

THE FALLON CLINIC (1949-1990) BY DR. ROD SAGE

Editor's Note: The history of the Fallon Clinic was brought to my attention by Dr. David Klubert, who is married to Dr. Barbara Caffaratti Klubert, daughter of Dr. Darius Caffaratti. Dr. Caffaratti's medical legacy includes his daughter Barbara (Ward), who attended our two-year School of Medical Sciences, son John, who went to medical school at the University of Oregon, and a granddaughter, Angela Caffaratti Exline, who graduated from the University of Nevada School of Medicine in 2000.

I also have fond memories of the Fallon Clinic. In 1968 as a new pathologist I was assigned to make monthly visits to the Fallon Clinic and Churchill County Hospital. The annual meeting of the hospital staff was the weekend that duck hunting season began, and Dr. Dingacci hosted the hospital medical staff at the Greenhead Club. Memories also linger of Dr. Caffaratti's keen sense of humor. He performed autopsies while the pathologists completed the microscopic evaluation. Each of his autopsies started with the words, "The body is opened in the usual manner with a linoleum knife." This curved knife was perfect for the task and was used by most pathologists to open the chest

cavity.

I prevailed on Dr. Rod Sage, who knew these Fallon doctors, to provide a description of them. He received assistance on the following article from Joan Elliott, Pat Dingacci, Drs. David and Barbara Klubert, Ciligia Littlefair, R.N. and Bunny Corkill of Churchill County Museum.

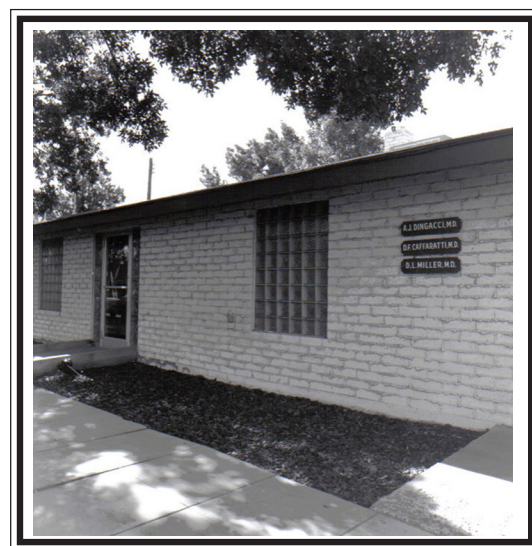
The nicknames "Ding," "Caffy," "Si," and "Len" rekindle fond memories of the much-loved quartet of physicians who served the Fallon, Nevada, area for upwards of 100 doctor years.

Dr. Alphonse J. Dingacci was universally known as "Ding" to his many patients and friends. **Dr. Darius Caffaratti** logically went by "Caffy." **Dr. Verlyn Elliott** was known as "Si," a moniker he acquired in childhood. **Dr. Leonard Miller** was simply "Len."

These medical practitioners were the sum and substance of the Fallon Clinic from 1949 to the

early 1990s.

Dr. Dingacci, with his friend and colleague, Dr. Leonard Miller, had worked together in Hawthorne before coming to Fallon where, in due time, they collaborated on organizing and building the Fallon Clinic, which opened its doors in January of 1949. They left their offices on Auction Road near the old hospital to move into the 4,000 square



Fallon Clinic - 1979 - '80
(Photo from Churchill County Museum and Archives)

foot, up-to-date structure at the corner of Taylor Street and Williams Avenue, where it soon became a local landmark and remained so until it was demolished in favor of a "Jack in the Box" eating establishment in the mid '90s, after the four doctors had departed, one way or another.

Ding was born in 1915 in San Mateo, California. After high school there, he attended Santa Clara University, graduating in 1937. From there he went



Left, Michael Dingacci, Dr. A.J. Dingacci, Dr. Fred Anderson - 1985

(Photo by Fallon Eagle-Standard and Lahontan Valley News)

through medical school at Creighton University in Omaha, finishing in 1941.

