

Retired but not forgotten, he never turned down a call

By DAN ENZENSBERGER
of the News staff

On October 7, 1895 on a farm just 10 miles from Seaforth, Ontario, Murray M. Fisher made his entrance to the world stage. The first of four children, the boy would become, as a doctor, one of the most respected and revered citizens of Gravenhurst.

In 1901 he began his education in a little red school house. "There I had a wonderful teacher by the name of Johnston" he said "a man whose ability was really outstanding. His motto was 'Aim High'."

Every week there would be a list of questions on the blackboard related to current events. The pupils had to find the answers. "He kept us on our toes" he said. "It's amazing how much we knew about what was going on in the world in those days." When Dr. Fisher was 12 years old his father died and he took over the chores on the farm.

Going to high school in those days meant travelling by horse and cutter in winter and by bicycle in Spring and Fall. "Seaforth Collegiate in those days was a wonderful school. G.F. Rogers, the principal, later became the Deputy Minister of Education. Seaforth Collegiate won the Prince of Wales Scholarship I believe at least three times during Rogers' principalship."

After high school Dr. Fisher needed money so he went to the faculty of education in Toronto, got his teacher's certificate, and taught one year.

In 1916 he enlisted in the Signal Corps, trained in Toronto and at Rockcliffe Camp in Ottawa and on October 7, on his 21st birthday landed in England.

"After the war I went into the army of occupation in Germany. I went back to England on leave and found out I could attend Khaki University in Rippen. There I got most of my first year in medicine."

Dr. Fisher was back in Canada in late summer of 1919 and continued his studies in Toronto. "The training today is different. Today, men are specialists perhaps in internal medicine and beyond that one special organ. My son is a specialist in liver disease. The surgeon has the glamor job."

MARRIED IN '23

In 1923 he graduated a doctor and married Martha Rome in Toronto. That same year Dr. Fisher returned to Great Britain for five months because "I hadn't made up my mind what I wanted to do -- where to settle in. I got a lot of good clinical work there."

"I could have got in under some great men in ear, nose and throat" said Dr. Fisher "but at that time I thought that looking up the noses and down the throats of men was the last thing I could contemplate."

Dr. Fisher returned to Canada in 1924, moved to Gravenhurst and set up his office in his residence on the corner of Brown and John St. In 1929 he moved his office above the Jackson, Porritt Drug Store, now Bush Pharmacy. Later Harry Martin built an apartment on the back of Martin Manor for the Fishers. It was in 1929 that Mrs. Arnold (Edna) Groh began working with Dr. Fisher.

"He was a real family doctor" she said. "He went day and night. He never, never turned down a call."

"The nearest hospital was in Orillia" said Dr. Fisher "so operating on the kitchen table was a common thing. We had no choice. We would do

things then that today you wouldn't think of doing and yet we got into comparatively little difficulty. Of course we made mistakes."

In 1926 Dr. Fisher had begun to use a snowmobile for his winter calls but gave it up when they began to plough the highways in 1931. "It was all right on the township roads but the gravel on the highways would wear out the treads."

Mrs. Groh laughed at the mention of the snowmobile -- a Model 'T' with caterpillar tracks on the back and skis on the front. "I don't think there was ever a call with that thing that we didn't have trouble. Dr. Fisher was the only man who could drive it."

55 BELOW

Mrs. Groh recalled one particular incident when Dr. Fisher had a call in the middle of the night for an obstetric case in Houseys Rapids. At 55



MRS. ARNOLD (EDNA) GROH

degrees below zero they started out but about four miles out of town the snowmobile upset. They had to walk back into town and hire a team and driver.

"It was cold that night, real cold" said Mrs. Groh. "I've heard the saying about freezing to the marrow of your bones and that's one time in particular when I could see how true it was. I could feel the cold in my bones."

When they got to Houseys Rapids, Harry Campbell the driver, had to continually drive the team around the property to prevent the horses from freezing to death while Dr. Fisher and Mrs. Groh worked inside.

"In those days" said Dr. Fisher "we never knew if we were going to get paid. When

I moved uptown in 1929 I threw \$11,000 in unpaid bills into the trash can and started all over again."

"Today" he went on "remuneration is guaranteed. If the boys get bad debts, I don't know how they do it."

"A good third of the bills were unpaid at the best of times and the fees were small. A house call cost two dollars and an office call \$1.50."

Said Dr. Fisher "Doctors will still do house calls if they have to but they don't want to. Today there's a counterforce of population and the offices are overflowing. The 15-minute office call is the rule of the day."

"In our day we never turned down a call. We often went under the most hazardous conditions but you never thought of not going. Sometimes we'd be so damned tired when we got there we couldn't think clearly."

Dr. Fisher continued "we did so much in our own office -- blood counts, urinalysis, minor surgical work. I was lucky to have had an awfully good nurse in Mrs. Edna Groh."

Most obstetrical work was done in the patient's home. Midwives were able to give a great deal of help. If there was a miscarriage "you were stuck." Consequently, Dr. Fisher always carried two bags -- a general bag and an obstetrical bag with all the instruments that might be needed.

Said Mrs. Groh "his technique in the home was the best I'd ever seen. Everything was sterile. He'd boil the instruments in a tray, turn the lid over and put the instruments he had used into the lid. He was always very careful about his instruments."

Dr. Fisher recalled operating on a woman who had a miscarriage and ceased breathing during the operation. He stopped what he was doing, "pushed down on her chest to get her going" and then continued. "Everything worked out OK."

World War II created a shortage of doctors as many went off to war. Dr. Fisher's territory during those years included south to Severn Bridge, Bala, the Sahanation Reserve, Southwood (a 20-

mile drive at the time) and some help in Bracebridge because it too was left short of medical aid.

