

# A Step Back in Time

By Bobbie Sue Shelton-Lonas

Imagine, looking at a present-day Nashville paper and finding an article and picture which includes your grandmother! Well, that is what happened recently. Ann Marie Clark Hooper was glancing at a newspaper and saw an interesting article on St. Thomas Hospital. Reading the article, she saw her grandmother's name, Irene Hay, mentioned and could not believe it.

The paper was the June issue of the 'Nashville Retrospect', which is printed monthly, and contains pictures and articles that have previously appeared in Nashville newspapers. In 1955, Irene Hay of Eagleville had participated in an historical event, the first of its kind, in the United States. The Saint Thomas Hospital in Nashville was the first hospital in the nation to establish a fire prevention plan. During the intensive training, Irene, who was a nurse at Saint Thomas, participated in a demonstration of the efficiency of removing patients from the hospital in case of a fire. In the demonstration, Irene acted as the patient, and was carried out of the hospital, by other nurses, on a hospital bed mattress.

The picture and article was also a surprise to Irene. She had no knowledge of the article or picture ever being in the newspaper.

With permission from the Retrospect Editor and Publisher, Allen Forkum, the readers of the Eagleville Times can also enjoy the article.

The following article appeared in the Nashville Banner, June 2, 1955.

## FIRST IN U. S. WITH HOSPITAL FIRE PREVENTION PLAN

1955 - The Nashville Fire Department is staging the first extensive hospital fire prevention program in the United States.

Its first object of training is St. Thomas Hospital, where the personnel have a motto: "Every week is Fire Prevention Week." Hospitals are among the many institutions, the City Fire Department is training.

The Fire Department's indoctrination at the Maxwell House, for example, impressed authorities when an actual fire broke out recently, and occupants filed out of the building without panic and with clockwork efficiency.

Schools, hotels and businesses are also

getting the indoctrination. Each employee has a special job if a fire comes.

Members of Truck Company No. 1 put on a demonstration at St. Thomas on Wednesday, ending the current training there. City Fire Marshal Dan Hicks, Inspector Herman Slonecker and Drillmaster Maurice Schutt supervised the rescue and emergency evacuation demonstrations.

Nurses were taught that a "stretcher" easily can be improvised by tying the sheets around the mattress like bands, so that the patient is held in the trough securely; and the "bands" can be used for handles in carrying out patient and mattress. Firemen H. T. Frensley and Thomas Soule demonstrated the fireman's carry, when Frensley hauled Soule down an extension ladder from a window.

Soule later got an unusual ride to the ground, bound in a mattress, with teammates lowering him by a rope. Fireman G. E. Pidcock showed how the small but powerful "Davy fire escape" works, by harnessing himself into its chest band and descending from the third story as slowly as he cared to. The Davy will support 1100 pounds, and has gears inside its pulley box to control the speed. In a Toronto hospital fire, the Davy saved 17 lives.

Drillmaster Schutt explained that each nurse at St. Thomas now has a special duty in the event of fire. "Each baby, incubator and all, must be removed," he pointed out. "So there is a nurse for each baby. We don't want any of this carrying out one baby, then going back for another one. That takes time."

Sister Catherine, hospital administrator, keeps the staff aware of fire prevention, along with the help of Ed Shea, personnel and public, relations director. Fire extinguisher demonstrations, compulsory fire prevention films and drills are regular programs.

"Planned action saves lives," say the officials. "Know what to do!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Irene, daughter of George Washington and Bertha McCluskey Sulser, of Lincoln County, graduated from Blanche HS in 1943 and St. Thomas Hospital of Nursing in 1946. She was introduced to an Eagleville resident, David Marion "Buddy" Hay, while a student in nursing school. On June

# Eagleville Resident Participates In Historical Event



December 1949 - At her desk at St. Thomas Hospital

22, 1946 Irene and Buddy were married in Nashville, and after a few years living there, they moved to Eagleville. They are parents of two children; Peggy Marie and David Michael.

Irene started her first professional job as a registered nurse at St. Thomas Hospital on Hayes St., Nashville. Irene was traveling to Nashville working at St. Thomas as head nurse on the women's surgical floor and later held the assistant supervisor position on the medical floor for 11 years. In 1952 Irene had one of her nursing high-lights. She was taking care of Minnie Pearl's mother and one day Minnie Pearl put her arms around Irene and thanked her for taking care of her "sweet little mother". Being hugged by Minnie Pearl out in the busy hospital hallway was certainly a thrill for Irene.

During this time, Buddy was working at GE, he and Irene decided to quit going to work in two directions, so on December 26, 1961, Irene started to work at the Rutherford Hospital in Murfreesboro, which later became the Middle Tennessee Medical Center. By working in Murfreesboro, she and Buddy was able to ride to work together each day. The first year, she worked on the medical floor as a

medicine nurse, during the second year she was head nurse in the surgical unit. The rest of her employment at the hospital was as head nurse in the recovery room. In the later years, the head nurses at the hospital got a new title: Patient Care Directors.

Irene was very instrumental in the planning and building of a new "Same Day Surgery Unit" in the old Middle Tennessee Medical Center. She was asked to plan and design the new unit. She and Buddy traveled to other hospitals looking at their units and equipment until she was able to work out the plans and knew what equipment was needed. She got the unit all set up, started and worked in it until her retirement March 30, 1993, after 32 years of service. Irene's face was the first one a lot of people saw when they were waking up from surgery. During these years at the hospital Irene also helped many of her Eagleville neighbors thru surgery or during their hospital stay. She was a great comfort, not only to the patients, but to their families also.

Since Buddy's death in 2007, Irene continues to live in Eagleville, enjoying her children and their families which include several grandchildren and great grandchildren.



In the first extensive hospital fire prevention program in an American city, nurses at St. Thomas Hospital carry out a 'patient' with directions from Lt. Herman Slonecker (left and Capt. Maurice Schutt. The nurses are, left to right, Mrs. Imogene Shea, Mrs. Irene Hay (on improvised stretcher) and Miss Jane Haynie. (Image: Nashville Public Library, Special Collection Division)



Irene Hay In front of the old Middle Tennessee Medical Center