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## Canton's short-lived hospital offered valuable service

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The Canton Hospital operated between 1917 and 1922. It was set up during a typhoid epidemic with the help of Reuben B. Robertson, general manager at Champion Fibre Company.

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The Champion Hospital in Canton was established, equipped and staffed in one week in the spring of 1917, a rapid response to an outbreak of typhoid fever in the town.

Information that several cases of the contagious illness had been diagnosed and the disease appeared to be spreading among town residents, including plant employees, was relayed to Reuben B. Robertson, general manager of Champion Fibre Company, primary employer of Canton area citizens.



Robertson reacted immediately, meeting with the chairman of the Canton Board of Health, local physicians and the towns board of aldermen. He offered the cooperation and resources of the entire Champion organization to stem further spread of the disease, according to a June 1917, issue of The Log, Champion's in-house publication.

Patients required care that could be provided only in a hospital. The closest treatment

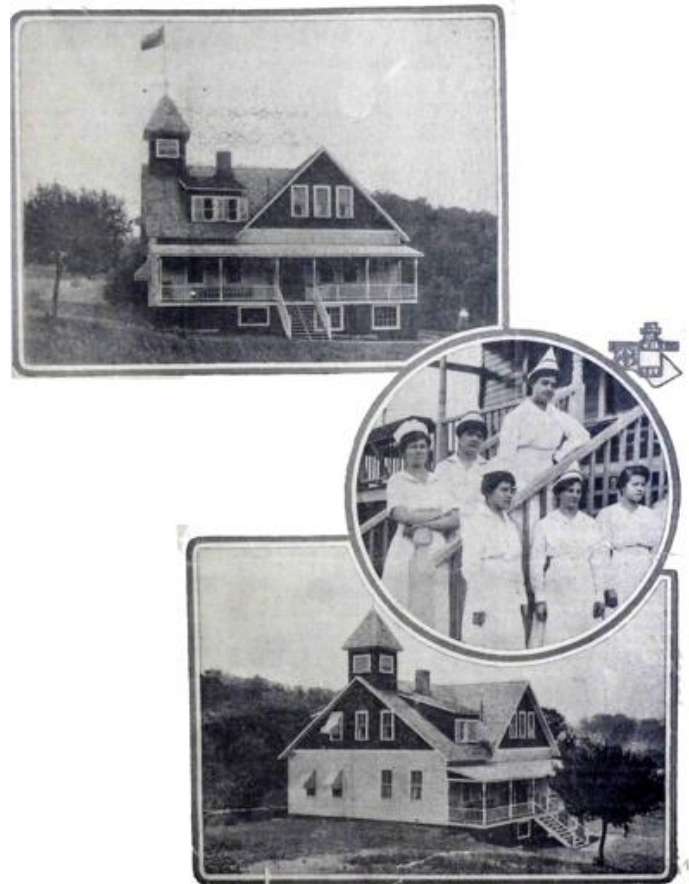
centers were located in Waynesville, a small facility with limited capacity, and in Asheville, approximately 18 miles from Canton. Travel to either was neither quick nor easy.

Fortunately, Champion had recently purchased the former Episcopal Mission School building located on Hill Street overlooking the mill for use as a clubhouse. Robertson offered the structure for use as a hospital.

Quoting from The Log, the building was “...turned over to Master Mechanic Battison (William) with instructions to remodel it into a hospital with haste ... a large crew made up of (Champion) carpenters, electricians, masons, painters and plumbers attacked the old school building with the various weapons of their trade, the result being that within one week the hospital was ready for occupancy.

In the meantime, someone of the purchasing department began telegraphing orders for hospital equipment. Fortunately, a large order for beds and other hospital furnishings had been placed with a Louisville concern, by a hospital in ... neighboring Waynesville, and this order was diverted by express to the Champion Hospital to meet the emergency.”

A search for nurses was conducted by Champion. Five trained nurses and one probationer “were on hand to help arrange the furniture as it was unpacked and within 12 hours from the time the carpenters stopped their hammering, five patients





were occupying beds.”

On the preceding day, “42 women, members of the local Cheerer Club, working five sewing machines were preparing sheets, pillow cases and hospital gowns with material furnished by Champion Fibre Company.”



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According to The Log, 16 patients were in the hospital on June 26, 15 of whom were suffering from typhoid.

“Seven of these are convalescent and will leave the institution within a few days. All

the others are getting along well.”

An Aug. 16, 1917, issue of The Twin-City Daily Sentinel in Winston-Salem, reported under the headline “Charters Issued by Secretary of State” that “Champion Hospital, Inc., Canton, authorized capital stock, \$10,000; \$2,000 subscribed by Reuben B. Robertson, Charles S. Bryant, Asheville; David J. Kerr, Canton, and others.”

On the same day, the Raleigh News and Observer published a notice stating “Champion Hospital, Canton, Haywood County; to operate hospital and training school for nurses, capitalized at \$10,000 and authorized to begin business with \$2,500. R. B. Robertson, Charles S. Bryant and David J. Kerr are incorporators.”

