

## **Background on Mary Black** **Compiled by H. Walter Barre 6-25-08**

Who was Mary Black, this woman with a hospital, a school of nursing, and a private foundation named in her honor? And what was her connection to the health care community in Spartanburg?

Mary Louisa Snoddy was born on September 5, 1860 in Wellford, SC, the third child (second daughter) of Col. S. M. Snoddy. Growing up during the Confederate War and reconstruction thereafter .... “she knew the trials, privation, and poverty through which the South passed. ...She lived a life of consecration, service, and usefulness. She transmitted to members of her family the virtues of her forefathers: uncompromising honesty, industry, courage, and an unwillingness to ever acknowledge defeat. Her entire life was devoted to the care of her home and family, and to the welfare of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, of which she was a loyal member.” (from Hugh Ratchford Black, A Medical Pioneer by Lewis P. Jones.)

Her father was a large landowner in the county and a Col. in the Confederate army. Her tie to the medical community of Spartanburg came by way of marriage to Dr. Hugh Ratchford Black. Dr. H.R., as he was commonly called, was of Irish descent, born in 1856 in Cleveland County, NC around Kings Mountain. He received his medical training at The University of Maryland, graduating in 1883. In 1884, he loaded his belongings in a saddle bag, and with \$40 in his pocket he headed west. Upon reaching Spartanburg, he met Dr. Jesse Cleveland who convinced him Spartanburg was the land of opportunity. So he decided to stay and set up his practice in the community. He opened an office in Wellford. According to family lore, he was on the street in Wellford one day and saw an attractive young lady walking down the street. He asked somebody who she was and was told, “That’s Col. Snoddy’s daughter, Mary”, to which he replied. “I’m going to marry her.” And on January 2, 1889, he did.

They had five children: Sam, Hugh, Rosa, Mary Kate, and Paul. Sam and Hugh both became physicians and surgeons also, training at Jefferson Medical College at The Univ. of Pennsylvania, and then with the Mayo brothers in Rochester, Minn.

Dr. H.R. Black was truly a medical pioneer, doing much to improve the health of and medical conditions for Spartanburg and its citizens. Some of the “firsts” attributed to him are: first laryngeal intubation operation performed in the state in 1895, first large skin graft operation in 1897, first operation in Spartanburg County to remove stones from the bladder, first hysterectomy in the county, one of the first operations for a strangulated hernia, and in 1901 the first appendicostomy operation in SC for the relief of ulcerative colitis. (Hugh Ratchford Black by Lewis Jones)

Late in 1904, Dr. Black, Dr. George Heinitsh, and Dr. James Jefferies purchased a small frame house on North Dean Street and opened what was known as The Spartanburg Hospital. The money for it, \$3,548.38, was provided by Mrs. Mary Black. She received a mortgage, but there is no record of it ever being repaid. The facility was used for three years and contained an operating room and facilities for nine patients. City Council voted \$50 per month for six months to help it get started. In 1907, \$25,000 in capital was raised and a two story brick building with a large basement was built next door to the

original hospital. This new building became the hospital and the frame house became a nurses home. A training school for nurses had been established in 1906 and by 1909 the enrollment was 18 student nurses.

By the time of the first World War, there was considerable support for a tax-supported hospital. A referendum was held to approve a \$250,000 bond issue. Dr. H.R. Black was very instrumental in getting the referendum passed, taking ballots to a number of precincts and urging laymen to write letters to the editor in favor of the project. The Legislature finally chartered Spartanburg General Hospital in 1917, ground was broken in July of 1919, and the hospital was opened Sep.29, 1921. In Nov. 1920, the Dean Street building was sold to John B. Cleveland who established a home for aged women to be called The Georgia Cleveland Home, in memory of his wife. This building is now back into medical use as the home of St. Lukes Free Medical Clinic.

In the mid 1920's, Dr. H.R. Black participated in his final pioneer undertaking, the establishment of another new hospital, the third of his career. He and his two sons (Sam and Hugh) in January 1925 opened The Mary Black Memorial Hospital, a memorial to Mrs. H. R. Black. The hospital was the first eleemosynary corporation in SC, and operated as a tax-exempt hospital until 1996 when its assets were sold to Quorum Healthcare Corp. At the time of the sale, the proceeds (some \$60,000,000) were turned over to The Mary Black Foundation, which carries on the work of improving the health and wellness of citizens of Spartanburg County which is what Dr. H.R. was doing when he first met Mary Snoddy in Wellford in the late-1880's. Not a bad return on the \$40 he had in his pocket when he headed west.

#### Mary Black's family

##### Five children

Sam O. Black – surgeon, married Sallie Marvil from Delaware

Two children – Sam O. Black, Jr. and Shirley Black Barre

Hugh Snoddy Black – surgeon, married but no children

Rosa Black – never married

Mary Kate Black Phillips – married but no children

Paul Black – married Anna Maybry

Two children – Marianna Black Habisreutinger, Paula Black Baker

Of the four grandchildren, two are still very active in the Spartanburg Community (Marianna and Paula), as are seven great grandchildren and one great-great grandson

Wally Barre

Mary Joan Black Ryan

J.P. Baehr

Lamar Baehr

Anna Habisreutinger Converse

Paul Habisreutinger

Charles Habisreutinger

Bert Barre