

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

DR. FURNIFOLD MCLENDEL SIMMONS PATTERSON

INTERVIEW 502.2

This is Dr. Francis King interviewing Dr. Furnifold McLendel Simmons Patterson, number 502.2. The date is July 19, 1991. The interview was conducted in Dr. Patterson's home.

Dr. King: Why don't you just begin with the early history of St. Luke's as you recall it.

Dr. Patterson: I have very few recollections of some of my physician friends. Dr. Alan Davidson was one of my closest friends. He was outstanding in the field of his chosen specialty, e.g. Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology. He was a superb diagnostician and surgeon, was kind to his patients and many friends, was a dedicated churchman, and a wonderful father and husband. Dr. Charles Ashford was an excellent surgeon, had great rapport with his patients and fellow physicians, was an astute business man, and was respected throughout our community. Dr. Joseph Latham was an intellectual giant. I always respected him and sought his advice on many occasions. Dr. Ernest Bender was an excellent pediatrician, was kind, gentle, and loved by his patients and colleagues. Dr. Richard Duffy was a very austere gentleman, always immaculate, and was difficult to know. I rather lived in awe of him, for he seemed to be in a different world. Dr. R. DuVal Jones, who was my father's associate, was one of my godfathers and was always kind to me. He was an excellent physician and surgeon, was greatly respected by many, but he never seemed to reach the level of the common man. Dr. Christopher Barker was a great friend of mine and was always kind and thoughtful in our relationship. Through the years we were very close to one another. He was a great and true friend of my father and ardently supported him on many occasions. Dr. Barker

came to New Bern in 1917 after a call from my father. There was an epidemic of influenza in New Bern and assistance was needed. Dr. Harvey Wadsworth was an excellent physician, had a relaxed and humorous personality, and nothing seemed to "rattle" him. We were good friends but at times he was an enigma to me.

Dr. King: Why was Dr. Wadsworth an enigma?

Dr. Patterson: I never knew what he was thinking, to be honest.

Dr. N. M. Gibbs and Dr. Raymond Pollock I knew by name and reputation only, but they contributed very positively to the practice of medicine in New Bern during their life time. One of my favorite physicians was Dr. Ernest Bender of Pollocksville, N.C. He was a very knowledgeable pediatrician and was a fine human being.

Dr. King: Did he live in Pollocksville at that time or in New Bern?

Dr. Patterson: He lived in either Pollocksville or Trenton.

One gentleman that I remember with great joy and affection was Dr. W. S. Rankin, Director of the Duke Foundation. As a result of the financial assistance of the Foundation our St. Luke's Hospital was able to care for the needy and indigent patients that were hospitalized. Through the years my father and Dr. Rankin had a very friendly and close relationship. I have several letters from Dr. Rankin to my father that I have treasured through the years. He was a fine, thoughtful and considerate gentleman. I will always cherish my memory of him. St. Luke's Hospital in reality was a private institution.

Many indigent patients were cared for and it was through the assistance of the Duke Foundation that the expense for the care of these patients

was able to be handled. Next, I will just concentrate on St. Luke's Hospital. Now I remember the following physicians as being members of the staff. They were Dr. R. DuVal Jones, Dr. Joseph F. Patterson, Dr. N. M. Gibbs, and Dr. Raymond Pollock. Miss Mary McMulkin, R.N., was superintendent. She had trained at a hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Miss Madie Bell Hay was my father's secretary. The first floor of the hospital included wards, private rooms, a solarium, private offices for Drs. Jones and Patterson, and an office for the superintendent. The second floor was allocated entirely for private patients, and there was a diet kitchen. The third floor included a solarium, obstetrical rooms, and the operating room suite. In addition, patients were anesthetized on the third floor. Also, there was a sterilizing room and a x-ray department. There was an excellent nursing training school at New Bern. The nursing school was disbanded in 1937. During the entire period that the school was operational not a single nurse from St. Luke's Hospital failed the North Carolina State Board of Medical Examiners. In 1929-32 I remember the following people were nurses associated with the hospital: Miss Guthrie Sledge, Miss Smitty Bartling, Tiny McKee, Jean Harris, Marea Kafer, Nell Brinson, Ruth Killingsworth, Rowena McSorley, Annie Humphrey, Lela Elliot Badham, Bernice Willis, Harriet Wynn, and Ida Pigott. Miss Alberta Bagley, a 1929 graduate of a training school in South Carolina, was the operating room supervisor. Miss Teeny Henderson (now Mrs. Stone Burnette) and Miss Thelma Chinnis (now Mrs. Sherman Lewis) were the laboratory technicians. It is interesting that Dr. Lee Cohen an ear, nose, and throat specialist from Baltimore, Maryland, often came

to New Bern and did ear, nose, and throat surgery, especially, mastoidectomies. As far as anesthesia is concerned my memory is that the first anesthetist was Miss Guthrie Sledge. Miss Alberta Bagley assisted her as did Miss Ida Pigott.

Dr. King: This was open drop ether, is that right?

Dr. Patterson: As far as I remember, that is correct.

Dr. King: There was no other type, was there?

Dr. Patterson: No. Now, let's go back a few years to the New Bern General Hospital which was situated on Craven Street.

