

## **KGH....A Community Built Hospital**

While Kennewick General Hospital celebrates its fortieth anniversary in 1992, the history of medical care in the area known today as Kennewick goes back into the past century. The town of Kennewick dates itself from the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad bridge in 1883. At that time, there were no doctors resident in the small construction town; any doctors in the area were railroad doctors based in Pasco. Dr. Blalock sometimes did ride on horseback from Walla Walla for emergencies such as broken bones, but no surgery was done in the Kennewick vicinity and people either died or they went by whatever means they could find to hospitals in Walla Walla, Spokane, Seattle, or Portland. They had a choice of travel by riverboat, horse, railroad, or often a combination of the three. It took two days of tedious travel to get to Walla Walla; buggies were slow and the Columbia River had to be crossed by ferry to Wallula, a ferry that ran several times during the day, but never at night.

The first doctors who actually established themselves in Kennewick came in 1902, as the irrigation canal was about to be finished, opening up the area to agriculture. They were Dr. William Pallister, a Canadian, who moved to Seattle in 1906, and Dr. J.W. Hewetson a Scotsman with a wife and two children, who became Benton County's first Coroner when the county was established in 1905. In 1913, charges were brought against Doctor Hewetson, accusing him of child abuse and neglect of his little daughter, Melva. While he was cleared of the charges, he left town and his daughter was adopted out to relatives in the east. The Hewetson house at Third and Washington, now the Colonial Retirement Home, remains silent about this traumatic incident in the town's early life.

Dr. Franklin Crosby replaced Dr. Pallister in 1906 and Dr. LeGrand Spaulding came some five years later. In 1910, Dr. Crosby bought the first privately owned automobile in Kennewick, a 22 horsepower Buick, which he really needed as he was often called upon to make long trips into the country. Dr. Spaulding came to Kennewick on a cold November day in 1911 with his wife, Adelaide, and small son, Gene. He was much loved, and made his home in the town until his death in 1940.

As Kennewick began to develop in the early years of this century, doctors' offices were located on the second floor of the various retail stores in the bustling downtown, most of which still stands. The first known hospital in Kennewick opened in 1909. Mrs. F.B. Jennings, who had been operating the Ritzville Hospital, opened what was known as the Kennewick Hospital. It was first located in the Beach Block on East Kennewick Avenue (today the location of Pacific One Bank, but before its demolition serving for many years as Kennewick City Hall). Later that year, when that space was outgrown, the hospital moved to what was known as the Staley home at 423 West Albany Street. The hospital also took on a new name, Twin-City Hospital. The hospital had several beds, and many of its patients suffered from typhoid, for at that time there was a great typhoid epidemic in the area; by early 1910 a number of prominent Kennewick citizens had died of the disease.

Babies were frequently born at home with trained nurses serving as midwives. Mrs. Eichner, Miss Tripp and Mrs. Henderson were among those who delivered babies in Kennewick. When she was born in 1909, Bonnie Brown Scott's family lived in the Horse Heaven Hills, where he father farmed. Her parents chose to have Bonnie delivered in town at Mrs. Henderson's home at 422 West First Avenue, in order to be near Dr. Crosby, Mrs. Brown's physician.

After the typhoid epidemic had subsided, Dr. Crosby began to push for a real hospital in 1910 in a speech to the Commercial Club, the forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce. He was appointed to head a committee to investigate, but that hospital also remained unbuilt.

However in 1916 the Sister of Joseph of Carondelet moved to Pasco from Lewiston, Idaho and opened a 15-bed hospital in the old Montana Hotel leased from Mrs. Crotty. Housewives helped clean the old two-story building and donations of \$800 were collected. The Pasco and Kennewick doctors donated medical and surgical equipment, while local businessmen furnished the rooms. It was a small dismal building with no elevators, just a narrow winding stairway, which made it hazardous to move patients about. While it was a great step forward in medical care in the area, the six doctors in Kennewick and Pasco shared a desire to build an even better hospital.

That would have to wait. World War I intervened. Drs. Crosby and Spaulding both left Kennewick to serve their country; Dr. Crosby became a surgeon general in the Bordeaux area of France, while Dr. Spaulding went to Savanna, Illinois as a lieutenant, in charge of the medical department at the army proving grounds.

New doctors arrived in Kennewick to replace them, including Dr. Arthur Tullar and Dr. Walter Morrison. Dr. Tullar remained in the area for ten years. He was a fine tenor and had sung his way through medical school in Chicago. After a botched tonsillectomy he became a fine baritone. Dr. Tullar enjoyed playing the cello in string trios for guests at his home at 523 West Albany Street. Like many good doctors, he enjoyed playing golf and helped establish Kennewick's first golf course, near the location of the present Tri-City Country Club, and was its first president.

During war time, in late 1918, the town as well as the nation was hit by a severe influenza epidemic. Glenna Kinkaid Taylor, who lived with her family in the Horse Heavens, remembered when her parents came to town and had to wear masks on their faces. They had to telephone ahead to the grocer, who packed their order and set it outside of the store for them to pick up. Even then, they contracted the flu. Schools, theatres, and even churches in town were closed the month of October 1918 by order of Dr. Morrison, the county health officer; by December the flu was rampant. All hospital beds were filled and no new cases could be accommodated. On December 12, 1918, 95 new cases were reported for the week. People had to be isolated in their own homes, and many died. Eventually the quarantine was relaxed. When the war ended on November 11, 1918, Dr. Crosby returned home to Kennewick, but Dr. Spaulding decided to go to Walla Walla.

