

In Search of Lost Infirmmary

Histories

By Richard B. Rosen, MD

When I first came to the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary in 1984 as a medical student, a second-year resident, Scott Spector, MD, regaled me with stories of the Infirmary past—how the legendary architect Stanford White supposedly helped design the South Building, how Francis Ford Coppola and his crew took over a ward on the fourth floor of the Infirmary's



Official seal of NYEE, unveiled in 1824

South Building to shoot the hospital interiors for *The Godfather*, and how the founding hospital president was a signer of the U.S. Constitution. It was not until a few years later, when our new department chair, Joseph Walsh, MD, returned from his fellowship-turned-chairmanship at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine to take the helm, that I began to learn the great legacy of the Infirmary and its place in American ophthalmology.

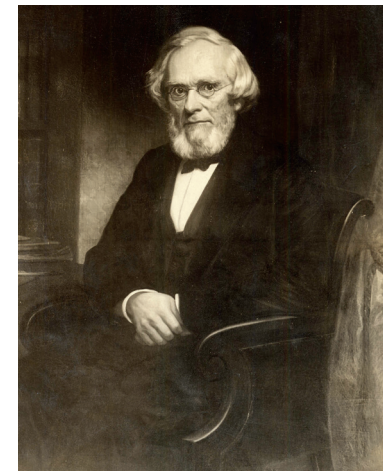
Dr. Walsh was an enthusiastic student of history, incessantly scavenging for scraps of our past and cobbling them into an ever-expanding compilation of lost anecdotes. He collected and identified classes of bygone residents, dove into old collections of photographs, and perused ancient Board of Trustees reports. He formalized the department annual reports, creating them on his desktop computer, and initially assembling them in Duo-Tang folders printed at the sixth floor print shop. Slowly, I was seduced into the richness of this dusty trove of documents and references from days past.

Given my own previous career in photography, I was inspired to illustrate his reports with photos from our embryonic Advanced Retinal Imaging Center, Dr. Robert Ritch's Ocular Imaging Center, and Dr. Steven McCormick's invigorated Pathology Laboratory. The reports slowly expanded into published volumes with striking color images. From time to time, alumni, staff members, and even

patients would contribute photos and memorabilia, further stoking the flames of nostalgia and reverence for the rich traditions built by our forebears. Oral histories from the likes of Drs. Seymour Fradin, Thomas Muldoon, Richard S. Koplin, and others, as well as contributions from our development and external affairs directors, Ann Brancato and Jean Thomas, helped fill in the many gaps from the nearly 200 years since the founders' initial dream.

Our infancy was marked by a modest beginning and an adolescent period of rapid growth, which featured frequent moves to new homes as we outgrew our digs every few years, before finally planting ourselves firmly on Second Avenue at 13th Street. From this point on, we began to acquire the trappings of an adult organization with sustained expansion as we hustled to keep up with a growing following of New Yorkers who recognized the gem in their midst.

Within a few years, many of our physicians also began to export our brand of expertise and helped pass it on to new institutions and departments of ophthalmology locally, nationally, and internationally,



Founder, Dr. Edward Delafield



The Infirmary's permanent home on the corner of Second Avenue and 13th Street, 1856



Founder, Dr. John Kearny Rodgers

sharing the culture of caring and curing that they had learned here. New advances in anesthesia, surgical techniques, and clinical expertise to enhance patient care, and academic associations such as the American Ophthalmological Society, the New York Ophthalmological Society, and later, ARVO and the Pan American Ophthalmology Association, were pioneered by our faculty. Quietly, we remained steadfast to our mission of service as the first and ultimately last freestanding eye institute in the country.

With the approach of our bicentennial, Dr. Walsh encouraged me to assemble a historical scrapbook of our place in American history. Further emboldened by some fellow history aficionados, including Drs. Jay M. Galst, Stanley B. Burns, and James G. Ravin, I serendipitously stumbled upon Laurie Levin, a author-anthropologist and chronicler of institutional histories,

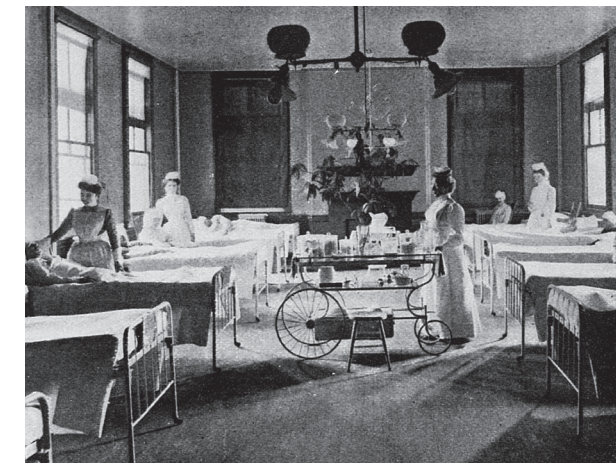
and her creative partner, Larry Zempel, graphic artist extraordinaire, who agreed to help me compose and assemble a modern history and family album of the Infirmary.

Sadly, Dr. Walsh passed away in 2017, never seeing the fruition of our shared aspiration. To honor his vision and inspiration, I have dedicated the book to his memory, for his mentorship and friendship, and for exemplifying the ideals of compassionate care, boundless curiosity, and leadership. This book also honors the thousands of men and women of the Infirmary over the past 200 years who have dedicated their lives to repair and enhance the lives of so many grateful patients.

In the spring of 2020, we look forward to sharing this lusciously illustrated family volume of stories and facts, highlighting our first 200 years.



Illustration of the Infirmary published in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1875



Patient ward, Schermerhorn Pavilion, 1880s



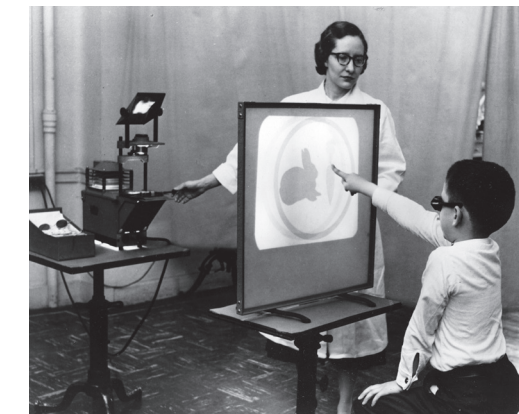
Surgery in progress, 1940s



Thomas Muldoon, MD, Chief of Retina Service, 1995-2011



Roof garden and the David W. Look Sun Parlor for fresh air treatments, 1900s



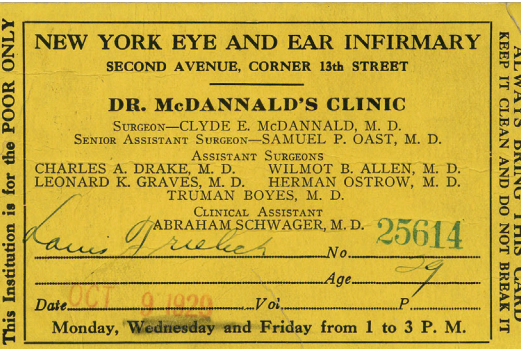
Amblyopia treatment, 1930s



Eikonometer, 1930s (the only one in NYC)



Pathological Department, 1900s



Patient appointment card, 1929



Wooden chair with NYEE seal given to graduating residents since 1972