

THE HENRY FORD HOSPITAL Henry Ford and the Beginnings

FRANK J. SLADEN, M.D., L.L.D.

Chief, Department of Medicine, from Oct. 1, 1915, day of the opening of the Henry Ford Hospital, until Feb. 2, 1952. Currently Consultant, Department of Medicine.

September 1, 1915. Henry Ford Hospital opened its doors to receive patients.

September 15, 1915. Henry Ford Hospital was incorporated as a nonprofit institution.

Everything in those days centered around Mr. Henry Ford. To grasp that significance, one must recall the character of Henry Ford of those days and his accomplishments as well as the qualities of his personality which created the influence and relationships that made his achievements possible.

For he was a creative man, influenced by enough success to make him feel that he could turn his hand to anything. Yet he was well-known for his disregard of precedent and the records of those who preceded him. These characteristics were not so rigid as they were thought to be. They varied with differing circumstances and conditions. When a biblical passage was quoted to him and interpreted, he returned to it several days later with an entirely different meaning, having looked it up in the meantime.

When seated next to Dr. Will Mayo at a banquet, he is reported to have said to him, "I have a hospital on my hands. What shall I do with it?" The significance of this attitude can be recognized. He made the most of an opportunity to learn from the experience of a great man who had himself built a wonderful and unique type of medical service.

Then, too, Mr. Ford planned to do something himself in keeping with his own ideas and not turn it over to someone else, a church or some organization, to do for him.

This simple and humble creative genius often corrected and inspired even one of his medical staff by injecting into a conversation the statement, "Nothing is impossible, if it rightfully fills a need."

This is the type of young man, aged 52 at the time, whose inspiring leadership became such an important factor in the lives of medical men and others as they were assembled during the year 1916. Fortunate men indeed! Mr. Ford's ideas were often completely at variance with orthodox hospital activities and the previous training of the medical men.

Yet, in time, these very methods gained enthusiastic approval and adoption in older hospitals of good standards in the nation. For example, the service of a dispensary clinic with its characteristic benches was changed to a system of appointment for a special time and place with a certain doctor. The appointment card with these notations was at once a challenge in the form of a recognized and rightful expectation to be seen by that certain Doctor and at the time designated.

The new Clinic Building of 1954 was built on a plan dictated by that method of dignity and respect for the individual, no matter what the social or economic standing. A record of the beginnings of the Henry Ford Hospital must include the events which led to the conception of the idea and its delivery as a realistic project.

Dr. William F. Metcalf, a successful surgeon and gynecologist in Detroit, was impressed with the need of a new provision to meet Detroit's shortage of hospital beds. This was after the turn of the century, at a time when hospitalization was not the plan of general choice. It was necessary for major surgery. But admissions for diagnosis or therapy in medical conditions and many of the special fields still lagged far behind the surgical.

Dr. Metcalf was an ambitious leader and out of his efforts, plans were ultimately drawn for a European type of hospital in the form of a series of one-story pavilions. His ideals for Medicine and Surgery on the very best standards of the new century just begun (1900 and on) enabled him to assemble a Board of Trustees of influential men and to succeed, at least at first, in obtaining what seemed to be adequate voluntary subscriptions for the project, known as the Detroit General Hospital Association.

Mr. Henry Ford was a member of the Board of Trustees and chosen as its Treasurer. Dr. Metcalf was the surgeon who had operated upon Mrs. Ford. Mr. Ford was very friendly with him and believed him to be a great surgeon imbued with high ideals as well as ability. Mr. Ford's contributions were large. Mr. Ford actually purchased the 13+ acres on which the hospital was built and still stands 50 years later. At that time these acres were a part of open farm land in the northern boundaries of Detroit.

Here again Mr. Ford showed his uncanny vision and ability to foresee the future. It was he who selected the site; it was he who bought the land originally; it was he who foresaw business built around the site as a new center of Detroit.

1912 saw building areas being excavated and building begun. But 1914 showed in an alarming way the persisting inadequacy of financial support. Many difficulties arose and many differences of opinion among the Trustees as to what should be

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done, what should be the next step. Finally, Mr. Ford withdrew further support and Dr. Metcalf acknowledged the end of the plans was at hand.

Then, after a lapse of time, in the same year 1914, Mr. Henry Ford proposed to the remaining Trustees that he would assume responsibility for continuing the building of the hospital provided he was allowed:

- (1) to do so without reservations on their part and without interference;
- (2) to return all donations to the original donors and go it alone.

He would agree to build a hospital as was originally planned, to serve the acute need of Detroit. So in 1914, what was known as the Detroit General Hospital became the property of Mr. Henry Ford.

