

Health flashbacks

Karl Heusner (1872-1960)

Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital (KMH) opened in 1995 to replace the Old Belize City Hospital.

Karl Heusner, the first native born Belizean doctor, was the son of German immigrants Emilia and Jacob Heusner. He was born on the 6th of September of 1872.

He studied medicine at Tulane, the University of Louisiana and the University of Pennsylvania, returning to Belize in 1892 to start his own practice. He became known in the United States, the Caribbean, and Central America for his expertise in tropical diseases.

During his career, he made extensive use of herbal remedies and local plants as well as more conventional drugs. Dr. Heusner was fascinated by "bush medicine" incorporating remedies like "Jack ass" bitters into his prescriptions dispensed in glass bottles marked "K Heusner". His patients believed in him, and his medicine. Once a man returned a bottle claiming someone had switched its contents because it tasted different. Sure enough, a mistake had been made and the bitters had been left out.

He served the people of Belize for 63 years from his clinic on Regent Street, making calls by bicycle, horse, buggy and finally his black model T-Ford. The car and his black wool three-piece suit became his trademark.

But it was Dr. Heusner's sense of humor and com-

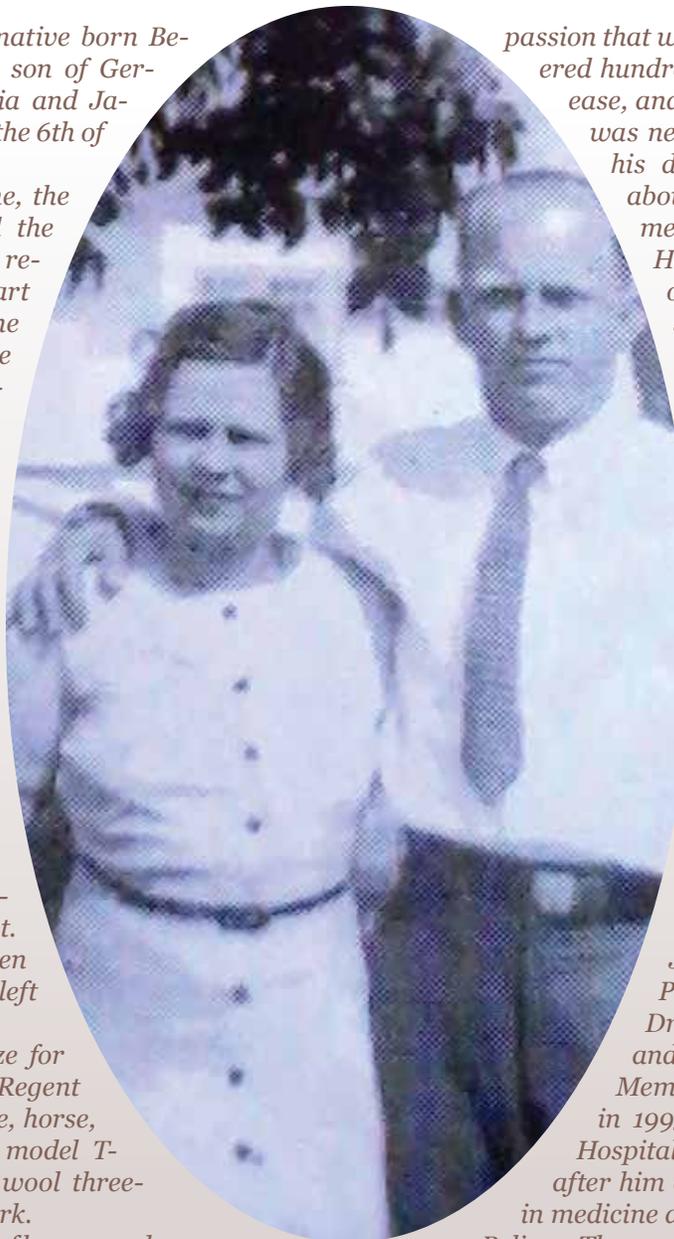
passion that won his patients. He literally delivered hundreds of babies, putting mothers at ease, and teasing young fathers. Payment was never a problem; the records after his death revealed he accepted just about anything in exchange for treatment, even a plucked chicken!

Heusner was married to Catherine, one of the seven daughters of John James Usher, a cousin of prominent Creole businessman and politician Archibald R. Usher. He had five children with her.

He was 88 when he died on December 1, 1960. Concerned about his patients to the very end, he spent the entire morning in the clinic, as always, but around noon he calmly told his son Raymond he had chest pain and believed he was going to die.

On the day of his funeral, December 7, 1960, flags were flown at half mast, shops were closed early and hundreds lined the streets of the cemetery. Three other doctors, Dr. Perez Schofield, Dr. Mclearr and Dr. John Reneau and the Hon. George Price were among the pall keepers.

Dr. Karl Heusner is remembered and honored by the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital (KMH) opened in 1995 to replace the Old Belize City Hospital in Belize City. It was renamed after him as a tribute to his lengthy career in medicine and his dedication to the people of Belize. The canvas of Dr. Heusner in the hospi-



Karl Heusner and his wife Catherine

tal's lobby, painted by his granddaughter Pat Heusner from old photographs and memories, was not unveiled until July 2000, 5 years after. Today anyone in Belize with that last name is his direct descendant. His descendants hope that all Belizean health care providers will be inspired by his skills and compassion and remember that a laughter can be the best medicine.

Today, KHMH is the country's flagship hospital providing tertiary care for the entire country and serving as the secondary care hospital for the Central Health Region.

There is also a commemorative postage stamp in memory of Dr. Karl Heusner.

References

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Karl Heusner and family: (from left to right) mother Emilia with grandchildren John and Leah; dad Jacob with grandsons William and Karl Jr.; wife Catherine with Raymond. Dr. Heusner is standing in the back.

Once more we wish to acknowledge the help of our friends at the Belize Archives and Record Services and the National Heritage Library, without whom this section would not have been possible