

THE STORY OF JOSEPH GANT GAITHER, M.D.

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The Pennyroyal Region has produced its share of outstanding personages and truly memorable characters. It can be successfully argued that the medical profession has contributed some of the most notable in both categories. Dr. David Amoss of Night Rider fame and Dr. Frank Bassett, the imminent physician-politician come immediately to mind. In medical circles, however, the name that comes up with regularity is that of J. Gant Gaither.

Joseph Gant Gaither was born December 18, 1884 in Hopkinsville.¹ He had two sisters, Rebecca and Elizabeth with whom he apparently did not get along even in adult life. He had a brother, Nick who lived in Seattle. The two brothers were joined by a bond of mutual admiration and affection.² Their father was Nat Gaither (1844-1918), circuit court clerk and president of the Bank of Hopkinsville. His mother was Rebecca Love Gant Gaither (1854-1927). She was the daughter of Joseph Kinkead Gant, who was a pioneer in the Hopkinsville tobacco trade and an honored member of the Tobacco Board of Trade. Joseph Kinkead Gant has been described as a public spirited citizen who had a life-long love for the prosperity of the city of Hopkinsville and its surroundings. His father, Archibald Gant, in turn, was an early merchant of Hopkinsville, a hatter, who specialized in the sale of tall Beaver hats popular in his day and costing \$10 and up.³

The Gaithers could trace their ancestry back to the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, through John Gaither the fourth Trustee of that town. A long line of Revolutionary War heroes, congressmen, journalists and physicians preceded young Gant. Nat Gaither's father was Dr. Nicholas Gaither of Adair Co. Kentucky. Nat served as a gallant soldier on the side of the Confederacy. After the War, he moved to Hopkinsville. There, he married Miss Mary Dorothy Zollicoffer, the daughter of General Felix Zollicoffer. She died several years after the marriage, leaving one son, Felix Z. Gaither.⁴ (Felix subsequently moved to the Fort Worth, Texas area and had off-spring of his own)⁵ Subsequently, Nat Gaither married Miss Rebecca Gant (1875) and entered her father's tobacco business. Mrs. Rebecca was a community spirited and socially prominent lady in her own right. As such, she was to play a strong role in Gant's life choices.

Little is known of Gant Gaither's childhood except that he attended Clay Street School and had his own share of heroes and guiding lights. Prominent among them were Walker Wood, founder of the Kentucky New Era and Miss Julie Arnold, a high school math teacher. As with most of the young people of his day and social class, he graduated from South Kentucky College which used to grace the top of Belmont Hill.^{6 7}

He attended the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee where he received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1904. After graduating from Sewanee, young Gant served for a year as a night reporter for the Memphis Commercial Appeal.⁸ He became disenchanted with this field and decided that he had gifts in areas other than journalism.⁹ He returned to Sewanee, this time to study medicine and he received a Doctorate in Medicine from that University in 1907.

Gant was the Valedictorian of his medical school class.¹⁰ He was a member of one of the last classes of the medical school at Sewanee. It closed in 1909 because of its remote location and the absence of clinical material. In 1913, there was a movement to reestablish the medical school in Nashville, occupying the old buildings of the University of Nashville. It was felt, however, that the effort to compete with the established Vanderbilt Medical School would unnecessarily deplete University funds and that effort was abandoned.¹¹

Dr. Gaither did his internship at Mississippi Charity Hospital in Vicksburg, Mississippi.¹² During that time he met a charming 14 year old young lady, Miss Jane Lum, who would become his wife 5 years later.¹³ Miss Jane was the daughter of a well known and respected Vicksburg cotton broker, James J. Lum and his wife Delia. Mr. Lum's grandfather was Walker Brooke, a senator from Mississippi who was one of the two signers of the Constitution of the C.S.A. from that state.¹⁴ ¹⁵Following his internship, Dr. Gaither began a general medical practice in Areola, Mississippi. He soon became frustrated with the role of a "pill pusher". He felt hand-cuffed at offering placebos and nothing else in the face of trivial and life threatening disease alike. He was driven to take up the career of a surgeon.¹⁶

From 1909 to July 1912, he was surgeon to the University of Mississippi in Oxford under the Chancellorship of A.A. Kincannon, M.D.¹⁷ This was roughly equivalent to the modern day general surgery residency. During this time it is reported that the young surgeon had performed circumcision on the novelist to be, William Faulkner.¹⁸ Since Faulkner would have been between 12 and 15 years of age at the time, it would have been a memorable event for them both. No mention of late circumcision is made in several exhaustive Faulkner biographies. It could be that this was a product of Dr. Gaither's humor and a metaphor for the number of surgical cases done by him in Mississippi or simply objective reporting of an event that was too painful to report elsewhere. Nonetheless the curtain of time and uncertainty is mercifully drawn down on this legend. He completed his Residency at Street's Sanitarium in Vicksburg.¹⁹

