



70 for 70

Celebrating seven decades of caring for the Northshore

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On Nov. 28, 1954, an estimated 1,000 residents of St. Tammany Parish gathered on a piney plot in Covington to witness history.

It was then and there that officials dedicated the new 30-bed St. Tammany Parish Hospital, the culmination of years of raising money and rallying community support.

Previously, residents of the rural Northshore had to make the drive around Lake Pontchartrain to New Orleans to receive hospital care. Sometimes, they wouldn't survive the trip.

With the opening of the hospital, they instantly became the envy of smaller, rural communities everywhere.

"I now hand over ... the key to this fine institution," Police Jury President Fred Mizell told hospital board Chairman Oliver Hebert upon dedicating the building. "May this key never be used to close it; may

it always remain open to suffering humanity."

Three days later, on Dec. 1, the hospital opened its doors for the first time.

Honoring Mizell's wishes, it has yet to close them.

A lot has happened at St. Tammany Health System's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital in the seven decades since. The onetime country hospital has grown to become the healthcare destination of choice on the Northshore, a regional health center with dozens of facilities throughout the community.

To mark its 70th anniversary and to honor those men and women who worked tirelessly to establish the hospital, St. Tammany Health System is highlighting artifacts and moments that tell the health system's story.

The pages that follow are a sampling. You can read more about each at StTammany.health/70th.

1946: A CAUSE IS BORN

If hospitals were issued birth certificates, this brief 1946 announcement published in the St. Tammany Farmer newspaper would be St. Tammany Health System's. In it, the Women's Progressive Union of Covington urged the citizens of St. Tammany Parish to join its then-newly announced effort to secure the needed funding to build the parish's first hospital. It would take eight years, but they would eventually succeed.





1947: A NEW CHAPTER

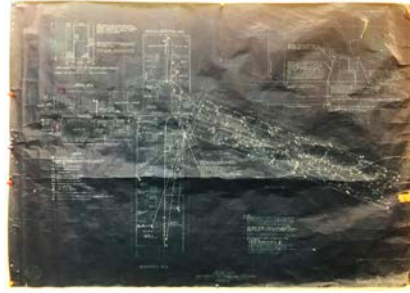
For decades, the local M.C.B. Club ran a lending library out of the 1903 building at 131 N. New Hampshire St. in Covington. When the club disbanded in 1947, it sold the building to Christ Episcopal Church, which still owns it today, and eventually donated the proceeds to the fledgling hospital to outfit its very first nursery.



1951: THE SCRAPBOOKING HISTORIAN

Two years before ground was broken and three years before the hospital was complete, a prescient Cecile Hebert — wife of the hospital's first board chairman — started keeping this now-tattered scrapbook. It remains an invaluable chronicle of the hospital's early history, continuing through the hospital's 25th anniversary in 1979.

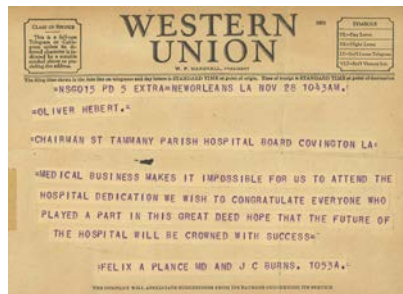
1953: A GROUNDBREAKING MOMENT (See accompanying sidebar.)



1954: BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

This 1954 blueprint of St. Tammany Parish Hospital shows the original hospital's footprint, as designed by the New Orleans firm of August Perez and Associates. That, for the record, is the same firm behind parts of the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition, the Canal Place office tower, the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, the Piazza d'Italia and the Shrine on Airline, among other prominent New Orleans structures.

1954: THE FIRST FAMILY OF ST. TAMMANY (See accompanying sidebar.)



1954: TELEGRAM!

On the morning of Nov. 28, 1954, New Orleans physicians Dr. Felix A. Planche and Dr. James C. Burns, whose practice was then located in Canal Street's Maison Blanc building, sent this Western Union telegram to congratulate St. Tammany Parish Hospital Board Chairman Oliver Hebert on the facility's long-awaited opening. Planche was a Covington native. Their message shows that the medical community of Southern Louisiana was paying close attention to the years-long efforts of Northshore residents to found a hospital of their own.



