

Former Hospital Lives in our Memories

Many residents and former residents of Milam County can trace their earliest moments in life to a three-story red brick building that once stood on North Crockett Street in Cameron. For many people, it's only a distant fading memory. Yet, a glimpse of an old photograph or postcard can conjure up vivid recollections of the facility called Old St. Edward Hospital. Many citizens of our area were born there, sought treatment there, or unfortunately passed away there. The once grand looking hospital building is no longer standing in Cameron, but it is not forgotten by those of us born or healed within its walls.

It is not uncommon for the faithful volunteers at the Milam County Historical Museum Complex to hear visitors comment, "That's the hospital where I was born!" On display in the third case on the right is a very small photo of Cameron's former hospital. Also, in the gift shop visitors can see or purchase postcards that clearly depict the medical center of Cameron's past, or the original St. Edward Hospital.

Furthermore, a very realistic exact replica of the original St. Edward's is a part of the Old Town Cameron exhibit in the up and coming new Milam County Railroad Museum. There, Jamie Larson, the Railroad Museum Director, has on display the model of St. Edward Hospital which was built by the late Mr. John Johnson. His remake of the hospital building stirs many memories for the Cameron and Milam county natives who remember the old red brick building with stark white trim and equally white porch railings.

The history of this fondly remembered old hospital building in Cameron can be traced back to the early 20th century. Plans to build a hospital for Cameron began in 1913 when Dr. William R. Newton, Sr. hired A. Z. Rogers of Henrietta, Texas to build a "sanitarium." The term sanitarium is a word commonly used in the past and is derived from the Latin word "sanitas," which means health. So, a sanitarium is considered a place where people go to regain their health or a facility where people with

chronic illness can seek treatment to better their health. Today we just call it a hospital.

On May 15, 1913, Dr. William Newton, Sr. awarded a building contract to Rogers, who was a well-known builder in north Texas. A. Z. Rogers completed the Cameron Sanitarium in six months. A reception was held for the new Cameron Sanitarium on January 5, 1914. The three-story building's grand opening was attended by over 1000 people. This provided Milam County with a then modern-day hospital with some of the best physicians/surgeons in Texas.

The hospital's founder Dr. Newton, Sr. was a native of Boone County, Arkansas. In 1899 he received a medical degree at the Memphis Medical College in Tennessee. Newton first practiced in Hallas, Arkansas before moving to Buckholts, Texas in 1901 to practice medicine in Milam County. His first one-story hospital facility was in south Buckholts and opened in 1903. Sadly, it was destroyed by fire in 1912. While Dr. Newton was studying advanced medical and surgical training in Chicago, he met Dr. Edward Rischar, a native of Germany. No doubt prompted by Newton, Dr. Rischar was enticed to come to Cameron and practice medicine. He would eventually partner with Newton in making the first large hospital in Cameron a reality.

Dr. Newton built the Cameron hospital on part of the John M. Hefley Estate. Newton purchased the land, 11.5 acres in north Cameron, for \$5,750. The three-story brick building would cost within a range of \$40,000 to \$100,000. It would eventually be called "Cameron Hospital." But when did it become St. Edward Hospital, a name more familiar to us?

After Dr. Newton died on May 21, 1938, the ownership of the Cameron Hospital eventually became the property of his partner, Dr. Rischar. As time passed and Rischar became older, he realized he would have to do something to keep the hospital in Cameron open for the future. In October, 1946, at age 74, Dr. Rischar donated the Cameron Hospital to the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word of the Diocese of Galveston. This group had been operating hospitals in Texas since 1876, so it seemed only natural for Rischar, a devout Catholic, to hand over the Cameron Hospital to this group of nuns. The Sisters of Charity renamed the Cameron Hospital St. Edward Hospital - Rischar Memorial and rededicated it on

November 21, 1946. Dr. Rischar died in 1948, but the Sisters of Charity ran St. Edward Hospital for 44 years. Obviously, this is why many of us know it as St. Edward's and claim it as our birthplace. Unfortunately, only photos and replicas of the original St. Edward Hospital remain. Oh, but also our memories survive.

In 1968, the Sisters of Charity decided to build a new St. Edward Hospital. This modern facility would be built just south of the old hospital and would cost \$1.35 million. This building would be dedicated on December 6, 1970 and be known as the "New St. Edward Hospital."

Today, this building has been remodeled into the impressive Milam County Annex and used for county offices and the new location of Bea's Kitchen. A recently written brochure by author Curtis Chubb, PhD., entitled "The History of the Hospitals in Cameron, Texas..." was an excellent fact-checking reference for this article. It covers the transformation of the 1970 hospital in greater detail.

However, the original cherished history-making hospital would be demolished from July-November 1971, but its image and impact can never be erased from Cameron's history. We all remember the sisters operating the old cage-like elevator as it shook and rambled to the third floor. We remember the white trimmed porches and red brick building surrounded by large beautiful trees. We remember the always kind and friendly sisters being caretakers of the hospital and nurses for the people of Cameron. We remember them bringing ice cream after tonsils were removed and taking x-rays after horseplay resulted in injuries. Yes, we still remember St. Edward Hospital. Also, many of us remember Newton's Hospital which was dedicated to the aforementioned Dr. William Newton, Sr. by his son, Dr. W. R. Newton, Jr. However, that is an excellent subject for another story in the future. That building is now the new Milam County Jail and Law Enforcement Headquarters.

If you are interested in finding out more about our county's past, or just recalling memories of the old hospitals in Cameron, drop by the Milam County Historical Museum. Our hours are Thursdays-Saturdays 10AM-3PM or by appointment. The museum staff will be happy to sell you a postcard of the "Old St. Edward Hospital" or reminisce with you about that important piece of Milam County history.