Toward the close of his residency, Dr. Gaither was faced with a life altering decision. Two of his close friends were finishing their training at the Mayo Clinic as he was to finish his training in Mississippi. The young men were filled with the spirit of adventure and entrepreneurial ardor. The proposal was for the three of them to travel to Brazil and open an exclusive clinic in Rio de Janeiro. Dr. Gaither was seriously considering this possibility when he returned to Hopkinsville for a visit with his parents.²⁰

It was his mother who appealed to his business sense. She pointed out that he had name recognition in Hopkinsville and that there was no other college trained surgeon in the area. She correctly assessed that young Gant would be assured of a successful surgical practice if he

returned home. Her arguments appealed well to the financial goals that he had set for himself. The decision was made and he was to return to his home town to pursue his goals.²¹

On his return to Oxford in 1912, he and Miss Jane were to be married. Because the boll weevil had decimated the cotton crop in that year, the Lum's were not in a position to afford an extravagant wedding. The ceremony was held at home with a relatively small guest list. A honeymoon followed at Brown's Wells, a resort near Vicksburg. The young couple then set out for Hopkinsville and a new life together.²²

They first settled in on 7th Street in the home of Jennie Glass. It did not take long for Jane Gaither to express her discontent with the situation and demand her own home in the neighborhood that she desired. Dr. Gaither had picked out the lovely Anderson home south of town on Cox Mill Road but his wife was not interested in living outside of the city limits. She wanted to be in the thick of things on Main Street. They initially found a cottage on Virginia Street. In 1918, when their son Gant was one year old they moved to the lovely home at 1704 South Main Street where they resided for the remainder of their lives.²³ The home was originally built in 1912 by Mrs. Myrtie Lindsey, the wife of a Madisonville pharmacist. The house was sold to Dr. Gaither by Mrs. Lindsey's son-in-law, Mr. William Kimmons, who worked as a distributor for Springfield Woolen Mills. It is of some note that the price that Dr. Gaither paid for the home must have been rather exorbitant since Mr. Kimmons sold it out from under his wife and children. For a short time they ended up living with the Gaithers until they could find a suitable replacement. Needless to say, Mr. Kimmon's family was very angry at him for the sale and have not forgotten it to this day.^{24 25}

The home underwent change and expansion as the Gaither children matured. The house was appointed with stained glass windows, a sleeping porch and the chandelier out of the old Holland Opera House. At one point the Gaithers built a beautiful upstairs apartment complete with a ball room. It was stylishly paneled in white oak with convenient bench seats, pegged flooring, a fold down desk, a solid oak door, and was set up in order to entertain young friends of their son Gant. As he said, it was designed to keep the young people out of the roadhouses. (The home has in recent years found itself badly in need of restoration and happily has found an owner, Mr. Ray Hancock, interested in the project).

Medicine in Hopkinsville *circa* 1912 was different than it was to be in later years. There was no hospital and certainly no operating room. Much of the care was rendered in physicians' offices or in the home by the "circuit riders". At that time it was common for general practitioners to drive through the country and stop at homes where needed. To attract the call of a physician, one would put out the appropriately colored flag of a given physician on the mailbox. For the "usual and customary" fee of two dollars, the physician driving his route would stop. It is possible on

occasion when things were slow, that flags would be raised on a box "inadvertently".²⁶

Most outstanding of the circuit riding physicians were Dr. O.L. Barnes and Dr. Erkilitian (a physician of Armenian extraction).²⁷ After Dr. Gaither's arrival he affiliated with the imminent and well loved family physician, Dr. Preston Thomas. Although association with a family physician in the community could often turn off surgical referrals from other doctors, Drs. Gaither and Thomas's practices were not afflicted with this malady. When notified of a need, Dr. Gaither would make the required house-call. His training, responsiveness and inexhaustible supply of energy spelled success for his surgical practice.

On many occasions, by the light of a window or lantern, appendices were removed on the kitchen table. Dr. Gaither lived by "the appendicial creed" that specified: 1)Deaths from appendicitis were unnecessary 2) No one died from appendicitis but from its complications (i.e. peritonitis) 3) There is a time during the course of appendicitis when operative intervention is curative.²⁸ Most every person who remembers the era of Dr. Gaither either had an appendectomy themselves or had a close relative who came under the curative knife of Dr. Gant Gaither.

