100 Years of Health Care

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Advocate staff writer

Cary McNeil Clayton, an occupational therapist at Baton Rouge General Medical Center, stands in the hospital hall in front of a portrait of her great-great-grandfather, Dr. T.P. Singletary, founder of the hospital.

BR's first hospital marks century of service to community

Two severely injured passengers were entrusted to his care.

As the train victims slowly recovered, according to hospital accounts, Singletary realized that local doctors could treat their patients more efficiently if they centralized care in a community hospital. So, he built a three-story building next to his office on Florida Boulevard in 1909 and called it the Sanitarium. A group of women formed the Charity Ward Association and raised the third floor for $2 a month to treat indigent patients and later took over operation of the hospital.

It was very much a family and community-run enterprise, according to an earlier interview with the late T.J. Singletary, son of T.P. Singletary.

"I remember the rope elevator, with its platform and the big wheel going around it at the top. Dad used to pay me a quarter for operating the elevator for him."

"How excited he was, too, when he got the first

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The Sanitarium (forerunner to Baton Rouge General Medical Center) operated out of this building on Florida Boulevard in the early 1900s. CENTER: In 1923, the hospital became known as Baton Rouge General Hospital when it moved to this house on East Boulevard. RIGHT: The General moved again in 1927 to this four-story, 62-bed hospital on Government Street, now the location of Guaranty Income Life Insurance Co.
Baton Rouge General Medical Center celebrates 50 years at its Midcity location, even as it celebrates its centennial.

Photos provided by BRGMC

Baton Rouge General Medical Center — Bluebonnet became General Health's second full-service hospital here when it opened its emergency room this summer.
X-ray machine in the city. I made quarters operating that, too. It was
an upright with a glass front and,
there being no electrical current,
we had to turn a crank to generate
the current.”

John “Buck” Noland Singletary,
grandson of T.P. Singletary, said
the General has been an integral
part of his life since his earliest
recollection.

“I had my tonsils removed there,
and my two sons were born there.
It has been a source of pride with
me that both my ascendants and
descendants have had strong con-
nections with the General over the
years.”

Singletary saved the hospital
invoices from when his sons were
born. “My oldest son was born on
May 5, 1959. The room rate was
$17.50 a day; they stayed five days
and the total bill came to $209.25.
The room rate had gone up to $21
a day when my second son was
born in 1961.

“I remember when hospital
rates went up to $100 a day in
New York, and people said that could
never happen here.”

T.P. Singletary, who also served
as parish coroner and physician
for the state blind school and the
state school for the deaf, con-
tinued to be involved in the opera-
tions of the hospital until he died
of cancer in 1916.

In 1923, the hospital became
known as the Baton Rouge Gen-
eral and moved into a large house
on East Boulevard. Expansion in
1927 saw a four-story, 62-bed
building on Government Street.

The 250-bed hospital at 3600
Florida Blvd. opened in 1950 and
became the cornerstone for what
is known today as BRGMC - Mid
City. Even as the General cele-
brates its centennial this year, it is
also celebrating its 50th anniver-
sary at the Midcity location.

Other milestones BRGMC
marked through the years include:

- 1944 — Louisiana Baptist Con-
vention takes over operations and
expansion of hospital.
- 1958 — “Heart Station” cardio-
vascular program is established
with first open-heart surgery per-
formed in 1959. The General’s
Diabetes Program established to
give education support to patients
diagnosed with diabetes.
- 1969 — Louisiana Baptist Conven-
tion relinquishes responsibility
for the hospital and releases it
back to the local board of trustees.
- 1970 — The General’s Burn
Center opens to provide emergen-
cy burn care to Gulf Coast re-
region and petrochemical corridor.
- 1976 — The General’s Chemical
Dependency Unit opens.
- 1984 — General Health System
is established, merging the associ-
ated health-care products, serv-
ices and programs of the many
BRG affiliates under one opera-
tional entity.
- 1994 — Baton Rouge Gener-
al Medical Center at Bluebonnet
opens.

Next week’s dinner is the start
of a series of events commemorat-
ing the hospital’s centennial, ac-
cording to Nanette Kelley, chair-
man of the Board of Trustees for
the General Health System.

“As we celebrate our 100th anniv-
ersary, we felt it was only fit-
ing that the Singletary family be rec-
ognized as the recipient of this
year’s Excellence in General
award.

“Dr. T.P. Singletary had the vi-
sion, compassion and philan-
trropic spirit that began our hospi-
tal... This event and our celebra-
tions in the year ahead are abou-
taking the history of a community hospi-
deeply rooted in a history of car-
ing.”