

A Short History of the South County Hospital

The first public service obtainable for the care of the sick and injured in the South County was through the establishment of services of a visiting nurse in 1909. For ten years her work demonstrated the danger, as well as the hardships incurred in taking patients to Providence. The roads were not as they are now, nor did the automobile ride as smoothly, and there was no ambulance service.

In the summer of 1919, a young boy in Narragansett was taken with acute appendicitis. By the time they got him to Providence, his appendix had ruptured and he died.

The tragedy of that case seemed to have stimulated a realization of our situation, and made it possible for Miss Caroline Hazard, Mrs. Isaac R. Robinson and Mr. T. G. Hazard, Jr., to start their long hoped for project.

In September of that year, the first of a series of meetings was held at which they presented plans for carrying out ways and means to achieve their end, that of establishing a small South County hospital.

They succeeded in arousing a group of backers representing South Kingstown, Narragansett, North Kingstown, Exeter, Richmond and Charlestown. Within three months they had been granted an act of incorporation, adopted bylaws, elected trustees, purchased the Watson House on Kenyon Avenue, Wakefield, and altered it for its new use.

On November 15, 1919, three months from the date of the first meeting, the South County Cottage Hospital was opened, with Miss Hazard, President, Mrs. Robinson, First Vice President,

Miss E. E. Trowbridge (then head of the Peace Dale Neighborhood Guild), Second Vice President; Mr. T.G. Hazard, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer, and Mrs. Caroline M. Jones, Superintendent.

There were two rooms and bath for the superintendent, kitchen, dining room and waiting room on the first floor; six beds, bathroom and operating room on the second floor; three nurses slept on the third floor, where there was running water only. The day before the opening, I remember that Mrs. Jones telephoned my mother and said everything was ready except the beds which had not come, and that one of the doctors wanted to bring in a patient that afternoon. My mother said to telephone Mr. Nye, who owned the Imperial Hotel at Narragansett, to send up a bed. He did, and our first baby was born, cradled in a clothes basket, the equipment for such purpose in quite striking contrast to our present equipment for the newborn.

The worth of the venture was soon proven and the fear of going to the hospital greatly lessened. The need for more space and better equipment was most evident.

A campaign was organized to raise funds and finally the land was given by the Town of South Kingstown; and a real hospital erected on the present site. The choice of location aroused much controversy. I remember my mother holding out against Dale Carlia Corner as being at noisy cross roads, bound to develop, and pointing out that the Town property "way out on Kenyon Avenue" was quiet and beautiful, and would not prove "too far to walk to".

On November 28, 1925, the South County Hospital was dedicated and the Cottage Hospital sold to Dr. J. Paul Jones, and once more became a residence.

My mother and Mrs. Bacon died just before the dedication

which they had worked so hard to achieve.

The top floor of the new building was used to house the nursing staff until 1926 when the generous gifts of Leonard Bacon and his sister, Susan Keith, in memory of their father and mother, started a fund with which to build Bacon House, the present nurses' home. The complete building was the gift of the children and sisters of Helen Hazard Bacon.

At the end of 24 years, it again became necessary to better and enlarge our facilities. Substantial gifts in memory of Mr. T. G. Hazard, Jr., were the start of a second campaign for funds. The T. G. Hazard, Jr., wing was built and dedicated July, 1952.

The next expansion was dedicated in October, 1963.

The ways of fund raising have been many through the years. In the early days, we had a Hospital Ball each winter, gay and effective after hard committee work in which Mrs. Jones distinguished herself toward their success. These balls were held in Wright's Hall (now the Community Theater), Patsy's and the Narragansett Casino until the Dunes Club took over their more sophisticated affairs.

The Woman's Auxiliary was founded in Dec. 7, 1932 after I reported the success of the one started in the Jamaica, Long Island, Hospital. It is hardly necessary to mention its great success here, for everyone know and deeply appreciates the intelligence and hard work of the Auxiliary members which has brought us to the realization that the Hospital could not get on without it.

Perhaps the Coffee Shop the Auxiliary established may help fill in a part of the loss of Mr. F. R. Hazard's stamp department of the

Auxiliary in so far as dollars and cents go, but nothing can replace the time and knowledge he gave in running that project.

Both Miss Hazard and my mother made a great point of their feeling that a hospital should have an atmosphere of hospitality. This quality was achieved in the Cottage and has been carried on through the many changes in size and efficiency of this hospital with remarkable effect.

No doubt we will never be through with needs for improvement, but I think we of the South County can feel pride and confidence in the facilities for care and comfort that the Trustees and officers of our hospital can now offer our doctors and their patients.

Ruth Robinson

July, 1965.