

Smith

History of the origin and growth of the Multnomah County Hospital

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THE HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE  
MULTNOMAH COUNTY HOSPITAL  
PORTLAND, OREGON.

by

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The History of the Origin and Growth of The  
Multnomah County Hospital

Sixty-five years ago this coming June 10th in Multnomah County the first seed was planted in the interest of life and health of the county's indigent sick. Little did the sowers realize to what a magnificent structure this minute seed would grow, their object at this time was simply to provide a shelter for those homeless old and unfortunate individuals who must of necessity throw themselves on the mercy of the more fortunate. This body of men known then as they are now, as the Commissioners of Multnomah County, while in regular session on June 10, 1868, voted the sum of \$4,000.00 with which to purchase land where they could establish a Pauper's Farm. Negotiations had been under way for some time, as they had already chosen the future site. This was 160 acres of land lying about two miles west of the city of Portland on the old Canyon Road where now is laid out the West Hills Golf course.

The first known printed mention of the Pauper's Farm was found in the Daily Oregonian on Wednesday morning, June 10, 1868, and was headed thusly, "Pauper Farm Purchased", "During the last session of the County Commissioners, the negotiations for a tract of land for a pauper farm, which have been pending for some time, were concluded. The land was purchased from General Stephan Coffin for the sum of \$4,000.00."

It was interesting to note, in this musty, old sheet, that in the column adjoining the above mentioned article a modern touch was added in the advertising section, reading as follows: "Mrs. S. A.

Thompson, Electrician and Eclectic Physician - Treats all chronic diseases successfully. Examinations made by electric battery - connecting the nerve forces, without asking question." This sounds so much like our present medical competition that I must note one more news item from the same issue, so that you may appreciate the fact that this was 65 years ago. "General U. S. Grant has just been nominated for President of the United States in the recent Chicago Convention."

It has been generally thought that Multnomah County Hospital grew directly out of the old Canyon Road Pauper Farm, but Oregon's grand old man of medicine, Dr. Simon E. Josephi, dispelled this idea. Dr. Josephi first came to Portland in February, 1867, from San Francisco aboard the then splendid ship "Orflam", a "side-wheeler" of the old ocean-going type. He arrived in the Portland harbor on a stormy, blustery day, and his ship was forced to anchor in mid-stream for the night after several unsuccessful attempts to make fast at the little dock. Portland was then a city of about 5,000 to 6,000 inhabitants but even at this early date, had made provision for the county's sick.

In the block near 12th Avenue Southeast and Asylum Street (now called Hawthorne Boulevard) was situated a private hospital owned and operated by the Doctors Hawthorne and Loryea, who contracted with the State of Oregon to care for the state's insane. In a small frame building adjoining the Insane Asylum the county's poor sick were cared for by these same physicians under a contract with the County Commissioners. Dr. Josephi took employment with

these men and so began his medical career as an orderly in the Insane Asylum and because of these affiliations was permitted free run of the building in which were housed the county's sick. These patients, he states, were made up entirely of old chronic cases of all descriptions but with tertiary ~~lues~~ <sup>lues</sup> predominating. The greatest number of patients at any time did not exceed eight to ten and during his stay here he does not remember one single acute case of illness.

The next printed notice pertaining to the old Pauper Farm was found in the Oregonian of July 12, 1870, wherein a former disgrunteled inmate had charged a Mr. Hart, then Keeper of the farm, with misappropriating monies, carrying blank names on the payroll and of not properly dispensing the medicine which had been prescribed by a Dr. Watkins, who was the County Physician at this time. The Grand Jury while in session took a "brisk hour's drive" out to the farm to make a personal investigation. In their report they appear to have found things being run in a fairly orderly manner and dismissed all charges, but did recommend that a more systematic record be kept of the money collected and spent. They also recommended that certain repairs be made to some of the buildings to better insure the comfort of the patients.

Some three years later a public spirited minister of Portland paid an unofficial and unexpected visit to the Pauper Farm and reported it to the Oregonian on July 12, 1873. He found a most cheerful and contented atmosphere prevading the place. The buildings had been added to the summer previous, the orchard of some 200 trees was bearing a fine crop, 40 acres of the 160 had been put under fence and ten of these were under cultivation. About two months previous a big

forward step had been made in building a bath house where one could turn the "spigets" at will and have either cold or hot water for bathing.