In the aftermath of the flu epidemic, in which sometimes there were 26 patients crowded in the 15 bed Pasco hospital, there began a drive in 1919 for a new hospital in Kennewick. Pledges began to come in. By December of that year, a new hospital was, in fact, established in Kennewick by Drs. Crosby and Hopper, a new Kennewick doctor and former Richland mayor. They opened a hospital in the Bartlett home on Fourth Avenue and Vancouver Street (now the location of Midtown Red Apple). This was at that time one of the finest homes in the Kennewick Highlands with room enough for 14 beds. On the first floor were three private rooms, a small surgery, reception, office room and kitchen, while on the second floor there were four private rooms and one ward. There were two trained nurses

in charge. It was known as the Kennewick Hospital.

Soon after Dr. Spaulding's return home from the war his wife died, presumably of cancer. After her death the townspeople of Kennewick were able to persuade him to return from Walla Walla to Kennewick to practice. In 1920 he did come back with his son, Gene, and remained in Kennewick until his death twenty years later.

By the end of 1920 and into 1921, there began a drive to make the Kennewick Hospital a public hospital. It was felt that the burden of maintaining a hospital should not have to fall on the medical profession, but should be a community responsibility. A Kennewick Hospital Association was formed and began raising money, but there were other interests in the community. There were fundraising drives for an automobile bridge across the Columbia and for a park for Kennewick. The hospital fund drive came up short and again no hospital came to be in Kennewick.

The year 1921 did see the opening of new, modern, 50 bed Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital on Fourth Street in Pasco. This was a big event, not only for Pasco, but also for the surrounding communities, and people of both Kennewick and Pasco celebrated. Expected to cost \$80,000, the hospital actually cost close to \$140,000. When a \$2,800 annual interest payment for the hospital was due in 1924, Kennewick, along with other Benton County communities, helped raise the money, \$1,000 alone being raised in Kennewick.

The year 1922 saw the departure of Dr. Crosby for healthier climes in California. That year also saw the opening of the Pasco-Kennewick toll bridge. The new bridge (50 cents a car, 5 cents a passenger) eliminated the need to take the ferry to the Pasco Hospital, or more commonly, to walk the railroad bridge. Walking the bridge was done by even the doctors of Kennewick, often met on the Pasco side by their patients or family. Frequently, it was easier to walk the bridge than to try to maneuver a car onto the ferry.

Doctors did make house calls in those early years - to the Horse Heavens, to Finley, Richland, Hanford, and White Bluffs. A house call in those early years cost \$1.50; by the end of World War I the fee had risen to \$2.50, or \$3.00 for those who lived in the country, and \$5.00 to the Horse Heavens. A newborn baby cost \$35 to be delivered, and the family furnished the hot water (and a free meal if it happened during dinner time.)

Small hospitals opened in Kennewick, too. After the war, in 1919, a hospital known as the McGregor hospital, operated by two sisters, Miss McGregor and Mrs. Bratton, opened on Fourth Avenue and Washington Street. Mrs. Harry Linn opened a small hospital south of town on Washington Street in 1926, but later moved into town and had several beds in her home at 503 West Kennewick Avenue. In 1928, Mrs. Germaine Bechtel opened a hospital, known as the Sanitarium, in a cottage she rented at 523 West Kennewick Avenue. She specialized in medical and dietetic cases and later married Dr. H.J. Capell, another physician who had come to Kennewick in 1929. Miss Gladys Selleck of Finley opened a hospital down in the old Garber house on Columbia Avenue in October of 1932, but it burned down on Christmas day two months later. Undaunted, several months later, Miss Selleck reopened the Kennewick Sanitarium in the former M.H. Church home at 510 West Kennewick Avenue with services

including diet and massage.

Doctors did not get rich in Kennewick. There was a steadier income in Pasco, because of the railroad business. Dr. Tullar said he was a physician, not a bill collector. Payment was not always in money. Sometimes it was a dressed chicken or a dozen eggs; perhaps a bushel of potatoes or apples. Wheat farmers paid once a year. Some did not pay at all. The region was not prosperous, especially during the Depression. When Dr. Tullar's son, Richard, was nearing college age in 1927, the doctor realized that he could not face college expenses on a Kennewick doctor's pay, and left for California. But Dr. Spaulding remained, as other doctors came and went.

In 1925, schools were closed because of diphtheria and the following year schools again closed because of a light form of smallpox. Another attack of influenza occurred in 1928. A quarantine was imposed by Dr. Spaulding, the county health officer, for two weeks in the summer of 1934 for all children under 16 to guard against infantile paralysis.

Dr. Spaulding brought a young doctor, who had been practicing in Pasco, to his Kennewick practice in 1938. That man was Dr. Ralph deBit. He would remain a family physician in Kennewick for nearly 50 years.

In June 1940, Dr. Spaulding died.

The population of Kennewick tripled between 1941 and 1947. Wartime projects such as the Naval Air Station in Pasco and the Hanford Engineer Works north of Richland combined to stretch the limits of Kennewick. And once again, local physicians entered the war with new doctors coming to serve the folks on the home front. Dr. Roosevelt W. Kite arrived in Kennewick at this time.

With the population explosion during the wartime years, it became evident that Kennewick would need a hospital. Citizens formed the Kennewick Hospital Association and began an impressive fund drive to erect what became Kennewick General Hospital. In 1949, this drive took off in full swing. Events ranged from building a \$20,000 house that was raffled off to sponsoring circuses, concerts, and rummage sales. Benton County established a hospital taxing district in 1950 and on November 4th of that year a \$350,000 bond issue was passed. Ground was broken in March of 1951, and on August 1 of 1952, a new 46-bed hospital was opened to the people of the Tri-Cities. As a special section of the Tri-City Herald stated in July of 1952, "Kennewick General Hospital is a symbol of what a community - this community or any other community - can do if it gets solidly behind a single project, and, with unity and selflessness, drives on to ultimate victory."

By Thomas Moak, October 1992