



New England Sanitarium.

From the private collection of Michael W. Campbell.

## New England Sanitarium (1899–1999)

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### MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

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Seventh-day Adventist medical facility that operated for a century in Massachusetts. The sanitarium went through several name changes. It was nicknamed the Melrose Sanitarium when it moved to a new location and renamed the New England Memorial Hospital in 1967 and the Boston Regional Medical Center in 1995.

### Early Beginnings

South Lancaster Academy was founded in 1882. By 1895, some rooms in the girls' dormitory had been converted into a small health clinic to care for the students and staff. In the late 1890s, J. H. Kellogg (1852-1943) sent Mary Byington Nicola, M.D. (1869-1935) and Charles Chesterfield Nicola, M.D., also known as C. C. (1867-1911), to Long Island to establish a new medical mission in New York City. At the time there was a strong push by church members to formally establish a sanitarium in South Lancaster. The believers raised \$10,000.<sup>1</sup> By late 1898, Kellogg had shifted plans to open a sanitarium with the Nicolas in South Lancaster instead. It was hoped that it could be opened in the spring of the following year. "The brethren made a great sacrifice there," wrote Kellogg, "in devoting one of their school buildings to the Sanitarium enterprise and we must cooperate with them to the fullest degree."<sup>2</sup> The entire girls' dormitory was set aside for this nascent health enterprise.

On April 28, 1899, a legal incorporation established the New England Sanitarium and Benevolent Association. The health facility formally opened in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, on July 5, 1899. Mary Byington Nicola, M.D. was on hand for the official opening and presumably ran the sanitarium initially because her husband, C. C. Nicola, M.D. was traveling with Kellogg in Europe (he would become the first medical superintendent). Together the Nicolas provided medical expertise for the new institution.<sup>3</sup> The sanitarium was affiliated with the Battle Creek Sanitarium and described it as the "Eastern Branch" of the world-famous institution. Kellogg took a personal interest in the development of the new sanitarium and on several occasions personally visited and performed surgeries there.<sup>4</sup>

The new sanitarium proved popular, and within the first year they needed to rent a large adjacent building as an annex.<sup>5</sup> G. B. Thompson reported the "Christian homelike atmosphere which pervades the institution is enjoyable, and the physicians, nurses, business manager, chaplain, and all connected with the institution are seeking to make it an important factor in saving souls."<sup>6</sup> The New England Conference voted to fund a bed for patients who could not pay.<sup>7</sup>

The sanitarium had 330 patients in 1900 and increased to 502 patients by 1901. Most of the patients were from Massachusetts, but patients also arrived from twenty-two other states as well as Canada and Jamaica. The sanitarium started a two-year course for medical missionary nurses. The first class of seven members graduated November 1901, and a second class of eight students had just completed their first year of nursing when the sanitarium moved. Both the sanitarium and South Lancaster Academy benefited from its location. Fifteen young people paid their expenses at South Lancaster Academy by working at the institution.<sup>8</sup> The sanitarium also conducted "schools of health" in the community led by Mary Nicola and assisted by M. Olive Jones. The first was held at Northampton, Massachusetts, at the Connecticut Valley Chautauqua Association, a second in Boston at Mr. Loder's vegetarian restaurant, and a third in Dover, New Hampshire, with F. C. Gilbert and a Pastor Hartwell. Each "school" lasted ten days with afternoon and evening sessions and had 60 to 70 people in attendance. By 1902 Charles Nicola reported the addition of a laundry and electric-light plant and recommended an addition to the main building to accommodate the increasing patient load.<sup>9</sup>

## Move to Melrose

As the sanitarium grew, tensions developed in the community. The wealthy Thayer family requested that the sanitarium be moved so that Pauline Thayer (1862-1934) did not have to see patients. Nathaniel Thayer III (1851-1911), who was in the midst of remodeling his own home, offered to buy the land, dismantle the building, keep the wood, and ship everything (he owned the local railroad), if they would just move somewhere elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Ellen White at the time was encouraging church leaders, especially Kellogg, to build more smaller sanitariums out in the country, rather than one large enterprise in Battle Creek. She also wrote a specific testimony noting that moving sanitariums, including this one, into more rural locations would have the added benefit of not having wealthy neighbors to potentially criticize them.<sup>11</sup>

