



James M. Jackson, M.D., started what is now known as Jackson Memorial Hospital.

‘A Friend to All Humanity’

James M. Jackson, M.D., became part of Florida medical history.

By E. Russell Jackson Jr. and Glenn E. Bryan, M.D.

The world famous Jackson Memorial Hospital owes its existence to the son of a country doctor who became Miami’s first physician and a leader in organized medicine. James M. Jackson, M.D., the FMA’s 30th President, started the Miami City Hospital, which was later named in his honor and is now the teaching hospital for the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

Dr. Jackson had another extraordinary connection: His mother, Mary Glenn Shands, was the great aunt of the late Sen. William Augustine Shands, who served as Florida Senate President in 1957 and was a leading advocate for the establishment of the University of Florida College of Medicine in Gainesville. Shands Teaching Hospital is named for the senator. Though he died relatively young at age 58 in 1924, Dr. Jackson made a lasting impact on medicine in Florida, the state of his birth.

FAMILY TRADITION

Dr. Jackson's father, James Madison Jackson, M.D., was born in 1831 in Chester District, South Carolina, and graduated from the Medical College of New Orleans, later known as Tulane University. The elder Dr. Jackson settled in White Springs in northern Florida on the banks of the Suwannee River. In 1858, he married South Carolina native Mary Glenn Shands, and they moved to what is now Sanford, Fla. The 1860 Census listed him as the only qualified physician there.

Dr. Jackson served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War in the Florida Cavalry and in other companies as a surgeon. After the war, he returned to White Springs where the Jackson's son, James Mary Jackson, was born on March 10, 1866. Two years later the family moved to Levy County and the town of Bronson, just west of Gainesville, where the elder Dr. Jackson would serve as the area's country doctor for the rest of his career. He opened a drug store, owned citrus groves, served as mayor of Bronson, its postmaster, and superintendent of the Bronson Methodist Church.

In 1881, the elder Dr. Jackson attended the Florida Medical Association Annual Meeting in Tallahassee and was elected Second Vice President. He continued to pay his annual dues to the FMA almost to the time of his death in 1911.

MAKING HISTORY

The younger James Jackson attended East Florida Seminary in Gainesville, a predecessor of the University of Florida, and received a bachelor's degree from Emory University in 1885. Wanting to follow in his father's footsteps as a physician rather than manage the family's citrus groves, he entered the Bellevue Hospital Medical College in New York City that year. He later returned to Bellevue, graduated the following spring with his M.D. degree, and joined his father's medical practice in Bronson.

To people's surprise today, Bronson had at that time about 5,000 residents and could support two physicians. However, freezes in 1894 and 1895 destroyed much of the citrus trees in the Florida, leading large numbers of people to leave Bronson.

Miami was one part of the state that had escaped the freeze, which inspired industrialist Henry Flagler to extend his Florida East Coast Railroad even further south from Lake Worth to the newly developing town of Miami. There, Flagler would build Miami's first luxury hotel, the Royal Palm, and attract settlers and tourists who would need a physician.

After young Dr. Jackson had practiced with his father in Bronson for eight years, Flagler asked him to be his physician in residence for the Florida East Coast Railroad in Miami. In March of 1896, Dr. Jackson took Flagler's railroad to Fort Lauderdale, then its southern most terminus, and went by boat the rest of the way. He thought at first that the rudimentary town, with its unpaved roads and unpainted buildings, was not a great place to live. But unable to leave by any means that day, he stayed for several days and the town's leaders persuaded him to move there. He wrote his wife, Ethel Barco, "This Miami spirit is a great thing. It is infectious." When Miami was incorporated in July of 1896, he was the sole physician residing in Miami.

In addition to his duties as the railroad surgeon, he was appointed in May of 1896 as the local health officer for the Florida State Board of Health by the State Health Officer, Joseph Yates Porter, M.D. When the Royal Palm Hotel opened in January of 1897, Dr. Jackson also became the hotel physician. He brought and enforced basic sanitation measures, organized the Miami City Board of Health, and as the County Health Officer quarantined the city during the yellow fever epidemic of 1899. Dr. Jackson built his office and surgery behind his home in downtown Miami on what is now N.E. 2nd Ave. The building was moved in 1917 to its present location at 190 S.E. 12 Terrace and has been designated as a historic site.



Miami City Hospital, now Jackson Memorial, is shown in 1918.

Community leaders recognized early on that Miami needed a hospital within the city limits. Tourists and indigents became ill and Miami had no place to care for them. An emergency hospital had been erected during the yellow fever epidemic of 1899, and Drs. Jackson and Porter were in charge until the hospital was burned to the ground after the epidemic. Also that year, Flagler erected a framed hospital building with the proviso that the city equip, staff, and administer the hospital. The city was unable to raise the necessary funds, so he turned the building into an apartment house.

As Flagler began to extend his railroad in 1905 south of Miami towards Key West, large work gangs arrived in Miami, and the apartment house was reconverted to a hospital with Dr. Jackson in charge. The Friendly Society Hospital was also established in 1909, but neither of these first facilities was adequate for the burgeoning city. After organizing the City Board of Health, Dr. Jackson was elected its President and tasked with building a new city hospital. Miami City Hospital opened its doors in June of 1918 with Dr. Jackson as its first President.

COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZED MEDICINE LEADER

Dr. Jackson was a civic leader who was involved in numerous community activities. He was a founder and first President of the Rotary Club of Miami in 1917, and a charter member of the First United Methodist Church of Miami. He and his wife had two daughters, Ethel and Helen. Their infant son died soon after birth.

From the very beginning of his medical career, Dr. Jackson was actively engaged in organized medicine. While still practicing with his father in Bronson, he attended the 1895 FMA annual meeting in Gainesville. As Miami's first physician, he was a leader among the physicians who followed him there. A founder of the Dade County Medical Association in 1903, he became its second President in 1905 and served another term in 1923. Dr. Jackson was inaugurated as FMA President in 1905, and in his Presidential Address at the 1906 FMA Annual Meeting in Gainesville, he called for physician unity. In 1911, he served as President of the Southern Medical Association.

When Dr. Jackson died on April 2, 1924, of a lung infection, local businesses closed for a day to mourn his passing. The Miami City Commission renamed the Miami City Hospital to the James M. Jackson Memorial Hospital in his honor. In the decades since, Jackson Memorial Hospital has grown into the comprehensive health care system and teaching hospital that we know today.

The original 1918 City of Miami Hospital building named for Dr. Jackson is affectionately known as the Alamo, where residents and medical students worked and slept. It is the centerpiece of the 76-acre University of Miami/Jackson Health System campus and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Dr. Jackson is buried in the City of Miami cemetery.

The May 1924 issue of *The Journal of the Florida Medical Association* dedicated two full pages to Dr. Jackson's memory. A tribute on the second page reads in part: "A friend to all humanity – the memory of James M. Jackson will be held in one of loved reverence and respect by all who knew him. ... Dr. Jackson devoted his life to the relief of suffering humanity. His services were as much at the command of the needy as the affluent, a call of distress was a call to duty – and with him he never swerved where duty called. He lived a beautiful life."

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