

PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF LONESOME PINE HOSPITAL

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Big Stone Gap, Virginia

As of 1968 there were no Joint Commission for Accreditation of Hospitals open to the general public in the counties of Dickenson, Wise, Lee, or Scott, Virginia. Miner's Memorial Hospital (renamed Appalachian Regional Hospital) in the Town of Wise was accredited, but would accept admissions from only members of the United Mine Workers of America. Several attempts to build a Joint Commission approved hospital in Big Stone Gap had failed through the years. Numerous citizens of the Town became openly concerned, and a petition was circulated, and it received considerable support.

In 1965 Congress had passed the Appalachian Regional Commission legislation, whose purpose was to fund infrastructure in the poor areas of the Appalachian Mountains. The concept was that the construction of roads, colleges, hospitals, water and sewage facilities would encourage economic development and would allow the people of this area to raise themselves out of poverty.

Fortuitously, the Counties of Wise, Lee, Scott, the City of Norton had recently formed a regional development authority to do just these things for themselves. Its acronym is LENOWISCO. Its transjurisdictional nature was a novel concept nationally. Virginia and the Federal Government quickly adopted this functioning organization to administer Virginia's share of the ARC's program. LENOWISCO'S successes in playing this role soon made it the poster child of the Federal Government, who toured foreign groups through the area to tout its programs.

ARC's concept concerning fixing the area's hospital problem was to consolidate all the public hospitals into one 250 bed subregional hospital to be located in Big Stone Gap. This site was chosen because the center of population for the county was located in Powell Valley, and because a board had already been formed in the town, and they had already raised a large construction fund that would serve as seed money for the ARC grant. The plan was to build the hospital in two phases, the first to contain the nucleus of the hospital; to deny Certificate of Need applications for any building programs by the existing unapproved hospitals; and then after the public began to shift its business to the new hospital to construct a 'T' wing in its west parking lot.

There was one hurdle the Big Stone Gap Hospital Board had to negotiate. That was to recruit an additional physician for the hospital staff to assist the single physician already practicing in town, Dr. George Sutherland. The hospital board had done an extensive search of

an additional physician, and had failed. There was one remaining potential candidate, and that was the author, who actually had expressed no interest in the situation.

I interviewed with the hospital board during April 1969. They offered to build a new modern clinic facility, complete with a laboratory and an x-ray department that included a machine capable of legal Black Lung x-rays. There were only two in the LENOWISCO region at the time. It was agreed that I would join the Dickenson-Wise Medical Group, who would rent half the Clinic for me. Dr. Sutherland agreed to rent the other half. In order to not touch the hospital construction, fund a consortium of people who were on the board formed a separate stock corporation to build the Clinic. The largest stock holders were Quesenberry's, Inc., Stamack Mining,. Inc., Daniel's Plumbing, Inc., and Glenwood (Pat) King. Dr. Sutherland reneged on his promise, and Southwest Virginia Health Services, Inc., the facility owning corporation for the Dickenson-Wise Medical Group, quickly bought the entire facility. The Group began to staff the Clinic. Initially I was there alone, but with time off relief provided by the Wise Clinic Group. Arrangements were made for me to practice at the Wise Clinic and Wise Appalachian Regional Hospital until the Big Stone Gap Clinic was completed. After the Big Stone Gap Subregional Hospital was funded, the Wise Hospital had opened itself to the general public. August 1st, 1969 I began practicing at Wise, but lived in Big Stone Gap. The Group funneled most of the Appalachia-Big Stone Gap patients to me.



THIS IS THE AUTHOR AND
GEORGE SEWELL AT THE
DICKENSON-WISE MEDICAL
GROUP'S RECEPTION FOR ME AT
THE WISE INN IN THE SUMMER
OF 1969. GEORGE WAS A
PHARMACIST AT THE MUTUAL
DRUG STORE, AND WAS
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF
THE BIG STONE SUBREGIONAL
HOSPITAL (LONESOME PINE). HIS
BROTHER WAS DR. SIDNEY
SEWELL, WHO WAS MEDICAL
DIRECTOR OF THE WISE CLINIC.
THEY WERE GREAT GRANDSONS
OF COL. AUBURN PRIDMORE OF
JONESVILLE



NOTE THE EXCAVATION FOR LONESOME PINE HOSPITAL TO THE LEFT REAR



THE COMPLETED BIG STONE GAP CLINIC IN 1971



THE CLINIC OFFICE STAFF
ON OPENING DAY IN THE
LATE WINTER OF 1971 –

THEY ARE VIRGINIA
VANDERGRIFF, FRANCES
CROCKETT, TOM
WILLIAMS, MONA ORR,
ESTELLA WASHINGTON,
THE AUTHOR



THE HOSPITAL HAD ITS GROUND BREAKING
CEREMONY LATER IN 1971

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT THEY ARE:

BRUCE LARGE, SECRETARY OF THE HOSPITAL
BOARD, AND PHARMACIST AT THE ACME DRUG
IN APPALACHIA

STATE SENATOR M. M. LONG

U. B. BOWEN – LPH BOARD MEMBER

POSSIBLY ANNA BARRON MORRIS

LYNN CURRY – VA. ARC

GOV. LYNNWOOD HOLTON

REV. MANNEY, METHODIST MINISTER OF BSG

CONGRESSMAN WILLIAM WAMPLER, SR.