During the summer of 1902, the board voted to relocate the New England Sanitarium from South Lancaster to Melrose, approximately 30 miles to the south. Despite the distance, they planned to maintain a close relationship with South Lancaster Academy. Students could still travel between locations by trolley.<sup>12</sup> The new facility was located on what had been the Langwood Park Hotel. The hotel was begun by George F. Butterfield in the 1880s and consisted of 41 acres adjoining Spot Pond. It had tennis grounds and golf links.<sup>13</sup> The property was next to the Middlesex Fells (a natural park of 3,500 acres) and was only six miles outside of Boston.<sup>14</sup> This new location provided a new train and trolley service creating easy access for patients.<sup>15</sup> The facility valued at \$98,000 was purchased for \$40,000.

Within three months most of the medical equipment was installed, and all the sanitarium beds at the new facility were occupied.<sup>16</sup> C. C. Nicola reported that on October 9, 1902, the “final transfer of patients was made from South Lancaster.”<sup>17</sup> Earlier that year, on February 18, 1902, the Battle Creek Sanitarium burned down, and Kellogg was working on plans to rebuild. Church leaders in New England felt that it was important, with limited resources from the Battle Creek Sanitarium, to establish clear ownership of the New England Sanitarium and Benevolent Association and requested to transfer the assets, including all real estate and other property, to a new corporation to be created by the Central New England Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.<sup>18</sup> Ellen White first visited the New England Sanitarium during the summer of 1904. She reportedly stated that it was “a providential opening that put us in possession of this magnificent location for a sanitarium.”<sup>19</sup> She furthermore believed that the new facility was “far enough removed from the busy city [Boston] so that the patients may have the most favorable conditions for the recovery of health.”<sup>20</sup>

## Fire and Rebuilding the Sanitarium

On January 1, 1905, the New England Sanitarium caught fire. The “women nurses fought the fire with buckets, hand grenades [brigades], and a small hose, as the male attendants carried to safety the forty inmates.” All but the stone wing of the institution was destroyed, but fortunately, no life was lost.<sup>21</sup> The fire began when a nurse, Etta Albee, overturned a lighted kerosene lamp. They were able to evacuate the patients before the Fire

Department showed up.<sup>22</sup> The patients and employees were housed in nearby cottages that had recently been erected until the facility could rebuild.<sup>23</sup> When Ellen White heard the news, she wrote a letter of consolation and encouragement to the Nicolas. "We are sorry that you should lose one penny, but the part of the building that burned was objectionable in many ways. When I first saw it, I said to some one, 'If that part of the building could be taken away and a suitable addition put on, it would be a great blessing. This will have to be done in order for the institution to make a right representation.'"<sup>24</sup> Over \$8,100 was raised to rebuild.<sup>25</sup>

On February 28, 1906, a new sanitarium building was completed. The new facility had 65 sunlit guest rooms, physicians' offices, treatment rooms, parlors, and a dining room. The facility included a "first-class hydraulic elevator, steam heating, electric lights, telephones, call-bells, and other modern conveniences."<sup>26</sup> A large group attended its dedication.<sup>27</sup> The stress of rebuilding the sanitarium, combined with White's admonitions to Mary and Clarence Nicola to sever ties with Kellogg, who was disfellowshipped in 1906, contributed to their departure from the sanitarium.<sup>28</sup>

In March 1908, the board voted to spend \$15,000 to build a gymnasium and treatment rooms; the cold New England weather necessitated a place for patients to exercise. The cost of \$15,000 would be funded with \$10,000 from the General Conference and \$5,000 from the Atlantic Union Conference.<sup>29</sup> In 1909, Dr. Estella M. Houser went to the New England Sanitarium to serve as a physician.<sup>30</sup> In the same year, the staff recorded that they had 3 physicians, 38 nurses, and together they treated 1,008 patients.<sup>31</sup>

