

Photo of the Month

Dr. Rufus S. Rice



Move Over J. Edgar Hoover!

Dr. Rufus S. Rice was a member of a very prominent Benton County family. He had nine brothers and one sister. He married four times and had two children by his first wife Dorrinda [Puckett]. She and wives 2 and 3 all died young. Rufus was finally outlived by his fourth wife Kate [Carr]. His daughters were Pearl Ball and Grace McNeil.

Rufus' father, Charles W. Rice, moved his family from McMinn County Tennessee in 1859, buying a farm at Pea Ridge. Part of the Battle of Pea Ridge was fought on the farm and the family fled to Fayetteville where Rufus was born on April 5, 1863. The family returned to the farm after the war.

After receiving his early education at the Pea Ridge Academy, Rufus began studying medicine in 1883 - first at the Missouri Medical College and then at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in St. Louis. The new Dr. Rice had his first practice at Avoca. He moved his practice to Rogers in 1890.

Dr. Rice was known to have a mischievous sense of humor. One Benton County resident recalled in a 1961 article in the Benton County PIONEER that "one morning Dr. Rice called me over and invited me to

accept a silver dollar he had placed in a bucket of water. I knew the bucket was hooked up with a strong battery and that several had tried for the dollar and failed. But I rolled up my sleeve, jammed my arm in the water – and landed in the corner of the room.” Ah, the Hippocratic Oath!

The same writer noted that “His hobbies were children and horse trading ... and despite his love of horses, he was perhaps the first physician in the county to use an automobile.” He could often be seen “herding a bunch of small children into some shop to buy them candy or soft drinks.”

In this photograph, Dr. Rice is decked out as a blushing bride – for what reason we do not know. It has been suggested that he was dressed this way for the annual “Womanless Wedding” event, the origins and purpose of which we have not located at this time.

Dr. Rice died at his home on South Second Street in Rogers on Wednesday March 21, 1923 at the age of 59. His funeral the following Friday at the Central Methodist Church was described by the Rogers Democrat as “One of the largest ... ever known in the history of Rogers.”