THE MAN IN THE FEDORA IS UNKNOWN





OPEN HOUSE FOR THE HOSPITAL IN JUNE 1973

LPH opened for patients July 1, 1973. Almost immediately an isolation unit for the new born nursery was added. Other than that, the configuration of the hospital remained the same for several years. The government did not keep its commitment to the hospital to not issue certificates of need to the other area hospitals, and all built new facilities. The 'subregional' concept died with this development. The planned 'T' wing in the parking lot between the hospital building and the clinic was never built.

However, business for the clinic increased to the point that an upper floor was added in order to make room for a pharmacy on the original ground floor, and to add offices for more physicians. Growth continued as new physicians were added to the staff. In 1984 a large three story addition was built to the Clinic Building. This provided space for the author's fourth office location within the building.

BELOW ARE TWO VIEWS OF THE CLINIC AFTER THE 1984 ADDITIONS

THIS IS THE LAST CONFIGURATION OF THE CLINIC BUILDING UNTIL THE DICKENSON-WISE MEDICAL GROUP DISBANDED IN 1991 AND THE BUILDING WAS SOLD TO LONESOME PINE HOSPITAL



In 1993 LPH gave itself a big 20th anniversary celebration. Below is a picture of the Hospital Administrator, Sheila McKinney, introducing the keynote speaker, State Senator William Wampler, Jr. There had been no attempt to make it happen, but his father had given the main address at the ground breaking.



The original intensive care unit consisted of only three beds, and the press of patients needing this level of care forced the hospital to double its ICU bed capacity in 2001. The amount of space per bed was also significantly increased, giving adequate space for the equipment needed to care for patients in the modern setting. A prime example were ventilators. LPH had ventilated the first patient in the larger area, including the Tri Cities.

The money for the new ICU was given by the family of M. S. Quesenberry, Jr. Mr. Quesenberry was one of the major driving forces behind the birth of LPH. He, along with his partners Charlie Daniels and Glenwood (Pat) King, had given the land the hospital and clinic were constructed on. Mr. Quesenberry built the original clinic building, and was on the original hospital board of directors. He was followed in this position by both his son and grandson.

The first picture below shows the original configuration on the east end of the hospital, with the cafeteria being prepared to receive the construction of the new ICU. The second shows the steel superstructure.



The 30th anniversary of LPH was celebrated with great enthusiasm, with an ongoing program at Bullitt Park. With great appropriateness the entertainment was provided by Poppa Joe Smiddy and his Reedy Creek Band. Chancellor Smiddy, Ph D, was the beloved head of Clinch Valley College, now the University of Virginia at Wise. For years before, and during the birth of the Big Stone Gap Clinic, he had been on the Board of Directors of Southwest Virginia Health Services. This body had managed the physical clinic buildings that were staffed by the Dickenson-Wise Medical Group. As explained earlier, it was they that had facilitated the birth of the Big Stone Gap Clinic building. His top side man in the Reedy Creek Band was his son, Joe Smiddy, Jr. MD. He was the first pulmonologist in the region, and had helped many a coal miner with his Black Lung problems, both medical and legal. He had maintained an office in the Big Stone Gap Clinic building as a labor of love for the people of the area. Below are Poppa Joe and the author on stage at the celebration.



The procedural integration of new imaging equipment into intraoperative surgery required much larger operating rooms. Accordingly, in 2004 LPH built a new OR and endoscopy suite to accommodate these needs. The OR room was the largest in the area. Below is the new OR suite under construction as it looked in November 2004.



The business in the emergency room continued to grow and grow through the years. Its original size proved to be inadequate to the growing need, and in 2007 a new ER with greatly enlarged space and privacy considerations was constructed. It was dedicated to Anna Barron Morris, who had been the Fund Raising Chairman in the critical opening phases of the campaign to build the hospital. Her success was a major determining factor in the decision to locate the hospital in Big Stone Gap.

Below is steel superstructure of the new ER, with the old one being visible to the right.



Not pictured in this essay are the chapel that was added off of the main lobby, and the education building built to the east of the main hospital building.

The author wishes to express his appreciation to the community that gave birth and sustenance to Lonesome Pine Hospital. He has never encountered another like it.

FOOTNOTES

The architect was Kefratt & Jones. Mr. Keafott's father had designed the Appalachia Hotel, as well as the King's Mountain Hospital in Bristol, and the Rosedale Plantation houses of Elk Garden.

With especial appreciation to Bruce K. Robinette for the multiple roles he played in all of this, plus for his editing of the essay itself.