The preliminaries to this remarkable decision never can be really known and truthfully recited. (The writer was living in Detroit at the time.) There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Mrs. Henry Ford took part in the decision. She was his advisor and was known to have much interest in the possibility of creating a new type of hospital. Her hospital would eliminate many of the things which she and Mr. Ford had felt were wrong in their experiences. Edsel Ford was valued by every member of the early professional staff as the best friend of each one, and of the the Hospital. With his spirit, his understanding and encouragement, he could be expected to exert a big influence in the decision.

But it is presumed many others were aware of what was going on and had occasion in one way or another to express their views to Mrs. Ford or Mr. Ford. It is said some people felt intimate enough to bring pressure to bear, convinced that this hospital would prove to be a greater monument to this great man than even the Ford car.

At any rate, the decision was made and Mr. Ford, knowing little about the special nature of the task before him beyond what he and Mrs. Ford felt were their desires in quality of service, set out to build the hospital.

It was in these first days of sole ownership and acknowledged intent, that the name Henry Ford was applied to the Hospital. Very early the terminology Henry Ford Hospital was expressed as proper, not Ford Hospital. The full name, Henry Ford Hospital, remains today the title used legally, officially and by all the knowing population of his friends. The feeling was strong about this in people who knew that he had an interest and determination which greatly transcended just the feeling of ownership. As time went on this was apparent in his joy at meeting so many patients in the Hospital and in his interest in their troubles, especially in children, and in his desire to help them. He enquired repeatedly about their progress and what the doctors were doing for them.

To those who were privileged to institute so many of Mr. Ford's plans for the Hospital and learn at first hand the principles underlying them, there was a core of human interest in his fellow-man which was indeed a Christian quality, an exemplification of Christ's Great Commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself."

In every contact with the doctors, he showed the utmost graciousness and kindness, encouraging and stimulating and understanding their abilities and ideals. He often invited them to his noon-time luncheons with his executives, and on his inspection trips, for example, to his lumber resources in the North of Michigan.

One memorable trip in this exceptional company was on the Detroit and Toledo and Ironton Railroad, now converted from steam to electricity. Mr. Edsel Ford motored the first electric passenger car on this reconstructed line from Detroit to Cincinnati on this day. Much could be said about the efforts of this loyal group to protect Mr. Ford from the self-seekers and curious people who would recognize him, on these trips.

His attitude of special regard for the doctors in the Hospital had a great influence upon them. It was seen first of all perhaps in their loyalty to him and to his plans for the institution. These were great opportunities to make men of the staff appreciate the aims and goals of this hospital Mr. Ford was building.

The stories of rough handling which were heard about certain situations in the plants were hard for us to connect with the Mr. Ford we knew.

First and foremost in the program was the announced plan to provide medical care for the great class of people of average income, at a cost figured to be within their means. "The wealthy", Mr. Ford said, "can buy services; the indigent are cared for by the state, city and county. But the real mass of people with fair and average incomes have no provision for hospital care within their means."

Charges for services were determined by conferences between professional staff concerned and Mr. Ford's experienced financial men. The prevailing charges of the profession at large were given every consideration. But the charges for specific services were predetermined on this basis.

He planned to give the doctors on the staff freedom to care for the hospital patients on a standard of medical care based on the indications and responsive quality of service to the patient. The doctor reported services rendered in the adopted symbols, independent of the patient's financial status. The Accounting Department handled the conversion to the value of the service, the indebtedness and the collection.

Credit was given to the particular division for the work done. These amounts were reported to the division head each month and provided to the Chief background evaluation of what was going on under his leadership.

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Contrary to the custom of most hospitals, an annual report of the Henry Ford Hospital was never published. This was at Mr. Ford's instruction. The Accounting Department probably was aware of totals in their areas but none of the staff was ever made cognizant of them.

The required demonstration of the need first, the use and the purpose, was manifest in many ways. For instance, there was an entire lack of budgeting. The common dictum was that the "purse was in Mr. Ford's pocket", in lieu of budgeting. We were always successful sooner or later in obtaining equipment and materials in those younger days, provided we always demonstrated the need first. Mr. Ford's statement was "You saw wood, and I will watch the sawdust pile." This he continued to do!

This was in the face of the fact that we did not have our own Purchasing Department for a number of years. All buying was by the Purchasing Department of the Ford Motor Company, on our request.