Ellen White visited the New England Sanitarium a second time in 1909.<sup>32</sup> She reminded church leaders about the sacred responsibility of leadership at Adventist sanitariums.<sup>33</sup> She described the sanitarium as "one of the greatest agencies that can be employed to reach Boston with the truth."<sup>34</sup>

1910 was a significant year for the sanitarium. Area residents earlier had tried to change the tax status of the institution and charge \$7,000 for several years of back taxes. The local court had ruled against the city, but subsequently the higher court ruled in favor of the New England Sanitarium.<sup>35</sup> In response to Ellen White's visit, a Greater Boston Medical Missionary Bureau was established to organize the work of "nursing the sick, giving Bible readings, scattering literature on health and religious topics, conducting schools of health, and by such other methods."<sup>36</sup> Also, by 1910, George B. Starr became the chaplain and together with his wife were active in conducting ministry from the New England Sanitarium. He reported that the sanitarium was involved in on-going evangelistic meetings that included a health talk with nearly 200 attendees.<sup>37</sup>

## Legacy and Closing

In 1924 a stucco wing was added to the sanitarium. A more modern, four-story brick building was begun in 1952. Completed two years later at a cost of a million dollars, it had a total of 85 beds and 26 bassinets. In 1958 a new maternity section was completed with the latest scientific equipment. The addition allowed for air conditioning. The operating room suites were rebuilt in 1959 allow for three major operating rooms, a fracture



room, and a large new recovery room that could handle 6-8 patients at a time. The needs of the community meant that during the 1950s the sanitarium shifted to become a general hospital for community care, although they remained committed to Adventist health principles.<sup>38</sup> Between 1902 and 1965 the sanitarium graduated over 750 nurses. The program was discontinued in 1965, and the nursing program continued at Atlantic Union College.<sup>39</sup>

In March 1967 the name was changed to the New England Memorial Hospital. In August of the same year, all the original buildings were demolished, and a new 300-bed hospital built. By the early 1990s the facility was reduced to a 195-bed facility. In 1995 the name was changed again to the Boston Regional Medical Center. In 1996, the hospital lost \$3 million, in 1997 it lost another \$4.8 million, and by September 30, 1997, liabilities exceeded assets by \$5.3 million. In 1998 alone the hospital lost a staggering \$14,688,610 as the hospital spiraled into massive debt during a time when many other Adventist hospitals were struggling to make ends meet.<sup>40</sup> January 22, 1999, the hospital stopped accepting new patients, and then on February 4, 1999, attorneys filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy in the Boston Federal Court House.<sup>41</sup>

A *Boston Globe* investigation noted that for over a decade there had been “questionable financial dealings” that led to its demise.<sup>42</sup> Some administrators later reflected that in the 1990s as insurance providers developed a “preferred provider” program that the hospital did not embrace this new model quickly enough to keep up with competition.<sup>43</sup> By that point, insurance companies had dropped them from eligibility. This combined with increased criticism from church members about the administrators’ high salaries contributed to the closing of the institution.<sup>44</sup> When a for-profit company abandoned plans to buy 80 percent of the facility backed out, it led to the rapid closure of the institution in February 1999.<sup>45</sup> Over one thousand people lost their jobs. The property was sold at auction for \$20 million to a real estate developer.<sup>46</sup> The hospital owed some \$60.2 million dollars to hospital bondholders and other creditors.<sup>47</sup>

## Leaders

*Superintendents/Directors:* C. C. Nicola, M.D. (1899-1907); C. O. Prince (1907-1908); W. E. Bliss (1908-1912); L. E. Elliott (acting, 1922); W. C. Dunscombe (1922-1924); V. L. Fisher (1924-1929); W. A. Ruble (1929-1943); C. E. Parrish (1943-1948); J. S. Kootsey (1949-1951).

