Properties Association. The final development of that, that took several years to do, in the meantime they had to buy out Doctor Graham and so forth. All of these people gave up a tremendous amount of the wealth that they had accumulated. I'm sure at that time that Doctor Will was really feeling very poor, even though he wasn't. Even though Wilson's criticism, I can't disagree that it was a conflict of interest for Doctor Will to be chairman of the board of trustees at the university and pay attention to the development in Rochester as against a needed development in Minneapolis. I think this is just one of those things.

Beck:What year did Wilson write that?

Helmholz:That was just a few years ago.

Beck:I'm trying to think about...at the time of his serving on the board at the University of Minnesota, were they actually in the Foundation House?

Helmholz:Oh yes.

Beck:So it was after 1918. Because the Foundation House was built in 1918. They were in there twenty years. I was just thinking that the house they lived in before that time where the College Apartments are now, was that a big house?

Helmholz:No...

Beck:Much more modest house.

Helmholz:By the time he was on the Board of Trustees he was in that house. It just seems to be either '14 or '18.

Beck:I'm just curious to know.

Helmholz:It may not even be in there.

Beck:Well, this was published in '37.

Helmholz:Some how it sticks in my mind that it was before we got into WWI that they started that house.

Beck:It was 1918 that they finished or that they moved in. His position was president of the Board of Trustees at the University of Minnesota, is that right?

Helmholz:Yes.

Beck:It just says "has been a member of the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota since 1907." It doesn't say about his presidency there, but certainly he was president by '37, he died in '39.

Helmholz:He was off the board for a long time before he died. I think by 1920 he was off the board up there. I'm sure they were living in that house at the time. Now I remember Helen Clapesattle being at the Mayo house, this was after he had died, and she asked Mrs. Mayo, she said, "I've come across the story of Doctor W. W. Mayo being accused of selling..."

Beck:I know what you're saying. They would have a medical disability and he would see it for a fee.

Helmholz:That's right, he was accused of this, you see. When he moved to Rochester he was examining surgeon. I remember Mrs. Mayo saying, "Do you think this story is authentic?" and she says, "Well, it looks like it." and Hattie said, "Well, put it in."

Beck:I wonder if that story is in there? I don't think so because the whole character of that book is one of such celebration of the lives of these people.

Helmholz:Look under Doctor W. W. and see when he moved to Rochester and see whether the accusation that he was exempting people who shouldn't have been exempted.

Beck:When you have a family with as many strengths and accomplishments, a few things on the down side aren't going to do it in. As we talked about in the Historical



Committee, it makes the story more believable. If you hear nothing but the positive things, that makes it sound like a fairy tale and then it doesn't ring true. That's one of the troubles with Clapesattle's book, I think. (The story in pp. 83-86, Clapesattle, 1941, and 37-40, Clapesattle, 1954.)

Helmholz:I'll look again for that because I remember that distinctly. Mrs. Charlie Mayo, this charming, wonderful gal was recognized by everybody as a potent woman and so forth. Mrs. Will Mayo was thought of as Doctor Will's wife, that was all. She wasn't even thought of necessarily as much of a hostess, you see. When the both of them died, both brothers died the same year, everybody said, "Isn't that too bad, there's Hattie, she will die soon?"

Beck:She went on until 1952.

Helmholz:Not only that but she really blossomed. She built herself a place down in Tucson, she worked on the plants, she loved architecture and so on. I asked her one time, I said, "Tell me, did you feel you were a part of all this?" "Oh," she said, "Will always used to try things out on me first." All of a sudden I realized that she sure was always in the background, because in the privacy of their bedroom or wherever this was, she knew everything that was going on. She knew what was in Will's mind, what the problems were, she was his first counselor. Nobody knew it. I thought this was a lovely little insight on this person. You would not suspect Doctor Will, of all the things that you wouldn't suspect him of doing, would be trying out his ideas on a woman. This is a quote directly from Hattie Mayo, because I was curious. I wanted to know. I couldn't believe that she blossomed the way she did.

Beck:In what ways did she blossom?

Helmholz:Just that she developed a life of her own.

Beck:Was she more talkative, would you say, after he died?

Helmholz:Well, just more responsive let's say. She'd always been responsive enough but nobody had every noticed her. She evidently didn't care whether they did or not. I have to tell you this story. This has nothing to do with anything. At Wednesday, at the dinner, at dessert was served a chocolate cake about that thick with frosting.

Beck:Same thing every time?

Helmholz:Maybe ice cream along with it, but there was always this cake. One day when they moved into the Damon House, Hattie announced, "Tonight I decided we'll have apple pie and we are not going to have chocolate cake." Mrs. Walters, Mrs.

Balfour, and my wife got up and walked out and as they were leaving Hattie hollered after them, "I was only fooling!"

Beck: Was this after Doctor Will had died?

Helmholz: Yes it was. They were all chocoholics, you see. I told Mrs. Walters this and she remembered being one of those who got up and walked out.

If we go to the next generation we have Doctor Henderson, Doctor Balfour, and the group that were really sort of brought on by Doctors Will, Charlie, Judd; although they're not much younger, they still are the next generation and so forth. Doctor Balfour was really a very potent individual but did not have the wisdom that Doctor Will had. I really knew him a lot better than I ever did Doctor Will, but he, for example, was determined to, there was no question in his mind that if he was going to be a surgeon he was going to be the greatest surgeon. Then after he finally had the second or third tuberculosis break and realized he couldn't do surgery anymore, he threw himself into the Foundation and he became the director of that after Doctor Wilson. Well, there are probably more doctors in the United States of America and England and Australia who think of Doctor Balfour as their second father. That is what he became to those people at the expense of his family. This is a difficult part. It was an interesting thing to see that here was a man who had all the capabilities and everything comparable to Doctor Will, I thought anyway, without the wisdom that went with it. This whole story of that family is something like...have you ever read Buddenbrooks by Thomas Mann? It's a story that could compare with that family. There is great tragedy. It is evident that he and Doctor Will got along famously. Doctor Will saw his capabilities and moved him along, not that he couldn't have moved on his own and so forth. It's interesting that the story of Chuck Mayo and Doctor Balfour are similar in their treatment of their sons. Because young Charlie, when he came here it was evident that he didn't belong here. Doctor Balfour's son Don, when he was here it was evident that he didn't belong here.

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