1954: THE DOCTORS ARE IN

The secret to seven decades of success at St. Tammany Health System really isn't much of a secret. In fact, health system leadership has long made it clear that its number one asset is now, and always has been, its dedicated team of talented, highly trained healthcare professionals. Thanks to this article published in the St. Tammany Farmer newspaper on Nov. 26, 1954 — and faithfully clipped and saved by the hospital's unofficial first historian, Cecile Hebert — we know exactly who those physicians were.

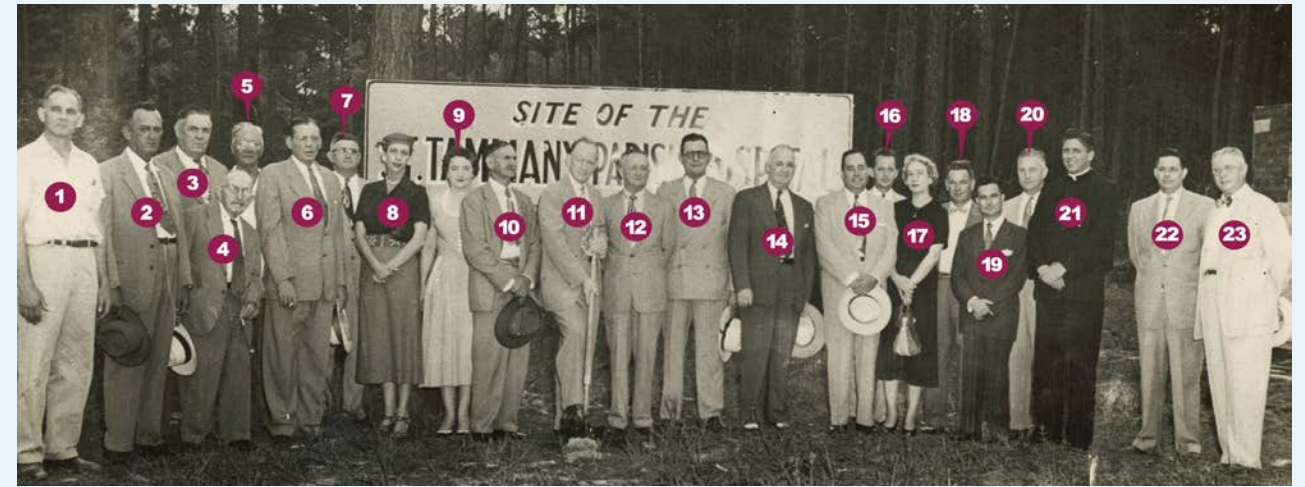


1954: INTRODUCING GREAT AUNT EMMY (See accompanying sidebar.)



1955: TEAM OF CHAMPIONS

This paper tea napkin embossed with the words "Hospital Guild" is believed to date to 1955, the year the St. Tammany Hospital Guild was founded. In addition to being a quaint touchstone to a past era, when white-gloved women gathered regularly over tea and cookies to find ways to better their communities, that little napkin — yellowed by time — is a reminder of the decades of invaluable contributions the guild has made, and continues to make, to the hospital.



Local dignitaries and leaders of the effort to build a hospital in Covington gather in May 1953 for the groundbreaking of St. Tammany Parish Hospital. (STHS archives)

A groundbreaking moment, annotated

This vintage photo taken at the 1953 groundbreaking for St. Tammany Parish Hospital, is a tribute to our founders, those determined Tammanyites who worked so tirelessly to establish the hospital all those decades ago.

But who are those founders?

Fortunately, scrawled in the margin of a scrapbook page containing another photo taken that day and squirrelled away in the health system's archives are the names of all 23 people appearing in it.