Caffy's life began in Italy in 1916, but at the age of 2 he came to San Jose, California with his family. After prep school at Bellarmine Academy, he too, attended Santa Clara, where he became Ding's roommate and life long friend. Caffy graduated from St. Louis University Medical School in 1941, his academic career having been capped by selection for membership in Phi Beta Kappa at Santa Clara and Alpha Omega Alpha at St. Louis University, the well respected undergraduate and medical scholastic honor societies.

Both young doctors returned

to Santa Clara County Hospital for their internships. Ding continued on for two more years of surgical training after which he served as an army surgeon in Europe until his discharge in 1946.

Caffy, whose lifelong hearing impairment excluded him from the service, started his career as director of a tuberculosis hospital in Oroville, California. He followed this with two years of work as a resident physician and clinician at the Butte County Hospital in Oroville. Then, in 1946 he launched his own family practice in that Northern California community where he served for 18 years.

Caffy left Oroville in 1962 for a year of European travel with his family. He used this opportunity to obtain more medical training in Vienna and London.

Returning to the United States in 1963, Dr. Caffaratti contacted his old friend, Ding, and promptly became an associate in the Fallon Clinic.

Verlyn "Si" Elliott was born in 1924 and grew up in Eastern South Dakota. He served in World War II as a Navy radioman, then returned for premed at Yankton College. He completed the two-year medical curriculum at the University of South Dakota, then obtained his M.D. degree from Colorado University in Denver, in 1952. Si interned at the Public Health Service Hospital in San Francisco, then went on to the Walker River Indian Service Hospital in Schurz, Nevada, for three years, followed by a stint of general practice and employment with Kennecott Corporation in Ely. In 1958 he joined



Dr. Darius Caffaratti
(Photo from Dr. David Klubert)

Ding at the Fallon Clinic.

The fourth member of this group, Dr. Leonard Miller, had practiced with Dr. Dingacci for two years in the late '40s, then helped to establish the Fallon Clinic. He stayed until 1953 at which time he entered a three-year psychiatry residency program, variously in Mexico, Hawaii, and New York City.

Dr. Miller, a native of Kansas, was born in 1912, acquired the necessary schooling there, then was awarded the M.D. degree from Kansas University in 1938. He interned in Detroit, did general practice in Dodge City, Kansas, then worked for the Civilian Conservation Corp. in California, before becoming a Navy doctor. He ultimately was the medical officer for a flotilla of mine sweepers in the Pacific theater.

Len practiced psychiatry in San Francisco for 18 years, where he was associated with the University of California and did research in substance abuse problems there and at the California Medical Facility in Vacaville.

For two years in the 1960s Len Miller demonstrated his free and independent spirit by living in (or out of) a van on the side of Mt. Tamalpais in Marin County, sleeping under the stars, then going about his necktie and white coat doctor role during the day.

In 1975 Dr. Miller pulled up stakes again, heading 300 miles east, back to the God's country of Fallon, Nevada, where he rejoined the Fallon Clinic, which he had left 22 years earlier.



Left, Dr. Si Elliott, Gov Mike O'Callaghan, and Legislator Norm Glazer - 1971 (UNSOM archive photo)

Len was a man of medium size, sturdily built, and with a sartorial elegance akin to that of Buffalo Bill Cody.

Between them the four doctors treated well over 100 patients daily in the clinic, in addition to this they made hospital rounds once or twice a day and many house calls.

Their scheduling allowed one doctor to be off for periods of five days, while night calls were rotated amongst the others. This amounted to a work week of 60 to 90 hours per physician. They needed those five free days just to recover.

The doctors enjoyed a variety of hobbies and interests outside of medicine.

