The 1930s—A Decade of Service

If the 20s laid the physical foundation for what would evolve into a complex and valuable institution in the community, then it can be said that the 1930s set the spiritual and moral tenor of the hospital that would elevate it to become one of Harlingen's most admired institutions.

It was Hurricane No.11, later popularly known as the Labor Day Hurricane of 1933, that put the hospital to a major test. The category 3 storm with winds well over 100 mph made a direct hit on Harlingen and San Benito on September 5. The severity of the storm can best be measured by providing the single statistic that 40 Valleyites died due to its furiousness. The hospital immediately came to be the center of relief for the numerous injured. So many required care that some of the hospital's doctors performed their services at the Reese-Wil-Mond Hotel where people had taken shelter. Fortunately, word of the impending storm had reached point further north in Texas and additional aid was soon on the way. A relief train from San Antonio arrived on Wednesday the 6th together with a hospital unit from Fort Sam Houston. The army medical unit consisted of 177 enlisted men, 12 officers, 5 nurses, 2 ambulance companies, and a hospital company.

The mayors of San Antonio and Houston had acted expeditiously upon learning of the turn of events. The former organized a train by Tuesday afternoon and rode along with it. The consist had six baggage cars with supplies and food, coaches carrying 60 nurses and 50 doctors, and even a tank car with drinkable water in anticipation that the municipal supplies would become contaminated. The train organized by Houston's mayor had ten coaches with doctors and nurses and a carload of supplies. At Robstown another car was picked up. It carried 18 nurses and 18 doctors. Soon two train cars from Dallas and one from Austin were on the way.

To accommodate the many injured citizens, many large tents were erected in the spacious front lawn of the hospital. If it looked like a war zone, it almost was. The Salvation Army was on the scene early, furnishing simple meals and sandwiches to the hard-pressed doctors, nurses, and security personnel. The Army also asked nothing in return. During and following the disaster, the mettle of the hospital staff had been severely tested, and it had come through with flying colors.

Each of the early VBH doctors obviously has a story worth telling, but space limitations prevent that here. One interesting story however illustrates the all-embracing philosophy of the hospital. It deals with husband and wife doctors, the Lamms. In addition to their Valley Baptist Hospital work, where Anna was an anesthetist and also delivered babies, they had a general practice for years in La Feria. Heinrich and Annie Lamm were German Jews, who as Hitler became increasingly oppressive, fled to the United States in the 1930s. After settling in New Jersey where their ship landed, they went to Kansas City in 1937 then later came to the Valley in 1939 and made their home in La Feria. The Corning Glass Museum in New York has an item connected with Heinrich Lamm. Heinrich's son had contributed a newspaper article concerning a discovery his father had made as a medical student in Germany in 1930. Doctors were searching for a non-intrusive way to examine parts of the human body. Heinrich had put together a packet of thin flexible glass rods which could bend and go around sensitive organs. These could conduct light and images thereby providing the physician a view of body conditions.
heretofore inaccessible. He had, in effect, created one of the first fiber optic devices if not the first.
Such dedicated individuals as the Lamms and their medical associates, together with the hospital staff, strengthened the ties with the community that would one day make the hospital a great and dependable resource.