

Courage of Lillian James Has Helped N.C. Hospitals

By H.E. Gibbons, Jr.

HAMLET, -This the story of a lady down in the southern part of North Carolina who has not only already devoted almost half a century to service of humanity, run a home and raised three fine children who today are grown and have families of their own which are a credit to their upbringing, taken an active part in the civic and social life of the community in which she resides, but who at the age when most folks are thinking of slowing up a little and devoting more time to their camellias and azaleas and less to work, has just begun to work.

This is the story of Mrs. Lillian D. James, superintendent of the Hamlet hospital and superintendent of the Hamlet Hospital Nurses Training School, champion of rural nurse training, staunch defender of student nurses subsidization by private funds while in training, and one of the founders of the hospital mentioned above which has lived through two World Wars, weathered a depression, and today when most privately owned hospitals are closing their doors or being changed into institutions financed through taxation, is not only doing nicely but expanding its services in every department.

YANKEE BORN

Lillian James is a Yankee by birth and a Tar Heel by adoption. She was reared in New York and after securing her education in that great city entered the nursing school at St. Luke's Hospital where she was graduated with an RN degree.

It was while there that she met and fell in love with a handsome young Southerner who was surgical resident and whom she later married. This gentleman from below the Mason-Dixon Line often told her of the need his people in rural North Carolina had for medical and hospital treatment, so the two of them decided that they could render the best service and most creditably acquit themselves in their chosen line of work by bringing this badly lacking service to the South. Together they established the Scotland Hospital in Laurinburg, and opened their first training school for nurses. This was in 1910. Experiencing to usual ups and downs they grew and administered to their friends and neighbors.

However, friends of theirs in nearby Hamlet, 16 miles to the west, urged them to move their facility to that town, arguing that the rail travel of that day and age had to be treated in addition to the population of the town which was growing by leaps and bounds. Recognizing that they could perform a greater service to humanity by the move, they reluctantly liquidated their hospital in Laurinburg and made the change to Hamlet. This was in 1915.

Securing a large dwelling and with the aid of two of Hamlet's leading Doctors, Dr. H. F. Kinsman and Dr. W.C. Terry, they set out to organize and maintain a hospital and a nurses training school. Down through the years both units have flourished and it is estimated that over 700 people throughout the south central part of North and South Carolina have either graduated from the Training School or have learned enough about the art of nursing so that they can qualify as practical nurses, since it was begun.

RED CROSS WORK

World War I came along and Lillian James did her part by organizing and supervising Red Cross groups which made and rolled bandages, in addition to her hospital work. She instituted nurse's aide classes and pulled her regular turn in the ARC canteen in Hamlet's railroad yard. Upon cessation of hostilities she turned her full time to the work at hand in the hospital-school. At an age when nursing was neither as attractive nor remunerative as it is today she managed to graduate an average of five every year over a period of the first 20 years of the school's existence and has lived to see that average increase to 10 over the second decade.

During World War II she offered the facilities of the hospital, then an institution of 100 beds, to the Nurses' Aides once more and even instructed them herself in addition to running an understaffed organization and having to buy on a ration-controlled market for food for the patients in her care. Her son, a doctor, was in the service of his country and her husband had the whole load of medical and surgical treatment on his shoulders and this was more than he could stand up under. He passed away shortly after the end of the War and the funeral of Dr. W.D. James was said to have attracted as many friends from that section of North Carolina than any ever held in Hamlet.

This seemed the hour when everything would stop, but realizing that the hospital must continue to operate for the alleviation of suffering. Mrs. James buried herself in the work at hand. Her younger daughter had met and fallen in love with a young man, Mark M. Lindsey, who was studying medicine at Yale and who showed great promise as a physician and surgeon.

Soon wedding bells rang for that happy couple and now the hospital had its quota of staff doctors to carry on the work begun by Mrs. James and her late husband.

IMPROVEMENTS MADE

The next few years saw the young doctors, aided and advised by the experience mother, gradually introduce reforms and install the latest equipment until the Hamlet Hospital began to shine like new money. Everything seemed rosy now with clear sailing ahead. But trouble reared its ugly head. The Nurses Examining Board began to grumble, find fault, and complain. This was wrong; that was not right. As they suggested, the hospital heads corrected. Still they could not seem to satisfy the Board. This organization

threatened to close the doors of the Nursing School. The student nurses became perplexed. They didn't know whether to complete their training, go home, or what. Parents of the students began to bombard the hospital authorities with phone calls, letters, telegrams, and visits. Things were in an uproar.

Lillian James then made one decision which was far-reaching. She had worked hard and long for this pet project of hers and she was not going to let any bunch of Johnny-Come-Lately's take it away from her without a fight. She had been charging no tuition for the students and in addition was paying them a monthly consideration while they learned. The Board could close the other schools down, if they wished, but not hers.

She looked at the record and that was enough to dishearten the average person. Whereas there were 78 nurses training schools in North Carolina in 1930 the number had diminished to 38 and it looked like the only way a nurses training school could stay open was to be associated with some large hospital in one of the cities of the state. But she rolled up her sleeves and with typical Yankee grit and determination went to work in the Courts and fought the issue to the North Carolina Supreme Court in 1951 where it was adjudged that the Board had exceeded its authority and that the Hamlet Hospital had complied with the remnants of a nurses training school and could therefore remain open and offer its trainees before the Board for examination for the RN degree.

PRECEDENT SET

This has set the precedent and has aided in stopping other training schools from being closed, especially since the number of hospital beds in North Carolina has been doubled and the deem for nurses is four or five times great as it was in 1930. Others would have been vainglorious their victory but Lillian James modestly took it in stride and continued on in her work without comment. She knew that since dawn of history Americans had ways fought for those principles which they held right and she upheld the tradition in this case.

Today the hospital is a modern four-story building with modern equipment of the latest design. It is accredited with the Duke endowment and had 100 beds with plans under way to shortly increase the capacity by 50 new rooms. A new Cancer Detention Clinic is almost completed and the Hospital heads are planning to submit it for State Inspection and approval. There are 50 student nurses in school and they work on the halls under the training of 21 others who are either in supervisory capacity or faculty members. A recent addition to the plant was a three-story hotel building a short distance away from the grounds which was purchased and completely renovated as a combination dormitory for nurses and classroom building. The nurses are chaperoned by graduate nurses and the superintendent of nurses and have all the modern conveniences in the new edifice. The administration urged attendance and membership of the student body in the local church and tries to arrange Sunday schedules so that a majority of the girls will have free time during worship hours for church attendance.

Through it all, though, Lillian James, has not lost her contact with the common man. She is understanding, sympathetic, helpful, and still working. No easy change for her or winters in Florida. She is too wrapped up in her life's work and the care of the poor people in rural North Carolina.