Roosevelt Hospital Historical Timeline

James Henry Roosevelt, whose bequest founded the Roosevelt Hospital, was the son of James Christopher Roosevelt (1770-1840) and Catherine Byvanck Roosevelt (1773-18??). He was also a distant cousin of President Theodore Roosevelt. James Henry was born at his family’s home on Warren Street in lower Manhattan on November 10, 1800. Following his earlier education in neighborhood schools, he enrolled in Columbia College, where his studies included law, and was graduated from there in 1819. He subsequently set up a law practice in New York City.

With his studies behind him, and his law practice established, he stood on the threshold of a promising life: Described as a young man of pleasing appearance, brown hair, above-average height and with a gentle and courteous demeanor, he was well-to-do, brilliant, and engaged to be married to Julia Boardman, who was from an old New York City family. But, suddenly, an illness that left him physically disabled struck, ending his plans for both career and marriage. The exact nature of the illness is unclear: Some speculated that it was lead poisoning from a home remedy for a cold, concocted of hot milk into which lead shot had been boiled. Others think he fell victim to poliomyelitis.

In any case, largely incapacitated, he abandoned his law practice. Not wanting to ‘burden’ Julia Boardman with his disability, he broke his engagement to her. (Neither married and both remained lifelong friends; in fact, one of the few bequests he made, outside of the one to his nephew, James C. Roosevelt Brown, and the monies left to found The Roosevelt Hospital, was an annuity for Ms. Boardman, whom he also named as executrix of his will.) James Henry then embarked on a life not just of physical limitations, but also of frugality and austerity, devoting much of his time and interests to real estate dealings and to the management of his securities; he thus increased his worth substantially. It is thought that he conserved and increased his funds for one specific purpose: to support “the establishment in the City of New York of an [sic] hospital for the reception and relief of sick and diseased persons.” Whatever the reason, when he died in 1863, he left in excess of one million dollars toward that objective.

The hospital to be founded under the terms of his will was to be a voluntary hospital that cared for individuals regardless of their ability to pay. It seems reasonable to suppose that
having himself suffered from illness, he realized the plight of those who might at the same
time be afflicted with both sickness and destitution.

It is said that James Henry was never morose or gloomy. He maintained an active interest in
the life about him and in the affairs in which he could not participate. He enjoyed the
companionship of a host of friends, one of the closest being Julia Boardman.

Although James Henry Roosevelt’s remains were first buried in his family’s vault in the
New York City Marble Cemetery, they were moved to the Roosevelt Hospital grounds when
a monument to him was placed there in 1876. Moved twice again on the hospital grounds
(hospital expansion required the moves), in late 1994 his remains were exhumed, and in the
spring of 1995 re-interred in the New York City Marble Cemetery. Julia Boardman’s
remains were interred in the same cemetery, but in her father’s vault.

Roosevelt Hospital: An Historical Timeline

1863 – James Henry Roosevelt dies November 30, leaving a large portion of his estate for
the founding of a hospital and for its permanent endowment.

1864 – James C. Roosevelt Brown, nephew of James Henry and a beneficiary of his will,
dies January 20. Under the terms of James Henry’s will, if his nephew dies without
issue and has no other heirs, which proved the case, the assets left to him were to be
added to the hospital’s endowment.

– The Board of Trustees holds its first meeting January 14 at the home of James I.
  Roosevelt, a trustee of the future Roosevelt Hospital.
– The New York State Legislature votes the Act of Incorporation of the Roosevelt
  Hospital, February 2.

1868 – The block of land between 58th and 59th Streets and Ninth and Tenth Avenues is
  purchased for the hospital at a cost of $185,000.

1869 – The cornerstone of Roosevelt Hospital is laid October 29.

1871 – Roosevelt Hospital is dedicated and opens November 2.

– A Medical Board is created to formulate medical policy, determine and enforce
  medical standards and recommend appointments and promotions.