Now, 70 years later, we celebrate them here — for posterity and in gratitude. They are as follows:

1. **Louis Voss**, a member of the Covington City Council.
2. **Archie R. Singletary** of Pearl River, the Ward 6 representative on the St. Tammany Parish Police Jury.
3. **James A. Thompson**, the Ward 3 representative on the parish Police Jury.
4. **Eugene Esquinance** of Mandeville, the Ward 4 representative on the parish Police Jury.
5. **Joseph Stein** of Madisonville, the Ward 1 representative on the parish Police Jury and its Hospital Committee.
6. **Fred Mizell**, president of the parish Police Jury. Mizell would be the person to turn over the keys of the hospital to board Chairman Oliver Hebert (No. 11) upon the structure's completion at a dedication ceremony Nov. 28, 1954.
7. **Eugene McIntyre** of Covington, the Ward 2 representative on the parish Police Jury.
8. **Norma Core**, who, as a leader

of the Women's Progressive Union of Covington, was one of the first voices to rally the community behind the idea of establishing a hospital in Covington. Later, she would become a member of the inaugural St. Tammany Parish Hospital Board of Commissioners. She's also presumably the Norma mentioned in the handwritten note included with the photo that reads, "Norma says keep." (We kept it, Norma!)
9. **Lucille Glisson**, a local civic activist and businesswoman who would later be named the first president of the St. Tammany Parish Library board.

10. **Walter Clairain**, of Abita Springs, the Ward 10 representative on the parish Police Jury.

11. **Oliver Hebert** (holding shovel), a Covington pharmacist, chairman of the inaugural St. Tammany Parish Hospital Board of Commissioners and a tireless advocate for creation of the hospital.

12. **Ivy A. Champagne** of Covington, chairman of the parish Police Jury's Hospital Committee.

13. **Gus A. Fritchie Sr.**, a Slidell lawyer and the brother of longtime Slidell Mayor Homer Fritchie. About a decade after this photo was taken, Gus Fritchie would become Slidell's first city court judge, a position he would hold until his death in 1971. Slidell's Fritchie Park is named after the Fritchie family.

14. **Hubert A. Davis** of Slidell, a representative of the parish Police Jury's Hospital Committee.

15. **August "Gus" Perez Jr.**, a noted New Orleans architect whose firm

was hired to design the original St. Tammany Parish Hospital building.

16. **Jack Tannehill**, editor of the St. Tammany Farmer newspaper, an early and vocal champion of the move to build a hospital in Covington.

17. **Cecile Hebert**, the wife of hospital board President Oliver Hebert and an unofficial historian of the hospital's early days, chronicling the local efforts and collecting news clippings about it as early as 1951.

18. **Geo. A. Broom** of Slidell, the Ward 9 representative on the parish Police Jury who in 1963 would be elected sheriff, a position he held until 1980.

19. **The Rev. Baxter Ponds**, the longtime pastor at First Baptist Church in Covington who delivered the closing benediction for the groundbreaking ceremonies.

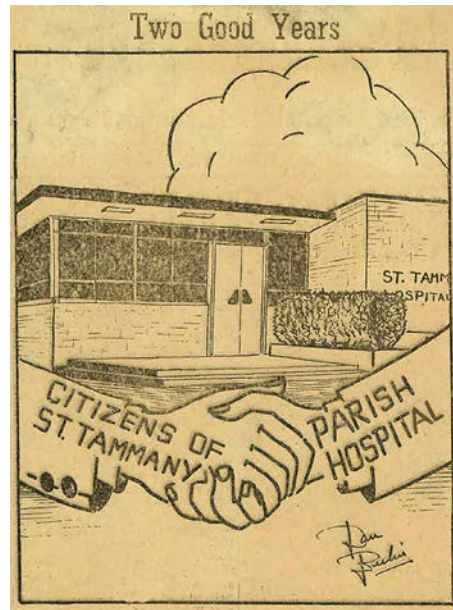
20. **Jesse Bankston**, a former state hospital head who served as a consultant for the Covington hospital project.

21. **The Rev. Timothy Pugh**, a priest from St. Peter Church who delivered the invocation for the day. He also delivered the invocation at the dedication of the hospital some 18 months later, on Nov. 28, 1954.