A preceding story found in The Asheville Citizen-Times archives provides additional details.

On Friday, May 26, 1917, the newspaper reported that, “Work at remodeling the Episcopal Mission school building, now the property of the Champion Fibre company, will soon be completed, giving Canton a modern hospital. The management of the company, realizing the need of a hospital in this community, recently authorized the transformation of the building and purchase of supplies and equipment.



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This is being done at a cost exceeding \$2,000 and within a few days the hospital will be open with a full corps of graduate nurses and physician in charge.

Dr. T. F. Reynolds is the physician in charge while Miss Sadie Vaughn, formerly of the Meriwether Hospital in Asheville, will be head nurse.

The equipment and supplies for the hospital are all the most modern that can be bought. Sanitary plumbing, portable bath tub, a dumb waiter and 25 hospital beds are included in the supplies bought.

Nann Royal was one of the nurses assisting Miss Vaughn, but other names are not immediately available.

The account names hospital governing board as D. J. Kerr, chairman; N. R. Wild secretary-treasurer; G W. Phillips, George M. Trostel, C. L. Westmoreland and Dr. T. F. Reynolds and said the facility is thought to be self-sustaining with arrangements made to take care of charity patients.

Patients were not restricted to typhoid victims. A related story in the Asheville Citizen-Times on June 28, 1917, reports that 15-year- old Clyde Aiken of Canton died in the hospital from injuries incurred in a motorcycle accident.

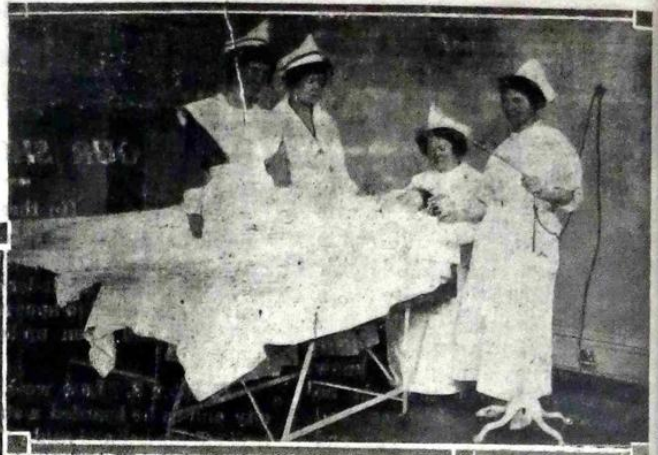
A similar record of the hospital is included in *Heritage of Healing: A Medical History of Haywood County*, written by Nina and William Anderson.

Further information from this source indicates that all county physicians were extended an invitation to use the facility.



## AT THE CHAMPION HOSPITAL

*Seventy-Four Operations in Four Days  
Is the Record*



This means that seventy-four Canton children will be given a better chance in life, a better chance for full development and the attainment of success, for every one of them was handicapped, some of them seriously,

with adenoids and diseased tonsils.

Many of these children were in ill health and it is gratifying to the Welfare Department, who made all arrangements for and carried the project through, with

the co-operation of members of the medical profession in Canton and Asheville, to note there has been such a decided improvement in the health and spirits of these children that the old folks are beginning to sit up and

take notice. One mother said: "I wouldn't have my children back where they were before the operation for a thousand dollars."

But it didn't cost her a thousand while we cannot explain all the details, we can safely state that the arrangements which were made saved the parents of these children the sum of at least four thousand dollars.

We join the parents and children in extending our thanks to all who assisted in this work, especially to Drs. Russell and Hunnicutt of Asheville, Drs. Reynolds, Johnson and Russell of Canton, the Merriwether Hospital and the nurses.

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Heritage of Healing, quoting The Log, added that "each Champion employee was assessed fifty cents a month to cover the hospital's operating expenses," calling it the first known instance of hospital insurance in the county.

"Employees and immediate family had first priority at the hospital, but patients outside the plant's employment circle were also accepted."

The medical history included an interesting mention of The Champion Hospital.

When The N.C. State Board of Health initiated tonsil-adenoid clinics, clinics were held in a variety of locations in Haywood County.

The history cited “strongly held medical belief that removing a child’s tonsils ‘eliminated at least a fourth of all sickness,’” as prompting the program and included the following report: “At the Champion Fibre Company hospital in Canton, 74 children underwent the surgery (tonsillectomies) within four days. Canton doctors who participated in the record-setting event were Drs. T. F.

Reynolds, W. C. Johnson and J. M. Russell.”

Five years after the hospital opened, The Carolina Mountaineer and Waynesville Courier printed an official notice of dissolution of the hospital by the Secretary of State, J. Bryan Grimes on Thursday, March 2, 1922.

With health care improving throughout Haywood County, Champion divested itself of the hospital business to concentrate solely on the manufacture of pulp, paper and tannin extract.

*(Editor's note: Information for this story was provided by Canton Area Historical Museum curator Caroline Ponton.)*