The Pauper Farm not being crowded at this time, it was thought advisable to reduce the county's expenses by establishing the county sick there and so in the natural sequence of events they were transferred from the Hawthorne Street Hospital to the farm on Canyon Road. The exact time of this move is uncertain, as no records pertaining to it were found, but Dr. Josephi thinks the change was made some time in 1876.

In March, 1877, an editorial was found in the Oregonian files which indicated that things at the Pauper Farm were not going so well. The first complaint being that it was situated much too far from town for the county doctor to take care of the urgent medical and surgical cases, for at this time, some 56 years ago, the only means of transportation other than afoot was by horseback or carriage. Further, that there were no special provisions made for the female inmates or patients. This editorial comment must have stirred up the necessary reforms, as nothing further could be found concerning the matter until the following year wherein it was reported that all was tranquil again.

In all the above notices, news items, etc., no specific mention was made as to the actual care of the sick, by whom done nor how executed, but we do know there was a county physician on a salary whose duty it was to handle these problems. It is in order to insert here, some of the early reminiscences of Dr. A. C. Smith, one

of the pioneers in the early medical history of Multnomah County and later County Physician for seven years.

Dr. Smith was born in 1856 in the State of Wisconsin. At the age of 18, he moved with his family to California and there entered Pacific Medical College in San Francisco. He attended medical school from 1874 to 1876, and then went into a hospital having the distinction of being the first interne at the San Francisco County Hospital. He spent a second year at the Marine Hospital there and was formally graduated in 1877, the same year that Dr. Josephi was graduated. He then opened an office in San Francisco, but after a short "starvation period", he joined the army and went to take part in the Bannock Campaign of '78, against the Indians of Eastern Oregon and Idaho, as an assistant surgeon. Following this adventure he returned to San Francisco and practiced there until 1887, when after a trip abroad, he returned and settled in Portland in 1888.

At this time Dr. <sup>Arthur Dean</sup> Evan D. Bevan, now Professor of Surgery at Rush Medical School, was the County Physician but left the West to establish his practice in Chicago in 1891, and Dr. Smith took over his duties. The Pauper Farm was being conducted in a very efficient manner at this time, the County Physician being required to visit the sick there regularly at bi-weekly intervals and at any other time of emergency. The major surgical cases were treated at the Good Samaritan and St. Vincents Hospitals, the charges being only \$1.00 dollar per day including the use of the surgery, instruments, etc.

Dr. E. P. Geary followed Dr. Smith's term in office and during this period the need of better and larger accommodations grew, but no mention of the Farm's progress was found until 1909. It will therefore be necessary to bridge this gap, previous to 1909, by some personal observations, and Dr. A. G. Bettman was the obliging source. Dr. Bettman in 1903 entered the old University of Oregon Medical School for the beginning of his four year medical course, and so was in fairly close contact with the Pauper Farm from that time on. He describes it as being beautifully situated on a hill with the "wild and untamed forest" forming back-ground. One entered the grounds from the main Canyon Road, through an old swinging gate along a winding wagon road passing first the little old graveroad on the right, then past the one room shack which was used as the "pest house" and so on up the hill to the main buildings of the Pauper Farm proper.

These consisted of two separate buildings built in the form of an L, one housing the women and the other the men inmates, connected between by a covered and enclosed ramp or walk-way. Further on up the hill was a small one room building where the tuberculous patients were housed. Dr. Geary was Director of the Farm and a Mr. Jackson was the Superintendent. The county staff at this time included Dr. Geary, and assistant county physician, four nurses and two extern-orderlies, one of the latter being Dr. Bettman during the summer of 1906. His hours on duty were from 7:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. and his duties were varied. Once each hour of the night,



lawns and shrubbery surrounding it would have graced the palace of a king.

This property was purchased by the County for \$50,000.00 and was rebuilt into Multnomah Hospital for an additional \$38,000.00. In its original plans its maximum capacity was to have been limited to 65 beds but seldom if ever, in the history of the institution, were there ever so few as 65 patients interred. This was a great step forward in the medical and surgical care of the poor and at the time probably equalled that of any city of the same size in the United States. The first staff of 21 specialists includes many familiar names, a number of whom are still in active practice here in Portland. Dr. E. P. Geary was the Medical Superintendent, assisted by Dr. Harry R. Cliff, Mrs. A. B. V. Spaulding, Superintendent of Nurses, and fifteen graduate and nurses in training.

