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News from the Swenson Center: 2012 Olsson Scholar

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News from the Swenson Center

The 2012 Nils William and Dagmar Olsson Scholar: Jennifer Vanore, Los Angeles

Jennifer Vanore explained her research project in her application for the scholarship:

My dissertation project, *The Call to Care: Religion and the Making of the Modern Hospital Industry in Los Angeles, 1895-1965*, examines the role different ethnic religious groups in Los Angeles have played in the development, expansion, and maintenance of the growing hospital industry in Southern California in the 20th century.

Overwhelmingly, the historiography of medicine, science, and health care uses a top-down perspective by focusing on the development of government policy and its effects on directing health care as a privatized industry in the United States. My project assumes a different lens and considers how the private industry was built from the basic ground up. Specifically, individual communities bound together by ethnic ancestry and religious beliefs have composed a substantial portion of hospital owners in the health care landscape. Small immigrant and religious groups, especially in the early part of the 20th century, constituted an important set of hospital founders and managers as they strove to build long-lasting institutions that served their own communities while reaching out and building bridges with their neighbors.

One unexamined group in this story is Swedish Lutherans, who in the first decade of the 20th century built one of the largest and most respected hospitals in Los Angeles. One of the difficulties I have encountered in conducting this kind of research is that very few hospitals

have kept their board minutes more than a few decades back. And those that have tend to be quite reluctant to share them with researchers due to HIPAA laws (which ensure health privacy to patients). As such, it is rare for a researcher to find sources that shed light on the founders and board members of hospitals and the ideas and beliefs that motivated them in their institutional decisions.

The archives at the Swenson Center would allow me to get at these beliefs via a slightly more circuitous route. The sources that the Center has on the Swedish Angelica Lutheran Church in Los Angeles would allow me to get at the Swedish voices of those who bought, founded, and expanded California Lutheran Hospital. This is a rare opportunity for me, and as such I hope the committee will consider funding me for a visit to the Swenson Center.

A glimpse of the history of the California Hospital

California Hospital was founded in 1887 in a small and unpretentious two-story brick building on 6th Street in Los Angeles (population 80,000 at that time) by Dr. Walter Lindley, an enterprising young man born in Indiana.

Shortly thereafter he gathered together 21 fellow physicians, who each chipped in \$1,000 to buy a plot of land on South Hope Street, where they built the first physician-owned hospital in the U.S. It opened for business at 1414 South Hope in 1898, and was an attractive four-story wood-framed structure with gables, corner cupolas, awnings over the windows and a large well-landscaped garden facing 15th Street. It had 30

beds. In 1916 an enterprising group of staunch Lutherans of Scandinavian heritage from the American Midwest formed the Lutheran Hospital Society of Southern California, with the express purpose of “establishing hospitals, dispensaries and clinics.” The Society bought California Hospital in 1921, and successfully operated it and several other L.A. and San Diego hospitals for the next 70 years.

The turn of the century brick and wood buildings proved inadequate for “modern” healthcare, and in 1926 a new nine-story brick hospital was inaugurated at 1414 South Hope Street on the site of the old buildings. It was deemed to be the most progressive medical building in the country at that time. It served Los Angeles well until the Northridge Earthquake of 1994 damaged it to the extent that patients could no longer be housed there, and it was demolished in 2000. Meanwhile the current patient tower at 1401 South Grand Avenue was opened in 1987 – Tibbitts Tower, named after a much-respected hospital administrator, Samuel J. Tibbitts.

(Source: <http://www.lacityhistory.org/blog/category/events/>)



California Hospital, Los Angeles, CA, built in 1898.