In 1913, a group of physicians that included Dr. Gaither incorporated the Hopkinsville Infirmary. It was located on Clay Street in the old Peter Postell home.²⁹ It was intended for those who could not be cared for at home. It was not until 1914 with Miss Jennie's hip fracture that a hospital was built. Appropriately, it remains under the name of Jennie Stuart Medical Center.

Dr. Gaither's practice covered ten counties in the Pennyryle and extended from Cadiz in the west, Madisonville and Greenville to the north and Russellville to the east.³⁰ He attended clinics in all of these towns. He is described by his contemporaries as a skilled technical surgeon with little regard or need for diagnostic skills.³¹ When required to cut, he viewed it his mission. It was common during his peak years to perform 14-16 major procedures per day. Sundays were no exception and he could often be seen walking into Sunday School at Grace Episcopal Church in his white lab coat and smelling of ether, having come directly from surgery.³²

In the operating room he was a whirlwind. He usually wore all-white scrubs, shunning the greens of today. His scrub-up was perfunctory at best followed by two dips of the hands in alcohol vats and on to the O.R. If he needed to, he would remove his gloves to feel the affected organ better. He knew his way around the abdomen better than anyone that ever picked up a scalpel and his wound closures were as expeditious as his scrub was with his lightening fast running sutures.^{33 34}

Although appendectomy was his *forte*, he was rapid and efficient at hysterectomies and the technically more difficult supra-pubic prostatectomy. Dr. Gabe Payne recounts Dr. Gaither's skillful handling of a challenging case of appendicitis in a man with *situs inversus*. He remembers

being hopelessly confused by the anatomy when Dr. Gaither reached under the bowel and fished up the offending organ in his clamp, purse-strung it, removed it and tucked in the stump without wasted motion. It has been said of him that he was "never uncertain about anything".³⁵ His patients adored him and he exuded a healing aura. "When Dr. Gaither just entered the room, you felt better already!"³⁶

Dr. Gaither claimed to have developed a unique method of performing an appendectomy. He would make a 2 inch scar over McBurney's point and by pressing on the posterior flank would prolapse the appendix out of the scar. He would then sever the organ, put in a suture and push the stump back into the abdomen, in an incredibly short period of time. Although, complication rates and outcomes were not recorded then, his reputation was such that his results must have been consistently good for his time.

Dr. Gaither was the king of itinerant surgery. Later, this practice became frowned upon, but is now experiencing a resurgence in some specialties. At that time it was a necessity if medical care was to reach the surrounding area. He drove a large high powered vehicle (usually a Buick) from town to town at a high rate of speed. When he became too tired to safely drive he would simply pull over and sleep for a while. He was even known to abandon a car in Mannington when it failed him on the way to a busy surgical schedule.³⁷

Dr. Gaither had little regard for speed limits and viewed them as an impediment. The story is told that one morning he was hurtling toward Madisonville through Crofton when one of that town's diligent police officers pulled him over. The officer indicated that Dr. Gaither's speeding offense would net him a fifty dollar fine and handed him a ticket. Dr. Gaither's reply was "Son, you had better give me two of those things because in a couple of hours I'll be coming back through here!"³⁸ The police soon came to recognize Dr. Gaither's car and left him alone. In later years it is rumored that he hired a private plane to carry him from one clinic to another and folks would note the time by when he would fly over their house.³⁹

Dr. Gaither's medical practice touched the lives of many people in all stations of life. In the fall of 1931 a former second grade school teacher by the name of Ruth Warren came under Dr. Gaither's care for what was diagnosed as gall bladder problems. On Monday, September 21, she underwent surgery for gall stones at Jennie Stuart Hospital and was found to have an incidental "bowel abscess". At first she improved but subsequently relapsed and grew worse. Her son was called from Nashville to join his father at her side. "She had received a blood transfusion preparatory to a second operation. After the long night, when she was wheeled in for surgery, Warren and his father waited wordlessly in the hall. The door opened at last, and the doctor came out. Warren saw that he was "carrying something on a pad of gauze...streamed with blood.

