By Dr. Tom Crumpler
Contributor

Probably the most distinguished citizen who ever lived in Highlands was Dr. Mary E. Lapham. She was an internationally recognized physician who specialized in the treatment of tuberculosis. Also, she operated the Highlands Camp Sanatorium from 1908 until its tragic destruction by fire in 1918. This nationally known treatment facility was located about where the Civic Center now stands.

Dr. Lapham was descended from a distinguished New England family. Her father, Jared S. Lapham, had moved to Michigan where he was the first banker in Northville and was also highly influential in the banking circles of Detroit. His son and grandson were both professors at the University of Michigan. A cousin, Dr. Maxwell E. Lapham, was Dean of the School of Medicine at Tulane University.

Mary had worked with her father very successfully in banking until she was in her late 30s. By this time she had visited Highlands on more than one occasion, staying at the Davis House. During these visits, she had observed the obvious lack of medical attention received by the local population, particularly the women. These conditions finalized her determination to study medicine and have a new career in that field.

Subsequently she graduated from the Women’s Medical College of Philadelphia in 1901 and later studied in Switzerland. Soon thereafter she moved to Highlands with two friends, Mrs. Edith Bloomer Dougall and Miss Caroline Barker. She had become especially interested in the treatment of tuberculosis and considered Highlands a likely place for practice of her specialty.

She built a house on Satulah Mountain which

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she named “Faraway” and with the assistance of Mrs. Dougall and Miss Barker many lavish entertainments and glittering social affairs occurred there. These three ladies were devoted to the good life and they had the most stylish carriage in town with a matched team of horses and a liveried coachman named Love Henry. Later their limousines piloted by Sam Baty were the talk of the town.

They loved opera and not only was the house equipped with a Victrola and Wagnerian operatic recordings, a grand piano, and a player piano, but they traveled extensively in Europe in the winters, usually arranging their tours to coincide with an operatic festival.

Mrs. Dougall was married to an elderly Scotsman who was rarely in residence. They had no children. Mrs. Dougall arranged to adopt as a daughter Valerie Ashton, the daughter of James Ashton, a recently deceased mining engineer from England. Valerie enthusiastically joined in the gaiety, so it became a merry household.

In 1908 Dr. Lapham built a large sanatorium for treatment of tuberculosis on the present site of Highlands Recreation Park, still known locally as “Bug Hill,” named no doubt in honor of the “tubercule bacillus.” The sanatorium consisted of two large buildings and 60 open-air cubicles where the patients slept in the fresh air. Until Highlands Camp Sanatorium burned in January of 1918, it was almost constantly full.

After the fire which destroyed the larger main building, 25 of the cubicles were moved across the road by Miss Bernice Durgin, a trained nurse who continued to operate the sanatorium for several years. Two of these cubicles can still be seen standing on the site which has now become the Highlands Trailer Park. Many of the original cubicles were moved and assembled into units of three to become residences which are still standing.

One of Highlands recently deceased residents, Wendell McKinney, the son of one of the town’s incorporators, remembered participating in the construction of the sanatorium and later working as the chief cook. One of his tasks was caring for the pigeon loft where squabs were grown as a principal article of diet for the patients.

After the burning of the sanatorium, Dr. Lapham was away from Highlands for several years heading a Red Cross-Medical Mission to war-torn Europe. She spent some time in Czechoslovakia where she became a fast friend of the first president of that country, Thomas Masaryk.

She was a much-loved family doctor for the people of Highlands and of the vicinity. House calls made in the middle of the night involving a 10-mile horseback ride were commonplace for her. In addition, she became internationally famous for her innovative methods of treating tuberculosis. She is cited in the medical literature as being one of the group of five doctors in this country who introduced and popularized therapeutic pneumothorax or artificial collapse of one lung. She also became the first woman ever to be president of the American Thoracic Society, a national medical group specializing in respiratory diseases.

In her declining years, she spent little time in Highlands and she died at her winter home in St. Augustine, Fla., in 1936 at the age of 75. The ownership of Faraway passed to Mrs. Dougall and Miss Barker.

An old photograph of Faraway has in a spidered handwriting this lovely poem:

They shut us round with misty rim
Afar against the golden sky.
Across their barrier, shadowy dim,
The outer world can never pry.
Here peace and calm unbroken stay,
Nor strife nor passion here molest.
They guard us still from all unrest
The purple hills of Faraway.

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Dr. Tom Crumpler, a part-time resident of Highlands since 1951, is a retired chemistry professor. He served 20 years as chairman of the Chemistry Department at Tulane University in New Orleans. He purchased “Faraway” in 1971.