From the start, the members of the professional staff were asked to devote their full time to the service of the Hospital and its patients. They were not asked to sign a contract to this effect, but simply requested not to have special outside demands on their time and efforts. Their income had no special relationship to their patients. The level agreed upon for each doctor was related to what would be commensurate with his earning capacity if in practice at the time outside the hospital.

It was not until some years later that all internes were paid the same way. As Mr. Ford was opposed to in-hospital quarters for the internes or anyone else, this salary represented sufficient allowance for board and lodging and upkeep in the neighborhood. Meals were provided without cost in this same period. Later, they were charged for, but at a very reasonable cost. It might be added, the food was always good!

The same spirit of human interest and provision for the welfare of his fellow-man existed in the handling of accumulated costs, when a patient was unable to meet the expenses.

It was well known that he did not believe in what was represented to most people by the word *charity*. Yet, he was the exemplar of a man who believed in love and charity for his fellow man and acted upon that belief. But the charity expressed as free beds, for instance, he opposed very definitely, and he would permit no part of it in the Hospital.

This fact as it became known, as it sounded on the surface, not understood, led to considerable criticism. Mr. Ford contended no beds in the hospital were free. Each occupied bed was a necessary expense. The basic hotel services and provision of medical care or skill of surgery must be paid for by someone. Nursing care, medications, attendants, janitor cleaning, linen, and laundry could not be provided without costs accruing.

On this rationale a so-called "free bed" did not exist as such. Again and again, Mrs. Ford or Mr. Ford did make such a needy patient their "guest" while in the hospital; as an alternative, he would arrange that the man or occasionally the woman involved be given a job which enabled paying of the account in time.

Much in keeping with these principles, he repeatedly announced, "You have no right to exist if you can't maintain yourself." Every division reported service rendered and when totalled this was accredited to the division. This credit occurred just the same whether this or that service did eventually become income or was discounted. This interpretation existed also in reference to the Hospital as a whole.

The question of justification of existence was related to service to the patient and not to the earned fee. This required a great deal of faith behind it, the where-withal to start it, the enthusiastic application, and sufficient patience to gain conviction that the quality of best medicine and best service does succeed, when the doctor is separated from the problems of charges, from being consciously in the midst of the finances of the case. This was demonstrated: the gain in patients seeking help can have a relationship to the fact that the doctor is free of the financial transactions.

This brings to mind the reference earlier to Mr. Ford's hope that we could and would give up to a certain extent our personal ambitions, which are justifiably self-centered and self-considering, to the acquiring of a reputation for the hospital in all its efforts to serve the sick and the well. "The well" is emphasized because Mr. Ford constantly expressed interest in his own health, in the ways and means of maintaining health and of attaining it.

One result of Mr. Ford's enthusiasm about health was to plant this health and the well man or woman within the domain of the physician's work and research. This was at a time when a man was apt to be told, "You are a well man. You don't need me. Come to see me when your are sick!" What factors determined a man to be well? Who knew how to eat properly? Health was judged from the physical. Mental health was not yet an active medical concern! And totality of health was not yet something that included emotion or the spirit of the man. So the field was open for much study and research. In addition, there was a stimulating challenge to build Mr. Ford's interest and to add to the whole field of health by contributions from the experiences and research of the Hospital.

The field was full of quacks with bizarre ideas that had neither sound physiology nor more than a veneer as an appealing front.

In this way the responsibility for health and the "well man" was considered a wholesome part of the medical field. Out of it concern for correct food selection, education of patients by menus in which desirable items were specially marked, and other methods arose. Physical therapy which contributed to general health, to rest

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and exercise, was instituted at a time when much could be accomplished by its application. Though not so corrective of handicaps as it is today, it became an indicated and useful therapeutic measure, much more than an indulgence.

The title to this paper was assigned before the writing of it. It does deal with the Beginnings of the Henry Ford Hospital inasmuch as it discloses the part Mr. Ford played in those first days. His desires determined the ways and means of the institution that grew to be important methods and purposes. His ideals built upon years of experience with men gave insight to the qualities of his personality, his thinking, his acting and reacting, his resourcefulness, even his vision. Expressions of these qualities became tangible influences to the small core of men who felt their responsibilities to him in the project.

This has taken much space and is only a part of the story. Personnel, buildings, organization, growth are reserved for a later date. In this pen picture of the Founder of the Henry Ford Hospital is a record of some of his thoughts and ideals which became building blocks of the Hospital.

His graciousness and friendliness and encouragement toward the Hospital and the staff were always maximum. It was most strengthening to feel the high esteem he had for those whose lives were dedicated to the care of the sick and the well.

Many of his thoughts and ideals are recognizable as still in existence and of proven value even now, today, fifty years later.

