

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

St. Paul's Hospital

Many people in Livermore remember that they were born here in St. Paul's Hospital. Paul E. Dolan came to Livermore in 1916 after his graduation from the Oakland College of Surgeons. He soon became acquainted with Veronica Concannon, daughter of the couple who established the Concannon Vineyard in Livermore. The chaplain at the Camp Kearny base hospital married them at St. Joseph's Church in San Diego on 22 June 1918 while Paul Dolan was serving in the U.S. Army Hospital Corps. After the war in August 1919, Dolan joined the practice of Dr. James Kyle Warner in his offices at Second and J Streets. When Dr. Warner retired in the early 1920s, Dr. Dolan continued with their practice.

At this time there were many little "hospitals" scattered around Livermore. From 1923 until 1935, Dr. William E. Judson operated a hospital in the old Pitcher residence at Fifth and South L. Anyone could set aside several rooms for patient care in a private home and call it a hospital. Evelyn Mulqueeney Griffith remembered that Mrs. Aylward's house at South K and Eighth Street was used as such a hospital. Every now and then, surgeons would come to town and use her home for operations. Despite the opportunity for such local health care, Evelyn and her mother and brother traveled to San Francisco to have their tonsils out, all on the same visit. Dr. Grace Devnich remembered 13 or 14 little places such as Mrs. Aylward's still in business when she came here in 1948.

Dr. Dolan decided to upgrade the town's ability to handle emergency medicine and maintain sterile operating facilities. He had St. Paul's Hospital built in 1927 at Eighth and J. The original building measured 46 by 96 feet and was made of cream-colored stucco with a red tile roof at a cost of \$20,000. Nearly 1,000 people attended the opening ceremonies on June 5, including the Livermore Band. Dr. Dolan performed the first operation the following week, a tonsillectomy on four-year-old Mary Gray. Additions were made twice, the last one a modern nursery in 1940. By then the private surgical hospital had 24 beds. When Betty Hock returned to Livermore after World War II, she had served in large city hospitals and U.S. Army hospitals during her nursing training. At first she was shocked at tiny St. Paul's. She soon learned, however, as she worked there as a private duty nurse, to admire the excellent care available. After all, this was the only major facility between Stockton and Oakland for accidents and emergencies. Betty recalled that Mary Twohey was the cook and prepared delicious meals with the help of local high school girls.

A Roman Catholic, Dr. Dolan was opposed to the use of any artificial form of birth control. When local women wanted a diaphragm fitted, for example, they had to change doctors. St. Paul's served all the physicians in the city, so although she was the patient of another doctor, Virginia Bing went to St. Paul's in 1954 to have her baby. The place was so crowded that she had to go through labor in a screened-off area in the men's ward. Everyone was amazed, including the doctor, when she had not one boy but twins. She had some difficulty after the birth and had to stay at the hospital longer than usual. Hospital rules did not allow children to visit the wards, so her husband, George, brought their other two little boys and held them on his shoulders near the window to see Virginia. She remembered the younger boy calling, "Come home, Mommy, come home!" Dr. Grace delivered many babies at St. Paul's; one of them was her favorite preemie that the nurses nicknamed "Tiny Tim." "One night," Dr. Grace said, "I just felt I had to go to the hospital. I walked in the small door at the rear, and a nurse came over to me and said, 'Tiny Tim died.' I went immediately to the nursery and picked him up. He took a breath! Those nurses couldn't believe it. When he was a year old, his mother sent me a photo of a fat little baby."

A sketch of Dr. Dolan's life in St. Michael's centennial publication reads in part: "He was very community spirited, a member of a number of service organizations, and a trustee of Livermore High School for many years. In 1950, he received the Eagles' Outstanding Service Award. ... He could get gruff, but he had a heart of gold." Dr. Dolan retired in 1951 and died in August 1958. Six of his former nurses attended his funeral in their uniforms, and the city flag flew at half mast. Dolan Park, at the corner of Ladd and Junction Avenues, was named in his memory in 1959.

Valley Memorial Hospital opened in 1962. When St. Paul's Hospital closed in the fall of 1965, Valley Memorial Hospital bought the facility to insure an adequate number of beds in the valley. After an addition to Valley Memorial in 1968, St. Paul's was closed and sold. The building, still at 813 South J Street, survived a threatened demolition in 1992 and is now Quail Garden, the fourth residential care home to use the facility after it closed as a hospital.

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