

THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE IN GREENVILLE COUNTY

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I would like to talk about medicine in the earliest days of Greenville County before the Revolutionary War and up to the beginnings of organized medicine, and also about some of the attempts at forming hospitals before the Greenville General and St. Francis Hospitals came into being.

It's obvious I cannot discuss all aspects of this subject, but I would like to discuss some of the areas I know something about from hearing my father and others of his generation talk about the "good old days," and from reading such books as *A Medical History of Greenville County* by Dr. J. Decherd Guess, *The First Eighty Years of the Greenville Hospital System* by Dave Partridge, and various articles in our medical library.

Perhaps the source which has helped me the most is two articles written by Dr. J. K. Webb, a general surgeon and a member of this Society. His paper, "The History of Medicine in Our County," given here some years ago, and "The General Hospital System," written for our State medical journal, show a depth of research and a labor of love.

I enjoyed reading A. V. Huff, Jr.'s recent book, *Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont*, and while there was not a great deal in it about medicine, it made me feel very humble to read about those early settlers who struggled through wars and depressions and epidemics and disease to lay the foundations for our affluent situation today.

Dr. Frontis Johnson, professor of history at Davidson College, used to quote to the graduating seniors a passage from Deuteronomy, which I think is appropriate here. Moses speaking to the children of Israel as they were going into the Land of Canaan, said: "You will

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occupy cities you did not build, and live in houses filled with all kinds of good things, that you did not provide ... then be careful you do not forget the Lord your God." Thank you, Dr. Huff, for reminding us of those who have gone before us. And thank you, Dr. Johnson, for reminding us of the blessings of the Almighty.

In his book, Dr. Guess stated: "The beginning of each era in Greenville's medical history was clearly delineated by an important event. The first era began just before the American Revolution and ended with the Civil War. The second era began with Reconstruction and ended with World War I. The third era followed World War I, and the fourth, or modern era, followed World War II and goes up to the present."

We know that medicine in Greenville County lagged behind Charleston and the rest of the Lowcountry by several years. Conditions were much more primitive in the Upcountry in the days before the Revolution. Many "doctors" had little or no training; they held other jobs, and practiced medicine as a sideline. Those early doctors had little with which to cure a disease. They knew about digitalis and laudanum, the precursor of morphine, but most of the methods of treatment consisted of herbs and hot poultices, turpentine stoups to the abdomen, hot mustard foot baths, and steam kettles and hot toddies for the croup; nothing heroic, although heroic measures would come later.

In those early days, there was a great deal of the art, and very little of the science, of medicine in the treatment methods. During times of illness, the doctor did a lot of "just plain sitting" with the patient and the family, and showing more caring and concern than skill in treatment. Many patients survived, which was due less to the medicine and treatment they received than to the undeniable fact that, as Psalm 139 says, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made."

These early physicians were patriots and fought in all the wars of the time. Most were deeply religious and, as their patients got better, they possessed much of the philosophy of a French physician. They probably had never heard of, Ambrose Pare, who said, "I dressed his wounds, and God healed him."

Some of the names of doctors of the 1800's would be of interest to you: Dr. Robinson Earle, one of his descendants is Dr.

James Earle Furman, one of our most respected pediatricians; Dr. Sam Marshall who was the great-grandfather of Mrs. Betty Allison, widow of Dr. Harold Allison; Dr. G. F. Goodlett whose descendents included Dr. William Goodlett and his brother, Dr. O. M. Goodlett; and Dr. Davis Furman whose son, Dr. Tom Furman recently died. There were other outstanding doctors in the 17th and 18th centuries but little was known of their daily lives, or of their methods of treatment.

Please remember that these physicians were dealing with diseases that we know very little about now: typhoid, diphtheria, pneumonia ("the friend of the aged"), smallpox, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis, known as "the Captain of the Men of Death."

The early doctors were ignorant of the cause of diseases. A paper, written by an unknown member of the County Medical Society in the 19th century, was entitled: "Bacteria and Other Microbes - Are They a Cause or a Result of Disease?" The rather benign methods mentioned earlier, did not have much effect on some of the more serious diseases, and doctors looked for other methods of treatment.

Four methods seem to have been prevalent: 1) Bloodletting was used for all manner of illnesses, which often caused a reaction in a patient which sometimes made the doctor feel good, but not the patient. Bloodletting could cause sweating, weaknesses, lightheadedness and death. 2) Purgatives and emetics - not "the gentle, overnight action" of the ones we hear so much about on TV - but calomel (sometimes given in the springtime to "clean off one's liver," but too often given in large doses over a prolonged period of time) and tartar emetic and ipecac and croton oil (the worst of all), all of which produced rather dramatic and rapid results. Repeated enemas (high colonic irrigations sounds more therapeutic) were used. Another way of putting it is the four H's: "high, hot, heluva lot, and hold." All of these were effective in "cleansing the body of impurities," but usually left the body in a debilitated and dehydrated state. 3) Skin irritants or blistering was another form of therapy. A blister was raised on the skin with a plaster and then broken, the pus flowing from the blister was believed to be a desirable emission of harmful matter. That is one of the examples of "laudable pus" that many of you may have heard about. After having been bled, purged

from both ends and blistered, the patient was ready to be restored to health by the use of tonics.

There were many kinds of patent medicines containing many ingredients - especially arsenic, quinine and alcohol. Much quackery abounded then and still does today. There is not much Federal control over patent medicines. It took over 17 years to get Carter to take Liver out of Carter's Little Liver Pills.

