Serving Beyond the Hill: JBU’s Medical Heritage

JBU has long been devoted to the task of providing medical support to both its students and its community. The first campus infirmary was built a mere ten years after Siloam’s first city medical clinic opened, and campus physicians have served the town in a number of ways since that time. Moreover, the city’s first hospital was opened by John Brown University.

In 1935, bank manager J. E. Bratt sold a “palatial” house to the campus of John Brown University. The Englishman had acquired the house and the city bank from Cornelly Harrington, a charismatic and controversial figure of Siloam’s early years. Harrington had built the extravagant building next door to his bank in 1913 as a venue for his many political and religious enterprises. To this day, the basement of the building contains a vaulted closet once used to handle funds from the bank.

When JBU acquired the house in 1935, the building was refurbished before opening as a hospital in the fall of 1936. It remained open to the community of Siloam Springs from its downtown location for over ten years. Staff consisted of doctors, nurses, students, and — ironically — staff members of Pyeatt’s funeral home. Since the three-story building did not contain an elevator, nurses would call Pyeatt’s if they needed to move non-ambulatory patients between floors. The funeral home also provided Siloam’s first ambulatory services, alongside the fire department.

The hospital was a significant venture for campus. In the hospital’s early years, the Threefold Advocate would publish a weekly column called “Hospital News” on the patients and cases of the week, typically procedures such as appendectomies or tonsillectomies. The building contained 25 beds by 1945 and most of the significant medical apparatus of the time. Dental offices and a lab were located in the building’s basement, while an adjacent one-story brick building provided housing for the nurses. It likely didn’t hurt student recruitment to be able to boast of running “one of the outstanding hospitals of this region” – and at decent prices. Case in point: when Dr. Gary Guinn, current head of the English Department, was born in the hospital, his mother’s

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ECHOES OF THE PAST

When students returned from Christmas break this year there were many comments concerning the missing trees. The telltale stumps stood out like sore thumbs near the Mayfield parking lot, along with the remains of what had once been trees. Students were discontented and some were very angry about the apparent destruction of old landmarks (and hiding places).

"The Phantom Woodsman strikes again!" said Steve Wiedmaier. "It seems like every time we turn around they are cutting down the nice big trees and replacing them with toothpicks." As Todd Masters put it, "The only shade trees we’ve got, and they cut them down... Guess we need the firewood." "Heat comes before beauty," said Marc Mills.

When asked about how she felt about the situation, Marilyn Timm said the campus was getting too civilized. Too much concrete and landscaping. "Which one will be next?" asked Dena Shea. Others were ranting and raving about the one who is heading the landscape project and cutting down all the trees.

Dr. Seward, head of Grounds Maintenance, was sorry to hear about the students’ reaction to the tree cutting. "We are only cutting down the diseased ones," he said. "The trees are not being removed for landscape purposes, and the young trees that are replacing them will be the trees of the future."

He went on to explain that there is a certain disease elm trees get called Dutch Elms’ Disease that is not curable. "When a tree has this, part of it (if not all of it) dies and then becomes dangerous. Dead branches can fall on unsuspecting people or cars. That is why they have to be cut."

Seward said there were only a few elms left on campus that years that were dying too. "The only healthy trees that have been cut were on the jogging trail," he continued, "and that was to make room for the joggers!"

It is no longer necessary to be paranoid about which tree will be next, for it is the law of the fittest and only the strongest survive.

(cont. from front)

In the winter of 1948, JBU moved its staff and equipment back on campus into the former home of the founder’s mother, where John Brown III was born shortly thereafter. The old hospital building entered its current duties as an apartment complex and the Chamber of Commerce, and Siloam relocated city medical services to City Hall until the completion of Memorial Hospital in 1950.

Though JBU’s official health service to Siloam diminished in the years following the infirmary’s return to campus, today’s pre-med students continue to serve 40 hours of field experience in local hospitals and clinics as part of their educational program.

Insights

From the works of John Brown, Sr.

I remember when I was a boy, a beautiful, three-colored poster, used by the regular army, to secure recruits for the regular army, was put up in the Post Office of our little town. Another boy, older than I, became so enthused and got me so enthused about the possibilities and splendors and glories of a soldier’s life, that we went off to a nearby city and sought to enlist. I was rejected because I was too young. That poster with beautiful scenery and charging horses and attractive uniforms and many men so enthused my imagination that I felt that I had been denied the highest hopes and ambitions that could surge through the human heart, when I was denied the privileges of wearing the uniform of a United States Soldier. Later, in the Spanish American War, when volunteers were called for, I immediately volunteered and went to the front, and the first discovery I made was that the man who drew that poster was a liar.

If a United States appeal for recruits in peace time, with its many colors and its entrancing background, could enflame the minds of youth as that picture did enflame my mind and the mind of my boyhood chum, can anyone begin to estimate the far-reaching influence of the pictures that hang on the walls of a home, whose voices – inarticulate, but tremendously insistent, are speaking their messages into the formative minds and spirits of our children every day?

And if this is true of the pictures on the wall of a home, it is probably even more true of the type of music with which most of our homes are blessed or cursed.

Excerpt from "Thinking Things."

Milestones

February 20, 1962: John Glenn becomes the first American to orbit the earth.

Eldon Green and other JBU students listened to the event live in Dr. Parage’s English class on a transistor radio.

October 22, 1967: The JBU men’s swimming team breaks a world record by swimming 100 miles in 39 hours, 45 minutes, and 26 seconds. 9 men swam 1,000 yard shifts until the feat was done. They were awarded with cake and ice cream. Numerous students stayed up to feed and cheer on the team.

four-day stay cost $35.85 ($4 per day of stay with a $10 delivery room fee and miscellaneous charges for drugs and “babe care”).