

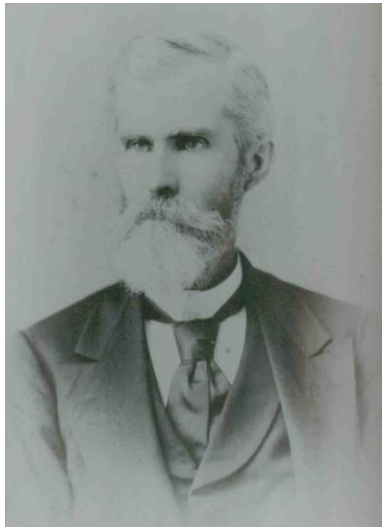
Superintendents and Directors of Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute



By Cheryl A. Veselik

Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute was known as Southwestern Lunatic Asylum from 1887 - 1902 and as Southwestern State Hospital from 1902 - 1980.

Southwestern Virginia
Mental Health Institute
340 Bagley Circle
Marion VA 24354
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Harvey Black, M.D. 1887 -- 1888

Dr. Harvey Black was the first Superintendent for Southwest Virginia Lunatic Asylum and served from 1887 until his death in 1888.

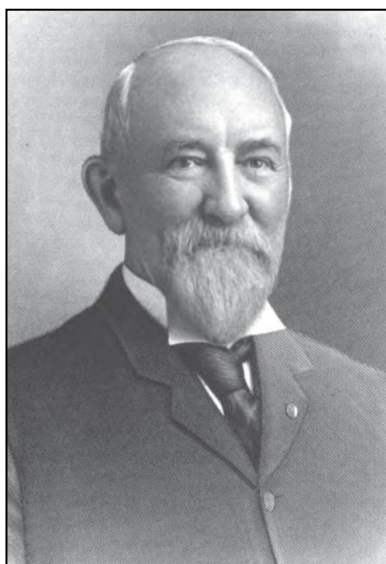
Harvey Black (1827-1888) was a native of Blacksburg and a grandson of Blacksburg town founder John Black. Harvey Black and John S. Apperson served together in the 4th Virginia, 1st Brigade during the Civil War. Black was a regimental surgeon and Apperson was a hospital steward under his command. (Harvey Black did not use the e in his given name, but as an adult he regularly signed his name as H. Black and he was almost always identified publicly as Harvey Black.) After attending local schools, he began studying medicine under two local doctors. In 1847, he volunteered to serve in the Mexican War in the 1st Regiment Virginia Volunteers; three months later, he was made a hospital steward. He entered medical school at the University of Virginia in 1848 and graduated in June 1849. That fall, he took a four-month journey, on horse-back, from western Virginia through the upper Mid-West as far west as Iowa. He decided to settle in Blacksburg and opened a medical practice there in 1852.

The same year, he married Mary Kent of Blacksburg. On August 2, 1861, Harvey Black was appointed regimental surgeon in the 4th Virginia, 1st Brigade, known as the Stonewall Brigade. John Apperson, who had enlisted with the Smyth Blues of Smyth County, Virginia, in April 1861, was appointed hospital steward under the command of Harvey Black in March 1862. Black and Apperson served together with the 4th regiment until late 1862. They provided medical care to the wounded at first Manassas, second Manassas, and the Battle of Fredericksburg. In late 1862, Black was appointed surgeon of the field hospital of the Second Corps, Army of Northern Virginia, and brought Apperson with him. Both served in this hospital until the end of the war, taking care of recuperating soldiers who were wounded of the Second Corps' major engagements, including the Battle of Chancellorsville in 1863 and the Spotsylvania Campaign in 1864. Black assisted Hunter Holmes McGuire with the amputation of Stonewall Jackson's arm on May 3, 1863.

After the Civil War, Harvey Black resumed his medical practice in Blacksburg. He was elected president of the Medical Society of Virginia in 1872. He played an instrumental role in the founding of the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College in Blacksburg in 1872. He was the first rector of the Board of Visitors. From 1876 to 1882, Harvey Black was Superintendent of the Eastern Lunatic Asylum in Williamsburg. In 1884, he was appointed to the board of a proposed state mental hospital for southwestern Virginia.

In 1885, he was elected to represent Montgomery County in the House of Delegates and served two sessions. In the House, he influenced the decision to locate the new hospital in Marion. In 1887, Black became the first superintendent of the new Southwestern State Lunatic Asylum in Marion. He appointed John S. Apperson assistant physician there. Harvey Black died in Richmond in October 1888 and was buried in Westview Cemetery in Blacksburg.

References: Glenn L. McMullen, "Tending the Wounded: Two Virginians in the Confederate Medical Corps," *Virginia Cavalcade*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Spring 1991), 172-183; *A Surgeon with Stonewall Jackson: The Civil War Letters of Dr. Harvey Black*, edited by Glenn L. McMullen (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1995); *biographical sketches of John S. Apperson*, by Glenn McMullen; and *Harvey Black*, by Crandall Shiflett; in John T. Kneebone, J. Jefferson Looney, Brent Tartar, and Sandra Gioia Treadway, eds., *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Vol. 1 (*The Library of Virginia*, 1998), 181-183; Germanicus A. Kent: *Founder*.



**Robert J. Preston, M.D.
1888 -- 1906**

Robert J. Preston, M.D. served as the second Superintendent of Southwest Lunatic Asylum from 1888 until 1906. He also had the second-longest length of service as Superintendent with approximately 18 years.

Dr. Robert John Preston was born January 25, 1841, at "Locust Glen," near Abingdon in Washington County, Virginia. He was the son of John Fairman Preston and Jane Rhea, and married Martha E. Sheffey, daughter of Eleanor Fairman Preston and Judge James White Sheffey, on October 19, 1875. His second wife was Mrs. Elizabeth Gravely, nee Stuart. He had three children.