"Those war years were pretty dreadful" said Dr. Fisher. "There were only two doctors here in town -- Charlie Johnston and myself. We would get so much territory to cover but the same thing held, we would never turn down a call. Holidays were unknown."

SLEEP ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Grohs recalled that Dr. Fisher could eat anything and could sleep under any conditions. Said Mrs. Groh "I think that, as much as anything, got him through those terrible years."

Mrs. Groh opened her home to maternity and tonsillitis cases sometimes to the point of overflowing. Her husband Arnold, who worked 31 years at Rubberset, recalls with a smile "I was working nights then and there was many a time I'd come home and have to sleep in the garage."

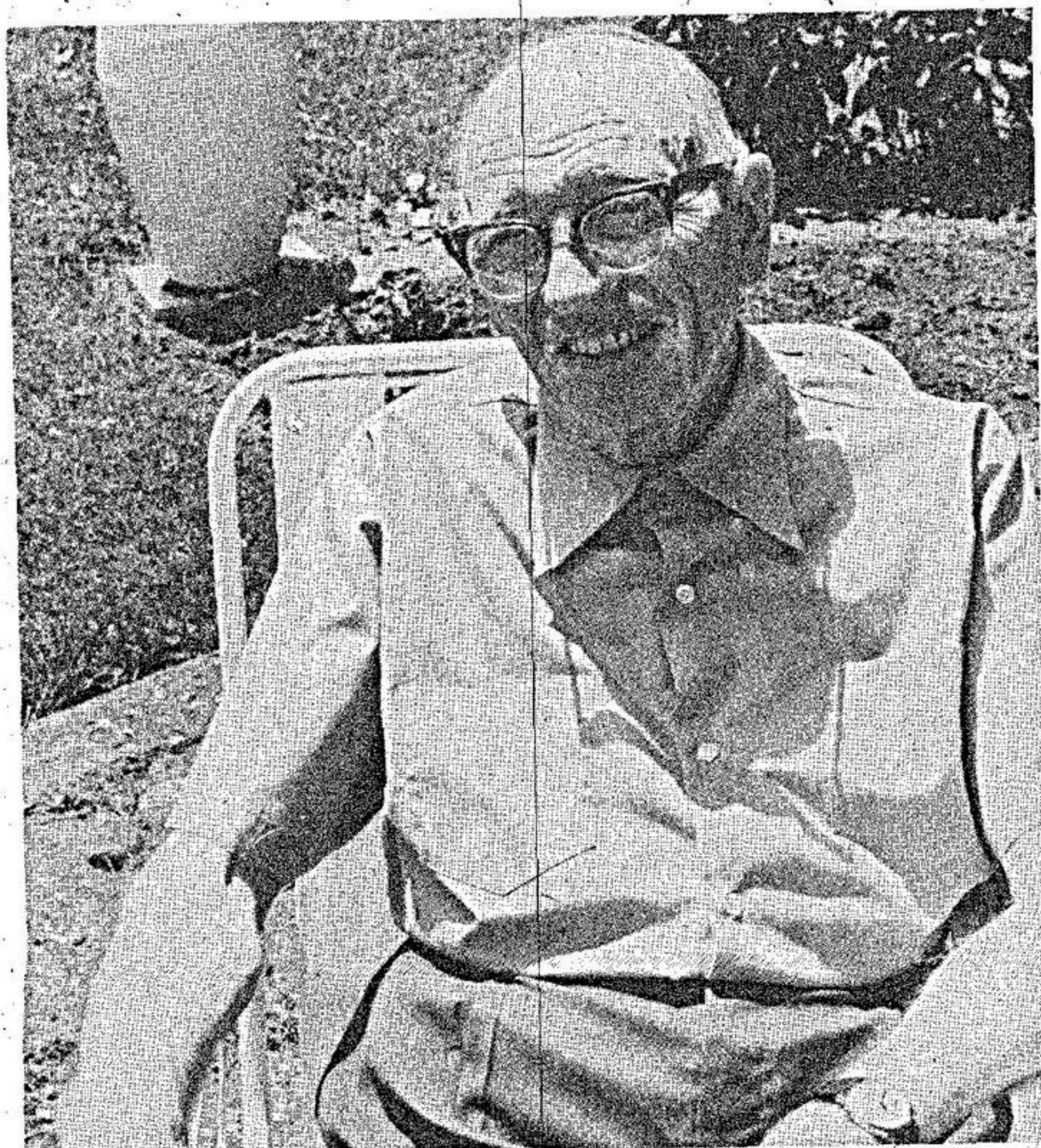
After the war Dr. Fisher felt that Gravenhurst needed a clinic and so built the Fisher Clinic in 1950 and it opened in 1951. Again, he threw a great many of his unpaid bills into the trash can. Said Mrs. Groh "If I remember correctly, there was quite a fuss raised in the office when he did that."

Dr. Fisher also sat on the board of directors of the Ontario Medical Association "but I had to get out because it was taking up too much of my time and by then I had my retirement in the future."

By 1960 Dr. Fisher had phased himself out of practice into retirement. "My wife died last November. She was a great gardener and she couldn't think of anything nicer than home."

There are still stacks of cards of sympathy piled on a table in the living room to be answered. "I've been trying to answer all of them but I don't know if I'll be able to get them all done" he said.

The piles of letters are a measure, not only of the woman he loved, but of the man himself. A man retired for 15 years but not forgotten. As Arnold Groh said: "he's a man who gave his life to his community."



DR. MURRAY M. FISHER