

Doctor's Work Changed State's Attitude

Dr. Charles Frederick Williams, a native of York County, was appointed superintendent of the State Hospital by Gov. Richard Manning in 1915.

The "insane asylum" had received meager appropriations for many years. The buildings were in terrible shape. The previous superintendent, Dr. James Babcock, a native of Chester, had struggled to improve conditions but could not cope with a hostile legislature and, after tangling with Gov. Cole Blease, had resigned.

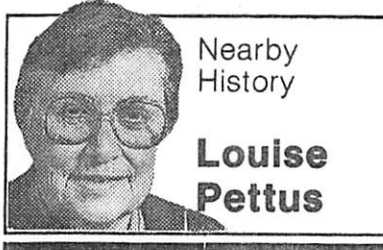
Normally, the legislature appoints the state hospital superintendent but Manning, a progressive with unusual political skills, would not wait on the legislature. Manning wanted Williams and paid his first year's salary out of his own pocket. Williams could have made more money in private practice but accepted the appointment as his duty.

Williams was born in York County in 1875, the son of Leroy Russell Williams and Virginia Wallace Williams. As a very small boy on a farm, Fred, as he was called, liked to tend to the sick

animals. In his neighborhood he was soon known as "the Little Doctor." The rest of his life, he listed "Dogs" as his hobby.

The boy grew up determined to become a physician. He attended the University of Maryland and received a degree in medicine in 1899. Williams returned to York County to practice for three years and then joined the U.S. Army Medical Service as an assistant surgeon. After two years, he resigned to start a private practice in Columbia.

Popular and highly respected as a Columbia doctor, Williams, at the age of 32, was appointed State Health Officer. Four years later he resigned to go to Europe for gradu-



Nearby
History

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ate work. While there he took courses in psychiatry and became fascinated with the topic of mental illness.

Williams predecessor, Babcock, along with doctors from the U.S. Health Department, had identified pellagra as the disease that sent more South Carolinians to the state hospital than any other cause. They discovered that pellagra resulted from a lack of niacin in the diet. South Carolina's poor ate mainly the "Three Ms," meat, meal and molasses. The meat was fatback. The cornmeal was not enriched. Too often, the result was disorientation.

Babcock's pioneering work had been on the physical causes of mental illness. Williams was to bring a new viewpoint to the state hospital. He believed that patients needed to have active minds and pleasant surroundings. His therapy was clean buildings, flower gardens and the right kind of work to keep the patients busy and happy along with a proper diet.

Manning persuaded the legislature to increase appropriations to clean and paint buildings and add

new ones. For the first time there was money for arts, crafts, baseball games, tickets for the circus, a full-time minister, etc.

In all areas, Williams hired specialists. He also established mental health clinics in eight S.C. towns. Rock Hill was one center. Teachers for the clinics were trained at colleges. Winthrop College cooperated in the training of these teachers.

More than anything else, Williams created a new attitude in the state toward mental illness. South Carolina became a national leader in the field.

Honors were heaped on Williams. He served as president of the S.C. Medical Association, the S.C. Hospital Association, the S.C. Conference on Social Work, vice-chairman of the Section on Preventive Medicine of the American Medical Association, and in 1934 was elected president of the American Psychiatric Association. In all cases he served with distinction.

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