Dr. Preston attended Abingdon Academy and later Emory and Henry College from 1859-1861, until the Civil War began and the secession of Virginia occurred. He immediately enlisted in the Confederate Army and was elected first lieutenant. When the Washington Independents were ordered to Richmond, he resigned his office and reenlisted as a private in the Washington Independents. His company was eventually reorganized and his regiment joined the army at Winchester under Stonewall Jackson.

Dr. Preston was later transferred to Company C of the 21st Virginia Cavalry and was made first lieutenant and later promoted to Captain. At Appomattox, Capt. Preston was with the cavalry

corps which drove back the enemy on the right of General Lee's line, when the announcement of the surrender was made.

During the Civil War, his family was left with only a few hundred acres of land which had been stripped of horses, cattle, and almost everything that could be used to support a family. Following the Civil War, he became a teacher of languages at the Abingdon Academy, and at the same time, read medicine with his uncle, Dr. Robert Alexander Preston. His teaching position gave him the opportunity to save enough money to study medicine at the University of Virginia and graduate in 1867. He continued his post-graduate work in New York, and was awarded many honorary degrees.

In 1887, Dr. Preston was appointed as first assistant physician at the Southwest Lunatic Asylum, and in November, 1888, he was promoted to Superintendent, following the death of Dr. Black. He served as superintendent until his death in 1906.

Additionally, he authored many valuable medical essays, hospital reports, and addresses as President of several medical societies. Dr. Preston became President of the Virginia Medical Society in 1894 after being a member for 23 years, and was awarded an honorary fellowship in 1895. In addition, he received honorary fellowships from the Lynchburg, Virginia, Academy of Medicine and the Boston Gynecological Association. He was also President of the American Medico-Psychological Association from 1901-1902.

On August 20, 1906, while on his way to Toronto, Canada, where he was to deliver an address before the British Medical Association, Dr. Preston was taken ill and died suddenly at Lewistown, New York. He is buried in Wytheville, Virginia.

References: *American Psychiatric Association, Robert J. Preston, M.D. biography; "Men of Mark in Virginia: A collection of Biographies of the Leading Men in the State" by Lyon G. Tyler, LL.D., Volume 5, 1909; "The Institutional Care of the Insane in the United States and Canada" by Henry M. Hurd et al, Volume IV, 1917; "The American Journal of Insanity" by Henry M. Hurd, M.D., et al, Volume LXIII, 1906-1907.*



Albert S. Priddy, M.D. 1906 -- 1908

Dr. Albert Priddy, served as third Superintendent of Southwestern State Hospital from 1906 to 1908.

Dr. Albert Priddy, one of seven children, was born on his father's farm in Lunenburg County, Virginia, on December 7, 1885, the son of Robert and Martha (Gaulding) Priddy.

Dr. Priddy received his preparatory education in an academy at Keysville, then known as the Shotwell Institute; and from there he attended the College of Physicians and Surgeons in Baltimore, Maryland, graduating in 1886 at the age of 20.

Dr. Priddy was a member of numerous medical societies including the American Psychiatric Association, Association of Southern Railway Surgeons, the Association of Norfolk and Western Surgeons, Virginia State Medical Society, of which he served as Vice President, as well as the Southwest Virginia Medical Society, serving as its President from 1907 - 1908. He also served as President of the National Association for the study of Epilepsy in 1914 - 1915.

From 1893 - 1894 and again from 1900 - 1901, Dr. Priddy represented Charlotte County, Virginia in the House of Delegates. During his service to the General Assembly, he served on numerous committees, and was one of the authors of the first law providing pensions for Confederate soldiers who had become disabled since the war. In the 1899-1900 session, Dr. Priddy was the patron in the House of a bill which became a law, providing for the government of the state hospitals for the insane and the care of the insane.

Dr. Priddy was appointed as assistant physician at Southwestern Lunatic Asylum in 1901, and in 1906, he was elected Superintendent. He resigned in 1908 due to ill health, but in April 1910, Dr. Priddy became the Superintendent of the State Colony for Epileptics and Feebleminded (now Central Virginia Training Center) in Lynchburg, Virginia. Dr. Priddy was central to the eugenics movement [*eugenics is a science theory developed in the late nineteenth century concerned with improving hereditary qualities in the human population by encouraging persons who are considered above average mentally and physically to have more children, and discouraging offspring from parents of lesser mental and physical abilities*] in Virginia, and, at the encouragement of the Colony's board of directors, he sterilized between 75 and 100 young women without their consent between 1910 and 1918. Together with his friend and state legislator, he helped to author Virginia's sterilization law, which outlined the process to be followed, including appointing a guardian, hearings, and court appeals. In 1924, the Virginia General Assembly enacted a law permitting forced sterilization of "feeble-minded" or "socially inadequate person[s]."

In November of 1924, Dr. Priddy testified in a case before the Circuit Court of Amherst County, *Buck v. Priddy* [later *Buck v. Bell*], that Carrie Buck “would cease to be a charge on society if sterilized.” The Circuit Court ultimately upheld the law and ordered the sterilization of Carrie Buck after the death of Dr. Priddy in 1925.

Sterilization of persons with intellectual disabilities still continued in the United States until the mid-1970's. However, by the close of the twentieth century, the *Buck v. Bell* decision had not yet been overturned.

References: “History of Virginia: Albert Sidney Priddy,” University of Virginia Library; “Supreme Court Drama/Buck v. Bell,” www.enotes.com, 2010.



John C. King, M.D. 1908 – 1915

Dr. John C. King served as the fourth Superintendent of Southwestern State Hospital, from 1908 - 1915. There was not a lot of information found on Dr. King, other than that reported here.

Dr. John C. King was born April 29, 1871, in Henry County, Virginia. He served as part of the Medical staff at Southwestern Lunatic Asylum, later known as Southwestern State Hospital, prior to being appointed as Superintendent on December 8, 1908. While he served on the medical staff, he was in charge of the “male service.”

