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A History of The Duval County Hospital

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History of DMC

THE DUVAL COUNTY HOSPITAL

R. H. McGinnis, M. D.

(1925)

Jacksonville.

The writer of this brief history of the old and new Duval County Hospital has, after strenuous effort, secured information from many available sources, by written communication and personal interviews, and the data offered in this article is substantially correct, but he feels, however, in presenting this matter to the medical and surgical staff of the hospital, and the Welfare Board, his deficiencies as a narrator of facts and begs of the staff and board a conservative estimate of his endeavors.

The site of the Old Duval County Hospital was purchased in two parcels. The first, tracts 27 and 28 in northeast Jacksonville, known as Oakland, a subdivision, was purchased by the Duval County Commissioners without restrictions, by warranty deed, June 4th, 1870, and recorded the same day. The title to this property was established by a decree of the Circuit Court of Duval County on March 4th, 1908, and recorded the same day. Adjoining property, consisting of parts of lots 196, 197, 198, block 30, "Oakland", was purchased, without restriction, by the County Commissioners November 19th, 1910, and recorded December 2nd, 1910. The two parcels, surveyed by the County Surveyor February 8th, 1913, comprises 8 acres and the survey is recorded in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Duval County.

Eight buildings were erected on the above-mentioned site between 1870 and 1890. Records of the county being destroyed by fire, May 3rd, 1901, there is nothing accurate as to the year the present buildings were constructed. The writer, from hear-say evidence, is of the opinion that the buildings now occupying the

site, with the exception of the operating room and tuberculosis camp, were built in the early seventies and designated as the Duval County Poorhouse. Two of the buildings were of the pavilion type, of two stories each, one for housing white and colored females and the other for white and colored males. The six other buildings were of one-story construction; one for administrative service, another combined dining room and kitchen, and the others for various utilities necessary.

The pavilions were equipped with cots and beds and necessary covering. Heat in winter, supplied by wood-stoves, which prevails at present. The inmates were the aged, infirmed and indigent. A caretaker provided food, laundry and help. A physician was called from the city when his services were considered necessary. Sewage and toilets, baths (tub and shower), gas and electric lights were installed in the early nineties. During the yellow fever epidemic in 1899, in Jacksonville, this institution was not used as a hospital for patients suffering from this disease.

Early in the eighteen nineties the institution began to assume the resemblance of a hospital. The County Commissioners, at this time, allotted to the lowest bidder, provided he was a physician, the care and maintenance of the admissions of the admissions to the institution. The physician obtaining the contract provided food, attendants and his professional services. He made a monthly report to the County Commissioners and received from them a remuneration at a per diem per patient rate. This practice prevailed for a number of years and no surgery of any consequence was done in the institution.

In 1899 a young man entered the ranks of the medical profession of Jacksonville, opened an office and became the surgeon of a large lumber mill. This lumber company operated and owned a railroad to supply the mill with timber to be manufactured into a marketable product. He found the hospitals in the city

W. H. W.

inadequate to offer him beds and facilities for the care of the injured and sick of this company. Obtaining permission of the physician in charge of the Duval County Hospital to use the institution for these patients, he became interested in the care and treatment of the other patients in the hospital. This young surgeon, with the indefatigable temperament characteristic of the man, enthusiasm that has never waned, and with energy that has neither faltered nor lessened, has contributed more to make the Duval County Hospital the efficient institution it is today than any other individual.

He and some of his colleagues operated under many difficulties, using a plain pine table placed in a back ward of the colored male pavilion, and an ordinary Arnold sterilizer for sterilization. They used short-sleeved gown and no rubber gloves, scrubbing their hands in basins of ordinary warm water and using the usual solutions of those days to secure sterility. Under these environments and difficulties these men operated upon many of the reparable conditions found among the patients and restored them to usefulness, happiness and contentment. All instruments, appliances, splints and apparatus used by these men were furnished and paid for by them.

Such conditions continued until 1913 when the Duval County Commissioners, after some urge, decided to operate the hospital. They secured the services of a superintendent, a graduate nurse, with power to engage what nursing help seemed necessary, to take care of the patients and manage the institution; and the expenses were paid by the Commissioners. During this year the present operating room and tuberculosis camp were constructed and equipped, and a staff of seven physicians selected to care for the medical and surgical service.

This staff organized, but met infrequently, nevertheless functioned with considerable credit until 1917 when many of them enlisted in the service of the United States in the World War. During this period of 1917, 1918, 1919, the

hospital patients were directly cared for by a county physician, employed by the Commissioners, and indirectly by those of the staff who had not the opportunity to enter the service of the United States army and Navy in a military capacity. When the enlisted men returned from the army and navy their services were resumed in the hospital and continued until 1920 when the Duval County Board of Charities assumed control of the medical and surgical management. During 1920 the present staff was organized with five members as an official body, one member in each of the following branches: Medicine, Surgery, Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat, Neurology and Dentistry. During 1925 a separate neurologic department was discontinued and neurology placed under the medical department. An out-patient department was created and an official staff member elected on this service.

At this point it is well to record the birth, growth and development of the social service work in Duval County. This service was organized in 1910 under the name of Associated Charities, with a paid secretary and office force, receiving its sustenance and maintenance from voluntary contributions of its membership and the citizens of the city of Jacksonville. Various and sundry committees, from the membership, functioned in many capacities thru a board of directors until 1920, a period of ten years.

