

## **Berkeley County Hospital of 1933 and Beyond ~**

There was a great deal of tuberculosis in the county among the poorer white people and the Negroes. As soon as a case was discovered, the patient's name and application for admittance was sent to State Park, near Columbia, which was the only place in the state where tuberculosis charity cases were taken care of and treated.

There was always a long waiting list, so much so that occasionally by the time the patient could be admitted, he was either too far gone for help or had already died.

Many of these tuberculosis cases were members of large families who slept in the same room and with the inadequate facilities then available, it was impossible to know when these "contacts" were infected with the disease. Consequently, children from these families were in school when they might be in the early stages of the disease, therefore, a danger to their fellow students was the result. Dr. Kershaw Fishburne determined that something had to be done at once to check this explosive condition. This quality of "at once" was expressed in a colorful way by one of the doctor's colored friends, who said that "when Doc wanted something done, it had to be done as of yesterday."

After mulling over ways and means, Fishburne concluded that the only conclusion was for Berkeley County to have a tuberculosis "shack" of her own, where these patients could be isolated and have treatment without delay. Having reached this decision, he was obsessed with fiery zeal and the necessity for speed in accomplishing his desire. He put on a whirlwind campaign, enlisting all the help available to raise enough money to build the shack.

Fishburne went to all the colored schools and churches in the county to talk about the situation and to ask for contributions. This meant miles and miles of hard driving and many hours of talk in which he brought forth the entire force of his mind and body to arouse his hearers to a burning sense of necessity.

Fishburne also sponsored a weekly dance at the unused furniture store in Moncks Corner and visited all the northern plantation owners on the Cooper River, telling them of his plight of these people, the lack of facilities to take care of them, and asking them for donations.

He finally managed to raise \$8,000.00. The smallest amount contributed was a sticky dime that came from a little boy who stopped Dr. Fishburne on the street and pulled the grimy coin from a ragged pocket and handed it to the doctor.

This sum was augmented by Berkeley County, which put up a \$10,000.00 bond issue. Realizing that this was not enough to build and equip a shack large enough for the needs of the county, the doctor went to Charlotte to see Dr. Rankin, head of the hospital division of the Duke Foundation, with hope that Dr. Rankin would match dollar for dollar the sum he already had. Dr. Rankin received Dr. Fishburne cordially and listened to his story with interest, but told him the Duke Foundation would not contribute to a Special Disease Hospital, as the turnover was too slow. Fishburne returned home very much discouraged. He had apparently reached a dead end.

About this same time, Nick Roosevelt, Dr. Fishburne's brother-in-law, returning from Philadelphia to his plantation, Gippy, met in the smoking car with Hugh S. Robertson, who was going to his winter home, Yeaman's Hall. Yeaman's Hall was a stylish winter club, catering to well-to-do northern businessmen and their families, and though near Charleston, it was actually situated in Berkeley County.

Roosevelt and Robertson engaged in conversation and Robertson told Roosevelt that he had bought a plantation on the Cooper River for hunting and fishing sports. He said that he was distressed at the apparent poverty of the colored people in the vicinity of his plantation and wondered what could be done to help in a long-range way.

Roosevelt told Robertson that the man for him to see was his brother-in-law, Dr. Kershaw Fishburne, who was director of the Berkeley County Health Department. Roosevelt related how Fishburne was making herculean efforts to raise enough funds to build a Tuberculosis Shack and a contribution to this cause would be of very great assistance.

Later on, Roosevelt suggested that Dr. Fishburne make an appointment with Mr. Robertson and talk over the matter with him. The doctor obliged, and after several meetings, the idea of a general hospital was born. Robertson told Fishburne to go back to Dr. Rankin and find out what the least amount that had to be raised locally for the Duke Foundation to match their money. Dr. Fishburne returned to Charlotte again to talk with Dr. Rankin, his loins girded for battle and a "do-or-die" determination oozing from every pore. Dr. Rankin greeted him politely, but in a skeptical manner to Fishburne told him that \$35,000.00 was the very least that Duke required from Berkeley County to have Duke do business with them, and that he knew from Fishburne's previous visit he did not have it, could not get this amount, and that he might as well go home and forget about it.

Dr. Fishburne returned home after several hours of hard driving and got in touch with Mr. Robertson, telling him of Dr. Rankin's ultimatum. Robertson listened to the story and told the doctor to go back to Dr. Rankin and tell him that he did have the \$35,000.00, for he, Hugh S. Robertson, would put it up.

Charlotte is 186 miles from Moncks Corner and Fishburne had already made the round trip that day, but without a moment's delay, not even stopping for food, jumped in his car and started once again for Charlotte, arriving just before Dr. Rankin closed his office for the day.

Dr. Rankin looked up in astonishment when Fishburne was ushered into his office and asked, "Why are you still hanging around Charlotte? I told you to go home!" Dr. Fishburne grinned and replied, "I have been home and I have the \$35,000.00 that you stipulated."

