A Millionaire Who Chose a Little Florida Hospital

With Wealth to Command World-Famous Experts,
James A. Allison, instead, ordered a special car
to take him to Fort Lauderdale
First Story of Edwards-Maxwell Hospital

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Although doctors had practiced in Broward County since the turn of the twentieth century, Broward’s first hospital was not established until 1922. The origins of this hospital, and an incident in its early history are the subjects of “A Millionaire Who Chose a Little Florida Hospital,” first published in 1923.

James Allison, the millionaire to whom this title refers, was a co-founder, with Carl Fisher of the Prest-O-Lite Corporation, which manufactured automobile headlights. Fisher, famous as an automotive pioneer, promoter of the Dixie Highway, and developer of Miami Beach, encouraged his partner to come to Florida. As a result, Allison opened an aquarium on Miami Beach in 1921, and invested in a number of real estate developments there, including Allison Island, which was named for him.

Dr. Scott Edwards, who had settled in Fort Lauderdale at the urging of his father-in-law, Idlewyld developer Thomas N. Stillwell, opened the city’s first hospital in the Wallace Apartment Building in 1922, and moved to the property off East Broward Boulevard the following year. Edwards’ friendship with Allison led, in 1925, to his moving to Miami Beach to take charge of the new Allison Hospital. He sold the Fort Lauderdale facility the following year to a group of doctors who renamed it Memorial Hospital.

Except for a short period in 1929 and 1930, when it was closed, the facility operated as a private hospital and sanitarium until 1939, when educator Mae MacMillan leased it for her Pine Crest School. Pine Crest occupied the site until 1965.

Some eight weeks ago, at his home in Indianapolis, James A. Allison, as widely known throughout the eastern half of the United States as he is in his own middle west and Miami and Miami Beach, was taken seriously ill.

As his illness reached the critical stage, Mr. Allison issued two orders. The first was that he be placed aboard a special car; the second was that the special car be attached to a train and sent to Fort Lauderdale and that he be removed to the Edwards-Maxwell Hospital in that city.

At that time, Mr. Allison realized the seriousness of his condition. He realized, as well, the hazards of a long trip from Indianapolis to Fort Lauderdale, but neither of these acted as an obstacle to deprive him of a desire — to be treated by one certain physician in one certain environment.

Why Mr. Allison, widely known as he is, able to select any world-famous hospital or famed specialist, should order that he be placed aboard a special car and brought to Fort Lauderdale to a new hospital, practically unknown, was the interesting question developed. Its answer causes none of its interest to be lost.

Dr. Scott Robert Edwards and the Edwards-Maxwell Hospital at Fort Lauderdale were the objectives of Mr. Allison’s desire to reach Florida, although the trip, he realized, was full of hazards. The story of Dr. Edwards and his hospital, now little more than a year old, will in time take its place among the romances of Florida development.

One year ago last April, or in April 1922, to be exact, Dr. Edwards, a young practicing physician in the city of Indianapolis, with a wide acquaintance throughout Indiana and reputed as among the best in his profession, was told that his close application to his work was wrecking his own health. He was advised that he had neglected himself for the service of others, to such an extent that only a change of climate would save him. He was told to go to California or some other location in the southwest, and he prepared accordingly.

Before his departure for Los Angeles, where he planned to begin practicing, Dr. Edwards decided to first visit Thomas N. Stillwell (Stilwell) at Fort Lauderdale. Mr. Stillwell’s old home is at Anderson, Ind. When Dr. Edwards reached Fort Lauderdale, he made some discoveries.

He had always been interested in institutional work as a physician and surgeon. He was first struck with Florida sunshine, and decided that the sunshine belt of Florida was providing 15 degrees higher temperature during the winter than that found in California. He found, also, that the atmosphere carried a minimum amount of precipitation during the winter months, and that during 60 per cent of the time, the prevailing winds were from the ocean.

Next, Dr. Edwards looked into other possibilities. With this climatic condition, he believed, there should be some institution providing facilities to care for the chronically ill, or those persons sufficiently ill to necessitate institutional care in a mild climate. It was his opinion that the ill in the north should be provided with some means of being removed to a better climate, and there,
in the new atmosphere, be given institutional treatment as good as any found in the country. Along with his discovery of remarkable winter climatic conditions here, Dr. Edwards found a lack of any such institution as he had in mind, and from that moment Los Angeles lost a permanent citizen and Fort Lauderdale and Florida gained far more than is generally realized.