*Business Managers/Administrators:* W. A. Wilcox (1899-1903); W. M. Lee (1903-1908); J. B. Huguley (1908-1909); J. G. White (1909-1916); H. B. Steele (1916-1917); H. K. Presley (1917-1918); E. J. Baker (1918-1920); R. Hook, Jr. (1920-1921); V. MacPherson (1921-1924); S. E. McNeill (1924-1927); E. L. Place (1927-1941); H. E. Rice (1941-1949); A. C. Larson (1950-1954); R. G. Manuel (1954-1957); V. D. Dortch (1954-1961); K. W. Tilghman (1961-1962); R. L. Pelton (1963-1970); T. O. Moore (1970-1975).

*Presidents:* E. L. Wall (1975-1981); Wolfgang von Maack (1981-1988); Francisco J. Perez (1988-1994); Charles S. Ricks (1994-1999).

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## NOTES

1. J. H. Kellogg to Ellen G. White, April 14, 1898, Ellen G. White Estate.

2. J. H. Kellogg to Ellen G. White, September 26, 1898, Ellen G. White Estate.

3. See notice under "Publishers' Department," *Good Health*, August 1899, 503.

4. See the testimonial of a patient grateful for a surgery done by Dr. J. H. Kellogg, recorded in A. E. Place, "New London, Norwich, and Boston," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, April 30, 1902, 3.

5. See note in *Good Health*, July 1900, 452.

6. G. B. Thompson, "The Institutions of District No. 1," *The New York Indicator*, December 5, 1900, 2.

7. "The New England Conference," *ARH*, July 23, 1901, 476-77.
8. C. C. Nicola, "The New England Sanitarium," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, January 8, 1902, 7-9.
9. "The New England Sanitarium," *The Missionary Magazine*, January 1902, 37.
10. Arthur L. Tauro, *A History of New England Memorial Hospital* (The Author: ca. 1984).
11. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1902), 7:88-89.
12. Frederick Griggs, "South Lancaster Academy," *The Advocate*, September 1902, 282-283.
13. "New England Sanitarium," *Good Health*, August 1902, 402.
14. See announcement in *Good Health*, November 1902, 560. This natural area was part of the very first conservation movement led by Charles Eliot, son of Harvard University president, who during the 1890s led a movement to set aside a number of public areas as park land. Peter DeMarco, "A Wellspring of Conservation: Spot Pond Provided Refuge and Inspired Public Works," *The Boston Globe*, July 4, 2002, 112.
15. See advertisement in *Good Health*, December 1902, 608.
16. C. C. Nicola, "New England Sanitarium Notes," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, November 5, 1902, 479.
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18. "A Good Move," *The New York Indicator*, November 25, 1903, 1-2.
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21. "The Burning of the New England Sanitarium," *ARH*, January 12, 1905, 19.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. Ellen G. White to Brother and Sister Nicola, January 17, 1905, as published in *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, February 1, 1905.

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26. W. A. R[uble], "The New England Sanitarium," *ARH*, May 26, 1910, 16-17.
27. Percy T. Magan, "Dedication of the Melrose Sanitarium," *ARH*, April 12, 1906, 17-18.
28. Michael W. Campbell, "Nicola, C. C. and Mary (Byington)," in the *Ellen White Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 477-78.
29. H. F. Ketring, "New England Sanitarium Gymnasium and Treatment Rooms," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, June 17, 1908, 4.
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31. "Statistical Report of Seventh-day Adventist Conferences and Missions," *ARH*, October 6, 1910, 27.
32. D. E. Robinson, "A Visit to Melrose and Buffalo," *ARH*, December 16, 1909, 7-8.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Special Testimonies, Series B, Number 13, 12.
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36. W. A. R[uble], "Nurses' Bureaus," *ARH*, June 2, 1910, 17.
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42. Dolores Kong, "Deal Clears Way for Sale of Hospital," *The Boston Globe*, December 2, 1999, 38.
43. Based upon phone interviews by the author with several church administrators who were involved in the closure of the hospital.
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