

Planning a post-war, mid-century hospital in Kent County

Kent District Medical Society takes lead in planning memorial hospital

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RIMJ MANAGING EDITOR

World War II had just ended and the suburban explosion and burgeoning "Baby Boom" generation was in its nascent stages. In Kent County, plans for a hospital were taking shape. The January 1946 issue of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* (RIMJ), published by the Rhode Island Medical Society (RIMS), supported the concept in an editorial, which stated:

"With the City of Warwick and surrounding towns planning memorials for returning veterans, it would appear that no finer tribute could be planned than for each community to contribute a unit to a Memorial Kent County Hospital for the improvement of health service to every citizen."

Editorials in subsequent RIMJ issues cited the demographics of the County and the need for expanded medical care:

"The excellent state highways that have enabled the city worker to move his residence outside of the Greater Providence area ... The area to be serviced has grown in stature in recent years. An estimated 60,000 persons reside within the county, with a projected growth of 100,000 in five years. It is encouraging that the city of Warwick and surrounding towns have accepted the responsibility for providing a hospital local to Kent County."

Kent County was located between hospitals in Providence and the 62-bed South County Hospital in Wakefield, and RIMJ editorials called for this "vital extension of medical care in the state's second most populous county." In addition, the development of voluntary hospitalization insurance and the "35,000 subscribers to Blue Cross in Kent County" was a positive factor.

At the same time, the Kent County Medical Society was experiencing growth in membership. Its 34 physicians provided "a fine nucleus for the staffing of the hospital," one RIMJ editorial pointed out.

Kent County Medical Society

In 1946, members of the Kent County Medical Society voted on forming a committee, which included local citizens from its constituent towns of Warwick, West Warwick, Coventry, East Greenwich and West Greenwich to investigate "the possibility of elevating a Memorial Hospital in Kent County to be named Kent County Memorial Hospital."

Kent County Medical Society executive officers **WHITMAN MERRILL, MD**, president; **PETER ERINAKES, MD**, vice president; **JEANNETTE E. VIDAL, MD**, secretary, and **JOHN M. MACK, MD**, treasurer, led the effort, which culminated in legislation passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly in April 1946 to incorporate Kent County Memorial Hospital.

Kent County physicians, citizens, civic and organization leaders, as well as veterans' groups, participated in an active

Jeannette E. Vidal, MD:

A Warwick Leader in Healthcare

Seventy-three years ago this month, at the December 7, 1947 meeting of the Kent County Medical Society held at the Greenwich Club, East Greenwich, the slate of officers for the 1948 year was elected; **Jeannette E. Vidal, MD**, (1918–2003) of West Warwick was named president.

The *Rhode Island Medical Journal* took note of the appointment in a column titled "Women Physicians." It stated:

"For the second time within three years a district medical society has honored a woman physician with its presidency. In 1945, it was Washington County that named Dr. Frances A. Kenyon as its leader.

The honor to Dr. Vidal is particularly significant in view of the fact that the Kent County Society has taken leadership in the campaign for a hospital in that area, and with the fundraising phase of the program being launched this month the president of the district medical society is certain to draw added important duties."

The article noted her qualifications as a member of the Rhode Island Medical Society's public laws and medical economics committee. She was also a member of the American Medical Association, the American Medical Women's Association, and the World Medical Association.

Dr. Vidal was the daughter of Judge George N. Vidal and Elmina Vidal. Census records of 1940 show she was 22 years old, and lived with her parents and brother George at 416 St. John Street in West Warwick.

She was a graduate of Rivier College, in Nashua, NH, in 1937, and received an MD cum laude from the University of Montreal in 1943. She was on the staff of Rhode Island Hospital serving as assistant physician in the Department of Medicine and later Kent County Memorial Hospital.

She also took an active role in the Mid-Century White House Conference on Youth and Children and served on the Rhode Island Dept. of Health Rheumatic Fever Programs, and at Kent County Memorial Hospital, serving as medical director of its research program.

She was awarded an honorary doctorate in science from Rivier College in 1964 for her contributions to social, scientific and philanthropic leadership.

Her entire professional career was spent tending to the healthcare needs of the citizens of West Warwick, where she and her medical assistant saw patients for more than half a century. ♦





The land for Kent County Memorial Hospital was donated by **Col. Patrick H. Quinn**, a native of Phenix, town of Warwick, and a prominent Rhode Island attorney and probate judge in Warwick.

[CARROLL, CHARLES. RHODE ISLAND: THREE CENTURIES OF DEMOCRACY, VOL 3, NEW YORK: LEWIS HISTORICAL PUB. CO., 1932.]

campaign to raise \$800,000 for the proposed hospital to be located on Toll Gate Road, midway between Westcott and

Apponaug, on a site donated by Warwick native and prominent attorney, **COL. PATRICK H. QUINN**. The Kent Medical Society was instrumental in developing proposed bylaws, and rules and regulations for the hospital and its staff. Representative citizens were solicited to form a Board of Trustees; **ARTHUR H. RUGGLES, MD**, Superintendent of Butler Hospital in Providence, was selected chairman.

Donations to the hospital

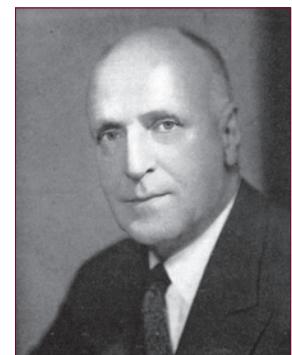
At the November 1949 meeting of the Kent Medical Society, held at the office of **DR. PETER ERINAKES**, it was reported that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of East Greenwich "are offering an iron lung for the new hospital and one could be obtained from

This sketch of the future Kent Hospital appeared in the April 1948 issue of RIMJ. Chartered by the State of Rhode Island in 1946, Kent opened with 90 beds in 1951.

the National Foundation." However, **DR. ARTHUR HARDY** suggested that someone be appointed to speak at the next meeting of the VFW and propose an alternative gift, such as a blood bank. **DR. GEORGE YOUNG** was appointed to the task, and the idea was met with enthusiasm when he and **DR. ORLAND SMITH** visited the Post. It was also noted that the Warwick Kiwanis Club was interested in donating an incubator.

The December 1949 annual meeting of the Society reported on the start of the construction of the hospital, which ultimately opened its doors in 1951. A year later, at the monthly meeting of the Kent Medical Society in February 1952, it was voted that a plaque be installed on the outside of the hospital stating that the Kent County Memorial Hospital was so named in memory of all the residents who served in World War II.

If a hospital can be described as a "Baby Boomer," Kent is surely one, nearing its 70th birthday in 2021. ♦



Arthur H. Ruggles, MD



KENT COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Architects—Howe, Prout, & Ekman of Providence
Consultants—Neergaard & Craig of New York

GROUND FLOOR—Main Unit: Kitchen, dining rooms, storage, locker rooms, etc. Wing Unit: Out-patient clinics (eye, ear, nose and throat, dental, etc.), X-ray department, laboratories, physiotherapy department.

FIRST FLOOR—Main Unit: Patient rooms (private, semi-private, 4-bed). Wing Unit: 3 operating rooms, 2 delivery rooms, all surgical and obstetrical facilities.

SECOND FLOOR—Patient rooms.

THIRD FLOOR—Maternity; patient rooms and nurseries.

Minimum capacity of 75 beds. Fund-raising campaign for \$800,000 now under way. Hospital to serve the 60,000 residents of Kent County, which includes Warwick, West Warwick, Coventry, East Greenwich, West Greenwich. Hospital to be built on Tollgate Road, between Apponaug and Westcott, on property donated by Colonel Patrick H. Quinn.