22. **Dr. M.J. Duplantis**, one of the inaugural members of the St. Tammany Parish Hospital Board of Commissioners and a member of the hospital's medical staff upon its opening in December 1954.

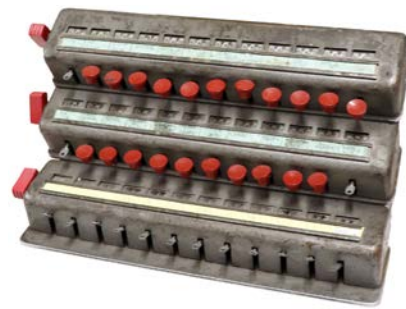
23. **L.L. Landon**, secretary of the parish Police Jury and one of the inaugural members of the St. Tammany Parish Hospital Board of Commissioners.

The first family of St. Tammany



1956: TOON TIME

Two years after the hospital opened, the St. Tammany Farmer newspaper published this editorial cartoon, which perfectly and simply speaks to the symbiotic relationship that has existed between St. Tammany Health System (i.e., “Parish Hospital”) and the people of St. Tammany Parish from the hospital’s very beginning.



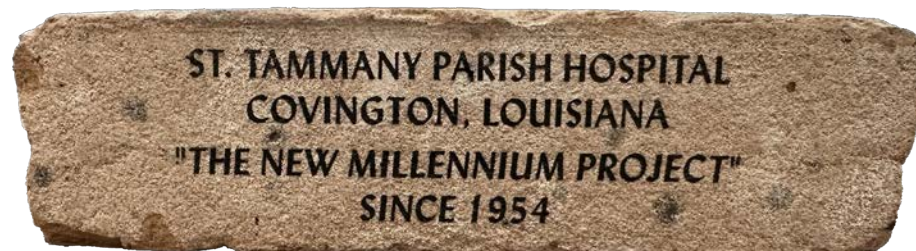
1980s: TALLY HO!

A patient’s gotta eat. And given how people in Southern Louisiana relish mealtime, it’s particularly important here to get it right. So, as St. Tammany Parish Hospital grew, its Dietary team had to get creative to keep track of how many of each dish to prepare for patients at breakfast, at lunch and again at dinner. To do so, they used this vintage Multi-Counter tally machine to record patients’ meal orders. A mechanical device resembling a cross between a typewriter and a cash register, and functioning like an umpire’s ball-and-pitch counter on steroids, it was “retired” in the mid-1980s.



1992: WHAT’S COOKIN’?

In summer 1992, former Times-Picayune cooking columnist Myriam Guidroz received the following reader request: “Can you get us the recipe for the bacon-lettuce-and-tomato soup that the St. Tammany Hospital serves in the cafeteria? It’s delicious.” Like any good Louisiana, former Director of Dietary Operations Kathleen R. Hill and her team were flattered by the request, which they were only too happy to provide.



2003: A STURDY FOUNDATION

This brick is among the only existing pieces of the original hospital building, the last traces of which were demolished in 2003 as part of the hospital’s ambitious New Millennium expansion project. Rather than sending the ruins to the dump, health system leadership invited people to collect a piece of it for posterity – like this one, which was inscribed to commemorate the event.

1956: A FATHER’S LOVE

T.E. “Toby” Rosenthal was a proud papa. His first and only child, Kerri Rosenthal Lamers, had just been born at St. Tammany Parish Hospital, and – after paying the \$56 hospital bill – he folded up his receipt and put it in his wallet for safe keeping. There it remained for the next 62 years, until his death in 2018, a priceless reminder of his little girl. “Dad was a sentimental guy,” explained Lamers, who donated the receipt and the tiny, beaded ID bracelet she wore home from the hospital – all of three-quarters of an inch across – to the health system archives earlier this year. Of note is the value assigned to the items on the obligatory donation form Lamers signed upon gifting them to the hospital: “priceless.”



