

106 Years of Service to Rochester's Children

Crestwood/Convalescent Hospital's tradition for healing is a long and venerable one, 106 years. The current change in name marks the third one in the agency's history. It has also occupied three different locations, and has had three different areas of service.

Today, Crestwood stands alone in this area in its service to the mental health needs of young children, particularly those in the birth to age 13 group.

During the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s, it was nationally known as an outstanding hospital for the treatment of children with polio, rheumatic fever, and other childhood diseases. Prior to that, it was on the cutting edge of treatment for children with the mysterious infant's fever (cholera) that took the lives of so many babies each summer. In a makeshift tent community on the banks of Lake Ontario was planted the seed that has grown into the agency we salute today.

In 1885, a malevolent summer fever struck an unusually large number of infants. It is now thought this was caused by improper pasteurization and refrigeration of the milk. However, a primitive tent community was founded that year for care of the infants by doctors such as Edward Mott Moore, Sr. and Jr. It was thought that the healthful lake breezes blowing through the tent community would cut down on fatalities -- which, indeed, happened.

The tent city eventually gave way to an airy wooden structure, still located on the beach, that operated only in the summer. (See Photo .)

By 1890, service was increased to care for children with long-term convalescent needs such as malnutrition and rheumatic heart. And, it began to appear from the growing population, that a more permanent structure was needed. By 1913, the local Ad Club was sponsoring a fund drive to raise \$100,000 for Infant's Summer Hospital for a permanent building at 425 Beach Avenue.

ISABEL LEWIS, of Rochester, was only 3 months old in 1921 when her father was told to rush her to Infants' Hospital or she might die before the day was over. He didn't stop to hitch up the family horse and buggy. Instead, he hopped a trolley near his home, bound for Lake Avenue, where he switched to another for Beach Avenue. A year of testing and treatment finally identified Isabel's problem as an allergy to cow's milk. She was put on goat's milk, left the hospital a healthy toddler, grew to adulthood, and had two children.

But Isabel was to need the agency again. In the 1940s, Isabel was at Convalescent as a parent. Her daughter, **GLORIA GESCHWIND** of Hilton, was a polio patient there for three years in the mid-Forties. She also recovered and had two children.

Isabel's niece is now a member of the Crestwood staff, so Isabel has seen the three changes in service as well as the three names.

Other Crestwood staff members also have family ties to the hospital of the past. **CINDY BAKER**, who works in Crestwood's Early Childhood Center, has a husband, **RICHARD**, who was a rheumatic heart patient in 1948.

KRIS SWEENEY, Coordinator of Crestwood's Child and Family Therapy, recalls that her father was a patient in 1930 for typhoid fever.

Another family story is that of **ROSE MARIE STEFANO LOMBARD** of Greece. In 1948, she arrived at Convalescent with polio at three and a half years old. During the same period, two of her future sisters-in-law were also patients. **DIANE ANNECHINO LOMBARD** entered in 1943 at the age of one year and remained for five years.

NORMA KILBURY STEFANO was seven when she entered in 1944.

Norma can remember the hot baths, the exercise therapy, the wheel chairs, and the isolation that was part of the polio treatment.

"I was there almost a year," she recalls. "I was determined that I would walk out of there on my own feet. And, I was very naughty. I'd practice walking at night after the lights were out. In retrospect, it was good for me because my muscles kept developing."

Other patients besides Norma remember the isolation. Rheumatic fever patients and polio patients could only see visiting parents through the building's window screens.

ROSE MARIE LOMBARD was the baby of her family when she was struck with polio. Because she was at Convalescent for 18 months, from age 3 to 5, she didn't recognize anyone when she came home the day before Christmas in 1949. Her six older brothers and sisters tell her that she spent several days crying for one of the nurses, a common occurrence for young children who spent many months in the hospital.

CHRISTINE WAGNER WELCH, of Irondequoit, was much older when she contracted polio in 1947. At age 11, she was admitted to Convalescent amid great publicity. Her father, **CHARLEY WAGNER**, was a local newspaper sports reporter. Because of him, the local sportswriters and sportscasters rallied to help the children stricken with polio, and the local Press-Radio Club was founded. They still sponsor annual dinners honoring national sports figures to raise money for their continued philanthropy.