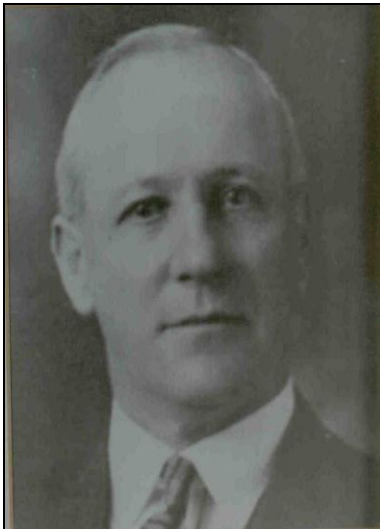
In 1902, Dr. King was instrumental in having the name of the facility changed from Southwestern Lunatic Asylum to Southwestern State Hospital, because he felt that the name “sounded too bad.”

Under Dr. King’s administration, an Amusement Hall was built in 1908, and the Tubercular Cottage was completed in 1912, which housed 50 patients who were fed from their own kitchen. Due to the shortage of money and timber at the time, permission was given by the Board of Directors to cut and burn the wood from the trees in the old sugar orchard to make the bricks for the building.

Also under Dr. King’s administration, the General Assembly voted to locate a building for the care and treatment of the criminally insane in Marion. The two-story building was completed in 1911, and was designed with the idea of giving patients and those confined awaiting trial or under observation, every opportunity for exercise and freedom of movement.

Apparently not satisfied with how things were going at the Marion facility, Dr. King resigned as Superintendent of Southwestern State Hospital on November 10, 1915, and set out to realize his vision of a facility that could produce a higher percentage of recovery for mentally-ill patients. With \$500 of his own money and \$16,000 in borrowed funds, Dr. King set up a corporation and acquired the buildings and 56 acres of land known as the St. Albans School for Boys in Radford, Virginia. The buildings were thoroughly renovated and on January 15, 1916, four patients were admitted to the St. Albans Sanatorium, later known as St. Albans Hospital. Dr. King and his wife kept St. Albans going for many years with their own money, because of the financial difficulties the facility experienced.

References: www.glencoemuseum.org, "A Place to Heal -- St. Albans Sanatorium," by Hanns-Peter Nagel, 2007; "History of Southwestern State Hospital," by Phyllis Doss, 1972; "Mental Health in Virginia," Autumn 1958 edition, pp 47-51, by Mr. F.M. White, an employee who retired from SWSH after 50 years of continuous service from 1901 to 1951; "Mental Health in Virginia," Summer 1959 edition, pp 46-52.



E. H. Henderson, M.D.

1915 -- 1927

Dr. E. H. Henderson served as the fifth Superintendent of Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute, then known as Southwestern State Hospital, from November 10, 1915, until his death on February 25, 1927. He also served as first assistant physician from 1908 until November, 1915. He had the third longest tenure of all of the Superintendents, serving for over twelve years.

Dr. Henderson was born in Giles County on December 4, 1871, to J. B. and Sarah A. Henderson, and was one of eight children. He received his medical degree from the University College of Medicine, Richmond, in 1898, and was first admitted to practice medicine in Virginia on July 21, 1898. He was a member of the Medical Society of Virginia, as well as the American Psychiatric Association. On November 27, 1901, he married Lou E. Wallace in Pulaski, Virginia. He died of heart disease and is buried in Round Hill Cemetery in Marion, Virginia, not far from the famous author, Sherwood Anderson.

Dr. Henderson had a successful administration by all historical accounts, as many improvements were made, including the excavation of the underground tunnel from a new power plant to the main hospital building that carried all of the steam, hot water, electric, and telephone lines. Also during Dr. Henderson's administration, additional lands were purchased,

including the 194 acres known as the Killinger Farm three miles south of the hospital, which provided the hospital all of the water it needed from a spring located on the farm.

The most recognized accomplishment, however, was the opening of the Davis Clinic on September 15, 1921. The Davis Clinic was established by special agreement that required the building be equipped to meet the high standards of the United States Public Health Service hospitals with the installation of hydro-therapeutic and electro-therapeutic equipment, operating rooms, and special kitchens, and that only ex-service men with mental and nervous disorders could be treated. The Bureau of War Risk Insurance required that the unit be known as a clinic and that a special name to designate it from the Southwestern State Hospital be given. It was unanimously agreed by the board of directors to name the building in honor of Governor Westmoreland Davis, who materially assisted Dr. Henderson in making and perfecting the agreement to build the facility.

Also during his administration, a new addition to the main building, which was later named after Dr. Henderson, was erected.

Following the death of Dr. Henderson in 1927, the Special Board of Directors wrote, "In reviewing his past record and noting the many high traits of character, the many kind acts and words of good cheer, the bright hope of encouragement inspired, are but symbols of the many deeds of kindness performed for those for whom he died. We, the Special Board of Directors, feel deeply and keenly the loss his death has meant to us, as a friend and coworker, to the institution over which he presided so efficiently and well, and to the State as a loyal and faithful official."

References: jama.ama-assn.org. death notices, April 23, 1927 ed.; US Census, 1880; www.newriversnotes.com/smythcem/roundhillmysythcemaq.htm, burial record; American Medico-Psychological Association; Annual Reports of Southwestern State Hospital of Virginia, 1919, 1921, 1924-25, 1926, and 1927.



George A. Wright, M.D. 1927 – 1937

Dr. George A. Wright, namesake of the Wright Building, now property of the Department of Corrections, served as the sixth Superintendent of Southwestern State Hospital (SWSH) from February 1927, until his resignation on December 1, 1937. Prior to being named Superintendent, he served as First Assistant Physician under Dr. E.H. Henderson.

Dr. Wright was born in Giles County, but moved to Chilhowie to practice medicine. During his tenure as Superintendent of SWSH, many physical changes took place:

- In 1931, the front porch, which still stands today, was added to the Henderson Building, and the old clock tower was removed due to its fragile and dangerous nature.
- Also during 1931, a stone gateway was added at the Main Street entrance. This gateway still stands today as well.
- In 1933, the Wright and Harmon Buildings were completed using patient labor, saving the Commonwealth money -- both buildings were dedicated in May of that year.
- In 1935, an old farmhouse was torn down and replaced by a t-shaped building with two porches, a basement that was used for dining, a first and second floor used as dormitories for the patients, dayrooms, and an attic space used to house employees.

