

Tampa General Hospital
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Tampa General Hospital, now in its 77th year of serving the community, is among the oldest hospitals on Florida's West Coast. Originally known as Tampa Municipal Hospital, TGH never appeared in the original plans for Davis Islands, nor did it originally appear, it is safe to say, in the wildest imagination of Davis Islands creator David Paul Davis.

It took quite a while for the city of Tampa to open its first public hospital. Before 1910, Tampa's white citizens who were sick or injured had to go to the Emergency Hospital, located at 908 Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Boulevard), the Tampa Bay Infirmary at the Tampa Bay Hotel (now the University of Tampa) or, for women, the Women's Home and Hospital at 105 West Ross Avenue. All three institutions were small and offered only limited care. The Emergency Hospital and Women's Hospital were both housed in two story homes, while the Tampa Bay Infirmary, though built as a medical clinic, was too small for Tampa's growing population.

Tampa's black community could not take advantage of these institutions, relying on the few local black doctors or, occasionally, a white doctor willing to cross the rigorous color line of the times. It wasn't until an African American nurse named Clara Frye opened her home in the early 1910s to everyone in need, regardless of race, with the help of a white doctor, that Tampa's black community had access to quality medical care.

On June 1, 1910, the thirty-two bed Gordon Keller Memorial Hospital opened at 306 North Boulevard, adjacent to the Tampa Bay Infirmary on the grounds of the Tampa Bay Hotel. The facility was named in honor of a noted Tampa businessman and city treasurer Gordon Keller, who died in 1909. Funds for the hospital were raised in part by Keller's friends and admirers who were eager to memorialize Keller's contributions to the community.

Unprecedented population growth in the early 1920s taxed the small Hyde Park hospital. The city initially wanted to expand the existing North Boulevard facility, but the idea proved impractical and the search for a new hospital site began. A site committee suggested building on Davis Islands, using a portion of the park land deeded to the city by Davis.

There is, of course, a story related to the hospital's location on Davis Islands. The story goes that, while playing golf at Palma Ceia Country Club with Dr. J. Brown Farrior and James Swann, David Davis asked Farrior where he wanted the new hospital. Davis drew a rough outline of the Islands in a sand trap and Farrior pointed to the northern tip as the preferred location. Whether the story is true or not is unimportant. What is true is that Farrior headed the construction committee and Swann served as chairman of the new hospital's board of directors.

One hurdle still existed – the proposed location in Marjorie Park still sat under water. Davis promised to have the land available as soon as possible, and in March 1926 construction began on the modern 250-bed facility. The Gordon Keller Nursing School, which was a part of Keller Memorial Hospital, moved to the Islands and opened with the new hospital in 1927. Continuing the celebration of Keller's life, the archway over the new hospital's entrance read "Tampa Municipal Hospital Memorial to Gordon Keller." That inscription, and most of the original Tampa Memorial Hospital building, is obscured by the prominent additions made to it from 1958 through the 1990s.

For many years, Tampa Municipal Hospital dominated the landscape of Davis Islands. The Gordon Keller School expanded in 1936, constructing a new home next to the hospital, further increasing the hospital's educational role. In 1937, Tampa Municipal was one of two hospitals in the nation using electroshock therapy. The hospital stood, on the eve of the Second World War, ready to grow, but it needed another spark.

World War II brought that spark, with great advances in the practice of medicine. Those advances manifested locally in Tampa Municipal Hospital and its capacity as a teaching facility. An internship program, started during the war, produced the next generation of Tampa physicians. In 1956, Tampa Municipal Hospital was renamed Tampa General Hospital. Also in the 1950s, Tampa General began to open its doors to Tampa's African American community, ending years of discrimination and unequal healthcare.

Though considered a world-class hospital, Tampa General is not without its problems. It seems no one gave too great a consideration to the piece of land the new hospital occupied, aside from the fact that the city already owned it. The location on an island accessible by only one bridge (two at present) would prove to be vulnerable during hurricane season, with evacuations not uncommon. Finally, after Tampa's close encounter with Hurricane Elena in August 1985, the hospital's

main generator was moved from the basement to a higher and safer location. At present, the hospital can withstand the strongest of storms. Yet the risk of the Islands' bridges washing out, thereby isolating the hospital from the rest of the city, remains.

Today's Tampa General is a modern, 877-bed facility, with thirty-six surgical suites and 4,000 employees. Over 25,000 patients are admitted and over 4,000 babies are born at Tampa General every year. In addition, the emergency room handles over 60,000 adult patients yearly. Though not originally intended for Davis Islands, Tampa General Hospital has become a major force, both on the Islands and in the City of Tampa.