Dr. Rankin was incredibly surprised, but Fishburne sat down and told him in graphic language the story of Mr. Robertson, who was putting up the money. Hugh Robertson, at that time, was building Rockefeller Center in New York, and was a personal friend of George Allen, one of the trustees of the Duke Foundation. Dr. Rankin had heard Mr. Allen speak of Mr. Robertson, and realizing who was putting up the money, withdrew all his objections and the remaining obstacles were immediately cleared away.

Dr. Rankin realized that Dr. Fishburne was pretty well tired out by this time, and insisted that he spend the night with him, which invitation Fishburne gladly accepted. (This series of events started a life-long friendship between Dr. Rankin and Fishburne.)

Not enough can be said for the generosity of Mr. & Mrs. Hugh S. Robertson, for as the plans for the hospital developed and expanded, it was seen that still more money would be needed. The Robertsons, who had planned to build a \$50,000.00 home at the Cooper River plantation (Bonneau Ferry), decided to give the entire amount to the hospital instead.

The tempo of excitement and urgency around Dr. Fishburne at this time was electrifying. Everyone in the county was watching the progress of the building with intense interest and sometimes, when Dr. Fishburne walked about among the workers, he felt compelled to put his hand out and touch the bricks to reassure himself that the hospital was at last taking shape and solid form, and was no longer in the realms of his dreams.

Mr. & Mrs. Robertson spent the summer in Europe and unfortunately, while in England, both contracted severe cases of pneumonia, from which Mrs. Robertson died. When this news reached Dr. Fishburne and his wife Anne, they were greatly grieved, for Mrs. Robertson was not only a charming woman, but a huge help-need on whom Mr. Robertson relied, in so many ways. She was in her early middle life and her death was a terrible loss, as you might imagine.

Upon his return to America, Robertson came to Berkeley County to see the hospital, which was almost completed. He told Fishburne that he wanted to equip the entire building in memory of Mrs. Robertson. He emphasized that he wanted 'everything' to be the last word in comfort and efficiency and to spare no expense to make it so.

All in all, Hugh Robertson gave the hospital \$72,000.00 and with the help of this magnificent gift, what started out as a modest Tuberculosis Shack, grew into the beautiful, modern hospital (at that time), that was the pride of Berkeley County. In addition to his gifts to the hospital building fund, Robertson made up the operating deficits for the first six months and in later years, sent two or three thousand dollars annually to help with the operating expenses.

Dr. Kershaw Fishburne was made Life Chairman of the Board of Trustees and it was one of the most enduring satisfactions of his life to see the great and lasting good that was accomplished by this hospital and its devoted staff.

On Sunday, January 15, 1933, an opening announcement in the newspaper read, "Berkeley County Hospital Will Open for Inspection by Its People."

The new Berkeley County Hospital, which cost \$140,000.00, opened with speeches, a barbeque, and a tour of inspection. Two of its largest individual contributors, Hugh S. Robertson, of New York and Bonneau Ferry plantation, and Nicholas Roosevelt, of Philadelphia and Gippy plantation were present. The exercises began at 11 a.m. with addresses from Dr. W.S. Rankin of Duke Foundation, and Dr. Robert Wilson of Charleston, Dean of the Medical College of Charleston and the State of South Carolina. A barbeque dinner for fifteen-hundred guests followed, supplemented with cakes made and donated by members of the civic league, and then the doors of the hospital were opened for inspection.

The Board of Directors were as follows: Dr. W.K. Fishburne, President; Hugh S. Robertson, New York City and Bonneau Ferry Plantation, Vice-President; H.W. Harvey of Moncks Corner, Secretary and Treasurer; Nicolas G. Roosevelt,

Philadelphia and Moncks Corner, G.K. Bonnoitt, Moncks Corner, J. Russell Williams, Pinopolis, and L.W. Bradwell of Cross, members of the Board.

Dr. Joseph Norman Walsh was elected by the Board of Directors as the hospital's Chief Surgeon and Physician. Also elected, Mrs. Emma Zeigler Loring, (recommended by the Duke Foundation as one of their best superintendents) as Hospital Superintendent, announced the following heads of departments: Floor Supervisor, Miss Mary Kimbrell of Fort Mill; Supervisor of Surgical Aid and Obstetrical Department, Miss Juanita Tribble of Greenville; Laboratory Supervisor, Miss Ella Marion Hoffman of Charleston; Supervisor of Tuberculosis, Miss Louise Patrick of Charleston; Dietitian, Miss Camille Alexander of Charlotte, N.C.; and, Bookkeeper, Malcolm Cain of Moncks Corner. The only Floor Nurse announced was Miss Thelma Winter of Moncks Corner.

As you know, this Berkeley County Hospital building is no longer used as a hospital, but that's not the end of this story. More to come.

Edited by Keith Gourdin

*Resources: the majority of this article was originally written by Anne Sinkler Fishburne, wife of Dr. Kershaw Fishburne; also, from the Charleston News and Courier newspaper; Columbia Record; and the State newspaper.*



Old Berkeley County Hospital 2019, courtesy Brandon Coffey