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THE FORMER COTTAGE HOSPITAL ON HAPPY VALLEY ROAD



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This is part of a series of architectural articles by the Bermuda National Trust that will highlight some of Bermuda's endangered historic buildings.

Citing the steady increase in the population, the lack of accommodation for those with complicated diseases and needing surgical operations, Dr Eldon Harvey spearheaded a group of his fellow physicians and community leaders and in 1886 lobbied the Governor, Lt Gen Sir Thomas Lionel Gallwey, for a cottage hospital. At the time there only existed two Royal Navy hospitals and the so-called Lunatic Asylum in Devonshire.

The design plan for Bermuda was adapted by the Colonial Surveyor from one in England using, despite its red-tiled roof, traditional Bermuda building materials. In 1887 it was estimated that the building could be built at a cost of about £1,000 with a further £200 for furniture, fittings and surgical instruments. It was expected that the hospital would be open to the ill poor from all parts of the Island and would be under the management of a Board of Governors and the supervision of three or more doctors who would provide their services in rotation and without charge. Medical practitioners throughout the Island were to be honorary members of staff and entitled to use the hospital. A matron was to be hired whose duty would be to cook, clean and nurse the patients.



Walter Aitken, the manager of the Hamilton Hotel, gave the first donation of £100 towards the building of the hospital because, he said, he did not know what to do with a guest who came down with an infectious disease or suffered a serious accident while on holiday. Further donations poured in and a series of fundraisers were held. In 1889 a quarter acre was purchased from John Barritt, a soda water manufacturer, and stone quarried from the site was used to build the hospital.

The hospital, with six beds for men and two for women, opened officially on 11 March 1894 and two days later the first surgical operation was successfully performed by Drs Harvey and Wilkinson on James Burgess of St George's who had been transferred there by his physician, Dr Smith.

Concerts and theatrical performances continued to raise funds for the Cottage Hospital. Thirty cases were treated in 1894, 49 in 1895 and 62 in 1896 when a much-needed addition was made. It was without an operating room until 1901. Additional land was purchased and the building extended so that it could accommodate ten patients but was still without a laboratory, ambulance or x-ray machine.

When King Edward VII Memorial Hospital opened in July 1920, the Cottage Hospital was expected to come under its control. This didn't happen and by 1922 the building was being readied for use as living quarters for married policemen as single policemen were housed in the recently demolished Allenhurst Building. In 1925 the need for an isolation hospital was discussed but the Cottage Hospital was considered too far away from KEMH and nearby Abbotsford was purchased instead.

In 1932 the Nursing Home on Curving Avenue was relocated to Happy Valley and became known as the Cottage Hospital Nursing Home. It was staffed by black nurses who were not then allowed to work at KEMH. When the renovation of the military Prospect Hospital was completed in November 1960, 13 patients were transferred from the Home to Prospect. The Cottage Hospital building was handed over to the Department of Health and was to become a children's day nursery. By 1964 this had not materialised and the building was in jeopardy of falling into dilapidation until it became the Headquarters of the Prisons, later the Corrections, Department. It has been empty since 2011 and is once again at risk.

Sources: 100 Years of Hospital Care in Bermuda, J Randolph Williams, and articles in The Royal Gazette and The Bermuda Recorder beginning in 1886