'There it is,' the doctor said. Neither the father nor son knew what it was. Mary (the daughter) knew that no tumor had been found, and so Dr. Gaither may well have excised tissue involved with the abscess where peritonitis had developed." The patient weakened progressively from this point and died on Thursday, October 1. Her death profoundly affected the subject matter and writing style of her son, Robert Penn Warren. His work, subsequently became the standard in creative writing for the South and the country as a whole. ⁴⁰

During World War I, Dr. Gaither volunteered as a Captain and served as an instructor of general surgery at Camp Greenleaf, Chickamauga, Georgia. For many years afterward he was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Medical Reserve Corps.⁴¹ Dr. Gaither served as President of the Board of Trustees for Jennie Stuart Hospital between 1940 and 1955.⁴² In that position he carried the hospital through many challenging and lean times. It also afforded him a tremendous amount of power and influence.

There was no formal medical staff at the hospital until 1947, and prior to that time Dr. Gaither controlled very closely who could and could not admit patients. If one were a hometown product, there would be no questions asked and it would be assumed that one would be allowed admitting privileges. Outsiders would have to come to the foot of the throne. When Dr. Raymond Snowden came to Hopkinsville in 1948 as a family physician, he remembers entering the surgeons' lounge where he found Dr. Gaither resting between cases. As usual, he was in white scrubs with a towel tucked in the front of his pants to protect from the diffusion of blood. Dr. Snowden approached Dr. Gaither and asked for permission to practice at the hospital. The answer was a direct and simple, "You're in!" At that time and later, Dr. Gaither had near absolute control in the medical community.⁴³

It is of interest that when Drs. Rachel Croft and Norma Shepherd appeared on the scene (1946) as the first female physicians in Hopkinsville, they were encouraged and supported by Dr. Gaither. There was a contingency that tried to make life difficult for them as physicians. They were effectively neutralized by Gant Gaither's authority.⁴⁴ (Dr. Croft retired in 1986 and Dr. Shepherd in 1987 after over forty years of successful medical practice. Dr. Shepherd died in 1993) In 1952, the Christian County Medical Society voiced strong opposition to the resolution that permitted "negro physicians" to be admitted as full members of the Kentucky Medical Association. The record is strangely silent as to Dr. Gaither's opinion on that issue.⁴⁵

Dr. Gaither was more than a good surgeon and medical politician. He was a compassionate and socially conscious man. He and Dr. Preston Thomas operated a black clinic on the third floor of the Bank of Hopkinsville Building, southeast corner of Seventh and Main Streets.⁴⁶ There is some evidence that Dr. Gaither assisted the imminent black physician, Dr. Phillip Brooks through medical school and was partly responsible for his returning to Hopkinsville. Gaither served as a

lay reader and part-time preacher at the black Chapel of the Good Shepherd⁴⁷ and it was at his insistence that the Gaither family servant, Aunt Patsy Brent, was entombed at Riverside Cemetery. She remains the only black person buried in that cemetery.⁴⁸ Yet, Dr. Gaither's views also reflected the influence of his southern heritage. He was said to have expressed an acceptance of the concept of slavery as it was practiced in the south. When his daughter, Jane, was in the sixth grade, he refused to allow her to do a paper on Abraham Lincoln. In this regard, he was as much an enigma as the times in which he lived.⁴⁹

Dr. Gaither was responsible for the founding of the first Alcoholic's Anonymous chapter in Hopkinsville,⁵⁰ although he himself had the reputation of a teetotaler. It was a major concession for him to allow champagne in the punch at his daughter Jane's wedding.⁵¹ He also founded a chapter to combat drug abuse in the community. Both organizations had their initial meetings at Grace Episcopal Church during his tenure as Senior Warden there. As his son, Gant, said, "He did a world of good for many."

In addition to his concern about the effects of alcohol, Dr. Gaither had a distinct intolerance for the smoking of tobacco. He also had very few individuals with whom he cared to converse on a regular basis. One of the individuals who could hold her own intellectually with Dr. Gaither was Mrs. Tom Fairleigh. Dr. Gaither had a great deal of respect and admiration for Mrs. Fairleigh. On one occasion, the Fairleigh's were guests at the Gaither home to play bridge. The group was visiting while waiting for Dr. Gaither to come downstairs to join them. During the delay, the decision was made to pass the time with conversation and a smoke. Apparently, Dr. Gaither came down more quickly than he was expected. He entered the parlor of his own home to find the group seated around a table with Mrs. Fairleigh holding three cigarettes!⁵²

