

# Doctor was well known for his genius, X-rays

*But he also used the medical plates for his wife's greenhouse*

## NEARBY HISTORY



Louise Pettus

"cutting edge."

In 1919, the editor of *The Yorkville Enquirer* came over to Rock Hill's Fennell Infirmary to have Dr. William Wallace Fennell remove a wart from under his eye. When that was accomplished, Dr. Fennell invited A.M. Grist to stay and observe an operation he was doing on an ex-soldier's badly shattered arm. An Army surgeon had left the young fellow's arm in horrible condition.

Fennell had the reputation of being a genius: a doctor so skilled that many others came to observe his techniques. From all accounts, Fennell thoroughly enjoyed acting as a teacher and demonstrating surgical practices that were

X-ray specialist.

Grist was told that the new X-ray machine, a product of the International X-ray Company, would be used to cure skin cancers and "tonsilar disorders." Unlike previous X-ray machines, this one didn't keep the doctor waiting for development. Grist viewed his own hand and recognized a damaged finger that he had hurt in a baseball game 15 years before.

Not only broken bones were demonstrated, but there were plates showing gallstones, tubercular damage to lungs, and stomach and kidney disorders. Simpson told Grist that the machine was wonderful in treating diseased tonsils. "No, we don't burn the tonsils out with the machine. We dry 'em, as it were."

A visitor asked Simpson what had happened to hundreds of X-ray plates he had seen on an earlier visit. The doctor responded,

"I've still got a good many of them around, but the most of them I carried to my residence and built a flower house for Mrs. Simpson. The glass is ideal for that purpose, you know."

Grist observed that "broken bones certainly serve a noble purpose by shielding beautiful and tender flowers from the winds and the cold."

Fennell had moved to Rock Hill in 1898. Some accounts give Fennell credit for opening the first York County hospital around 1900. Others say that honor should be given to doctors T.J. Strait and Thomas Crawford, who used a small house on Hampton Street to perform operations during the late 1890s.

Along with the infirmary, Fennell operated a school for nurses. The first trainer was an English nurse sent to Fennell by Dr. Gill Wylie. Her name has since been lost, but she is said to have been

trained by Florence Nightingale.

The Fennell Infirmary reputation was firmly based on the highly skilled surgical hands of Fennell. Medical emergency cases from all over the Piedmont were likely to be loaded on the first train headed for Rock Hill.

Fennell was the surgeon for the Seaboard Airline Railway and general surgeon for the Southern Railroad, which cooperated with him to the extent that they would clear the tracks if Fennell needed to reach a patient in a hurry. The Confederate Avenue rail crossing was known as the Fennell Infirmary Crossing.

In 1924, Fennell suffered a stroke and died just before he was scheduled to deliver a paper before a meeting of the American Cancer Research Society.

Louise Pettus is a retired Winthrop University history professor. Her column appears Sundays.

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The Charlotte Observer  
C O N N E C T I N G

# Commentary

## Senate reins lie in South

*Democrats could lose 3 Southern seats, possibly more*

The South is shaping up as a key battleground for control of the U.S. Senate in 2004, which is terrible news for the Democrats.

The most significant races that will determine the outcome are here, in the GOP's bedrock.

The Senate consists of 50 Republicans, 49 Democrats and one independent.

In 2004, Democrats must defend three Southern U.S. Senate seats, and possibly more:

- Ernest "Fritz" Hollings of South Carolina chose to retire rather than seek a seventh full term after 38 years in office.

- John Edwards of North Carolina chose to campaign full-time for the Democratic presidential nomination.

COMMENTARY



"If the Republicans win Senate seats in the Carolinas and Georgia next year (all quite possible), they'll hold all of the U.S. Senate seats in seven contiguous Southern states starting in Virginia and stretching around to Mississippi," Stuart Rothenberg, a Washington-based analyst, writes in the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call.

Georgia Democrats have had a difficult time recruiting a U.S. Senate candidate. Former Atlanta mayor and U.N. ambassador Andrew Young was the latest to decline.

"The problem the Democrats have is, they have some viable candidates, but they aren't interested in running for the U.S. Senate," says Emory University political analyst Merle Black. "They're all focused on regaining control of state government."