Christine was also a Convalescent success story. She left the hospital on her own two feet, had four children of her own, and worked in a day care center with other people's children.

Convalescent's links with other Rochester agencies also go back several decades. As early as 1910, it was training nurses for RIT.

In 1918, Convalescent became a charter member of the Community Chest, now the United Way. In fact, it is the only remaining charter member of a Community Chest organization in the United States.

Patients like **MARGARET MERCHANT CASSIDY** of Rochester were in Convalescent in 1920. She was only seven months old, but had blood poisoning acquired by a close encounter with a diaper pin.

"I have a photo taken of me shortly after I left, sitting on the lawn in what looks like a bonnet, but my family says it's a bandage," she recalls. (See Photo .)

In 1922, Rochester Rotary used the hospital's facilities from October through May before moving to Johnson Farms, now the Rotary Sunshine Camp. Several programs with Rotary, and its members who were interested in crippled children, highlight the hospital's history.

ELLA MAE BIRD TOOMBS of Cape Vincent was a rheumatic fever patient for nine months in 1926. She was 10 years old at the time.

ELIZABETH COLLIN STICKLE was also there, around 1928, because she had developed double pneumonia at Genesee Hospital following an appendectomy. She was eight years old at the time and, with loving care, recovered to lead an active life. She recently became a great-grandmother at age 71.

By 1927, Strong Hospital was founded, and Convalescent worked closely with doctors there. Children who were diagnosed at Strong were often sent to Convalescent for long-term care, and Strong's doctors visited frequently.

RUTH SCHREINER KLUEBER, of North Chili, remembers that her doctor at Strong was **ROLAND STEVENS**. She also vividly remembers the long-term head nurse, **MISS HANNAH HARLE**. (See Photo .)

"I was at Convalescent in 1936. I went to Strong Hospital originally to have my tonsils out, and before they operated, they found I had rheumatic fever. I was 11 years old then.

"Back then, they believed in having the children sleep cold. They thought it was healthier. I can remember having our beds rolled outside in the winter to sleep. They would heat soap stones to put around our feet, and bundle us up in hats and gloves. In the morning, when they rolled us back in, we'd have snow on the beds.

"I also remember the good food. Every evening, we'd have a snack of homemade bread with peanut butter and jelly. I almost got fat!"

Because she wasn't supposed to climb stairs, she was on the first floor in a ward with other older girls. (See Photo .) She even had to go to a school that didn't have stairs after she left Convalescent. She was told not to have children, but she did. She became the mother of three, the grandmother of eight, and has one great-grandchild.

The first name change occurred in 1928 when the Infant's Summer Hospital was renamed Convalescent Hospital for Children. At that time, its services also expanded for the entire year, not just the summer months.

In 1939, **ALFRED LEO** came to Convalescent Hospital from Municipal Hospital with rheumatic fever. He recalls having to line up to be weighed and visiting with his parents through a screen. For those children old enough to remember their illnesses, the required isolation is a memory that lingers today.

By the 1930s, school was being taught at Convalescent for the school-aged children. (See Photo .) One of the patients who greatly appreciated that was **ESTHER SCHREIBER COHEN**, of Pittsford. She was also in Convalescent in 1947, but she was a rheumatic heart patient. She was 13 when she entered, and was unusually old for the hospital. However, the only alternative was the Buffalo Hospital for Children, and she wouldn't go that far from home.

"The nurses were very nice to me. I was very studious and tutors were sent out to help me with my studies. However, I gave them a really hard time. I didn't want to stay in bed; I was a poor eater; just everything," Esther said.

Esther went on to finish high school at Franklin, eventually got a master's degree in learning disabilities, and worked with the city school district until she retired in 1990. She has been locating past staff who were there when she was. She recently talked with **EDNA TRUMETER** of Dexter, NY, who was the head nurse, into coming to the Gala. "I'm anxious to see her because she's the one I gave the most trouble," Esther recalled.

GENEVIEVE CESOLANI GOFFREDO, of Rochester, also remembers Convalescent as a school-aged child. But, she was only five and had just begun school in 1936 when she was diagnosed with rheumatic fever and sent to the hospital.

"My room was on the second floor, and I could see through the screens to my relatives below. I remember that although my family was poor, the nurses were always asking my father for quarters when he visited me because I kept breaking cups. The cups of cocoa we got each night before bed were so heavy, I'd drop them. (See Photo .)