While things were moving along smoothly enough at Multnomah Hospital, a bomb-shell was dropped in county health circles by Dr. Ralph Matson, then State Bacteriologist and Deputy County Physician, in a so-called exposure of existing conditions in the Tuberculosis Pavilion at the Canyon Road Pauper Farm. This expose was probably played up considerably by the local papers but as later events showed, was entirely justified. It seems that after appealing to the Commissioners repeatedly for an improvement of conditions, Dr. Matson allowed himself to be quoted in a newspaper article on the subject.

The article appeared on about November 18, 1910 and stated the facts as they existed. Amongst the charges was that the tuberculous sputum was improperly disposed of, being allowed to set about the bedstands in open tin cups, that some of the patients were too weak to even attempt to use the cups and hence their long unkept beards were matted with sputum; further, that the one male nurse was incompetent, a drunkard and in one known case had made improper advances to a young female patient confined there. In the numerous investigations which followed it was disclosed that there were no tubs in which the patients could bathe, no toilet nor sewage accommodations, the roofs leaked when it rained literally soaking the beds of the sick, flies collected by the thousands in the summer time, the food was coarse and improperly prepared and one cook and dishwasher supplied the gustatory demands of the 200 well and tuberculous inmates alike. There also was a marked lack of discipline amongst the patients as those who were able, made frequent sojourns into town at will, mingling freely with the inhabitants and as often as not returned home extremely intoxicated.

The county commissioners became disquieted at the notoriety which had been given its care of the tuberculous patients, and straightway published a censure of Dr. Geary and his assistants, and very soon wheels were set in motion to obtain new accommodations. Incidentally the censure of Dr. Geary was not entirely justified as the conditions had been reported not only by Drs. Geary and Matson but also by various health organizations of the county, and the excuse was always given that funds were scarce

and that no tax money was available for the provision of better quarters.

The direct result of this public scandal was found in a notice under the date of December 11, 1910, which told of the purchase by the County of 173 acres of land about one mile west of Troutdale and announced plans for the construction of buildings large enough to house some 250 people. There was to be one large building to lodge the well poor and another building large enough to accommodate between 30 and 40 tuberculosis patients only, also the necessary barns, sheds, etc. These plans went forward rapidly with the whole hearted backing of all Multnomah County and just one year later in December, 1911, the farm and its \$100,000.00 buildings were occupied for the first time. We can now leave this phase of the county health program and rest assured that all is well at the Poor Farm and T.B. ward, as in all references henceforth concerning it, we find nothing but praise and commendation. The patients are happy and well cared for by an efficient staff of nurses, internes and doctors, the farm is one of the most modern and prosperous found any where in Oregon and what is more is quite self-supporting.

Portland and Multnomah County in the next few years underwent a phenomenal growth and in all phases of public expansion the need of larger facilities for the care of the poor sick was being felt. The Multnomah Hospital at Second and Hooker Streets, which was large enough in 1909, was so continuously overcrowded that the need for larger and more commodious quarters was becoming more and more evident. When originally planned in 1909, sixty-five

patients were to have been the upper limit of its capacity, while in March of 1913 they were packing in as best they could from 90 to 110. The County Health Bureau and the people as a whole were growing daily more health conscious and realizing the dangers of overcrowding, instigated steps to enlarge on the present lodgings.

The first discussion of plans led to the proposal that \$400,000.00 be raised by the County for the construction of a new hospital. This was done and contracts were drawn up but were never passed upon by the Commissioners, mainly through the efforts of Commissioner Rufus Holman because the "county's interests were not sufficiently protected". Following this rebuff, hospital plans came in for more widespread and open discussion, the most favored one at this time being the "Cottage Hospital Plan" as suggested by Dr. Geary.

For reasons unknown to the writer the subject of the new hospital died out temporarily and the next revival of the issue seems to have occurred in October of 1915. When out of a clear sky, headlines were spread across the front sheet of a local paper to the effect that Multnomah Hospital was a firetrap and a menace, and should be discarded at once. A Grand Jury investigation a few days later <sup>substantiated</sup> corroborated this news item and recommended that a new hospital be begun immediately.

