

The Story of an Early Kula Sanatorium Doctor

Dr. Charles Paul Durney

Charles Paul Durney was born in Columbus, Ohio, on November 19, 1887. He was the son of Daniel John and Mary Elizabeth (O'Sullivan) Durney. His preliminary education was received in the public schools in Kenova, West Virginia, and at Miles City, Montana. He then attended Marshall College, Huntington, West Virginia, and graduated from Georgetown University Medical School in Washington, D.C. in 1909.

On December 7, 1910, Dr. Durney married Margaret May Bell. The couple had three children: Margaret Louise, Marie Rennis, and Charles Paul Durney, Jr.

A vacation trip brought Dr. Durney to Hawaii in February 1910, and, as so many before him, he decided to remain. He was first appointed government physician for Kahuku and Laie plantations and the Ko'olau Railroad Company on O'ahu. Later he became a government physician for the Ko'olauloa and Ko'olaupoko districts and surgeon for Libby, McNeil and Libby.

In July 1912, Dr. Durney became medical superintendent of the recently organized Kula Sanatorium and Farm on Maui. The first patients had been admitted in September 1910, and were cared for in tents, and, when Dr. Durney took over, conditions were still rather primitive. In a pamphlet describing those early days at Kula Sanatorium, the doctor is depicted as a curly-haired young man of twenty-four with a keen sense of humor, fair-minded, and very active. For the next thirteen years at Kula Sanatorium, he was not only doctor and superintendent, but architect, engineer, mechanic, and farmer. In the beginning he worked with practically no equipment and no x-rays. When Dr. Durney left, Kula Sanatorium had a 250-bed capacity and numerous buildings. The doctor performed the first pneumothorax, and in 1924 directed a Fresh Air Camp for undernourished children, a step towards preventive medicine in the field of tuberculosis.

Never in robust health, Dr. Durney became seriously ill and tendered his resignation, effective October 1, 1925. A few days before he and his family were to leave Maui nearly 1,500 people gathered on the grounds of the Kula Sanatorium to give him a farewell luau. On behalf of the management, he was presented with an antique calabash of koa and two silver plates suitably inscribed. The Portuguese community gave him a gold watch and chain, and the Hawaiians sang an original composition in his honor and gave him a guitar and ukulele.

Leaving Kula in October, Dr. Durney went to San Jose, California, where he became associated with Dr. George H. Evans and Dr. Philip King Brown at Alum Rock Sanatorium. Here he not only worked at the Sanatorium but throughout the community in association with tuberculosis clinics and the Santa Clara Tuberculosis and Health Association.

Dr. Durney died March 19, 1932, in San Jose at the age of 44. He was a member of the San Jose County Medical Society, the California Medical Association, the American Medical Association, the California Tuberculosis Association, the Laennec Society of Northern California, and the San Jose Lions Club.

(Source: A pamphlet, "Kula, Through the Years" put out on the 30th anniversary of Kula San, May 19, 1940.)