His own son said that Dr. Gaither was initially attracted to medicine by the lure of wealth and its possible accumulation.⁵³ Such belies the complexity of a man who was driven by so many things. During the years of the second World War, many of the community's physicians were called to active duty. This left the area with a shortage of physicians. The story is told that Dr. Gaither tried to volunteer but was turned down because of age. He was asked to do his part at home. Dr. Gaither remained and did his part by giving medical care free to Fort Campbell soldiers and their families.⁵⁴ Following the War, Grace Episcopal Church lost its pastor on the retirement of the Reverend George Jewell. As Senior Warden Dr. Gaither served as pastor of his church from 1947 until 1950. During that time he brought many souls into the Episcopal Church and was known for his wonderful, thought provoking sermons based on the classics for which he had an undying love. It has been said of him that he delivered more new members for Baptism and Confirmation during his time as pastor than any preceding minister had done.⁵⁵ Some light may be shed on his evangelical success when it is known that he offered his medical services during that time at no charge to members of Grace Episcopal Church.⁵⁶

He was admirably complimented by his gracious wife, Jane. She coordinated or was consulted on almost every wedding that occurred in the community at the time. She was the accepted and final authority on etiquette and protocol. While Dr. Gaither abhorred travel and detested California, Jane loved travel and exposed her children to it at every opportunity. Later, she was as much at home in the Palace at Monaco as she had been in Hopkinsville. She created a home environment that served her children well. Their son Gant provided her with an opportunity to display her skills in that regard through his close personal friendship with Princess Grace of Monaco. On one occasion when greeting the Princess, Mrs. Gaither addressed the Princess formally. The response was, "Oh, Mrs. Gaither, I'm Grace to you. You knew me when I was flipping hamburgers!"⁵⁷

The Gaithers were reputed to bring class to Hopkinsville. There was a time when everything that they did was news to the community. A newspaper clipping from 1935 reports the first transatlantic telephone call to come into Hopkinsville when the Gaithers' son Gant called his mother from London.⁵⁸

Although, as time went on, Dr. Gaither had competitors in the form of Dr. Charlie Yancey and Dr. Guinn Cost, he really remained above the fray. On occasion, he didn't hesitate to exert his power and influence but did it with a flair and a brilliant sense of humor while immune from recrimination. For example, one evening he was making his usual Sunday evening rounds when he recognized an acquaintance as a patient on the floor. He greeted the patient and asked what he was in for. The reply was, "Well, Dr. Cost has me in here. I've been having gall bladder problems and I'm in for surgery tomorrow morning" Dr. Gaither's retort was, "Well, you don't want to stay in here forever, why don't we go down and take care of that problem tonight?" The surgery was done that night. One can only imagine Dr. Cost's surprise on rounds the next day.⁵⁹

Dr. Gaither's humor demonstrated an unique sense of timing, spontaneity, and reflected his strong ego strength. On one occasion, he was standing in the lobby of a downtown bank talking to a friend. Out of nowhere came a fellow with a sheepish, rather insipid grin on his face. He presented himself to Dr. Gaither with the query that has plagued people that meet the public since the beginning of time, "You don't remember me do you?! Dr. Gaither, you did my operation several years ago." Without a moments hesitation, the imminent surgeon turned and dryly retorted, " Why, yes! My God, I thought you'd died!!!" The questioner slunk away enshrouded by the ultimate put-down.

Dr. Gaither often used his considerable talents as a thespian to carry him through a difficult situation. When Dr. Gabe Payne had only been in the practice of pediatrics for a short time, he was called by his life-long friend, Dr. Gaither to attend a patient in the Emergency Room. Dr.

Gaither introduced him as "an imminent pulmonary specialist". It was all that Dr. Payne could do to keep from breaking up in laughter until he realized that Dr. Gaither was dead serious. He would use any technique, including subterfuge, to reassure his patient and facilitate healing.⁶⁰

After the Medical Staff was formalized in 1948, there was some written evidence that Dr. Gaither had some difficulty in adjusting to the changes that were inevitable. He had always been free to treat his patients as he saw fit without the annoyance of documentation or the legal protection afforded by informed consent. This was recorded in the minutes of the Medical Staff dated June 21, 1950-"The forgoing cases are illustration of Dr. Gant Gaither's pointed determination and persistent refusal to comply with the rules and regulations of the hospital."⁶¹

He must have succeeded in making the transition. Or perhaps, like the local police, the hospital administration recognized the futility of arguing with Dr. Gaither, for no other mention is made of this issue. There is, however, evidence that Dr. Gaither continued to be of influence on the Medical Staff. Of particular note is his opposition (along with Dr. Preston Higgins) to a resolution proposed by Dr. Delmas Clardy to include veterinarians as members of the physicians' registry at the hospital. (It was Dr. Clardy, also, who authored the proposal from the Christian County Medical Society in the same year opposing the admission of "negro physicians" to the KMA) However, whether it was due to Dr. Gaither's own waning interest or due to the political aspirations of his colleagues and competitors, he was consigned to the Library Committee rather than a committee of more influence.⁶²