The staff to patient ratio in 1935 was quite different than it is today. During 1935, the average daily patient census was 1141 and the staff numbered only 78. During 2011, the average daily patient census is 135, with just over 500 employees.

Dr. Wright resigned his position at SWSH so that he could be the Administrator for Lee Memorial Hospital, now known as Smyth County Community Hospital.

References: *“A Brief History of SWSH 1887 - 1987, Joan Tracy Armstrong, 1987.*



Joseph R. Blalock, M.D. 1938 – 1971

Dr. Joseph R. Blalock was appointed the seventh Superintendent in February 1938, and served the longest term of any superintendent when he retired in 1971 for a total of nearly 34 years. Our Central Activities/Cafeteria/Storeroom Building is named for Dr. Blalock.

Originally from Rockingham, North Carolina, Dr. Blalock was born on November 18, 1897. He received his BA and MA degrees from Wake Forest College, his MD from Johns Hopkins Medical School, and his Med.Sc.D. degree from Columbia University. Prior to his appointment as Superintendent at Southwestern State Hospital, he had a private practice in Detroit, Michigan, and Pueblo, Colorado. In 1929, he joined the staff at the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Hospital in New York City and remained there until 1938. While in New York, he participated in a number of research projects and publications, and became certified in Psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. In 1943, he became a Fellow of the American College of Physicians, and in 1957, he received certification as Mental Hospital Administrator from the American Psychiatric Association. He was a member of numerous medical societies, both locally and nationally, and was also a member of the Governor's Advisory Board in Mental Hygiene.

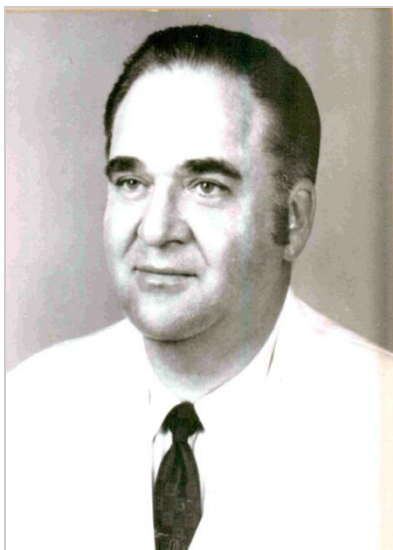
During his tenure, Dr. Blalock conducted several studies, including patient behaviors before and after lobotomies and studies on the criminally insane, published many papers in national and international medical journals, and conducted numerous public addresses before Medical Societies throughout the United States, including Virginia, New York, California, and Hawaii.

Many changes also occurred during the 34 years that Dr. Blalock served as Superintendent, which included the following:

- In the late 1930s, electroconvulsive therapy was started after a demonstration at Southwestern State Hospital.
- Transorbital lobotomies, considered to be safer than prefrontal lobotomies, were stopped after three patients died from the procedure.
- A form of an "out-patient clinic" was instituted prior to World War II, where Dr. Blalock, another physician, and a social worker would visit patients in their own homes, many of whom had been released from the hospital.

- In the early 1950s, drugs came into widespread use, occupational and recreational therapies were given greater emphasis, and the team approach in treating the individual was more widely used.
- The initiation of the 40-hour work week began on July 1, 1959, with two days off per week, which was considered as “a most acceptable single improvement for the staff.”
- In 1961, the Hospital Cemetery was relocated because of the construction of Interstate 81.
- Also in 1961, the Davis Clinic was vacated due to its poor condition and fire hazard.
- The Blalock Food Service Building was officially opened in 1968.
- The “Vocational Rehabilitation Unit” was begun on a part-time basis in 1969 with one rehabilitation counselor. It later expanded into a full program with training and job placement. The main objective of the program was to prepare men and women “to return to their communities and to function as useful citizens.”

References: *“Mental Health in Virginia,” report from the Dept. of Mental Hygiene, Summer 1959; Commonwealth of Virginia Dept of Mental Hygiene and Hospitals, “Sixteen Years of Progress -- 1938 to 1954;” “A Brief History of Southwestern State Hospital 1887 - 1987,” Joan Tracy Armstrong, May 31, 1987; Superintendent’s Annual Reports of Southwestern State Hospital, 1938 - 1971.*



Bernard H. Kasinoff, M.D.
1971 -- 1972

Dr. Bernard H. Kasinoff served as the eighth Superintendent from the spring of 1971 to the spring of 1972, which was a controversial year for Southwestern State Hospital (SWSH).

Dr. Kasinoff was appointed as Superintendent on March 1, 1971, following the retirement of Dr. Blalock. At the time of his appointment, Dr. Kasinoff was Clinical Director at DeJarnette State Sanatorium (now known as Commonwealth Center for Children and Adolescents) in Staunton, Virginia. Dr. Kasinoff joined the Virginia system in 1962 as Director of the Valley Mental Hygiene Clinic in Staunton, and in March, 1969, he joined the staff at DeJarnette.

Dr. Kasinoff is a native of New York, born February 15, 1920, and earned his medical degree from the University of Virginia in 1946. He served as a psychiatric resident at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Bronx, New York. He also served as both a staff psychiatrist and later as Chief of the mental hygiene treatment section for the Veterans Administration in New York before returning to Virginia.

During his brief tenure as Superintendent, Dr. Kasinoff was said to have been disliked for being an outsider with a direct approach to problems, including his blunt handling of employees and the public. Dr. Kasinoff thought that the community was “too involved with the hospital as they interfered with efforts to move from a program of custodial to therapeutic care.” Needless to say, many in the community were glad to see Dr. Kasinoff leave, although there were apparently a great number of employees who were not.

