

R Wing

by Lynne Belluscio

A new book by Jules Cohen and Stephanie Brown Clark traces the lives of two prominent Rochester physicians, John Romano and George Engel. Both men were members of the University of Rochester's medical school faculty from 1946 until their deaths in the 1990s.

The story of John Romano is intertwined with the story of Helen Woodward Rivas, the youngest daughter of Orator Woodward. According to Cohen and Clark's book, Helen Woodward originally wanted to donate funds for a cancer center, but the chair of the Department of Medicine, William McCann proposed that the funds be used to build a new wing for the psychiatry department.

Helen Rivas' first gift was \$2.7 million for construction of the new medical wing. That gift was followed by another in 1955, bringing the total to over \$3.2 million, which enabled the creation of a \$2 million endowment.

Dr. Romano, who had joined the faculty of the University of Rochester in December 1945, supervised the project and on May 25, 1946, excavation began for the new building on Crittenden Blvd. According to a history of R Wing, Dr. Romano wrote that the wing was to be known as Wing Q, but that he suggested

that the wing be named after the benefactor Helen Rivas and thus it became Wing R. However, Helen Woodward Rivas was not in favor of having her name or her initial on the building, so the stone that had been engraved with the letter "R" was presented to Dr. Romano. He quipped that he had never received a letter in college, so the "R" would be his first.

Romano wanted the new facility to be comfortable and welcoming and above all, non-threatening. The Statler Hotel in Washington served as a model. He was particularly proud of the elegant oak front door. His wife, Miriam selected the artwork for the lobby. The official bulletin of the medical school described the "Rivas Clinic": (It) will house approximately 65 bed patients and an out-patient clinic for children and adults. It is intended that the clinic will concern itself primarily with the study and care of patients whose illnesses promise improvement under the therapy available.

The building will provide space for research laboratories and office in addition to the clinical space provisions." A wooden panel above the fireplace in the lobby was inscribed with a dedicatory statement: "This clinic and those who serve it are



Helen Woodward Rivas

dedicated to the alleviation of human distress. To the enlargement of man's knowledge about himself and to the training of physicians to these ends. Those who here gain understanding and relief are constant beneficiaries of the vision and generosity of Helen Woodward."

Helen's philanthropy extended

beyond the University of Rochester. She financed the Spence-Chapin Adoption Center in lower Manhattan and the Medical Foundation of Buffalo, now known as the Hauptman-Woodward Research Center. She died in 1965, the last of her generation.

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