Dr. Patterson: Dr. R. N. Duffy was the Chief of Staff at this hospital which burned in 1928. Otherwise, I have no knowledge of this hospital. In regard to the care of emergency patients at St. Luke's Hospital, Drs. Patterson, Jones, Latham, Wadsworth, and Bender were the main participants in care of patients in the early days. It is interesting to recall that the night nurses at St. Luke's Hospital were on call ten hours in the day and twelve hours at night with two hours off to study. Recalling the anesthetists I will list the following that served in this capacity according to my memory: Miss Jessie Coats R.N., Miss Kathleen Edwards R.N., Miss Lou Justice R.N., Miss Margie Moore, Mr. Bill Aiken, Mrs. Alberta McCosley R.N. (Bagley), Miss Dorothy Ritchy R.N., Dr. Nicholas Petrov M.D., and Miss Ruth Lewis.

In later years Mr. Bill Aiken joined this department. We owe a great debt to these unsung heroes; e.g. nurses, anesthetist, laboratory technicians, administrators, general duty nurses, and x-ray technicians. It is remarkable what they accomplished under difficult circumstances. During the summer after my second year at the University

of Pennsylvania Medical School (1936), I helped to develop the laboratory department of St. Luke's Hospital and worked part time there as a laboratory technician.

Often patients were referred by my father and Dr. Jones to the McGuire Clinic in Richmond, Virginia. Dr. Stuart McGuire, a famous and distinguished surgeon, cooperated closely with the medical staff at St. Luke's Hospital in serious cases. Dr. Lee Cohen, an ENT specialist in Baltimore, Maryland, came to New Bern on many occasions and conferred and performed surgery at our hospital. On occasions, patients were referred to the Johns Hopkins Medical Center in Baltimore, Maryland.

When my brother and I returned to New Bern in 1952 as partners in the practice of general surgery, there were roughly a dozen practicing physicians here. We attempted to care for our patients at the three hospitals in this city; St. Luke's, Kafer Memorial, and Good Shepherd. It was no easy task. Ancillary services, such as sophisticated laboratory examinations, were at a minimum. Pathological specimens had to be sent to distant medical centers for examinations. There were only a few anesthetists available, and this often made operative scheduling difficult.

During the period from 1952 to 1963 when the present Craven County Memorial Hospital opened its doors and became operational, my brother and I were quite busy and gained very important operative experience.

We performed the first major thoracic procedure, performed the first total gastrectomy at Good Shepherd Hospital, the first brain decompression (trephine) in an accident case. We could not have done

this unless we had had an experienced anesthetist. We also performed the first major emergency procedure on a newborn infant with obstruction of the distal end of the stomach (Ramstedt procedure). Fortunately, all the patients survived. I performed the last major operation procedure at St. Luke's.

Dr. King: Tell us a little bit more about these cases. What was the thoracic procedure and how did you get anesthesia?

Dr. Patterson: In regard to the thoracic procedure, it was an interesting experience. It occurred on a national holiday. At that time a friend of mine, Miss Lucy Schmidt, with whom I had been associated prior to my coming to New Bern, was visiting us. A terrible accident occurred on the Morehead City highway and a patient was brought to the hospital with a severely damaged chest with collapse of a lung and bleeding. The case required excellent anesthesia supervision, and if Miss Schmidt had not been with us, I don't think it would have been possible to perform this operation.

Dr. King: She was an anesthetist?

Dr. Patterson: She was an anesthetist and at that time was chief anesthetist at the hospital in central North Carolina. My brother, Dr. Joseph Patterson, performed the operation, and I assisted him. Fortunately the patient made an uneventful recovery. This was the first open chest surgery operation that had been performed in New Bern to my knowledge.

Dr. King: What was the gastrectomy done for? Do you remember?

Dr. Patterson: Francis, I'll have to talk to Joe Pat about that. I believe the patient had linitis plastica. The patient was an elderly

negro woman. The operation was performed at Good Shepherd Hospital by my brother, Joe, and I assisted him.

The three early hospitals in New Bern deserve great praise for the performance of their professional staff when there were difficult situations. Mrs. Helen Kafer, Miss Dorothy Ritchy, and Miss Kathleen Edwards at Kafer Memorial Hospital were three of the most dedicated people I've ever known. Dr. Lula Disosway and Mr. O.T. Faison at Good Shepherd were the guiding lights there. Miss Alberta Bagley was one of the most wonderful and dedicated individuals that I've ever known.

She served as an assistant superintendent at St. Luke's Hospital and later as superintendent at the same institution. In addition, in emergency situations she served as anesthetist. She later accompanied my brother and me when we opened our new office.

Dr. King: Simmons, you mentioned that these people performed under difficult circumstances. Could you describe a little more the circumstances?

Dr. Patterson: It was a difficult situation because these procedures had not been performed before, and those assisting us in anesthesia and at the operating table had not had experience along this line.

Dr. King: How do you remember your father as a person in your early childhood?

Dr. Patterson: I have very fond memories of my father. He and I were very close through the years. We both loved athletics and attended many athletic contests together. Even in my early years I accompanied him to the hospital on many occasions when he treated



accidents and other emergency situations. It was because of him I think I decided to become a physician. During my undergraduate years at the University of North Carolina and especially in my four years at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, when I was home, I would accompany my father to the hospital and observe him operate.

Even then he was kind enough to let me treat some of the minor emergency situations, serving as my assistant. One important aspect of my father that I remember is that when a situation arose which he considered beyond the capabilities of him and the hospital, he would not hesitate to refer the patients to distant hospitals such as the Duke Hospital or the McGuire Clinic in Richmond. This is important because so many people do not realize that on occasions assistance is needed from others.

During the first years that St. Luke's Hospital became operational, there were 315 operative cases performed from November 1, 1915 to June 1, 1918. There were only three deaths giving a mortality of less than one percent. In this same period of time there were 101 x-ray procedures performed. During the first six months of operation of St. Luke's Hospital, there were 823 cases treated in the accident ward.

END OF INTERVIEW