Miracle of Hickory **[1]**

Select rating No votes yet

Rate

"Miracle of Hickory"

by Richard L. Zuber, 2006

1944

The "Miracle of Hickory" refers to an emergency hospital established in Hickory during the summer of 1944 to treat infantile paralysis (polio). The descriptive name comes from the title of a pamphlet issued by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis [2] (March of Dimes) later that year. The hospital was started in response to a serious epidemic that developed in June and was centered in the Catawba Valley. When the facilities at Charlotte Memorial Hospital and an orthopedic hospital in Gastonia were filled, it became necessary to treat patients at Hickory. The ‘‘miracle’’ was the speed with which the hospital was conceived and put into operation. The decision to open a hospital was made on a Wednesday at noon, and the first patients were admitted on Saturday morning, a mere 54 hours later. The initial building was a stone structure that was already occupied as a summer camp. Army hospital tents were used throughout the summer, and several additional frame structures were built. Much of the construction and other work at the hospital was accomplished by a massive local volunteer effort. The March of Dimes [2]provided doctors and contributed more than $500,000 for the hospital. The American Red Cross [3] recruited several hundred nurses, most of whom were housed at theHotel Hickory. Numerous other specialized medical personnel came from throughout the country. Several leading medical schools, including Yale [4], Johns Hopkins [5], and Bowman Gray [6], had research teams at the hospital. Treatments at the facility were a vindication of the methods of Sister Elizabeth Kenny, who had been fighting the medical establishment for several years to substitute heat treatments, massage, and hydrotherapy for the conventional splinting and immobilization. Over 500 patients received treatment. Almost from the time it was built, the hospital was controversial. It received national publicity, particularly in Life magazine [7], and Hickory became known as ‘‘the polio city.’’ Some parents left town with their children, and shoppers and visitors were afraid to enter the area. A quarantine was in effect for several weeks. One faction wanted to keep the hospital and another group wanted to get rid of it. By December, the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis [2] believed that it should be closed. An arrangement was finally made to transfer the remaining patients to Charlotte Memorial Hospital. The last patients were moved from Hickory to Charlotte in a highly publicized motorcade on 5 Mar. 1945.

Subjects: Hospitals [8]
Medicine [9]
Public health [10]
UNC Press [11]
Authors: Zuber, Richard L. [12]
Origin - location: Catawba County [13]
From: Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press. [14]

1 January 2006 | Zuber, Richard L.

Source URL: http://ncpedia.org/history/miracle-of-hickory

Links:
[1] http://ncpedia.org/history/miracle-of-hickory

[2] http://www.marchofdimes.com/mission/history_indepth.html
[3] http://www.redcross.org/
[4] http://www.yale.edu/
[5] http://www.jhu.edu/
[6] http://www.digitalforsyth.org/photos/stories/bgsm
[7] http://life.time.com/
[8] http://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/hospitals
[9] http://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/medicine
[10] http://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/public-health
[11] http://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/unc-press
[12] http://ncpedia.org/category/authors/zuber-richard-l
[13] http://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-15
[14] http://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia-