

Early Hazardville Days for the Donald Gordon Family, by Gary Gordon

Donald Covil Gordon was born (1897) in Hazardville, Connecticut. After finishing grammar school, he attended high school in Thompsonville and went on to Wesleyan College (now Wesleyan Univ.). In his sophomore year (1917) he was inspired by missionary speakers at a meeting in Northfield, Massachusetts. He didn't think he could preach, so he decided to be a medical missionary and start a hospital in an area that didn't have a hospital.

He finished college, graduated from Harvard Medical School, and did an internship at a Hartford hospital. Before leaving for the mission field, he married Helen Alma Gary, who had served two years as a missionary in Chile and Bolivia. They went to Peru as Methodist missionaries, where he worked three years in a large, established, mission hospital.

Early Days in Brazil for the Donald Gordon Family, by Gary Gordon

Dr. Gordon now had the desire, the training, and the experience to start a new hospital, but the Methodist Board of Foreign Missions refused to support a new hospital. So in 1928, my parents, both brought up in the Methodist church, found a welcome and support with the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions.

They were assigned to the Presbyterian Brazil mission, and spent a few years in Bahia, learning Portuguese and Brazilian customs. In order to practice in Brazil, Dr. Gordon had to pass exams in all the medical courses taught in medical school. Also, exams in Brazilian history and geography.

A year in Buriti, MG, in the west central part of Brazil, was a good introduction to the Brazilian interior. Dr. Gordon did some travel, going east from there to Goiania, the new capital of the state of Goias, looking for the right place to start a hospital. He was asked to spend a year working in a hospital in Anapolis, which was good experience.

In 1935 the family spent a furlough year in the United States, renewing contacts, visiting supporting churches, buying supplies, and preparing to move to Rio Verde, in the state of Goias. Helen Gordon

wrote: “It was a joy to take with us as far as São Paulo, Lucy (pronounced “Lu-ceé”) the lovely Christian girl who had been in our home for over six months and contributed so much to its smooth running. We left her to study in the M.E. Mission school in Piracicaba. “

Trip from São Paulo to Rio Verde.

After a year in the U.S., and the arrival of baby Alma a few weeks after reaching Brazil, the family was ready to head for Rio Verde, on January 29, 1936. The Ford car was piled high with baggage, babies, and some special equipment: a hoe, a giant jack, and a machete. Alma traveled in the baby crib that Gary used in 1929. Gary, Ana (Lucy’s sister), and Grandfather Gary shared the back seat. Don and Helen were in front, along with the paraphernalia necessary for a two-month-old baby who has to have supplementary feeding. Lucy took Hope and Alan by train as far as Uberlandia. Lucy and Hope rode the rest of the way in a “bus” which carries the weekly mail. Alan crowded into the front seat of the car, with his parents.

After crossing the river into the Goias state, the roads were worse. It rained all day. One mud-hole “did its worst.” The big jack pulled us out; later we learned that the “bus” had had to be pulled out by a team of oxen. Our Ford car was far too low to fit in the ruts made by the trucks. Even the trucks got stuck with surprising frequency. “Sometimes they would pass us or stop to lend a hand, and then we might pass them. Usually we were too strong on the “women and children.” On the second day we got stuck three times, with the big jack again coming to the rescue.”

On one of the worst muddy stretches, they met another car. One of the occupants asked if Donald were Dr. Gordon. He introduced himself as the governor of the State of Goias, Dr. Pedro Ludovico. He had heard that we were coming, was delighted with the plan to start a hospital in Rio Verde, and offered to help in any way he could. He is working hard to better the roads of the State, but in the rainy season the big trucks change the dirt and dust into a sea of mud.

Once in Rio Verde, the family spent a week in a hotel, while house hunting, and then moved into a temporary above where there was no room to unpack, but where the family could cook, eat, and sleep. The

mud floor of the kitchen was something of a trial, but a happy month was spent there.

Finally, they rented a big old house, a bit decrepit but with many possibilities. There were 8 rooms besides the pantry, a big closet, and a large space formerly used as a store. This space was given over to the medical work. A large shed, built to serve as a warehouse, was transformed into two rooms with a new bathroom - one room for Grandfather Gary, and the other a playroom for the children.

The clinic (consultorio) opened on April 1, 1936. My parents laugh on recalling how they tried to decide whether to have office hours in the morning or afternoon! Very soon the patients were coming all day long, about half of them from distances varying from 4 to 150 miles. To take proper histories and make good examinations, as well as attend to treatments, keeps Dr. Gordon and the student nurses busy all day. That means that in the evening Dr. Gordon had to do a lot of the laboratory work as well as writing up and studying cases. His wife did the book-keeping, filing, and so forth. What with visitors, church service, choir practice, night calls, they often kept going until their eyes closed by themselves.

The church work was most encouraging. Dona Loide had held together a small faithful group for some time, stimulated by the annual or semi-annual visits of a missionary pastor. She superintended the Sunday School and conducted the prayer meeting service, while Donald and Helen were responsible for the Sunday evening services. "Mother writes: "We feel the lack of a real pastor. I've been leading one service a month, and I assure you that preaching in Portuguese is not easy. The audience consists chiefly of young people which makes one just long to help them. Aside from the recently-installed motion pictures, given twice a week, the town's chief recreations have been dancing and gambling - and for the boys, worse.

While the clinic was serving sick people all day long, -- it was not a hospital. And yet, there were at least two cases that couldn't wait for a real hospital. A man came with a strangulated hernia. The surgery is relatively simple, but without the surgery he would die. On a table in our living room, the operation was performed. For anesthesia, my mother provided ether, under my father's direction. The patient recovered.

One day Alan, a boy only 4 years old, and I, were climbing and exploring the attic of this large house. Most of the ceiling was wood, but one room only had a cloth ceiling. Somehow, Alan lost his balance, ripped through the cloth, and plunged head first onto the floor below. I yelled "acode o Alan", and a maid ran for Dr. Gordon. Alan was unconscious for several weeks. Dr. Gordon had a set of books that told him how to relieve the pressure in the brain. Thanks to the treatment, plus many prayers, Alan recovered.

In his year at Anapolis, Dr. Gordon saw a hospital that wanted to expand, but didn't have the space. He was determined to start the hospital with plenty of land. He chose a large block, with a number of private homes along one street, but much of the block only had grass. This part belonged to the Rio Verde town, and they were willing to give it to the medical work. Dr. Gordon happened to read a small notice in a newspaper. It said that public land should not be given to any foreigner. So - the town gave the land to a private individual, who then gave it to the future hospital. In succeeding years, the hospital purchased the private homes as they were offered for sale, until the entire block was owned.

The first home purchased belonged to Denis McMullen. In succeeding years this building was used as: our home, a small hospital, and finally as the clinic. For many years a small house had a life-size doll in a bed, and was used to teach nurses how to give a sponge bath to a patient. The doll was very patient, and was named Job. So, this was named Job's house.