2005: BRAVING THE STORM

There are infinite reasons to look back with solemnity upon those dark days just after Hurricane Katrina, starting with the lives lost as a result of the storm, but it also gave us innumerable acts of heroism. That included the tireless work done at St. Tammany Parish Hospital, which stayed open – and illuminated – throughout the storm and subsequent recovery, transforming it into a default recovery hub and prompting one publication to call it “a beacon of light” on the Northshore.

It was Dec. 1, 1954, and Christmas was coming, so 22-year-old Ottis Arnold and his 20-year-old bride, Catherine Gregoire Arnold, were up on the roof of their Bedico home tweaking a display featuring Santa’s reindeer.

The holidays weren’t all that was coming, though.

Catherine was also nine months pregnant with the couple’s first child, and as they herded Dasher, Dancer and all the rest into place, she paused.

The baby, she realized, was on its way.

As luck would have it, that was the same day St. Tammany Parish Hospital first opened its doors. A day later, on Dec. 2, their daughter – Cathy Ann Arnold Kemp – became the first baby born at the then-new facility.

Seven decades and more than 62,000 babies later, Cathy Kemp and the hospital – the flagship facility of St. Tammany Health System – are both preparing to celebrate their milestone 70th year.

“My dad told me this story – he served in the Army in Korea, and the state of Louisiana was giving returning servicemen a \$300 bonus check at the time,” Mrs. Kemp said recently in the lobby of the hospital, sitting just feet from where the original delivery room was located. “Dad sort of giggled at the story and said he got his check from the state of Louisiana and then he gave it to St. Tammany Parish Hospital because my bill was \$300. He likes that little story.”

To this day, Mrs. Kemp’s father and mother, nonagenarian, still relish their status as St. Tammany’s first family. In fact, they remain loyal patients of St. Tammany Health System.

“We cannot come to this hospital without whoever is the patient – my mother or my father – telling everyone they see,” Mrs. Kemp said with a laugh.

“A year or so ago, my Dad was a patient for a few days, and everybody that entered – whether it was a doctor or a nurse, someone taking blood, the sweet girl picking up the food tray – (he would tell them), ‘There she is! She was the first baby born here!’ It’s really been sweet and cute.”

Now retired, Mrs. Kemp said



To mark the birth of its first baby – born Dec. 2, 1954 – St. Tammany Parish Hospital gifted the parents of Cathy Ann Arnold Kemp with a small sterling silver mug engraved with her name, her birth date and the words “1st Baby,” printed just above the hospital’s name. (STHS photo)



Cathy Ann Arnold Kemp, at center, pays a visit to the New Family Center at St. Tammany Health System’s flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital. Mrs. Kemp was the first baby born at the hospital upon its opening in December 1954. Since then, more than 60,000 babies have been born there. (STHS photo)

her parents chose St. Tammany Parish Hospital – as opposed to the tiny Wiginton Memorial, which operated in Hammond from 1942 to late 1959 – because their family physician, Dr. Jacob Kety, was among the first doctors on the St. Tammany Parish Hospital staff.

His business partner, longtime local physician Dr. Francis Rodwig, delivered the Arnolds’ new arrival by Caesarean section, a fact mentioned in Dr. Rodwig’s 2000 obituary.

“My mother said, in her words, ‘I was pretty out of it,’ and my dad said everybody was just bustling around,” Mrs. Kemp said. “There were other people who had gone into labor, so it was sort of intrigue that I got to be the first one.”

By the time newspapers reported the next morning that the long-awaited Covington hospital had opened, it was still unclear who would earn the title of first baby. The St. Tammany Farmer had a pretty good idea, though, noting that Mrs. Arnold “was awaiting her first baby and will undoubtedly be the first obstetrics case.”

It was right. Little Cathy Ann Arnold was born Dec. 2, the first of eight babies born in the hospital’s first week of operation.

To mark the occasion, the hospital gifted the Arnolds with a small sterling silver mug engraved with her name, her birth date and the words “1st Baby,” printed just above “St. Tammany Hospital.”

She still has that cup.