Several retired employees were interviewed while preparing this article, and they described Dr. Kasinoff as a “character” who was unpolished, outspoken, and often argumentative with the “wrong people.” Many did not like Dr. Kasinoff because of his gruff personality, but he was described as a very good psychiatrist. Daphne Ernest, who worked as a Secretary in the Superintendent’s Office, said that she remembered Dr. Kasinoff would often barbeque hot dogs on the porch of the Henderson Building for breakfast. Paul Shepherd, Staffing Nurse Coordinator, remembers Dr. Kasinoff riding around Bagley Circle in a 1967 Plymouth several times each day checking on the patients who were out on the grounds.

Following his resignation as Superintendent at SWSH in January, 1972, he moved to Richmond for a time, then started working at Marion Correctional Treatment Center as a Psychiatrist, where he worked until his retirement. Dr. Kasinoff died March 29, 1994, in Abingdon, Virginia.

References: *“Mental Health in Virginia,” Department of Mental Hygiene and Hospitals, Winter 1971; “A Brief History of the Southwestern State Hospital 1887 - 1987,” by Joan Tracy Armstrong,, 1987; Personal interviews with Paul Shepherd, RN; Daphne Ernest, Secretary in the Superintendent/Director’s Office from 1970 to 2002, and Jimmy Farmer, Retired Aide.*



Frank F. Merker, M.D. 1972 -- 1978

Dr. Frank F. Merker replaced Dr. Kasinoff as Superintendent of Southwestern State Hospital (SWSH), on March 15, 1972. Dr. Merker was also the last "Superintendent" of SWSH, as after his administration, the chief administrator became known as the "Director."

A native of Brooklyn, New York, born on July 2, 1909, Dr. Frank F. Merker graduated Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1931, and received his medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia in 1943. He interned with the U.S. Marine Hospital in Baltimore Maryland before serving two years in the U.S. Army Air Force. After leaving the Air Force, Dr. Merker trained at the School of Psychiatry at the Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Topeka, Kansas.

During his career, Dr. Merker served as the Chief of Staff at the VA, Salem from 1958-1960, Director of the VA, Roseburg, Oregon from 1960-1966, Director of the VA Hospital, Coatesville, Pennsylvania from 1966 - 1969, and as Director of the McGuire Hospital, Richmond, Virginia from 1969-1972. He was a member and fellow of numerous medical societies, was Board Certified in Psychiatry and Neurology, and served as an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Medical College of Virginia.

Dr. Merker first moved to Marion, Virginia in 1935 when he was stationed here during an active duty assignment with the U.S. Army Engineer Corp. It was in Marion where he met and married his wife.

Under Dr. Merker's administration, a work-release program was instituted to promote the idea of patient rehabilitation. The program was based on the belief that a patient could be returned to the community within 90 days as long as a psychiatric team was available to establish a program for the patient's recovery.

Also under Dr. Merker's administration, capital improvement projects started or completed included the renovation of the laundry facilities, conversion of the steam generation plant from coal-fired to gas or oil-fired boilers, completion of the second new geriatric building, and the installation of auxiliary electric power in the power plant.

In 1976, the hospital implemented the unit system approach to treatment, where each unit consisted of a treatment team comprised of a doctor, psychologist, social worker, nurses, occupational and recreational therapists, and direct care staff, the same basic team approach used today.

Dr. Merker resigned as Superintendent effective March 15, 1978, at the age of 68 to become the Chief of Medical Staff, stating that he wanted to continue with some of the programs he initiated while Superintendent. He transferred to the Department of Corrections on September 15, 1980, and died in Roanoke, Virginia, on July 23, 1994.

References: *“A Brief History of the Southwestern State Hospital, 1887 - 1987” by Joan Tracy Armstrong, 1987; “Smyth County News,” Marion, Virginia, February 15, 1972; “Smyth County News,” Marion, Virginia, February 9, 1978.*



C. W. “Bill” Brett, Ph.D. 1978 – 1980

C. W. “Bill” Brett, Ph.D., served as the first “Director” from 1978 - 1980, a shift from the Superintendent title. He was the first non-physician head of at Southwestern State Hospital (SWSH).

A native of Richmond, Dr. C.W. “Bill” Brett, began his career with service in for the U.S. Air force from 1963 - 1966, serving a 12 month tour of duty in Vietnam. In 1971, he received his Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology from Old Dominion University, his Master’s in Psychology from Virginia Tech in 1973, and his Ph.D. in Psychology, also from Virginia Tech, in 1977. While pursuing his Master’s Degree, he worked in the Department of Psychology at Virginia Tech.

From 1973 - 1976, Dr. Brett served as a Clinical Psychologist at SWSH. From 1976 - 1977, he served as the Director for Mount Rogers Community Services Board Community Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services Clinic System.

In March, 1978, Dr. Brett was appointed as the tenth Director of SWSH. During his administration, several initiatives were completed, including:

- Completion of the reorganization of special treatment units unit into five distinct areas, all with an Assistant Director as the unit leader. These five areas included:
- Administration, which consisted of logistics and support services.
- Medical, which consisted of medical and dental services, medical records, pharmacy, utilization review, and medical consultations.
- Training and Research, which consisted of staff development, grants administration, mental health planning, and the library.

- Geriatrics, which was a semi- autonomous section for the 260 elderly patients, as well as physical health services.
- Clinical, which consisted of six distinct units: Admissions and Acute Care Treatment Center; Living Skills Unit; Adult Development Treatment Center (multi-handicapped); Adolescent Treatment Center; Substance Abuse Treatment Center; and Secure Confinement (criminal services)
- While the patient population decreased by about 50 percent, the staff increased by about 50 percent as well, allowing better treatment opportunities.
- In 1978, a new tube was constructed that connected the patient dormitories to the dining facilities.
- A legislative feasibility study was conducted for the need of major renovations and/or replacements of buildings in 1979. This study eventually led to the building of the Bagley Building.
- Also in 1979, SWSH received an award for its energy conservation efforts from the Governor.
- Dr. Brett coordinated the implementation of the first full project of pre-admission screening in the community.

