



San Rafael's Cottage Hospital

By Scott Fletcher

Marin History Museum Volunteer

In 1905, Marin doctors William Farrington Jones, Henry Howitt, and William Wickman opened Cottage Hospital in San Rafael. The new medical facility and emergency hospital was located at the corner of 5th St. and Petaluma Ave (now Lincoln Avenue). At the time, the only other Marin hospital was the County Hospital and Poor Farm in Lucas Valley. That hospital was run by the County Supervisor's and was quite distant from Marin's population centers. A year later, with only fourteen beds, Cottage Hospital was overwhelmed with patients from the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. Within a year, the founders purchased and remodeled a large, two-story mansion at 5th St. and Nye and moved the hospital there. A 1907 Marin County Tocsin article described the hospital as, "...one of the most modern institutions in the country, with two operating rooms, a sterilizing room, large patient rooms with views of the city and Tamalpais, heating throughout, fire extinguishers on every floor and telephones, speaking tubes and dumbwaiters." The hospital was also given a horse-drawn ambulance that was eventually converted to a gasoline-powered vehicle that transported patients to the hospital throughout the county. Doctor William Farrington Jones is pictured above standing in front of the hospital in 1925.

To better serve their patients, the doctors also established a nursing school at the hospital. Female students attended lectures in the evening and received on-the-job training during their shifts at the hospital. Ms. Marion Gambetta, also pictured above, was in the graduating class of

1912 and worked at the hospital for many years. In a sign of the times, her Novato pioneer family, organized a “card-party” and dance to celebrate her graduation that was held at the Tamalpais Center in Kentfield. With more than 200 attendees, the winner of the card-party had the “honor” of escorting Ms. Gambetta to the dance.

In the early 20th century, it was common practice to publish patient arrivals, injuries, conditions and recoveries in the local press. Newspaper accounts relate, sometimes in gruesome detail, those patients recovering from appendectomies and other surgeries, those brought to the hospital after collisions between horse-drawn carriages and early automobiles, victims of fire injuries, robbery and gunshot victims, and those injured or killed in train accidents. On the brighter side, births to county residents were also heralded, including this Marin Journal announcement in 1907, “Mrs. T.J. Clancy became the mother of a boy and girl this morning. This is the third successive time she has given birth to twins, the first being both boys and the second girls.”

Cottage Hospital was sold to Elsie Simmons in 1920 and was moved into a new, larger building adjacent to the original at 5th and Nye St. in 1927. Ms. Simmons married Joseph Dias and the two operated the facility until selling it to John Taylor in 1946. He changed the name to San Rafael General Hospital, enlarged it to 65 rooms and eventually ran it as a non-profit until it closed in 1966.

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