

Historical Notes - General Hospital No.4

Before the war, General Hospital No. 4 had been originally built (in the 1850s) to house sick and injured seamen and was known as the Seamen's Home. The four-story brick building was located on the southwest corner of Dock and South Front Streets and, in 1855, two stores were located on the ground level. One of these was Robert Thorburn's Eagle Bakery, which continued in operation for most of the war. Before 1860 the other premise was occupied by several merchants including Charles Quigley's Boot and Shoe store and James H. Mitchell's Gas & Steam Fitting establishment. The hospital itself was gas-lit and was supplied with water from the town's water works. Before the war, (when beds were available) it was sometimes used as a hotel; the "Keeper" was George Williams, whose wife also worked as a Matron in the Home. The Home had a kitchen, library, a reading room and, next door, a Bethel. The Home was built to foster good moral habits among the resident seamen, services were frequently held there.

Prior to the establishment of "General" Hospitals, States funded aid for men from that State alone, but it was determined that a General Hospital system, that is, one that accepted patients from the units of all Southern states was more efficient. In Wilmington, there were two General Hospitals, Nos. 4 and 5. Hospital No.5 (or the Marine Hospital as it was known locally) was located near the outskirts of town, at Nun and 8th Streets. There was also a Naval hospital at the foot of Chestnut Street and later a "Wayside" hospital (No.5) was established at the Wilmington and Weldon railroad depot.²

Soldiers were allowed to stay at a private home, with relatives or friends if such arrangements could be made. At various times, a newspaper advertisement would order all men in "Private Quarters" to report to the hospital for examination. It would also appear that several men were quartered in hotels in town. Just what arrangements were made to accommodate these men is not known; it is quite possible that the hospital was just too crowded and they were given a hotel room (by 1864 the price of a hotel room was out of the reach of soldiers!).

At the end of the first year of war, (November 1861) the Seamen's Home site was selected to house sick and wounded Confederate soldiers; as needed, several buildings across the street could also be utilized to house sick soldiers. Keeper Williams was induced to stay on as Steward, while local physician Adam Empie Wright took the helm of the hospital. Doctor Wright quickly ordered (from local druggist William H. Lippett) over \$1,000 worth of supplies: syringes, drugs, surgical and dental instruments, in short everything from bedpans to bandages! Wright remained at the hospital until December 1861, when Doctor (Surgeon) Thomas Atkinson was placed in charge. Surgeon Atkinson did not survive the year; he died on 31 December and Doctor Wright again became Surgeon-in Charge for most of 1862. In January, 1863, Surgeon Thomas M. Ritenour was given charge of the hospital. Ritenour's tenure lasted from 1 January 1863 until September of that year. After Ritenour, Doctor Thomas R. Micks ran the hospital until the capture of Wilmington by Federal forces on 22 February 1865.³

² It is interesting to note that when Surgeon Tipten of the Confederate States' Navy became ill, he went not to the Naval hospital, but to G.H. No.4. See Chapter VI, volume 278, *Register of Patients*, 1863-1864, listed as number I in this work.

³ Record Group 109, *Letters Sent, General Hospital No.4*, 1863-1865, Chapter VI, volume 399. Letter from Surgeon Benjamin F. Fessenden, dated 17 September 1863. Dr. Fessenden, Major General W.H.C. Whiting's Medical Director, filled the void from 17 September 1863 until 23 September 1863.

In a letter to his superiors written in November 1863, Doctor Micks described the building as containing:

four buildings; the largest of which is known as the 'Seaman's [sic] Home'; this house was loaned to the Confederate Government by the Seaman's Friend Society Jan 'y. 8th 1862. One room now occupied as a storeroom was retained by the Society, which was afterward impressed by the Government at a rent of \$35 per month. It is a commodious building well adapted for Hospital purposes... except its utter want of outdoor room. Occupying all the ground attached to it, it has streets on two sides, an ally [sic] on the third and is joined to another on the fourth. Its capacity is 96 beds[.]

