CHRONOLOGY OF EASTON’S MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

What follows is a very condensed chronology of Easton’s hospital. What cannot be stressed enough is the unbounded generosity of this community (including to a lesser extent our neighboring counties) in its continuous support of the hospital. This has been demonstrated over the last century not only by wealthy patrons, but by all segments of the population. While Talbot’s leading benefactors and businesses often gave large cash gifts or donations of equipment and supplies (not just during various fundraising drives), there were countless instances of small gifts not only of cash, but also items such as fish, produce or other goods from those who had little cash but wanted to help. The total number of volunteer hours must be staggering.

It should also be mentioned that both the U.S. and Maryland governments have provided funding to the hospital over the years. The state’s first appropriation was $2000 in 1906. Perhaps local author Dickson Preston said it best in his history of the hospital “75 Years of Caring 1907-1982”, “The hospital is the product, not of a few wealthy donors, but of a public which recognized the need for improved conditions and provided their own answer”.

1906 No hospital in Talbot. If you lived in Talbot and came down with acute appendicitis you had three choices: take the night boat to Baltimore, take the train to Baltimore (via Wilmington, De.), or go home and pray. (Note: Cambridge had a “hospital” but no surgery, and remember there was no bridge over Choptank and local travel was by horse). Drive commenced to start a hospital by Judge William T. Martin and Mary Bartlett Dixon who became the hospital’s first treasurer. Corporation formed under name “Emergency Hospital of Easton, Md.”

1907 “Emergency Hospital” opens in rented top two floors of vacant three story hotel on corner of Washington & Dover Sts. (“Lockhart” building now houses Crackerjacks). There were 32 beds, two surgeons and four g.p.’s. Surgeons were not allowed to operate the rope powered elevator (donated $512) so they wouldn’t hurt their hands. The community donated most of the supplies including towels, linens and canned goods. Easton Furniture Co.(closed 1942) supplied furnishings. A private room for a week (all inclusive) was $10-15. Hospital treated 176 patients in first year, 65 for free (no one was turned away, black or white). Most prevalent malady was typhoid (Easton had no sewers). Nursing school also begun.
1911 A group raised $2,270 and purchased land for a new hospital (where there’s now a Citgo gas station). Land was later returned, since it was within sight of Spring Hill cemetery, and present site on South Washington St. had more land. Note: There was a GREAT debate about which site to choose.

1913 Fire in building next to hospital. Patients evacuated, and calamity narrowly averted. This prompts drive for new, larger building. Yearly patient load grows to 700. Campaign to privately raise $40,000 begun. Total eventually raised was over $43,000.

1915 In November new three story, 55 bed hospital was opened. It was said to be the finest outside of Baltimore. Innumerable gifts and supplies from community. This structure still part of complex today (according to 1982 book).

1920 Nurses residence built. $20,000 donated by Talbot County Red Cross. (later torn down)

1929 Mary P. Campbell maternity wing built. Milton Campbell was largest donor. Other improvements made as well. $75,000 raised, not including other separate gifts.

1930 1,100 patients a year. 8 doctors, 5 graduate nurses and 17 in training.

1937 Hospital in deficit. Fundraiser at Avalon featuring John Charles Thomas and Gene Tunney (both part time Talbot residents). “Great success” said Star-Democrat.

1943 Name of hospital changed (per same 1906 articles of incorporation) to “Memorial Hospital at Easton, Md., Inc.” to honor local servicemen and women and volunteers who pioneered the original hospital.

1955 Major fundraising drive begun to expand hospital. Headed by George Olds (Pickering Creek). Goal was $750,000 and this was exceeded by more than $300,000. Both Q.A. and Caroline Co. citizens also contributed. Also got federal grant of approx. $400,000. “South wing” and “north wing” built. Total number of beds raised from 106 to 164. North wing had mechanicals and kitchen. Payroll now 165 persons at $450,000 per year.

1959 Nick Rajacich hired as chief administrator.

1960 Comprehensive study of hospital and areas medical needs (including longer range) by outside professionals authorized.

1962 Report documents numerous serious problems both immediate and longer term.

1963 Major fundraising campaign for expansion and improvements begun chaired by Morgan Schiller (married Elizabeth Lloyd and is buried at Wye House). Goal is $3 million of which $625,000 is federal grant. Consultants say community (including surrounding counties) could only come up with a maximum of $1.7 mil.. More than $2.6 million raised after J.McKenny
Willis, Jr. says it can and must be done. Hospital also had to borrow $2.5 million due to rising construction costs. This is first time hospital goes into debt.

1964 Annual payroll tops $1 million. Budget $2.6 million. Huge positive effect on local economy (per Star-Dem. article).


1973 35 bed nursing facility added.

1975 Service building and helipad built.

1982 Annual budget $22 million. More than 10,000 admissions (up from 176 in 1907).

1984 Two story east wing, Health Education Center and other renovations with $3.9 million in community donations (out of total of $17 million).

1991 Fundraising for nursing school improvements. The Macqueen Gibbs Willis School of Nursing began in 1907, and has been “certified” since 1959.

1996 Birthing center on fifth floor. $2 million spent.

2004 Hospital has 1,200 employees with a total payroll (incl. benefits) of over $59 million.

2006 New emergency room opens at a cost of $30 million. Total economic benefit to Talbot County in excess of $250 million a year.

2006-2013 Talbot County purchases site for new hospital. Easton town council and county council amend comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances to accommodate new hospital. Memo of understanding between county, Easton and U.M.M.S./S.H.S. signed. All utilities and roads planned for. Site plans and other necessary documents reviewed and approved. All that is needed is a “Certificate of Need” from Maryland Hospital Commission.

Sources: “75 Years of Caring 1907-1982” by D.J. Preston. “Images of America-Talbot County” and “Images of America-Easton, Md.” both published by Arcadia Publishing. Finally, a voluminous clipping file in the Md. Room at the Talbot library, and further research by Talbot Preservation Alliance members.