The respect of Dr. Gaither's colleagues was amply demonstrated when they elected him President of the Kentucky Medical Association for 1955.⁶³ However, there was some good natured joking involved. Members of the Bowling Green delegation to the KMA overheard two members of the Hopkinsville delegation talking following the election. One said to the other, "At least now we can get him out of town for a while so we can get some work for a change!"⁶⁴

Dr. Gaither served well as President, and was instrumental in coordinating efforts with the Southern Medical Association and the American College of Surgeons in which he was also influential. Issues that were handled that year included: response to criticism of medical services in the eastern coal fields, by-law changes regarding apportionment of delegates, mandatory AMA membership for KMA members and the initiation of a study regarding military obligations with the end of the doctor draft after the Korean War.⁶⁵

There is no doubt that Dr. and Mrs. Gaither would rank as one of their greatest achievements the success of their children. In later years he devoted much of his energy to providing for their welfare. Their son, Gant, was born on August 1, 1917 and at the encouragement of his father wrote his first play at the age of about six years. He attended the University of New Mexico and

the Royal Academy in London. He later received his B.A. from the University of the South in three years. He gave up a job in New York to go to the School of the Arts at Yale University where he studied architecture. After playing in summer stock, he got the idea of "winter stock" in Florida and built his own theater in Miami Beach at age 22.. This was with the able help of his mother who personally prepared the theater for opening night. It was at that theater that the famed actress Kim Hunter was first presented as a budding actress. He is experienced as a playwright, scenic designer, stage manager, and director. During World War II he served in the military and received the Bronze Star. He was a producer at the Broadway Theater, New York from 1947-56. In 1951 he met Grace Kelly when she was cast in his production of *Alexander*. They subsequently became close personal friends. He is author of "Princess of Monaco-The Story of Grace Kelly". Mr. Gaither is an accomplished sculptor and illustrator. He is currently living in Palm Springs California and is a Trustee of The Princess Grace Foundation.⁶⁶⁶⁷

On November 24, 1919, a daughter was born to the Gaithers. She was named Jane, after her mother. She was married in Hopkinsville in 1948 to Ian Eric Campbell of Lexington. She lived much of her adult life in Monterey, California where she moved with her husband after purchasing the former summer home of President Herbert Hoover. She attended Sophie Newcomb College in New Orleans and graduated from Goucher College in Baltimore. She served with the American Red Cross during World War II. She remained an active member of the Episcopal Church. She was active in many social service groups including the advisory board of the Salvation Army, the Family Service Agency, and the Monterey County Commission on Alcohol. She was a member of the Monterey History and Art Association and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Approximately ten years after she was married, she and her husband divorced. She had five sons one of whom died with leukemia. She was blessed with several grandchildren. She died as a result of breast cancer in August, 1995. She is remembered as a petite, energetic and lovely person with a keen sense of humor. Undoubtedly, she made her parents very proud.^{68 69}

In approximately 1921, the Gaithers had another daughter, Elizabeth. This child was born with severe congenital birth defects including cleft lip and palate as well as being totally blind. The child did not thrive well and it was obvious that she would need permanent custodial care. Dr. Gaither had decided that the child should be institutionalized rather than be an ultimate burden to her siblings. In an attempt to save her, Mrs Gaither took Elizabeth to Rochester, Minnesota after her birth to consult at the Mayo Clinic. The two of them lived there for 6 months until the time of Elizabeth's death. Mrs. Gaither was heart-broken and anxious about this child. She blamed herself and felt that there must have been something wrong with her or that she had done something wrong to have had this visited upon them. For this reason they never had additional children. When he was four their son Gant, remembers poignantly at little Elizabeth's funeral that he and his sister, Jane were each given sprigs of Lily of the Valley to press in little Elizabeth's

hands in the casket. The memory of this child and her life as well as her early death were indelibly written on the heart of each member of her family.