Gradually, because of better education and travel, doctors with better reasoning powers, came to believe that the three approaches discussed above were indeed killing patients or leaving them damaged, and other methods of treatment were sought. That wonderful old philosophy of "*primum non nocere*" or "first of all, do no harm," became more prevalent and exists until today.

This leads us up to the Civil War, or War of Northern Aggression, as John McLeod calls it. Up til now we have been talking about individuals. There was no organized medicine: no hospitals, no groups of doctors, no specialists (might be a good thing!), no standards, no governing boards, no guidelines. The giants of medicine are disappearing today. Medicine is becoming more complicated and sophisticated, the team approach is now the usual and not the exception. There was a team of doctors at Johns Hopkins Medical School which are known until this day, not only as a team, but also as individuals: Drs. Kelly, Welch, Halstead, and of course, Dr. William Osler.

With regard to the Civil War, I was surprised to learn that there was much Union support in Greenville County up to 1860; just as there were a number of Tory sympathizers before, and even during, the American Revolution. But after Fort Sumter, many Greenville doctors and laymen volunteered to fight for the Cause. There were three surgeons and 67 assistant surgeons on the roster of the 16th South Carolina Infantry, though we do not know how well trained they were. Conditions were poor in the field and in most of the hospitals. Many a soldier died from wounds, who could have been saved, in later times. Most with trunk wounds died. Most extremity wounds became infected and developed gangrene, necessitating immediate amputation. The fastest surgeons were considered the best surgeons, since there was very little anesthesia.

These men were not butchers as many people thought. They just did the best they could with a desperate lack of supplies and instruments. After the war, like all other soldiers, they came home to rebuild their lives and their communities.

In 1862, three hundred ladies from the Academy of the Baptist Female College founded the first real hospital in Greenville County to care for Confederate veterans. It was on College Street and was called "Soldiers' Rest." This hospital did much good but was closed by Stoneman's Raiders in 1865.

Following this, there were various clinics run by doctors and by churches, and several health spas, such as that established by Dr. Chick. Greenville had developed a reputation as a place where Lowcountry folks could get away from miasmas such as malaria and yellow fever. I would like to mention Dr. Jervy's hospital across from Christ Church. As a typical pediatrician's child, with bad ears and sinuses in the pre-antibiotic era, I spent much time there. It had a wonderful smell about it, a combination of chloroform and formaldehyde and ether, plus a heavy rubber mat that ran the length of the first floor. When you opened that front door, you knew that there was some serious treatment going on! Such private hospitals filled a need. However, by 1891 it became apparent that Greenville should have a City hospital.

The city bought a building from a Dr. Corbett, and thus began the astounding growth of the Greenville Hospital System, with its several hundred beds and nine units throughout the county today. The quality of medicine improved. A Medical School was established in Charleston in 1824, a hospital library was formed for the use of the doctors, and more and more doctors were specializing. Bacteria were found to be the cause of many diseases, and soon we would have antibiotics to help treat these illnesses.

Most of us think of GHS as being over on Grove Road, with the various satellite units, but old timers remember that it all started over on Arlington Avenue with that Corbett Building, which served many purposes and was only torn down several years ago. I would like to mention the St. Francis Hospital, which has been run since 1932 by the Sisters of the Poor of St. Francis. The Catholic Church bought the old Salvation Army Hospital, which had gone bankrupt

during the Depression. Dr. Charlie Wyatt, Dr. John Fewell, my father and several others volunteered to help staff it. In those days the nuns did most of the actual administration and care of the patients and they were indeed marvelous workers. There is just nothing like a good Catholic hospital. There was one problem, however, most of the nuns came from Germany and while they spoke correct English, they did not speak "Dixie." Since that time, the St. Francis has grown into a fine modern hospital on Sumner Street as well as on the Eastside.

Today, there is also the new Shriners' Hospital next to Greenville Memorial. Those fellows in those funny hats have helped many a crippled child through the years. When first opened in 1927, the Shriners' Hospital treated mostly polio and osteomyelitis, then burns, and now very complicated cases of cerebral palsy and spina bifida. The Shriners do not accept any money for patient care, and everything in their hospitals is of the very best, including the doctors. Incidentally, Dr. Frank Stelling was the chief surgeon for the entire United States for a number of years.

The Greenville County Medical Society has been a force for good since the 1890's. It, too, has changed. At first everybody knew everybody else; there were no specialty groups; and lengthy and lively were some of the debates and discussions in the olden days. The Society does not hold the interest nowadays that it did in the past. It is just too big and doctors tend to go to their specialty meetings.

I have a special fondness for the Greenville County Medical Auxilliary. Five doctors wives founded it in 1927, with much opposition from the doctors. My mother was elected first president and was a devoted member until her death. At first they furnished blankets and bottles and helped in setting up milk kitchens for the poor. They functioned as a relief agency, since this was before the days of the United Way. The Auxilliary has grown into an organization that not only supports doctors but also furnishes many thousands of dollars through various projects to the Roper Mountain Science Center and other worthy causes.

Well, that is a quick summary of doctors and patients and hospitals. As you have heard, I am optimistic about the future.

Especially if all those graduating from medical schools are given, and follow the philosophy of, this prayer found on the wall of a children's ward in London:

From inability to let well enough alone,
From too much zeal for the new,
And from too much contempt for what is old,
From putting knowledge before wisdom,
Science before art, and cleverness before common sense,
From treating patients, as cases without names,
And making the cure of the disease, more grievous
than the endurance of the same,
Good Lord, Deliver us. Amen.