



Shriners Hospital included a play area for the children (1935)

Spokane's Shriners Hospital

A Legacy of Love and Hope

by Blythe Thimsen

photos courtesy of Spokane Shriners Hospital



Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children, on Summit Blvd.

IN 1920, WHEN THE SHRINERS GATHERED FOR their national convention, they were searching for a way to give back and to make a difference in the communities in which they lived. After discussing how to do this, they decided to open and support a system of hospitals for children with orthopedic problems. The first Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children opened in 1922 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Two years later, on November 15, 1924, a Shriners Hospital opened in Spokane.

Spokane was the seventh Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children, but was the first "mobile unit," hospital. The mobile unit did not have a permanent, stand-alone structure; rather, it was a 20-bed ward in a rented section of St. Luke's Memorial Hospital. The initial unit was known as "the biggest little Shriners Hospital" in the Shriners system because it served so many children; patients came from Montana,

Northern Idaho, Washington, Alaska, British Columbia and Alberta.

The mission of Spokane's mobile unit of Shriners Hospital was declared, "To provide free and skilled attention to crippled children whose parents or guardians are unable to pay for such service, and whose disabilities can be sufficiently improved to enable them to be self-supporting in after life."

Patients never paid for services at Shriners Hospitals. All costs for the hospitals were financed by a five-dollar annual fee paid by each member of the Shrine, as well as by bequests, endowments and donations, and later, by money raised through events such as the annual Shrine circuses, rodeos, horse shows and football games.

When opened as a mobile unit, the cost per patient per day was \$3, though patients were never charged. By 1956, that cost would rise to \$11.11 per day. Despite what seemed like rising expenses, the cost per patient, for all expenses at Spokane's Shriners Hospital was the lowest of all Shriners Hospitals.

In his message to the El Katif Temple's Spring Ceremonial on May 18, 1926, Henry A. Pierce, Chairman of the Governing Board said this in his assessment of the importance of Spokane's Shriners Hospital. "When one realizes that these children are reconstructed from helpless cripples to useful citizens, able to make their own way in the world, at an average expense of less than \$300.00 per patient, it looks like the greatest humanitarian work ever conceived by man." Though the cost has significantly risen, the thought remains the same. The work of the hospital made a big difference in the lives of its littlest patients.

The first year the hospital was open, 115 patients were treated. Polio was a major affliction of patients, as were clubfeet, bone infections and tuberculosis of the joints.

One of the first patients was June Penney, and 11 year-old girl from Kalispell. Her story was told in an unmarked 1927 newspaper clipping. "Two years ago on Christmas Eve, June was stricken with infantile paralysis – the most dreaded of all children's diseases. The malady left her paralyzed from her arms down. She could neither walk, dress nor feed herself." After surgeries by Dr. C. F. Eikenberry, chief surgeon, and physio-therapy treatments, June grew better, and "the morning following the

Halloween parade June was placed aboard a Great Northern train for Kalispell, able to walk, able to dress herself and able to use her hands and arms."

A handwritten note in the hospital archives reads "The enclosed item tells a story about my nephew, [proving] that the Shriners really helps crippled children. Steve Forge entered Spokane's hospital about 15 or 16 years ago, and now you can read what he is doing. Thought you might like to know. ~ E. W. Webster." The newspaper clipping she attached was a sports article from the paper that stated "the Lewis-Clark Twins made life unbearable for American Legion baseball teams from Oregon as well as Washington last night on Bengal Field ...

behind a superlative pitching performance by Steve Forge, who struck out 10 and didn't walk a man." He was a patient-turned-pitcher!