1877 – A horse-drawn ambulance service is instituted, one of four Manhattan hospital
  ambulance services begun that year.

1881 – William Halsted, MD, organizes an outpatient ‘dispensary’ and remains its director
  until 1886. Among his endeavors while at Roosevelt Hospital, Halstead pioneers the
  use of peripheral nerve cocaine anesthesia for minor surgical operations.

1885 – Prompted by the successes of Halsted’s dispensary, the hospital plans and then opens
  a one-story outpatient building.
1886 – Richard Hall, MD, performs and subsequently reports on what is thought to have been the United States’ first survival of a patient after early surgical removal of a perforated appendix.

1888 – Charles McBurney, MD, joins the staff and assumes responsibility for the design and planning of a new operating pavilion, eventually to be named the Syms Operating Theatre.

– Robert F. Weir, MD, joins the surgical staff. Characterized as “one of the most brilliant surgeons of his time,” he pioneers in rhinoplasty; is among the first to adopt, urge and teach Lister’s methods of antisepsis; and performs the first well-documented total removal of an unequivocal brain tumor in America.

– The diseases of women division is separated from the medical service and is designated a separate gynecological service under Robert Watts, MD.

– The College of Physicians and Surgeons is rebuilt on 59th Street across from Roosevelt Hospital, and the teaching connection between the two institutions is thus firmly established.

1890 – The McLane Gynecological Operating Room opens. One of the earliest of the “new generation” operating rooms, which were completely designed for aspetic surgery, the room is the gift of Dr. James W. McLane, Roosevelt Hospital president, 1905-1912, in memory of his son, James W. McLane, Jr.

1892 – The Syms Operating Theater opens, the gift of New York City businessman, William J. Syms. Also a “new generation” operating theater, it is widely hailed in the press as a model of its kind and one of the finest, if not the finest, in the world.

1893 – McBurney originates the classic diagnostic point for acute appendicitis, henceforth known as ‘McBurney’s Point.’ He further develops the ‘muscle-splitting’ incision for appendectomy, which becomes the universal standard.

1896 – The School of Nursing is founded.

– The one-story “Ward” building is enlarged to five stories to provide additional private patient rooms and housing for nurses and interns; eventually the building is given over entirely to private patients.

– The Roosevelt Hospital Alumni Association is formed.

1897 – Thomas L. Bennett, MD, introduces the nitrous oxide-ether sequence for anesthesia at Roosevelt Hospital. Thought to be its first use in America, he goes on to design the Bennett Inhaler, for many years considered standard equipment in anesthesia administration.

1898 – Spanish-American War: Roosevelt Hospital’s Ward V is turned over to the United States Department of War to care for troops from New York/New Jersey training camps who were ill with typhoid and other epidemic diseases.
1899 – The Abraham Jacobi Ward for Sick Children opens and later becomes known as the Catherine A. Bliss Ward after the donor who endowed it. Abraham Jacobi, MD, widely known as the “father of American pediatrics,” assumes charge of the ward.

– An Accident Unit with an ambulance court opens.

1900 – The first radiology department is established and opened in the Ward Building.

– The horse-drawn ambulance service is replaced by electric vehicles that “…travel sixteen miles an hour, weigh 4,800 pounds…and cost about $3,000.00 each.”

1903 – The ambulance service reverts to horse-drawn vehicles (electric vehicles were undependable and their maintenance costs excessive).

1908 – The ambulance service is discontinued due to high operational costs, including the legal costs of frequent accidents.

1910 – Karl Connell, MD, becomes assistant surgeon. During his tenure, he develops the celebrated Connell anesthetometer, the Connell airway, and the Connell meter for measuring gas flow. He also perfects a gas mask, the Connell Mask, which is adopted and used by the armed forces during World War I.

1912 – A social service is begun “to meet the needs of distressed patients outside the hospital walls, with an emphasis on chronically ill and aged patients.”