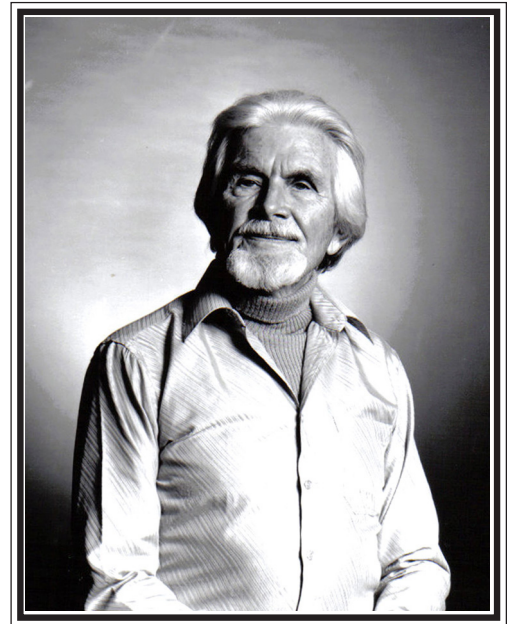
Ding was an avid duck hunter and knew the Greenhead Club intimately. He was also an accomplished musician with special abilities on the accordion, clarinet, and organ. Though his wife, Pat, was an excellent horsewoman, Ding shunned this sport, but was regularly the attending physician at the area rodeos. Ding was a small and wiry man, possessed of a mischievous

twinkle in his eye and an enviable sense of humor.

Darius Caffaratti was dark complexioned, compact, and loquacious. His many opinions about life in general, and especially medicine, were ex-

pressed with his quite distinctively rasp-like voice. In the 1960 presidential election, while still in Oroville, Caffy managed the regional campaign for Jack Kennedy, but in due time abandoned the Democratic party to become a staunch Republican. He was an avowed enemy of socialized medicine, worked to legalize prostitution in Churchill county, and served as the County Public Health Officer.

Caffy was an inveterate collector; including old cars, cameras, swords, and firearms. He had his own photographic dark room in addition to a wood working shop. He excelled artistically in both



Dr. Leonard Miller c. 1979 (Photo from Churchill County Museum and Archives)

endeavors.

After 18 years with the Fallon Clinic, Caffy died quite suddenly in September of 1981, leaving his wife, Rose, daughter, Barbara, now an internist in Portland, Oregon, and a son, John, a cardiologist in Ohio.

In contrast to his clinic partners, Si Elliott was somewhat angular of build, quiet, and taciturn by nature. A caring and attentive physician, he became active in medical politics, eventually serving as president of the Nevada State Medical Association in 1970-71. He followed this with a term on the Medical Board of Review. Si and Joan raised four children in Fallon, the oldest of whom is currently a physician with the Navy in South Carolina. They also trained a number of horses at their ranch on the outskirts of Fallon. He enjoyed duck and deer hunting, but especially each autumn, he savored a trek to his native south Dakota for pheasant shooting. He was also the team physician for many of the Fallon high school sports activities.

In 1976, Si moved from Fallon to a new practice in Reno. The following year he suffered a severely disabling stroke which forced him to retire from medicine completely. He died in 1990 at the age of 66.

-To be continued-

MEDICAL CONDITIONS IN JAPANESE INTERMENT CAMPS

Ken Maehara, Ph.D., a member of the History of Medicine and Pathology programs, will start a six-month sabbatical in January 2005 to research medical conditions, which existed at the Hunt, Idaho (Minidoka Camp) during World War II. Dr. Maehara was director of the Medical Technology Program from 1977 until 1992 when he became Pathology Course Coordinator. He has a special interest in Minidoka

because he and his parents were interned there from 1942 until 1945. Dr. Maehara would welcome any information our readers have on medical conditions at Japanese Internment Camps.

GREAT BASIN HISTORY OF MEDICINE 2004 ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the History of Medicine Society was held October 21 at the Eldorado Hotel and Casino Convention Center. The event was attended by 72 people who enjoyed the presentation of Dr. Todd Savitt, from the Department of Medical Humanities at the East Carolina School of Medicine. Dr. Savitt talked on "Sister's Hospital: The Founding and Early Years of a Catholic Hospital in Frontier Montana." The topic was chosen because hospitals on the Montana

frontier were established in a manner that was typical of the western frontier, including Nevada.

Dr. Savitt also did a Medical Readers' Theater with the second-year students emphasizing social and ethical issues. The students performed "A Face of Stone" by William Carlos Williams and "Follow Your Heart" by Richard Selzer. "A Face of Stone" deals with a physician taking an instant dislike of an immigrant couple and his subsequent development of a poor physician/patient relationship. "Follow Your Heart" tells the story of the widow of a man whose organs were transplanted, and how she deals with her grief by wanting to listen to her dead husband's heart beating in another man.

Happy Holidays
From the Greasewood Staff

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