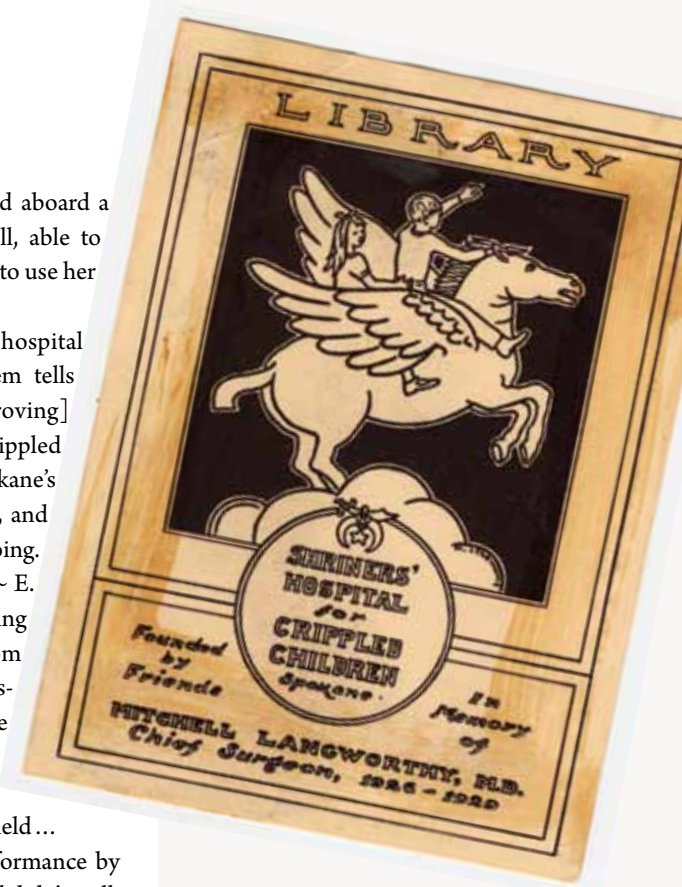
Inspired by these great tales of medical success for the children, the Shriners wanted to reach even more children, making it a mission to bring them here to provide medical care. "We are desirous of ferreting out every needy case in your district and getting them on our waiting list. We only accept cases of crippled children up to 14 years of age, which are entirely charity cases. In other words, we do not accept part pay for any of the medical service. Neither do we accept mental defectives," read a letter from Spokane Shriners Hospital to P.O. King of LaCrosse, WI.

On Thursdays at the mobile unit, patients from Spokane and outlying communities who were able to walk could be seen at an outpatient clinic, the first of its kind in the area.

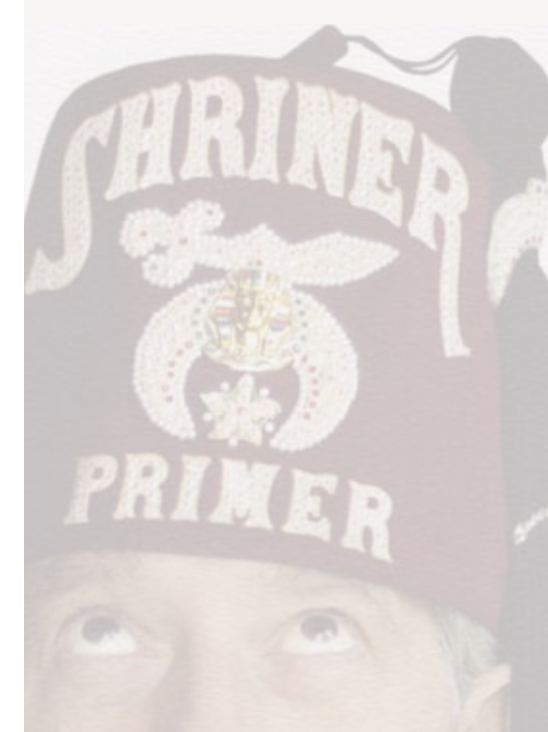
Dr. Mitchell Langworthy was the beloved chief surgeon for the mobile unit from March 1926 until October 1929, when he was "the victim of a bullet from an unhappy industrial patient in his private practice."

One thing that Dr. Langworthy saw the beginnings of, but did not live long enough to see come to fruition, was the building of a permanent structure. There was interest among the Shriners as well as in the community, to build a permanent stand-alone structure, rather than continuing with a mobile unit, but it would take a great deal of money.

In 1926, as a way to raise money, H.P.



Above: A memorial card for one of the hospital's beloved chief surgeons, Dr. Mitchell Langworthy.



Flickinger, the city of Spokane's plumbing inspector, and also a member of El Katif temple, created a foil committee. Local residents saved and collected tin foil to raise money. The collected foil came mainly from the wrapping on cigarettes and cigars, and donation boxes were set up in most cigar stores in the city. The popularity of the drive spread from Spokane and became a nationwide phenomenon. The foil was shipped from Spokane to Chicago, where it was melted into tin-alloy bars. The last load, shipped to Chicago in 1933, filled an entire Northern Pacific train car with over 100,000 pounds of foil. A large sign was painted onto the side of the car, letting people know it was full of foil to benefit the local Shriners Hospital. Though the foil drive had been successful for seven years, this labeled load was one of the last that was sent from Spokane, as there was a decline in the amount of tin foil being used, because foil was being replaced with cellophane in cigarette and cigar wrappers.

