

Homes of History: Pendergrass hospital still used as home

Written by By Ava Barlow, Staff Writer
Thursday, 14 April 2011 11:50 -

April 7, 2011 - Dr. John Pendergrass began the Pendergrass Hospital in Leonard circa the 1920's. The hospital originally occupied a two-story frame house on the corner of Hunt and Parmele streets in which Dr. Pendergrass had added an operating room with a skylight for better lighting. He also had the house bricked and added the west wing as probable patient rooms or exam rooms. Dr. John and Dr. Scott Pendergrass, his older brother, both used the hospital to treat and do surgery on patients.



The Pendergrass brothers, Scott, Al and John were all doctors who practiced medicine in this area, but Al lost his life while treating area families during the typhoid epidemic in 1883. The beloved Dr. Scott had purchased a lot at the first sale of lots for Leonard on July 22, 1880, and built a house on that lot. Dr. Scott practiced in the area for a total of 62 years but early in the Leonard history when faced with the typhoid epidemic in 1883 he requested Al to come help, only to be faced with the loss of his brother from the epidemic. Dr. John practiced for 50 years in the area, retiring in June of 1937.

Longtime Valley Creek resident, Howard Netherton, remembers having his tonsils removed in 1931 in the operating room with the skylight by Dr. John Pendergrass.

The original house had a coal-burning fireplace, which graced the front foyer at an angle, and a trap door allowed a person to shovel coal into the fireplace from the basement. A large parlor type room was to the right of the entry hall and a dining room with French doors was off the parlor, which is how the house sits still today. The dining room also had an east outside door to the home/office. A large kitchen occupies the northeast corner of the house and gains entrance from the dining room and a hallway off the foyer. Straight ahead from the foyer is a wide hall with an entrance to the basement and a small bathroom on the right, and a staircase on the left. Beyond the stairs is an entrance to a storage area and past the storage area is the room previously used as the operating room with the skylight, faucets for cleansing and cabinets for storing supplies. To the left of the foyer is a large bedroom with private bathroom and a private entrance into the west wing/doctor office area.

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In the storage/pantry area there is a door, which leads into the examination rooms that were added by Dr. Pendergrass. There is also a door to a laundry area and on the other side is the exit to the spacious backyard across from the stairs. The upstairs has four bedrooms, a bathroom, and a large sitting area. The floors are hardwood floors and the wide staircase makes for easy access with up and down traffic. Each upstairs room has a huge storage area/closet, which is unusual for a house built during the early 1900's. There is also a storage area under the wide staircase.

Today the basic house is pretty much original, including three light fixtures. The stairs have been painted and several of the original doors have been removed or replaced. The back sunporch is now a laundry area and has an oval doorknob, which appears to be original to the house. In the front upstairs bedroom is a chifforobe that has been encased as part of the closet area. The skylight is still in place in the operating room as well as the faucets coming out of the wall, however the sink has been removed. Some local residents remember a drain being in the floor of this room. An old sideboard still stands in the kitchen but whether it was original to the house or brought in later is unknown.

Bessie Wright owned the place and rented out rooms to boarders during an unconfirmed span of time before Dr. Davis bought the house and offices. Donna Duke Sudderth remembers starting school in 1953 and living in one of the apartments with her mother, Viola, for about three years.

"We lived in the area of the house that was used as the surgery suite where the skylight and big windows are located," Sudderth stated.

Dr. James Davis came to Leonard in 1952 and later bought the house and clinic area for his family and practice.

"Then about the third year (we were here) we bought the old Pendergrass Hospital," says a quote from Dr. James Davis. in the History of Leonard Book II. His wife added, "It had twenty rooms. He had ten and I had ten."

He practiced here for 34 years, until 1986 when Dr. Rodney Franklin brought his wife, Sherry, and young family to Leonard and took up residence in the house and began his practice. The

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Franklin's made very little changes to the house. When Dr. Franklin left in 1994 the house sold to Fred and Joyce Doty. Doty made the most significant change when he moved the fireplace from being catty corner to being flush against the north wall of the entry area. He also installed an antique mantel to the fireplace and added a very ornate mirror over the mantel. There is also an old piano in the entry hall that the current residents were told is original to the house. The Doty's sold the house to James and Debbie Gauntt who in turn sold it to Jon and Jennifer Somers. The Somers opened the house for the Christmas tour one year and Leonard residents had a good time exploring all the nooks and crannies of the old doctors hospital/office and later home.

The B. G. M. A., LLC now owns the property, having two sets of renters who live at the location. One family lives in the two-story house and the other lives in the area that used to be exam rooms for the physicians who practiced there.