"I wasn't supposed to exercise too much, but I was allowed to go outside to sit. However, I'd cheat and climb on the jungle gym. I was very lonesome in the hospital. We were in wards of 12 to 14, but everyone was sick. I was supposed to be quiet and not overexert my heart, but at night I'd move my legs up and down, pretending I was walking. I wanted to walk out of there."

She did walk out, grew up, and had two children of her own. She also spent 35 years working at a local bank.

Over the years, Legion posts and auxiliaries, the Guild for Crippled Children, the Chatterbox Club, garden clubs, civic groups, service organizations, the Grey Ladies, and private individuals donated time and money to Convalescent.

The reputation Convalescent acquired throughout western New York was that of an outstanding, caring hospital, especially for its polio patients. **JANET PARR'S** aunt, **JANET STRACHAM**, called recently to share her memories of the wonderful care her niece received while a polio patient in 1946. After a short stay at Strong, she spent more than a year at Convalescent. Janet Parr now has a master's degree in nursing and lives in Delaware.

In 1945, Rochester's **AL SIGL** presented an entire radio show detailing the history of School #5 (the School for Crippled Children) and Convalescent, as well as the Rotary Sunshine Camp's service to both places.

In 1952, **MARILYN HEERS** began working at Convalescent as a nurse's aide. She was only 18, herself.

"We lived on the property in nursing quarters, and we made \$25 every two weeks, plus our room and board. I remember many of the children I worked with, many of whom had muscular dystrophy or were called "blue babies" because of their defective hearts.

"We worked long hours, but one of the fringe benefits was the location on Beach Avenue. When the kids had their afternoon naps, the aides could go down to the beach and relax. It was wonderful."

Some of the children who recall Convalescent in the Fifties include **SUSAN BLAKER** of Rochester who, in 1955, was an 8 year-old with rheumatic fever. She remembers the new television set and watching the Trudy McNall cooking show.

STEVEN PICKMAN was a patient in 1952, also with rheumatic fever. He had no close family, and recalls how, during his three-year stay, the nurses and staff became his caring family.

By the late 1950s, cures were being found for many of the insidious childhood diseases. The Hospital's board of directors decided that a shift in focus was needed.

The first children needing help for mental illness were admitted to Convalescent in 1958. By 1960, the old Beach Avenue site was sold (it's now the Lakeshore Nursing Home) and the agency moved to 2075 Scottsville Road on 50 acres of woodland overlooking the Genesee River.

Shortly afterward, Convalescent became the first officially designated children's community mental health center in the country under new federal mandates calling for such care for children.

At the Scottsville Road site, a rapidly developing facility would grow into the residential program, outpatient programs, two schools for elementary and preschool/primary education, and a whole host of services aimed at helping the growing number of disturbed children.

Today, Crestwood Children's Center treats children and their families for a wide variety of problems centering around mental and emotional illness. A satellite clinic in Corn Hill specializes in working with adolescents and problems related to that age group. The Allen P. Mills Group Home for adolescent boys is located nearby, as well.

Another clinic in Honeoye Falls provides treatment for patients in the southern part of the county and for surrounding rural counties. One of the specialties of that clinic is the assessment of alleged child sexual abuse.

Some 38 school districts now bus students to the Scottsville Road campus for school in the elementary and preschool/primary schools. Hundreds of children are treated as outpatients, and a haven is available in the residential cottages for those children who can benefit from being away from the home during therapy. Last winter, a community-wide image and awareness study was conducted to determine various perceptions of Convalescent. The survey indicated that Convalescent was a name that was no longer representative of what the agency did. In fact, many parents hesitated to send children to an agency with such a name, fearing the children were seriously physically ill. The children were not pleased with the name, either. It was time for another change.

In 106 years, the agency has gone through a metamorphosis of three different locations (beachfront tents, Beach Avenue, Scottsville Road), three different areas of service (infants, long-term convalescent care, mental illness), and three different names. The Infant's Summer Hospital gave way to Convalescent Hospital for Children, which has now completed the trilogy by becoming Crestwood Children's Center. However, as always, this is the place where the healing begins.

This scrapbook was kept by **RUTH SCHREINER KLUEBER** during her stay at Convalescent 1936 - 1937.