Dr. Gaither had made it clear to many friends that he would retire when he had accumulated one million dollars in trust for each of his two children.^{70 71 72} This was quite an awesome achievement for 1957. It was even more amazing when one considers that it was accumulated at the rate of fifty dollars for each appendectomy performed. When discussing this in the surgeon's lounge with his good friend and competitor Dr. Charlie Yancey, Doctor Gaither repeated his goal of a million dollars for each of his children and a "little nest-egg" for himself and his wife. Dr. Yancey inquired what a "little nest-egg" was. Dr. Gaither replied that it was about \$600,000. Taken alone that sum would have provided for a relatively lavish life-style for the time.⁷³ By comparison, his longtime partner, Preston Thomas retired on a total of \$200,000, which was also no small sum then.⁷⁴

Dr. Gaither had financial interests outside of medicine that included a chemical works in Nashville and a zinc mine. He is credited with inventing several new industrial chemical processes (these included a method to extract aluminum from clay which he gave to the War Department during the Second World War at no charge)⁷⁵. During World War II, Mexico cut off this country's supply of fluorspar. Fluorspar is an essential ingredient in steel manufacturing and its derivative, hydrofluoric acid is essential in making lenses. Dr. Gaither owned and developed fluorspar mines in Crittenden and Livingston Counties to meet the demand. He had several real estate holdings within the city.^{76 77 78} He was always quite generous in his support of community projects. He was instrumental in acquiring a federal grant to build a large addition to Jennie Stuart and solicited a minimum of two hundred and fifty dollars from each physician which was hard to come by in the 1950's.⁷⁹ No one knows to this day how much personal money Dr. Gaither put into this project but it is reported to be a considerable sum. When the \$1.5 million addition was completed in 1966 it was appropriately christened "The Gaither Addition" or "the G Wing".⁸⁰ It has only recently been razed to make way for the new physicians' office annex.

Dr. Gaither was on the Board of Directors for the Bank of Hopkinsville and of course his office was upstairs in the Bank Building. For years after the turn of the century, there were four banks in Hopkinsville, The Bank of Hopkinsville (on the corner of seventh and Main), City Bank (at the current location of Hopkinsville Federal), Planter's Bank and First National. There came a time in the mid 1920's when the McPherson family that owned much of the Bank of Hopkinsville expressed an interest in selling out. This prompted competition between the City Bank and Planter's Bank for shares in the Bank of Hopkinsville in order to obtain a controlling interest and thus acquire it. Dr. Gaither favored acquisition by the City Bank. Seldon Trimble IV, a prominent attorney and financier on the board of Planter's, of course, favored that bank. The

deciding shares in the Bank of Hopkinsville belonged to Mr. Tom Fairleigh. Mr. Fairleigh lived in a home at 7th and Clay Streets (about where the Salvation Army now sits).

Every evening around 4 pm Mr. Trimble would close his office and stop by the liquor store near-by. He would purchase a pint of whiskey and walk down to join Mr. Fairleigh on his front porch. There, they would enjoy a drink and would discuss the events of the day. Conversation would always turn to what Mr. Fairleigh planned to do with his bank shares. As soon as Mr. Trimble had taken his leave, Dr. Gaither would time his arrival and mount the porch anew to discuss goings on at the Episcopal Church of which Mr. Fairleigh was long-time, faithful member. This went on, according to Dr. Gaither, for several months until, as Gaither said, "I won!" The Bank of Hopkinsville became part of the City Bank. Later, in 1931 the City Bank merged with First National to form what is now known as First City Bank.⁸¹

Late one evening in 1957, Dr. Gaither received a phone call at home. It was the Head of Nursing, Ruth Coppedge, R.N. She reported to Dr. Gaither on a patient and then asked him to come in and evaluate them. He asked her what time it was. "11:15 pm, sir," she replied. "I'll be right in," he answered. Dr. Gaither went in and carefully addressed the patient's problems. As he was preparing to leave, Ms. Coppedge asked him to see another patient. "What time is it?", he asked. "It's a little after midnight," she answered. "In that case, I'm sorry. You'll have to find someone else. You see, I'm retired."⁸² Shortly after his retirement in 1957, Dr. Gaither was found burning his office financial records. When interrupted and queried, he stated that he didn't want anyone (especially, his sister) finding them and hounding his former patients about money.⁸³

Dr. Gaither prided himself on being a shrewd businessman and up until later years, filed his own tax returns. He was always fighting with the IRS and seemed to really enjoy being in the heat of battle. Around 1967, however, he finally gave up and handed over his returns to be prepared and maintained by the trust department at the bank. His Trustee went to his home to pick up the forms that Dr. Gaither had prepared. On opening the packet back at the bank, the young man was both surprised and amused to find in the right hand column where the tax form called for occupation, a list that included "physician, surgeon, chemist, playwright, journalist, banker etc" up to ten or more categories. The shrewd fellow was listing professions that would allow justification of nearly all his expenses as those that would be deductible in his various endeavors and interests.⁸⁴