1913 – Philip Van Ingen, MD, joins the staff as pediatrist (pediatrician) and eventually becomes director of pediatrics. In 1929 President Hoover appoints him chair of the Committee on the Medical Care of Children, the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection.

1914 – Students of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons are admitted to patient wards for bedside teaching.

1917-18 – Roosevelt’s “Mackay Unit” staffs the United States’ World War I Base Hospital No. 15 and renders “distinguished service” in Chaumont, France. The unit’s commander, Colonel Charles H. Peck, MD, is awarded the Distinguished Service Medal; four nurses receive the Croix de Guerre.

1930 – The Roosevelt Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae Association Bulletin begins publication. Eventually renamed The Roosevelt Review, it remains through 1978 a primary source of information, not only for nursing affairs, but also for much of Roosevelt Hospital’s history.

1931 – A free library service for patients opens and is widely considered a model of its kind.

1932 – New York Hospital’s Allergy Clinic, founded in 1918 by Robert A. Cooke, moves to Roosevelt Hospital. It later becomes Roosevelt Hospital’s Institute of Allergy.
– The Women’s Committee is organized to coordinate volunteer work in the hospital. It is eventually renamed Volunteer Services.

1933 – A formal Social Service Department is established.

– The Sym's Operating Pavilion is remodeled as a memorial to James I. Russell, MD, a member of the staff 1901 through 1942 and director of surgery 1936-1942.

1936 – Thomas T. Mackie, MD., joins the staff and assumes directorship of the Gray Clinic for colitis. He is also named president of the American Foundation for Tropical Medicine, an organization said to have greatly improved the health of American troops in the tropics during World War II.

1939 – The hospital resumes its own ambulance service with modern motor vehicles.

1941 – Condict W. Cutler, Jr., MD, organizes The Catastrophe Unit (also known as the Disaster Unit), the first of its kind in a New York City voluntary hospital. The Unit’s overall goal is rapid placement of teams of doctors and nurses at the site of any civilian catastrophe or at the scene of destructive enemy action.

– Roosevelt Hospital’s Catastrophe Unit aids victims of the fire aboard the French liner, *Normandie*.
– Roosevelt Hospital’s World War II Evacuation Hospital No. 9 is activated at Camp Blanding, Florida. The unit goes on to care for military personnel and civilians in North Africa, Sicily, the Italian peninsula, France and Germany.
– The Blood Bank opens.
– Dr. Cutler, a founding member of the American Society for Surgery of the Hand, publishes *The Hand, Its Diseases and Disabilities*.

1945 – Roosevelt Hospital physician Thomas T. Mackie is coauthor of *A Manual of Tropical Medicine*. The sixth edition is published nearly 30 years after his death as the classic *Hunter’s Tropical Medicine*.

1946 – Dr. Cutler is awarded the Legion of Merit for his work “…in the restoration of function of hands crippled by wounds, thus giving many members of [the] Armed Forces an opportunity to follow gainful employment occupations without the handicap of artificial appliances.” He also receives the Congressional Medal for Meritorious Service.
– The Roosevelt Hospital Medical Library Opens in September.

1949 – A pilot program in Outpatient Psychiatry begins in conjunction with the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene.
– Philip Van Ingen, MD, publishes his scholarly history, The New York Academy of Medicine: Its First Hundred Years.

1950 – The Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation is established.

1951 – J. William Littler, MD, widely acclaimed for developing techniques for restoring function and sensation to injured fingers and wrists, founds the hand surgery unit, one of the earliest in the country devoted to the comprehensive treatment of hand injuries. Currently known as the C.V. Starr Hand Surgery Center, it continues to attract patients from around the world.

1952 – Dr. Littler establishes a hand surgery fellowship program.
– The Henry Harrington Janeway Clinic for Therapeutic Radiology opens. It houses a $1,250,000 radium beam projector weighing 8,000 pounds and described as the largest in America and the most versatile in the world. The unit employs 50 grams of radium loaned to Roosevelt Hospital from Belgium’s Union Miniere du Haut Katanga. The Radium Pack is the largest ever accumulated in one unit anywhere in the world.
– Affiliation with Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons is formalized.