The foil was worth six cents per pound, and originally, Mr. Flickinger hoped to raise \$100 to \$200 at the most. By 1933, the campaign had raised close to \$1,500.

According to an article in the *Spokane Chronicle* in 1933, "The best part of the idea, however, remains to be told. The collecting of foil gave Shriners and others interested in the hospitals for crippled children an incentive to raise money from other sources. Indirectly, the foil idea has been responsible for money-raising campaigns that have poured thousands of dollars into the hospital funds. So, though tin foil does die a natural death, it will have served a good purpose; it will have been the means of restoring hundreds of crippled children to usefulness."

The Shriners Hospital's governing body was growing increasingly serious about wanting to put a permanent hospital in Spokane, estimating the cost to be between \$50,000 and \$75,000. They were held back from beginning the project, though, because they did not have the funds to pay for both the labor and material.

J.B Felts was chairman of the board of county commissioners in 1933 and was a vocal advocate of the push to build a permanent, stand-alone Shrine Hospital. Part of his "campaign" for the construction project was that it could be



Children and Shriners gather for a photo at the hospital.

considered an "unemployed project," meaning that it would provide job opportunities to local craftsman who would be hired to work on the project. Mr. Felts suggested that if local suppliers offer their products at cost, it would be affordable, and in the process would provide jobs for the laborers.

Felts argued that a Shriners Hospital "is not an institution that calls for assistance from the Community Chest nor, ever will it be an additional burden on a presently overloaded community. By giving needy men work now, it would not alone provide cash for food and clothing, but it would tend to raise the morale of those who would rather work than remain idle and be fed at city and county expense."

The following article by C. A. Bartleson, president of Building Supplies, Inc., appeared in the February 7, 1933 edition of the *Spokane Chronicle* and was a major show of support for the project:

"Having noticed several articles in your recent editions relative to building the Shriners Hospital at the present time, we wish to commend the fine spirit which animated Mr. Felts and the other proponents of this plan for

giving work to some of our unemployed.

It is probably well known to you that building laborers and craftsmen have suffered abnormally during this depression to the extent that 80 percent of those normally employed in the building trades are now without work, according to department of labor figures as of January 1, 1933. Naturally, any project, which can give jobs to a part of these men would be most opportunely welcome.

In the *Spokane Chronicle* of February 2 we read with approval the letter from Mr. Georg of the firm of Alloway & Georg offering to aid in the construction of the Shrine Hospital without fee. Our company would like to place itself on record as being anxious to cooperate to the end that the proposed building could be erected.

We offer to furnish common bricks for use in the Shrine Hospital at cost. We do not manufacture any other building materials, so are limiting our offer to products of our own make."

It wasn't just people from Spokane who were assisting with the cost for the building of the Spokane Shriners Hospital. A freewill

collection was taken at the Masonic and Eastern Star picnic in Coeur d'Alene's city park on July 18th, 1933. "Our picnic was a real success and, if we had no other success than the collection for use in the Shrine Hospital, that in itself would be very gratifying," wrote Herbert F. Minister, master of Kootenai lodge No. 24 A.F. & A.M. of Coeur d'Alene, in a note that accompanied a \$128 check. Similarly, the Western Montana Shrine club presented an \$800 check, which was raised at a dance in Missoula. Montana had such an interest in the success of Shriners Hospital because 20 to 25 percent of the patients were from Montana.

The *Spokane Chronicle's* 18th annual baking contest earmarked all money raised from selling baked goods, which in 1934 totaled \$802, to the hospital's building fund. In 1936, local schools rallied to help with the hospital building fund. The annual football game played between North Central High School and Gonzaga Prep, held on Armistice Day 1936, brought in \$1,600, all of which was donated to the building fund.

All of the financial support made the proposed building a reality. In March of 1939, the hospital moved into its new building. The four-ward Spokane Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children on Summit Boulevard was constructed for \$85,000. Amazingly, the entire building was completely paid for by the time it was dedicated. According to archives, "The architecture was of a mosque design with a copper dome, in remembrance of the Mystic Shrine. It stood on the triangular plot just south of the main entrance to the original St. Luke's Memorial Hospital."

Children were transported to St. Luke's Memorial Hospital for surgery, via an underground tunnel. This route was used for 32 years, until 1971, when St. Luke's built a new hospital across town (its current location). The old hospital was leveled, and the land was purchased by a local charitable foundation. Charitable indeed; they gave the deed for the land to Shriners.