In May 1980, Dr. Brett was named Deputy Commissioner for the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Services. From September 1981 until February 1983, he again served as the Executive Director for Mount Rogers Community Services Board. Since 1983, Dr. Brett has worked for several private hospitals in Central Virginia, Macon, Georgia, Indiana, and he currently resides with his wife in Pennsylvania.

References: *Smyth County News, February 28, 1978; Smyth County News, March 7, 1978; Smyth County News, February 27, 1979; Smyth County News, March 29, 1979; Smyth County News, May 6, 1980; Norma Phillippi, Mount Rogers CSB.*



David Rosenquist, MRA, Director 1980 – 1990

Mr. Rosenquist served as the eleventh head of Southwestern State Hospital (SWSH), and the second non-physician Director of the facility.

David Rosenquist, MRA, a native of Tiskilwa, Illinois, was named Director of Southwestern State Hospital on September 1, 1980. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, in 1968; his Master's Degree in Psychology from Bradley University in 1970; and his Master's Degree in Hospital Administration from the University of Minnesota in 1980. He married his wife Patricia in 1968 and

has two sons.

Prior to being named Director at SWSH, Mr. Rosenquist served four years in the U.S. Air Force Regional Hospital at Westover AFB in Massachusetts, receiving an honorable discharge in 1973, five years at Oaklawn Community Mental Health Center in Elkhart, Indiana in various roles, and as Administrator at Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute in Falls Church, Virginia, for one year.

When Mr. Rosenquist was appointed as Director of Southwestern State Hospital (SWSH) in 1980, the facility was a 500 bed, unaccredited institution, housed in an antiquated building with a \$13 million budget and 820 staff members. During the ensuing decade, the patient census was reduced by one-half and staffing by one-third. At the same time, the facility achieved Joint Commission accreditation for the first time in the hospital's 100 year history.

One of the first, major changes that occurred at SWSH shortly after Mr. Rosenquist was appointed Director was the consolidation of the Food Service Department. At that time, satellite kitchens were located in the outlying buildings, which required approximately 150 food service staff to operate. A study had been commissioned by the previous Director, Dr. Bill Brett, and completed just prior to Mr. Rosenquist's appointment, which recommended the consolidation. The satellite kitchens were all closed and an insulated tray line was instituted in a centralized food preparation/dining area maintained by the hospital. One hundred of the 150 food service employees were cross-trained as psychiatric aides. As vacancies occurred, a cross-trained employee was moved into that slot with the promise that if they did not like their new role, they could return to the kitchen -- none did. This plan not only saved money for the facility, but retained valuable employees in the process.

Another major change that occurred was the move from separate male and female wards to co-ed wards, which at the time was regarded by direct care staff as an "abomination." Since its establishment, the facility had always maintained separate male and female wards, but this

arrangement was very inefficient. For example, if the female admission ward was full and the male admissions ward had a vacancy but the next admission was a female, then the struggle was, where to put her? After many months of planning by the Executive Management Leadership, and dozens of meetings with staff and local legislators, the Building and Grounds Department started building walls in bathrooms to separate male and female toilet and shower facilities and slowly the change was made. It turned out that mixing genders on the same living units had a calming and normalizing effect on ward milieu.

During Mr. Rosenquist's administration, several other significant events took place:

- In May 1980, Marion Correctional Treatment Center opened its doors and took over the Finley Gayle Building. Out of the 156 employees that opened the Correctional Center, 104 transferred from SWSH.
- In 1986, demolition commenced on the original Henderson Complex and construction of Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute (SWVMHI) began.

In its first one-hundred or so years, Southwestern State Hospital was considered Southwest Virginia's employment "Rock of Gibraltar." Area factories might lay off employees, but those who worked for the state had guaranteed employment for life. However, in the mid-1980's, the first "cataclysmic" change occurred when, because of hard economic times, the Virginia General Assembly started cutting hospital and training center budgets. For the first time in its history, SWSH had to layoff employees. This affected the lives of many employees in profound ways, and guaranteed state employment was never the same again.

In 1990, a four year replacement/renovation project was completed, and patients and staff moved into the new Bagley Building, which received Citation-level recognition in Modern Healthcare's national Design Awards Competition. The building was not the same one originally designed by staff and architects. The original version had more space and stunning interior features, but because of monies awarded by the General Assembly, the designs had to be changed to the building we see today. Upon the dedication of the Bagley Building, the name of the facility was changed to its present name of Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute.

Mr. Rosenquist remembers the "closest brush with panic in his thirty years of hospital administration" came when the Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health announced his goal of having every mental health facility in the system accredited with the Joint Commission within three years. At that time, he barely knew what the Joint Commission was, let alone what accreditation meant, and never did he depend on his executive team more than in the ensuing months leading up to the first survey. Mr. Rosenquist remembers that the survey report was "huge and downright ugly, but we passed." When the first accreditation certificate arrived in the mail, he couldn't believe anything could ever look so beautiful!

One interesting note is the fact that Mr. Rosenquist hired our very own Dr. Cynthia McClaskey as a staff psychologist in 1987 while she was finishing her Ph.D. degree from Indiana University.

In 1990, Mr. Rosenquist took the position of Director of Hiram Davis Medical Center in Petersburg, Virginia, and remained there until his retirement in 2008. While serving as Director at Hiram Davis between 1994 and 1997, Mr. Rosenquist also served as Acting Forensic Unit Director and Acting Director at Central State Hospital in Petersburg, Virginia, as well as Acting Director at Northern Virginia Mental Health Institute in Falls Church, Virginia. He was also appointed by the Commissioner to membership on the State Forensic Review Panel and served on the panel from 1994 until 2002. He was Panel Chairman from 2000 until 2002. He and his wife make home in Chester, Virginia.

References: *Smyth County News, May 15, 1980; Smyth County News, August 26, 1980; Smyth County News, September 9, 1980, Kathleen Austin, Retired HR Director, Hiram Davis Medical Center; and David Rosenquist, MHA, Director of SWSH/SWVMHI, 1980 - 1990.*



**Leo Kirven, M.D., Acting Director
1990 - 1992**

Dr. Kirven served as Acting Director of Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute for two years.

