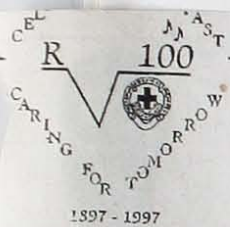




Family Medical Tradition

June 4/97



by Marjorie Lindsay

Devoted care, compassion and skill generously given to people in Renfrew and area by doctors, members of three Renfrew families, is an impressive record of family tradition. Extending over two generations, it covers the period from 1888 to the present day.

In the weeks to come articles will appear about Dr. Norman McCormack who practiced in Renfrew from 1888 - 1939, his son, Dr. Colin McCormack, 1928 - 1940 when he joined the Canadian Army Medical Corps, Dr. Edward Y. Handford, 1933 - 1987, his brother, Dr. Herbert L. Handford, 1946 - 1970's, Dr. George B. Burwell and his son, Dr. William B. Burwell, the focus of this week's article. Dr. George Burwell 1893 - 1977.

From the History of Renfrew Victoria Hospital.

Born in Horton Township, a son of William H. Burwell and his wife, the former Jane Adeline Humphries.

Education: S.S. #5, Horton; RCI; Queen's University, B.A. 1913. Graduated from Queen's Medical School in 1915. Following post graduate work in New York, 1919 - 1920, he set up practice in Renfrew in 1921.

During the First World War he went overseas with the Canadian Army Medical Corps, receiving a commission in the 22nd British Division. He served as a field ambulance medical officer in France and Macedonia and was Medical Officer of the 12th Lancashire Fusiliers and the King's Shropshire Light Infantry. He was twice mentioned in dispatches and was awarded the Military Cross and Bar. Subsequent postings were to the army hospital at Rawalpindi, India and to the 25th British Division in France. There was also a posting to #20 Casualty Clearing Station at Charleroi, France, and finally a tour of duty at a hospital in Germany.

Married: DeVee Oliphant of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1922. The family medical tradition is still continued by sons Dr. William B. Burwell of Ren-



Dr. George Burwell.

frew and Dr. Robert Burwell, and by a nephew, Dr. Douglas Burwell Guest.

Community Activities: M.O.H. for Renfrew & District for three decades. A member of the Renfrew Town Council. A charter member and president of the local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge and the Odd Fellows. An ardent curler who attended many Valley bonspiels.

In 1956 he was made permanent Chief of Staff at Victoria Hospital. Although this was usually a one-year term, the honour was given in recognition of the esteem and respect in which he was held by his colleagues. Dr. Andrew Mackie was made Assistant Chief and it was he who attended hospital board meetings.

Dr. Burwell was created a Life Member of the Ontario Medical As-

sociation in 1959 and received a Senior membership in the CMA in 1969.

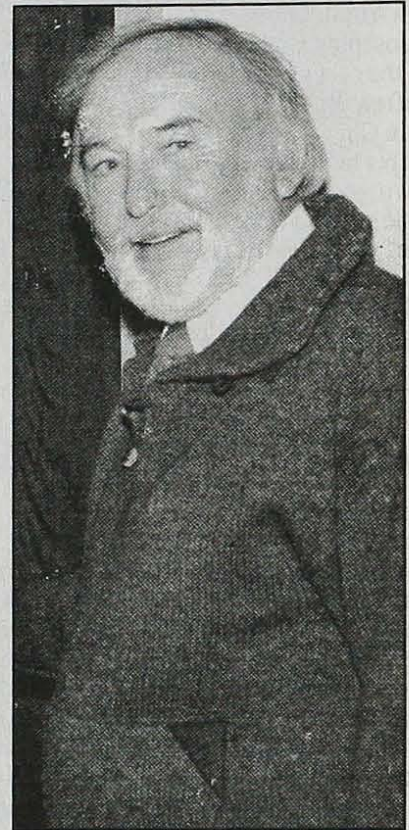
It is said that he never refused to answer a call, no matter how bad the weather was. He travelled by horse and buggy and by train. On one winter night, when called to attend a confinement at Calabogie, he sat in state on a railway hand-car while two K & P Protection men pumped the machine all the way from Renfrew. Another expedition which he recalled was the time he rode a freight train to make a Sunday afternoon call at Castleford during a bad snowstorm. He arrived safely and made the call but had to spend the night in the station, sleeping on a hard wooden bench.

When he died in 1977 the following words appeared in *The Mercury*: "Dr. Burwell was a country doctor in the very best sense. From the time he joined the British Army in the First World War until the time he stopped practising, he was caring for people most of his waking hours. There are many witnesses to that. Part of the quality he brought to medicine was liking people. That combined with a sense of humour and a strong sense of duty. Even the memory of the man does us good here in Renfrew." Dr. William B. Burwell

Dr. Bill, a graduate of RCI, studied medicine at Montreal's McGill University Medical School and established a family practice in Renfrew in 1956. He continues to be associated with Renfrew Victoria Hospital in 1997.

Care of people by Dr. George Burwell and his son, Dr. Bill represents 77 years of the 100 years that RVH celebrates this year. Like his father, Dr. Bill likes people, also has a sense of humour, and a strong sense of duty.

RVH has experienced many changes since the 1950s in the practice of medicine and in hospital administration. To mention a few — RVH became a community hospital in 1962 extending the area served by RVH to include Renfrew and nine surrounding townships, important technological advances in diagnostic medicine, introduction of hospital in-



George Burwell's son, Dr. W.B. Burwell carried on the medical tradition at the RVH.

surance by the Province of Ontario in the 1960s.

On his retirement in June 1996 after 38 years as medical director of Bonnechere Manor, home for the aged, the County of Renfrew, residents and staff honoured Dr. Burwell at a reception for his many years of service to the residents. In reply to the many accolades Dr. Burwell said, "In my time with the manor, approximately 2,300 have been residents. I feel that the residents and staff have been my friends over the years."

In February 1997 the Dr. Bill Burwell Education Resource Centre was officially opened and dedicated at Bonnechere Manor. Inside the library is a framed black and white photograph of the doctor enjoying his favourite hobby, steam engines, wearing his trademark railway cap and coveralls.