Dr. Gaither had a love for both Greek and Latin and was a regular and frequent reader of both. He was familiar with several foreign languages (Spanish, French and German). He was the author of several plays in the late 50's and early 60's.⁸⁵ He loved the theater and when his children were young, never missed a chance to expose them to performances in Nashville. He was determined

that his children would not suffer educationally from their small town life and on one occasion hired a Spanish speaking native to live-in with the children. He was a dedicated father and educator.^{86 87} He also enjoyed food that was unusual or difficult to obtain. He would drive to Nashville to obtain fresh baked French bread, skim milk and cultured sour cream.⁸⁸ It was not just his own children with whom Dr. Gaither concerned himself. Many remember his presence at the high school "Career Days". It has been said that he rarely missed one.⁸⁹ He followed with interest the careers of his children's former playmates and took an active interest in the youth of the community and worked to recruit them back to Hopkinsville.

It is the task of a historian to present a picture of the past in as truthful a manner as is possible. In this case with Dr. Gaither having been gone for almost thirty years, one is left to form an image of him through the eyes and memories of those who remain. It would be less than forthright to deny that Dr. Gaither had his detractors. They would point out that he had a contract with the United Mine Workers to provide surgical services in a time before health insurance as it is known today. There were allegations that the volume of surgery generated from those clinics suggested that many who were operated on did not really need it. Certainly, given the demographics and clinical indications for surgery today, the number of surgeries that he did seems quite high. There is no written record with which to resolve the issue and there was no peer review process then to confirm or deny the suspicions. In fact, it can be stated with some truth that Dr. Gaither "had no peers in Kentucky".⁹⁰ That is as close to an answer as one will ever have and speculation about the unknown is of benefit to no one.

After retirement, he pursued his past-times of reading the classics, visiting with his friends, and playing bridge. As time passed, he came to lose his powers of computation and had to give up the game.⁹¹ This must have been frustrating for a man so gifted with the powers of intellect and reason. His life was not without regrets and on occasion he had cause to reflect what life would have been if he had joined his colleagues in Rio de Janeiro instead of settling for the relative provincialism of Hopkinsville. At that time, as offspring are wont to do, his son reminded him of the relative elegance of his life and the contributions that he had made (not the least being the success of his children).⁹² How Dr. Gant Gaither viewed the summing up of his life, only he knew. We can only speculate. He certainly must have found much in which to be proud.

J. Gant Gaither departed life on a Tuesday morning December 3, 1968. The terminal event was described as congestive heart failure.^{93 94} It is appropriate that he left life in the institution that he had supported so vigorously throughout the years- Jennie Stuart Medical Center. His wife, left Hopkinsville shortly after his death to join her children on the west coast. Jane Eskeridge Lum Gaither left this life in 1974 at the age of 81. She lies beside her devoted husband in Riverside Cemetery. The monuments that they have left behind are not confined to a graveyard. They are in the form of a church that is vibrant and active, a hospital whose reputation for excellence is

increasing and a community that is thriving and growing with grace and beauty in a semi-rural environment. They would be proud of the sense of social responsibility exhibited here and would not shirk from the challenge of opportunities to improve.

Dr. Gaither only stood about 5 feet six inches in height. He had close-cropped hair on a relatively round head with full cheeks. He tended to have something of a paunch. His head may have seemed disproportionately large. He had small hands that were an asset in surgery. He has been described by those that were less flattering, as looking like a Kewpie doll.⁹⁵ All agree, however that despite all this, he was an imposing figure. He held his head high at all times and that, coupled with his erect posture, gave him an air of certainty that some people mistook for arrogance. The need for life and death decision-making molded him into a confident and authoritative man. His friends rarely if ever heard him say a negative thing about anyone.⁹⁶ He sometimes wore clothing that fit too tightly or showed some age.^{97 98} That did not disguise his creative mind and boundless energy, but only served to confirm his preoccupation with family, patients, and community.

What can be said, is that Dr. Gant Gaither was a dynamic, influential, and powerful man for his time. There was, indeed, a time in Hopkinsville's history when what Dr. Gaither said was the way it was with no questions asked. The life of Joseph Gant Gaither and the history of the Pennyroyal region are inextricably intertwined. To know his life is to know what our community was like during his era. Despite his diminutive physical stature, Dr. Gaither casts a long shadow of influence that will extend far into the twenty-first century.

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