1953 – The nine-story Tower Memorial Building opens, housing both specialty and general medical clinics.

1955 – J. Maxwell Chamberlain, MD, chief of thoracic surgery, develops and reports on a technique of segmental pulmonary resection for the treatment of tuberculosis. The procedure is universally adopted and represents a major step in the development of the specialty of thoracic surgery.
– Garrard B. Winston, president of the Board of Trustees, dies, bequeathing nearly $4 million from his estate to the hospital.
– The New York City Board of Estimate approves a budget appropriation for 29 psychiatric beds at Roosevelt Hospital. Fifteen beds are set aside for children, making it the largest of such units in a New York City voluntary hospital.

1956 – Hospital-wide facilities are mobilized to care for passengers rescued from the stricken Italian liner, Andrea Doria.
– An outpatient psychiatric clinic for adolescents, unique in New York City voluntary hospitals, opens.

1957 – A cardio-pulmonary laboratory under the direction of Charles A. Betrand, MD, is established to diagnose and evaluate disorders of the heart, circulatory system and lungs.
1960 – The Intensive Care Unit opens, one of the first established in metropolitan New York.

1961 – The cornerstone is laid for the 12-story Garrard Winston Memorial Building.
   – Psychiatry institutes a Day Care Program and a 24-hour emergency service.
   – A new Patients’ Free Library Service, a pilot model program staffed with trained volunteers, opens and operates full-time and daily.

1962 – The Department of Pediatrics is reorganized with Edmund Joyner, III, MD, as its first full-time chief.
   – A gift of $1 million to establish a gastrointestinal service is given to the hospital by Mrs. Janet Upjohn Stearns, granddaughter of Dr. W.E. Upjohn, founder of the Upjohn pharmaceutical company.

1963 – Affiliation with Columbia University’s School of Dental & Oral Surgery is begun.

1964 – The $12.5 million Garrard Winston Memorial Building opens.
   – A clinic devoted exclusively to the care of adolescent patients opens.
   – J. William Littler, MD, publishes an upper extremity surgery chapter in Converse’s Reconstructive Plastic Surgery; it becomes widely regarded as the bible of hand surgery.

1967 – Plans are authorized for the 12-story Arthur J. Antenucci research center.

1968 – A private nurse-midwife practice opens.
   – The Board of Trustees authorizes construction of a 12-story medical research building to be named for Arthur J. Antenucci, MD

1971 – United States Senator Edward M. Kennedy holds health care cost hearings at Roosevelt Hospital.
   – R. Brinkley Smithers pledges a $10-million gift for the treatment and rehabilitation of alcoholics. It is the largest single grant ever made by an individual or agency, including the Federal Government, to combat alcoholism.

1973 – United States Senator Walter Mondale holds hearings on child abuse at Roosevelt Hospital; the following year, Mondale initiates CAPTA, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.
   – The Arthur J. Antenucci Medical Research Building is dedicated.
   – The Smithers Alcoholism Center and Rehabilitation Unit opens in the former Billy Rose mansion, 56 East 93rd Street.

1977 – Hospital Affiliates International, Inc. assumes management of Roosevelt Hospital.

1978 – Roosevelt Hospital announces plans to merge with St. Luke’s Hospital Center.

1981 – A $2.5 million state-of-the-art emergency room opens.

1985 – The Kathryn and Gilbert Miller Health Care Institute for Performing Artists opens.

1986 – The Arthur J. Antenucci Institute of Medical Research is established.

1993 – A new 13-story main hospital building opens on Tenth Avenue between 58th and 59th Streets.

1996 – The first hospital-based birthing center in New York City opens.

1997 – St. Luke’s-Roosevelt Hospital Center enters into partnership with Beth Israel Medical Center, forming Continuum Health Partners.


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