



Digital Imagery: Jason Gould

Timeless Contributions

**Dr. James Graham
united SIU and the
Springfield medical
community to provide
better health care.**

In the year 2076, city officials will unearth a 76-year-old time capsule and learn about Springfield as it existed in the late 20th century.

The School of Medicine will be part of that education thanks to James Graham, M.D. He has seen the growth of the School of Medicine from its origins at Seventh and Carpenter Streets (above) to its current position as a major health-care provider for central Illinois.

Dr. Graham wrote a letter outlining the practice of medicine in Springfield, including the origins of SIU School of Medicine, that was placed in the time capsule buried March 25, 2000.

He is possibly the most qualified individual to perform this task, since he has made numerous contributions to the Springfield medical community in his 66 years as a community physician, including being a founder and defender of the School of Medicine.

Dr. Graham played a vital role in establishing the School when it was no more than a wisp of an idea back in 1965. After the Illinois State Legislature approved the plan for a medical school in Springfield, the chancellor of SIU-Carbondale, Dr. Robert MacVicar, approached the esteemed Dr. Graham for help.

“At that point I was active in everything,” says Dr. Graham. Setting up a medical institution was nothing new to him, for he had been one of five founding partners of the Springfield Clinic 30 years earlier.

During the School’s formation, Dr. Graham was one of its most vigorous advocates. He was largely responsible for spreading the word about it, planning the cooperating network of the University, St. John’s Hospital and Memorial Medical Center, and recruiting and coordinating local physicians to support it. He spent five years planning and organizing committees while maintaining his own surgical practice.

Dr. Graham was a member of the committee that appointed Richard Moy, M.D., as the School of Medicine’s first dean in January 1970. “Dr. Graham is a sincere, straight-arrow kind of man,” says Dr. Moy. “I’m proud to count him as a friend and supporter.” Dr. Moy retired in September 1993 as the longest-sitting dean of any medical school in the country.

Gaining the support of local physicians — some who were reluctant to endorse a new medical school — turned out to be pivotal for the School’s existence. Dr. Moy says that Dr. Graham, in effect, “saved the School at a critical time in its formation.” In the early days, the School’s budget was threatened due to some local opposition. Recalls Dr. Moy, “It came down to a single question of convincing the State Board of Higher Education that the School had the support of the community physicians.” Dr. Graham, as head of the Sangamon County Medical Society, adamantly defended the School and guaranteed the support of area physicians.

And it worked. As a result, the budget was fully reinstated, ensuring the School’s development. “When the School needed help, Dr. Graham was always there,” says Dr. Moy.

In addition, Dr. Graham served as a clinical professor of surgery until his retirement in 1983. He emphasized to students the importance of the physician-patient relationship. “You can’t be impersonal and cold and be a good doctor, because you can’t feel the patient and the patient can’t feel you,” he stresses. “Doctors have to be very personal and caring and let the patient know that.”

Roland Folse, M.D., chair emeritus of the Department of Surgery, joined the School in 1971 and remembers how Dr. Graham helped him get to know the medical practitioners in Springfield. “He provided a good link with the rest of the Springfield medical community.” Dr. Folse counts Dr. Graham as a personal confidante and friend. “If I had a problem, I could sit in his living room and discuss it with him. He is a good strategist.”

Always intrigued by new endeavors, what Dr. Graham loves most about being a physician is the opportunity to keep up with the advances in medicine.

“Major and minor medical changes occur every week,” he says. Dr. Graham performed the first colonoscopy in Springfield, was the first surgeon to perform surgery to correct patent ductus arteriosus (PDA), a cardiac condition, and was involved in the evolution of heart surgeries in Springfield.

Though Dr. Graham formally retired in 1983, he continues to contribute to the medical community. Now 92, he works part-time as a medical consultant for the Federal Bureau of Disability Determination for the State of Illinois, where he was named Employee of the Year for 1998.

Besides improving health care in Springfield, Dr. Graham also has made it his mission to make Springfield a better place to live. He helped plan Springfield’s Prairie Capital Con-

vention Center in 1960; he served as president of Springfield’s United Way™; he was a director of the First National Bank; he received a Copley First Citizen award in 1968; and the list goes on.

The Grahams’ appetite for new experiences led them to a love of traveling. They have visited 90 countries in all seven continents, and all seven seas. “We’ve traveled from the arctic to the Antarctic,” jokes his wife, Marian Graham, in describing the travels she and her husband have enjoyed.

Despite a passion for travel, Illinois has always been Dr. Graham’s home. Born and raised in Springfield, he emerged from a family of lawyers as a 1930 graduate of the University of Illinois School of Medicine. After training in New York City and Boston, he returned to Springfield to begin his surgery practice in 1934. He has remained here ever since, except for his service as lieutenant colonel of the United States Army Medical Corps during WWII. It was in Springfield that Dr. Graham met his wife, Marian. Together they raised three sons and three daughters, who have given them 11 grandchildren.

After three decades as a champion of the School, Dr. Graham continues to declare his support. “The School of Medicine has been a big factor in increasing the reputation of medicine in the Springfield area,” he says. “It is a great asset to the city of Springfield.”

Dr. Graham, himself, is a great asset to Springfield. His spirit and enthusiasm for medicine helped to shape the fine reputation Springfield has earned as an accomplished medical center and growing city in the heart of Illinois. When the time capsule is opened many decades from today, the School of Medicine will be preparing to graduate its 102nd graduating class. The world and the School will have changed greatly, but Dr. Graham’s achievements will continue to impress. ■