Associated Charities merged into a city board of charities, which operated on a larger scale of endeavor until 1921, when more extended efforts became necessary and expedient, and the Duval County Board of Charities assumed the social activities of the entire county. This board of charities inaugurated many additional features to the expanding requirements of the service and functioned until 1923, a period of two years. It was deemed advisable, at this time, to do away with the word "charity" and substitute the word "welfare" for all activities along the line of social and rehabilitation work, and a measure was introduced and passed by the State Legislature of 1923 creating a Duval County

Welfare Board, outlining its duties and prerogatives, and enabling it to ask the Duval County Commissioners to levy a county tax of three mills on the assessed valuation of the property of Duval County for its maintenance. The Welfare Board, realizing the handicap the medical and surgical staff of the hospital had in rendering competent and efficient service in the antiquated and fire-damaged buildings comprising the hospital group, began devising ways and means to provide a new hospital building, modernly equipped and officered, under one roof, to enable the staff to do better work in its great rehabilitation program. It has been possible, however, with the old and inadequate buildings, to perform service therein which meets with the minimum requirements of the American College of Surgeons to admit the institution to an A-1 rating. It being admitted with an "asterisk" in 1922 and in 1924, it was accepted without reservations. This rating enables the hospital to appeal to the better class of graduates of medical colleges to accept it for their internship and clinical study. The hospital has had interne service since 1913. Intermittently during the first four years. No internes could be obtained during the years 1917, 1918 and 1919. Since then two internes have been secured each year and none of them have been dissatisfied with the service.

In 1916 the Duval County Tuberculosis Association obtained, thru its adherents and workers, a signed petition of 25% of the voters of the county, petitioning the Commissioners of Duval County to call an election for a referendum vote to enable the Tuberculosis Association to provide some means to care for the indigent tuberculous patients of the county. At one of the regular elections in 1916 the question was accepted by the people by an overwhelming majority. A measure was therefore prepared by two interested attorneys without remuneration, and presented to the legislature in 1917 and enacted into law. The measure provided for the creation of a tuberculosis commission, consisting of three members,

to carry out the requirements of the law. The necessary funds to enable the commission to function was a one mill levy on the assessed valuation of the taxable property of the county. Two physicians could have received appointments on this commission, but the members of the Duval County Medical Society, being modest and wishing not to offend, only recommended one physician to serve with two laymen, also recommended by the society. The recommended commission was appointed by the Governor of the State. Any county or group of counties in the State were authorized to operate under this law. The Duval County Tuberculosis Commission organized and the physician-member was chosen chairman. An architect was selected and plans and specifications for a fifty-bed tuberculosis hospital, on a site previously purchased by the commission, consisting of 2 3/4 acres, more or less, at the intersection of Tenth and Surveyor Streets in northwest Jacksonville. Contract for the building was let in June, 1923, and final payments were made in September, 1923.

It is to be recalled that the Duval County Welfare Board, by law enactment, removed the necessity for a tuberculosis commission and the commission relinquished its books and turned over its funds to the Welfare Board July 1st, 1923.

The Duval County Welfare Board was organized in July, 1923, pursuant to Chapter 9274, Laws of Florida, Acts of 1923. The Board immediately authorized an architect to proceed with plans for additions and alterations to convert the former Tuberculosis Hospital into a general hospital for the treatment of all diseases, including tuberculosis. In August, 1923, the constitutionality of the law creating the Duval County Welfare Board was attacked in the Circuit Court for Duval County, Florida. Five public-spirited lawyers, without charge, represented the Board at the hearing before the Circuit Court. The Circuit Court promptly declared the law valid and dismissed the suit. However, the attack was

renewed by appeal to the Supreme Court of Florida. The same lawyers represented the Board before the Supreme Court, without charge. The Board was again successful when the Supreme Court handed down an opinion sustaining the validity of the law under which the Board was created. All work on the hospital was discontinued during the pendency of this litigation, for obvious reasons. This caused a delay of between six and seven months. Immediately after the Supreme Court's decision the Board proceeded with its plans for remodeling the tuberculosis hospital. In the latter part of July, 1924, contracts were awarded for the construction of the new building, and the remodeling and alteration of the old one. The original tuberculosis hospital cost in the neighborhood of something less than \$150,000. The new building and remodeling of the old one represented an additional amount of a little over \$200,000. The whole work was completed in October, 1925. The building is a fire-proof structure. During the fall of 1925, the Welfare Board has planned and purchased equipment for the entire building, representing an expenditure of something less than \$75,000. At this time, November, 1925, the equipment is being installed, and suitable and efficient management of its hospital and social service activities are being provided.

The Duval County Hospital of 150-bed capacity, to be opened and ready for service in the next few months, is a county institution, built, equipped and maintained by the citizens of the county, thru taxation of a three mill levy, for the express purpose of caring for the indigent sick of the county. It is the earnest desire of the Welfare Board to render the very best service to the unfortunate citizens of the county who may have to appeal to it for assistance, and to carry out this laudable, sincere and worthy motive, the hospital and social work of the Board should not be burdened with the citizens of other counties of this State and other States seeking its assistance and aid. Any county, or group of counties, may operate a hospital under the same law which governs the

activities of the Welfare Board of Duval County

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