It’s a little tarnished now. A little dinged up here and there. But it has pride of place in her home, just as it has for the past 70 years.

“Birthdays have always been a big deal to me,” Mrs. Kemp said. “It’s nice memories, especially for my parents. I love their loyalty.”

“My husband and I lived in Hammond for 35 years, and we used a hospital there, our doctors were there. But my parents, all these years, always here. Always here.”



2011: IT'S A BIRD! IT'S A PLANE!

When St. Tammany Parish Hospital first opened its doors in 1954, Covington was a considerably more rural place than it is today. So, after buying land across busy South Tyler Street — occupied today by the Charles A. Frederick Medical Office Building — hospital leaders decided in 2010 to construct a 208-foot, \$3 million skybridge spanning the roadway to provide pedestrians safe passage between the two buildings. The catch: To build it, traffic would have to be shut down for several hours on South Tyler Street. The solution: a spectacular maneuver in June 2011, in which a massive steel truss was hoisted into place by crane in the dead of night, to reduce the impact of the traffic disruption. By November of that same year, it was ready to open — which hospital leaders did by second-lining across it.

2013: TAKING ROOT

In 2013, as part of a larger expansion of the hospital's Emergency Department, St. Tammany Health Foundation embarked on a campaign specifically to bolster its pediatric emergency services. Just like the communitywide effort to build the hospital in 1954, the community responded with enthusiasm. By March 2016, the campaign had raised \$3 million for the project, a record for a single campaign. In a sign of gratitude for that outpouring of generosity, the foundation commissioned the tree sculpture, which — in addition to brightening the space — incorporates the names of those who contributed. "The tree is not only representative of life on the Northshore, with its design hinting toward the importance of nature, water and family to us, but it also represents the incredible generosity of the people who live here," foundation Executive Director Nicole Suhre said.



2013: HONOR RED, WHITE AND BLUE

Military veterans have long held a place of honor at St. Tammany Health System, so when a hospital employee pitched a way to honor patients and colleagues who served, the nonprofit St. Tammany Health Foundation wasted no time putting it into practice. The moving result of that effort is the Honor Red, White and Blue program, in place since 2013 and which includes a solemn flag tribute for military veterans who pass away while a patient at the hospital.



2020: A ST. TAMMANY TIME CAPSULE

When the nurses of 2070 reflect on the history of their profession, they'll just have to pop open the time capsule prepared by the St. Tammany Health System Nursing Department in December 2020 and ensconced in a glassed-in enclosure in the hospital's South Tower shortly before the building's completion in spring 2021.



2021: WILD HORSES

When St. Tammany Health System and partner Ochsner Health moved their joint cancer operations into a new, purpose-built facility in 2021, it marked a new day for cancer care on the Northshore. But one beloved artifact from the old facility — an equine triptych painted by local artist Gretchen Armbruster — also made the journey to the new space. The center's patients wouldn't have it any other way. "They would talk about how peaceful and relaxed they felt when they would sit in that area," STHS Cancer Services Manager Lindsay Gomez said. "Our patients love all the artwork on display here, but those horses are particularly special. They mean a lot, and for that reason I suspect they'll always have pride of place here."



2021: KEYS TO A HEALTHIER NORTHSHORE

These are the keys to the Be Well Bus, St. Tammany Health System's 40-foot mobile medical clinic, equipped with all manner of health screening equipment. The bus has been rolling down the streets of St. Tammany Parish since May 2021 on a twin mission to combat stubborn local health metrics and to address barriers to quality healthcare.



2024: A TRADITION IS BORN

Tradition runs deep in Louisiana. On Jan. 24, 2024, St. Tammany Health System introduced a new one when opening its new St. Tammany Academic Center in Covington, inviting guests to sign the mat of a frame that now holds a photo of that day's ribbon cutting. Today, it hangs inside the facility, a testament to the labor of those who willed it into existence. The idea was so well received that it was repeated in April for the opening of a new family medicine clinic in North Covington. Given the number of new facilities the health system currently has in various stages of completion, you can expect to see a lot of similar signed and framed photos in the next few years. That's how traditions work — and that's how St. Tammany Health System rolls.