The hospital, located on its own patch of land, became a home-away-from-home for its young patients who often stayed for months on end. Hospital rules stated, "While the child is in the hospital doing well, if parents or relations are not present, they will receive one postcard a

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Shriners Hospital's current location, on Monroe and 5th Ave.

week, telling of its progress. If he is old enough to write himself, he will be encouraged to write as often as possible. If he is to be operated upon, you will be notified in advance, and one card each day, reporting on his condition until he is again convalescent will be sent... There will be no accommodation for parents or others to remain at the hospital."

Children were not able to bring anything personal with them—none of their clothes, blankets, toys or stuffed animals from home. They were given all new things once inside the hospital. Hand-carved wooden toys were distributed to each patient once they arrived, and hand-sewn clothing was provided for them.

Polio and tuberculosis were such common and frightening diseases in the 1930s, that when children were admitted, they were put into isolation cubicles for 72 hours, to monitor and ensure they were not carrying the diseases. While these diseases are serious, but nowhere near as frightening nowadays, this was before antibiotics, and a disease like polio or

tuberculosis could be fatal.

Because there were no antibiotics, children underwent "elaborate skin preparations involving a surgical scrubbing and covering with sterile towels 48 hours before surgery, then again 24 hours before."

The average hospital stay for patients admitted during the 1930s was four months, most of which they were away from their family. Visits were strictly limited to Sunday afternoons. This strict rule helped to ensure no communicable diseases were spread to the children. As a result of spending so much time together, without their families, there was a sense of camaraderie among the children.

Though the patients were removed from their loved ones, there was still plenty of love in the hospital, according to Mrs. Margery Livingston, the second superintendent of Spokane's Shriners Hospital. "I'll never forget one little girl whose face was severely burned," she wrote in *Shriners Hospital for Children - Spokane, 75 Years of Caring*. "Despite the fact

that her face was terribly scarred, I knew she felt loved and beautiful when she was there. All the children were loved."

There were celebrations for the children to make their time at the hospital enjoyable. Holidays were a special occasion for the children. Each year at Christmas, Santa Claus came to visit the children, and on all holidays there was a special dinner, which they would gather together to eat. On a patient's 100th day in the hospital, they got a special celebration, similar to a birthday. And when it came to birthdays, each child received their own personalized birthday cake.

There were special visitors, as well. Vice President Charles Curtis (vice president for President Hoover) was on a train heading to Spokane for a speaking engagement, and on the train ride he was given so many gifts of apples and bouquets of flowers, that he didn't know what to do with them, so he requested they be donated to the Shriners Hospital as gifts to the children. Years later, the original Lassie came to

visit in 1967, and other visitors, including Red Skelton, members of the Harlem Globetrotters, Mickey Mouse, and local sports stars would stop in to visit the children.

In 1951, a new wing was added to the hospital, adding 15 more beds, an isolation room and a formula room connected to the area for babies. According to a report for the Spokane hospital, the hospital had many modern marvels, including an "X-ray and photographic room; outpatient department with cast room; laundry; library and conference rooms on the second floor; nurses' quarters; a dental office with the very latest equipment; resident surgeon's quarters; chief surgeon's office; a large glass enclosed sun porch; two large deepfreeze and cold storage units; new laundry equipment." The hospital also was one of the few buildings with both heat and air conditioning.

Two teachers from the Spokane public school system were provided without charge to the patients, so that as they spent long stays in the hospital they were able to keep up with their schoolwork.

Spokane's Shriners Hospital stood on Summit Boulevard as a sign of hope and help for children for over 52 years. In 1991, a new, modern hospital was built high upon the hill, on the corner of Monroe Street and Fifth Avenue. This hospital is again connected to one of the city's major hospitals, this time Deaconess, providing access to additional medical service if needed. This current building was built for \$20 million, providing 100,000 square feet and the latest in medical technology.

Things are much different nowadays, in part because the risk of infection is so much less, the technology and advancements in medicine, and the psychology of healing have advanced; and the duration of hospital stays have been reduced dramatically. When the current hospital was built in 1991, "on-site family rooms and inpatient room parent beds were added so parents could remain close to their children."

The one thing that has not changed is Shriners Hospitals' unwavering determination to help children in need. A statement that was part of the dedication for the 1939 hospital, may say it best. "To the Glory of God and to all humankind, regardless of race, creed or color, Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children are dedicated. No man stands more erect than when he stoops to help a crippled child." ■



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