Dr. Edwards removed from Indianapolis to Fort Lauderdale, and began, in a small way, the Edwards hospital, which was to be an institute equipped to care for the chronically ill in need of institutional treatment. His beginning was necessarily small. At first he started his idea in an apartment in Fort Lauderdale.

Soon he realized that there was a demand for his character of treatment. Others in Fort Lauderdale also could see the possibility for a great work. Among those who became interested was Frank Stranahan of Fort Lauderdale, whose reputation as a public spirited citizen is well known in the Broward county seat, because he has a hobby, and that is the development of Fort Lauderdale.

Mr. Stranahan had in his possession, in a subdivision, a very favorable site for a sanitarium or hospital. He set aside four and one-third acres of ground, and made Dr. Edwards a present of that land. W. C. Kyle of Fort Lauderdale was also interested, and he turned his efforts toward assisting Dr. Edwards. According to Dr. Edwards, Mr. Kyle did more toward completion of the idea than any other one person as he made it possible for a sanitarium to be built.

Then the building, a handsome stucco structure of two stories, located on a rolling piece of ground, just east of the city of Fort Lauderdale, was completed. It contained rooms for 16 patients, and a surgical room equipped perhaps as well as any like room in the United States, including X-ray machine and other and vital apparatus.

A little more than two months ago, the hospital was declared completed, and was christened the Edwards-Maxwell hospital.

Dr. Edwards has a partner in his enterprise, a partner almost as interesting as he. The other is Dr. Leslie H. Maxwell, a graduate of Indiana University, with an additional two years in Germany before the war and a year in the University of Paris, also before the war. During the world war, Dr. Maxwell was decorated by the French government for services performed in the medical field. Recently Dr. Maxwell completed a postgraduate course at the University of Montpelier.

To complete an efficient staff for the direct management of the institution, Drs. Edwards and Maxwell employed Miss Corlie Brady as head nurse. Miss Brady is a graduate of St. Vincent's hospital, Indianapolis, and for three years was surgical supervisor there. She was for two years assistant superintendent of nurses in the Middle Georgia Sanitarium at Macon, Ga., and then came to the Edwards-Maxwell hospital.

Thus the two physicians, young in years, but old in experience, became pioneers in Florida in a different field of endeavor. They set to work at their new institution, and began its development.

Already it is indicated that changes for enlargement will be necessary, and to solve this problem before it becomes too great they have decided upon a unique plan. About a formal garden being developed at the rear of the main building there are being erected 25 small bungalows for patients.

Each of these bungalows will be provided two rooms and a bath, and patients in them will receive the same treatment as they would in the larger main building. The environment of these little patient homes is to be made particularly attractive, for those who are, unfortunately, compelled to take institutional treatment even in Florida sunshine.

Three years ago, in Indianapolis, Mr. Allison suffered from an attack of bronchial pneumonia. At that time he was treated by Dr. Edwards. Several weeks ago it became necessary that Mr. Allison undergo an operation in the nose. The distress of the operation was sufficient to cause a general physical break, and his heart was given severe punishment by a long, continued temperature. His condition was considered critical. At about the time the worst point was reached, Mr. Allison found that Dr. Edwards new sanitarium had been opened in Fort Lauderdale and although the hospital was without a reputation, or anything of the kind, Mr. Allison insisted that he be, and he was, brought to the care of Dr. Edwards.

"I kind of beat the devil again," Mr. Allison said, good humoredly beginning the first interview given since he was taken ill. "I came here a very sick man. I didn't think much of myself, that's true, but I knew Dr. Edwards would fix me up all right, and he has."

Mr. Allison, according to Dr. Edwards, was very seriously ill, but he is now rapidly recovering, although it will be months yet before a complete recovery can be looked for.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Allison took occasion to talk of the aquarium at Miami Beach, and its future this winter.

"I am receiving daily reports on the progress of the program for the coming year, and the aquarium will be thrown open to the public again on December 15," Mr. Allison said. "The force will start to work in about ten days, gathering specimens, and the traps are being set now for more hardy stuff than has heretofore been exhibited."

"Captain Thompson and others of the old force will be employed again this season, and I hope the exhibit will [line missing] . . . and Miami Beach visitors."

Edwards-Maxwell Hospital, 1923.