Surgeon Micks added that the building contained a "dispensary, store and baggage room, dining rooms" for both patients and attendants. The three buildings opposite the Home were private residences and were taken over when the battles in Virginia increased the casualty rate. One of the structures had been used as a boarding house and could handle up to forty-one men. Altogether, General Hospital No.4 could take up to 200 patients (although judging by the bed numbers assigned, that figure might be a bit low). For the buildings, the Confederate Government paid \$185 per month. Adjacent to the hospital was the "Seamen's Bethel." In addition to Chaplains holding services here, there was a reading room. The hospital was said to be one of the best in the State (even to the point of supplying mosquito netting in the summer), it was sometimes known as the "surgical" hospital; however, as far as Doctor Micks was concerned, the hospital was located in a bad spot:

“owing to its being in a central part of the city, it is difficult to keep the convalescents from straggling and the noise attendant on business on all sides is certainly prejudicial to the very sick”[.]

Doctor Micks also noted that several patients had objected to the lack of air and open space. He much preferred the openness around General Hospital No.5 (the Marine Hospital). One thing the soldiers did not complain of (at least not too often) was the food. Quartermaster regulations dictated that the sick and wounded soldiers in hospitals be fed first, followed by troops in the field and finally, those in garrison.

Judging by the hospital voucher book, the patients were fed coffee, hits, beef steaks, chicken, veal, potatoes, onions, butter, tomatoes, collards, milk and nearly every foodstuff that could be raised, grown or caught! Hospital Steward Richard Paddison made sure his charges ate fairly well; he organized a fishery to provide not only mackerel, shad and sturgeon, but also clams and oysters.⁴ In addition to items purchased from a hospital fund (funded by the \$1.25 per diem paid by the Government; later increased to \$2.50/day) donations were made by citizens and blockade running captains and owners. Since it was originally a seamen's hospital, it continued to accept mariners as patients, and although the Navy Department also had a hospital in Wilmington, many times sailors were to be found in General Hospital No.4. From the records, it would appear that there were 8 wards; rank did not matter, officers and enlisted were quartered together in the several wards.

Although hospitals were not segregated as to rank, the hospital was also open to African-Americans. They were not admitted, but, like many of the soldiers, they were usually treated and released. There is however, the case of Duncan Dudley; admitted to the hospital on June 10, 1863 he suffered from Acute Diarrhea and was given a bed in ward number 1. In place of "Post Office" (the soldier's home town) or regiment, African-Americans were simply listed as "Coloured".⁵

An interesting entry is that of James K. Jones of the 1st N.C. (artillery) Battalion. He was sent to the hospital in late July, 1862 with Remittent Fever. On the same day, , “Mrs. Jones,” (likely his wife) was also admitted to G. H. No. 4 with acute diarrhea. It is probable she came to nurse her husband and fell sick. It is also likely that she was the only female ever admitted (by the military) to the hospital.

The premises were occupied throughout most of the conflict, with the exception of the months of September-December 1862. It was at this time that yellow fever struck Wilmington; the soldiers were moved elsewhere and the hospital turned over for civilian use. After the occupation of the city, the site was used as a hospital by Union forces and the 35 or so sick and wounded Confederates left there were moved to private quarters.

Upon the building being returned to the Seamen's Friend Society in June 1865, the home was in a dilapidated condition; the mosquito nets were taken and used by Federal officers; after the war, the doors and windows were missing! Advertisements pleading for donations were placed in the newspapers, so that seamen could once again be afforded some semblance of home life and care if required, but it was some time before the Society got back on its feet. The building was finally torn down in the 1870's and a new one erected in its place. That building burned down in 1958.

⁴ National Archives, Record Group 109, Medical Department, *Book of Vouchers, of Articles Bought By General Hospital, Wilmington, No. Carolina*. See also *Letters, Telegrams and Orders Received, General Hospital No.4, 1863-65*.

⁵ Chapter VI, vol. 282, page 54, entry number 1578. In place of regiment, the words "Cav. Services" were written. There were several African-Americans admitted to the hospital throughout the war. The entry "coloured" was usually written somewhere in the record.