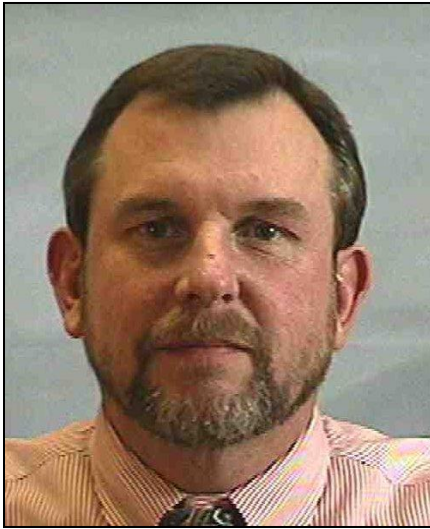
Leo Kirven, Jr. was born on July 18, 1923, in Pinewood, South Carolina. Dr. Kirven was a pilot in the Army Air Corps during World War II, serving in the European theater of operations.

Following his discharge from the Army, Dr. Kirven graduated from Clemson University, and then the Medical College of South Carolina. After completing his residency in Psychiatry, Dr. Kirven served for many years as the Director of Central State Hospital in Petersburg, Virginia, and was later named Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services. Dr. Kirven served as Commissioner for the Department from 1976 through 1981. He also served as staff Psychiatrist at SWVMHI for several months in the early 1980's when we had no full-time Psychiatrist on our medical staff. Dr. Kirven came back to SWVMHI again to serve as Acting Medical Director following the unexpected death of the Medical Director at the time and stayed on to serve as Acting Facility Director from 1990 to 1992.

Following his retirement from state service, Dr. Kirven served as a Hospital Surveyor for The Joint Commission, a position he held until he retired for medical reasons in October, 2008. He died on May 25, 2009, in Lakeland, Florida, following a brief illness. He visited SWVMHI again during his role as a Joint Commission Surveyor.

Dr. Kirven was a strong advocate for active patient care and was frequently found in the dayroom with patients or talking with direct care staff about their interactions and perspectives rather than being in his office. He had an edge that quickly cut to the heart of issues, especially with hidden agendas or when he thought people were not being straight with him. He had a reputation for being direct while compassionate with those for whom he cared. He had an impact on all who had the pleasure to know and work with him.

References: Richmond Times Dispatch, Richmond, Virginia; The Progress-Index; Petersburg, Virginia; SWVMHI "A View From The Hill," July 1, 2009.



**Gerald Deans, Director
1992 - 2002**

Gerald E. "Jerry" Deans, MSW, served as the thirteenth Director of Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute, and the third non-physician Director.

Gerald, better known to those of us who knew and/or worked with him, as Jerry, Deans, was born in Hampton, Virginia, and raised in a small town about the size of Marion called Poquoson, Virginia, located on the east coast. He first attended college at Ferrum College and graduated from Old Dominion University with a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology.

In 1970, Mr. Deans was drafted after drawing a 39 in the draft lottery. He signed up for the Artillery Officer Candidate School and graduated as a second lieutenant.

Against his wishes and better judgment, he was sent to jump school to learn how to parachute out of "perfectly good airplanes and helicopters." His first assignment was at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. After eleven jumps, he was sent to work at the post stockade to organize a counseling unit, which gave him the chance to earn experience which would later help him find a job. It was while working in this counseling unit that he met the love of his life and his future wife, Patsi.

After being discharged from the Army, he proposed to Patsi and found a job as a correctional counselor with the Virginia Department of Corrections (VDOC). He worked in various positions on the treatment side of Corrections and used the GI Bill plus a scholarship from VDOC to return to school and earn his Master's Degree in Social Work. That degree qualified him to take the promotion to Warden of Marion Correctional Treatment Center (MCTC). He served as Warden at MCTC for seven and a half years, and his assignment there was very rewarding, but a tragedy struck his family when he and his wife lost their 16 year old daughter Shantel in Hungry Mother Lake. However, the support he and his family received from both employees at MCTC as well as their church helped them during their recovery from their grief, and gave them a unique view of the love and compassion that is so characteristic of the Town of Marion. So when the leaders of VDOC suggested it was time for Mr. Deans to move out of Marion to a larger facility, he begged them to let him stay. About that same time, David Rosenquist moved to Hiram Davis and Mr. Deans felt it was time to apply for the position of the Director at SWVMHI. His wife Patsi actually had worked on the Admissions Unit as a Social Worker for three years when Mr. Deans became Director in January of 1992. Together, they decided it would be best if she resigned her position, which she did the day Mr. Deans became Director.

When asked if there were any particular events or initiatives that he was proud of, Mr. Deans replied that it was very rewarding to help shape and organize the first regional board in the history of the Department. The Southwest Board started out with a mental health focus but "working together as a region gave us the opportunity to apply for federal funds to start the Telepsychiatry project. This permitted the Institute to use our psychiatrists to provide much needed care to patients who were discharged to communities with limited psychiatrists," he said. The Board also funded the Family and Consumer initiatives, and the work of the Southwest Board was held up as an example to the rest of the State as well as recognized by legislators and consumer groups for its productivity. "Cynthia [McClaskey] did a superb job of helping to build the spirit of cooperation that characterized the Board's efforts," he added.

Mr. Deans was also proud of the teamwork of the clinical leadership team, which helped support and guide the treatment teams with the privileging of forensic and special management patients, as well as support the Institute through some challenging times.

One such challenge was the regional catchment area alignment. When Mr. Deans took over as Director, SWVMHI served as a backup for Catawba Hospital and Southern Virginia Mental Health Institute (SVMHI), and Central State Hospital (CSH) served as backup for SWVMHI. It was not unusual for Catawba and SWVMHI to reach capacity and divert individuals to SWVMHI. This meant that SWVMHI quickly reached capacity and had to divert individuals to CSH, which created a hardship for the families of those individuals sent to CSH. It took many years before the hospitals obtained the necessary resources and agreed with their CSB's to stop diverting individuals to other facilities.