Further evidence of the justice of these charges was obtained from Mrs. Emma E. Jones, who was then and is now the Superintendent

The need of a fire hospital was not granted by all members of Multnomah County Hospital. Her description leaves nothing to the imagination! She states that at that time, 1915, there was only one telephone, no elevators, no proper nor adequate fire escapes, no heat in the place during one eight hour shift and though they could keep the bed bugs fairly well controlled by fumigation, the rats were a constant and never ending problem, both while alive and more especially when dead. If they were fortunate enough to kill one in the open, well and good, but when one was only injured or poisoned, they would crawl into the wall spaces and die, and as she said, you can imagine the results. They were always overcrowded and often had to resort to the use of their "Roof Garden". This actually was on the roof of the building, covered and enclosed by canvas awnings and when it rained the nurses and attending physicians were forced to don boots to make their way from bed to bed.

There were no funds available at this time for the erection of a new hospital so a counter proposal was made that surplus patients be "farmed out" to the various hospitals in Portland and a committee was appointed to investigate the feasibility of a plan such as this. The committee report of December, 1915, showed this to be impracticable, as the only hospital willing to cooperate under this plan was the St. Vincents and their rates were considered much too high. They offered to take care of the overflow at a flat rate of \$8.00 per week, drugs, use of the surgery, anesthetics, etc., to be extra; while in past years Multnomah Hospital had managed to care for their patients at the low average of 78¢ per day per patient.

The need of a new hospital was now granted by all concerned and during the following year in all county health and political gatherings the question of where the new structure should rise was foremost. There were two factions involved in this dispute; the one, headed by Dr. ~~R.~~ A. J. McKenzie, Dean of the Medical School, and Commissioner Rufus Holman, argued that the ideal site was on Marquam Hill away from the noise of the city, conveniently located to the Medical School and lastly, because the land was to be donated by the University of Oregon. The opposing group led by the city's most prominent drugless healers and their ilk, contended that it should rise on the grounds of the present hospital, the latter's chief worry it seems was they would likely be crowded out by the "power" who were offering the Marquam Hill site gratis.

That the better elements in the promotion of health won their point is now known but only after a very bitter controversy. This politico-medical dispute <sup>over the ~~present~~ location</sup> carried on for another year and a half, but on May 16, 1919, the County Commissioners finally accepted from the Regents of the University of Oregon, the deed to some seven acres of land on Marquam Hill with the agreement that the County would erect and maintain the County Hospital at this location. Two months following, on July 23, 1919, the Commissioners met with the representatives of Sutton and Whitney, Architects, to discuss plans for the new hospital. Those agreed upon at this time, were for the eventual accommodation of some 500 patients, the total cost including equipment, to be in the neighborhood of \$1,000,000.00 dollars when all units

were completed. It was designed in the form of an H but at this time only the south one half of the H was to be constructed in which 250 patients could be easily cared for. The estimated cost of this unit and its necessary equipment was to be around \$500,000 dollars. /X

On June 27, 1920 work on the first unit was under way and continued for the next three years. There were the usual and unusual delays by strikes and other unforeseen obstacles and with the repeated requisition for more funds by the Architects, but in April, 1922, it was so near completion that Dr. Charles Mayo was conducted through the hospital on his visit to Portland. His comment on the structure is of note. Quote, "The hospital is particularly fortunatly placed because of the possiblity it offers for cooperation with the medical school. -----It is the finest hospital I have ever inspected and I expect it in the coming years to set the model for many advances in medical work in other places".

On November 26, 1922, the hospital was thrown open for public inspection, but not until August 29, 1923, was it ready for active service. On this day 80 patients were transported from the old "Hooker Street Hospital" by ambulance to their palacial new quarters on Marquam Hill.

It is interesting to note here that when plans were first discussed in regards to the construction of a new county hospital in 1919, the estimated cost was to be not more than \$500,000.00 dollars but the completed structure as it stood ready for occupancy in August, 1923, cost the County taxpayers some \$1,250,000.00 dollars. / This brief and incomplete history ends here ē the county's poor sick installed in one of the most complete, modern and beautifully

situated hospitals in the country and so no more should there be  
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heard,

"Rattle his bones over the stones,

He's only a pauper whom nobody owns," 1923

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Dr. S. E. Josephi

Courtney M. Smith  
March 30, 1933.

Dr. A. C. Smith

Dr. A. G. Bettman

Mrs. Emma Jones

Dr. Harry Cliff

Portland, Its History and Builders  
by Joseph Weston



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