Introducing Great Aunt Emmy

Last Jan. 4, when publishing a number of old photos of some of St. Tammany Parish Hospital's first nurses, we lamented that we did not know those nurses' names.

Then we received an email from ninth-generation St. Tammany resident Rebecca Mohr Carter, who recognized a familiar face in those pictures.

It was her Great Aunt Emmy, aka Emma M. Porche Wetherbee, one of St. Tammany Parish Hospital's first nurses. After consulting with others — "my two sisters, my mother's half-sister and Ancestry.com" — Carter penned a brief biography of her great aunt for us.

We are honored to share it here on behalf of all those nurses who worked alongside her, as well as those who have followed in her footsteps.

Born on Sept. 19, 1903, in Orleans Parish, I am Emma Porche Wetherbee, affectionately known as Great Aunt Emmy by my family. I was married to Marshall Threefoot "Dick" Wetherbee. We had one son, Halcolm Harry Wetherbee. My oldest sister, Madge Shirley Porche, quit school to be a seamstress so I could get an education as a nurse. My life story is woven through the memories of those closest to me. My great niece Greta Heine Laborde sheds light on my lifelong dedication to nursing. I was present in the delivery room and operating room during her mom's cesarean, showcasing my commitment to family. Despite the losses of my husband and only child before Greta's birth, I resided in Covington on 24th Avenue, surrounded by Victorian antiques possibly inherited from my mother, Spencina Jonte Porche. Dion Mohr, another great niece, recalls the enchantment of exploring my house filled with treasures, especially the antique pieces that transformed it into a museum-like space. The living area, adorned with two organs and carefully placed items, provided a tempting playground for a curious little girl.



Emma M. Porche Wetherbee, center, is seen in a colorized, undated photo from early in St. Tammany Parish Hospital's history. 'Great Aunt Emmy,' as Wetherbee was known by her family, was among the hospital's first nurses. (STHS photo)

Rebecca Mohr Carter, another great niece, recalls visiting with her grandma, my niece Spencina Hernandez Levy Gardner, during the day while Rebecca's siblings were in school. She enjoyed the piano and two organs in my home. She loved hearing the stories her grandmother and I would discuss during the visits. She recalls playing on the exercise bike while a soap opera or "The Price is Right" played on the TV. Stacey Levy Giancontieri reminisces about frequent visits to my home, where her mom would skillfully cut my hair, and her father, Edward Levy, would accompany me to medical appointments and on errands. I earned a reputation in the hospital as a stern leader, running a tight ship in my professional life. Known for my healthy eating habits, particularly my love for salads, I defied the odds as a heavy smoker, living into my late eighties or early nineties. Greta affectionately remembers the nights she spent with me, cutting coupons off my cigarette packs during our late-night chats. In my later years, Madelyn, my youngest sister Alice's daughter, became a close companion and caregiver. I eventually passed away May 8, 1990, in Ohio, where Madelyn lived, following the losses of my niece Spencina Gardner, and my oldest sister Madge Porche.



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2929 U.S. Hwy. 190, Mandeville
(985) 773-1550

**Pediatric Emergency
Department**

1202 S. Tyler St., Covington
(985) 898-4438

**St. Tammany Parish Hospital
Obstetric Emergency Dept.**

1202 S. Tyler St., third floor
New Family Center
(985) 898-4436

The date was Dec. 1, 1954. That was when St. Tammany Health System's flagship St. Tammany Parish Hospital first opened its doors. At 7:30 a.m., it got its first patient, a heart attack victim. He survived.

Seven decades later, St. Tammany Health System is still there for the families of the Northshore, now with three emergency rooms to serve the community, including the area's only pediatric ER and the area's only obstetric ER.

So breathe easy. St. Tammany is here and ready to handle whatever life throws at you and your family – just as we have been since 1954.



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ON TRAUMA**



**American Heart Association
American Stroke Association
CERTIFICATION**
Meets standards for
Primary Stroke Center