On the positive side, Mr. Deans noted that he was blessed by the work of those who had gone before him to have a brand new facility. "There were some bugs to work out of the Bagley Building, but the challenge was minimal compared to the aging facilities most of the other directors were dealing with across the state," he said.

Mr. Deans also noted that SWVMHI was one of the first hospitals in the state to undertake the full transition to a recovery-orientated system of care. The Rehab Department was reorganized and new staff were hired, but the giant step toward recovery care happened when SWVMHI opened the Treatment Mall.

In 2002, Mr. Deans moved to Central Office as Assistant Commissioner after ten years as Director at SWVMHI and eighteen years in Marion, "the most rewarding 18 years of my career," he noted.

In 2008, Mr. Deans retired and has helped with the child care of his son Jamie and his wife Johnna's son, Eli. Two years ago, Mr. Deans and his wife bought a camper and are doing their best to travel and see the nation. In his spare time, Mr. Deans volunteers with people in recovery from addictions as well as cancer, and he and his wife lead a grief support group at their church. In January 2012, they will be leading a retreat entitled, "When Dreams Die." Mr. Deans also recently finished a book that took two years to complete about his family's experiences entitled, "Waiting on the Lord and The Rest of the Story."

During his eighteen years in Marion, Mr. Deans and his family suffered a series of personal challenges. In 1998, almost 11 years to the day when they tragically lost their daughter, the Deans' 16 year old son Matthew was involved in an accident while visiting relatives in Alabama that left him paralyzed from the waist down. That same year, Mr. Deans' mother died, and their oldest son Jamie underwent an emergency appendectomy. In February of 1999, the Deans found out that their son Mark had suffered a previously undiagnosed, life-threatening injury from the same accident that injured his brother Matthew. On the very same day, Mr. Deans was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Despite these personal challenges, the Deans' family has remained strong. "The employees on the hill, together with our church and friends throughout the community supported us with prayers and encouragement that were, to say the least, extraordinary," said Mr. Deans. Volunteers from the community as well as SWVMHI built a fully-accessible handicapped addition to their house for Matthew. The overwhelming support and prayers led Matthew to earn his Masters Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation and he now works for the Department of Rehab Services in Chesterfield, helping others as others helped him. He plays wheelchair basketball with the nationally ranked Charlottesville Cardinals and coaches a youth team of wheelchair players. He and his wife Ashlee are expecting their first child in March, 2012.

In closing, Mr. Deans wished to convey to the employees of SWVMHI that, “whether or not staff realize it, [you] are working among a group of extraordinary people. The work that [you] accomplish every day to relieve the suffering of those struggling with mental illness is second to none throughout the state and the nation,” he said. “But the caring and compassion that [you] give to one another when the chips are down is what distinguishes [you] above all. Our family will forever be indebted to the wonderful people on The Hill for carrying us through the deepest valleys in our lives.”

References: *Jerry Deans, November 28, 2011.*



Cynthia L. McClaskey, Ph.D., Director 2003 – Present

Cynthia L. McClaskey, Ph.D., serves as the fourteenth Director of Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute, and the first female Director of the Institute. Dr. McClaskey served as Acting Director from 2002 until she was appointed Director in 2003.

Cynthia McClaskey, Ph.D., originally from Iowa, received her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Indiana University in 1989. She is a licensed Clinical Psychologist, a Certified Sex Offender Treatment Provider, and a Forensic Evaluator. She was hired by Southwestern Virginia Mental Health Institute as Psychologist Senior in August, 1987. In 1991, she was promoted to the position of Clinical Director at the hospital, and served in that role until being named Director in 2003. Dr McClaskey has numerous research publications and presentations on behavioral healthcare for adults, children, and adolescents.

In announcing her appointment as Director, it was noted that she “has demonstrated her commitment to the people of Southwestern Virginia and to high quality treatment for persons with serious mental illness. She has been instrumental in increasing active treatment . . . and is a recognized leader in the Commonwealth in the provision of services that improve the lives of persons with serious mental illness and substance abuse through evidence-based treatment and rehabilitation.”

Since that time, she has continued to champion recovery-based and trauma-informed care and services in the facility, the region, and the Commonwealth. In addition, she serves as the Virginia representative on the Board of Directors of the Southern States Psychiatric Hospital Association.

During her tenure, the biggest changes have come in the adoption of a recovery-oriented model of treatment and services that complements the traditional hospital model of care. This has included an emphasis on person-centered services that are coercion-free and trauma-informed, as well as culturally competent. “There has been a significant paradigm shift to the recognition that the services we provide must be based on a foundation of hope and recovery. We recognize that the recovery journey is a personal process of change experienced by each person in a unique way and it is a time consuming process. With new skills self-advocacy and empowerment, people find that they are able to lead rich and rewarding lives despite the presence of symptoms. We know that developing confidence, self-respect, and a positive purpose for one’s life doesn’t occur simply because symptoms of mental illness are lessened. By providing a rich, recovery-oriented environment, and holding onto the hope for individuals who have lost their hope, we best fulfill our mission of ‘promoting mental health in southwest Virginia by assisting people in their recovery,’ notes Dr. McClaskey.

Dr. McClaskey is thankful that she has been provided incredible opportunities to learn and grow during her twenty-five year tenure at SWVMHI. These opportunities have been afforded through the individuals and peers that she has worked with at the facility and in the community, as well as from her supervisors and mentors at the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, and from the incredibly talented and dedicated staff of SWVMHI. She is also very proud of the close working relationships that have continued to be built with community partners, such as Community Services Boards, law enforcement, and the region’s private psychiatric hospitals and community hospitals.

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul.
And sings the tune
Without the words
And never stops at all.
~ Emily Dickinson*

References: Cynthia L. McClaskey, Ph.D., February, 2012

SWVMHI
Established 1887



Honoring Our Past
Celebrating Our Present
Cultivating Our Future