

# Dr. Philip B. Price

*The Johns Hopkins of the West*

“Challenge, always makes people rise to the occasion.”

Dr. Philip B. Price observed in 1969.

Born of Presbyterian missionary parents on March 7, 1897 in Kashing Chekiang, China, Philip Price was taught by his mother until the family returned to the United States on furlough in 1910. Graduating with his medical degree from Johns Hopkins in 1921, Dr. Price completed his residency training in surgery at Union Memorial Hospital (Baltimore) in 1925. That same year, the recently married Price returned to China with his nurse wife, Octavia, as medical missionaries. For the next twelve years, until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, Dr. Price served as surgeon, assistant professor, associate professor, and medical director of surgery at Cheeloo University in Jinan.

If past is prologue, then Dr. Price's return to the United States was the next act in his professional career. In 1938, the 41-year old Price was appointed to the faculty of the medical school of his alma mater. For the next five years, as he was when in China, Dr. Price served as both an assistant and associate professor of surgery. By 1942 with the world at war, some other middle-age physician might have been content to continue to soldier on in his current capacity with promotion assured. But Philip Price's professional ambitions inclined him towards loftier aims.

## FORMATION OF FOUR YEAR MEDICAL SCHOOL

### PROFESSOR OF SURGERY AND DEPARTMENT HEAD

With the four year program officially established and Dr. Cyril Callister named part-time Dean, the business of assembling a staff for the new “college” began. Dr. Callister aggressively set out to recruit a top-flight faculty whose future members were to be drawn from a pool of talent who by his exacting standards were already well known in their respective fields of medicine, possessed excellent instructional skills as well as national reputations for their research. Outwardly, an improbable endeavor – even without a world war raging. In the fall of 1942, Dr. Callister sent his first letter extending to Dr. Price the offer to head the new Department of Surgery and an invitation to visit. Dr. Price arrived in Salt Lake in mid-November to inspect the University, the Salt Lake County General Hospital (SLGH) as well as LDS, St. Mark's and Holy Cross hospitals. Dr. Price was taken by the boldness of Dr. Callister's and President Cowles's vision to say nothing of being struck by the beauty of the valley and surrounding mountains. The whirlwind experience and lavish treatment produced an uncharacteristic effect on the otherwise modest Price: “The inflation of my ego, was to his surprise, ‘ignobly pleasant.’”

Returning to Baltimore to discuss his future prospects with his family, Dr. Price later wrote back to Dr. Callister in December: “If the Medical School is to fulfill its high destiny, it must have a University Hospital,” concluding, “if you can assure me I have your interest and support, I will gladly accept your invitation.”

Dr. Price assumed his duties as Professor of Surgery and Department Head in February, 1943. In addition to his teaching and administrative responsibilities at the University, Dr. Price was also named “Surgeon-in-Chief” at the Salt Lake County General Hospital. SLGH played an important part in the development of the new medical school as it assumed the role as the University's primary teaching hospital.

*Cornerstone, University Hospital*



Dr. Philip B. Price,  
Cornerstone Ceremony 1962

“We are fortunate to have such a man at so crucial a period in the development of our school.”

By formal agreement, the County and the Board of Regents placed the running of SLGH under the control of the clinical members of the University medical faculty. By all accounts, conditions at the County Hospital were dreadful. The medical school fared little better having to content itself with making do in twenty-five buildings, ranging from wooden barracks to old stables scattered about the city and campus. Despite the physical hardships, the opportunity to attract a number of “young idealists who were eager to try out their own ideas,” Dr. Price later recalled, was foundational in building the medical school's reputation. So successful was it in that regard, an article appearing in Newsweek in June, 1952 referred to the growing school as “The Johns Hopkins of the West.”

## ACADEMIC MEDICAL CENTER COMPLETION DEAN, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

“Brains Not Bricks” was, in those early years, the motto of the medical school. The desire to recruit a superior faculty meant that for fifteen years school and hospital functioned as two separate entities. Much of the planning for the Medical Center had been just talk prior to 1955 when Dr. Price became acting Dean. That year the University set aside a parcel of land on the northeast bench as the future site for the University Hospital. The following year with Dr. Price named permanent Dean, the Board of Regents approved a plan for construction of a \$10 million academic medical center. In 1957 the state Legislature authorized an appropriation of \$4 million. The remaining total was raised by means of a public fund drive headed by a committee of prominent citizens, and a \$2 million grant-in-aid by way of the NIH and Hill-Burton Act.

Although the contract for construction was not formalized until December, 1961, numerous dignitaries gathered with Dr. Price on the morning of July 13, 1959 to participate in ground breaking ceremonies. It was not, however, until January, 1962 that Dr. Price, along with University administrators and a few members of the medical faculty, watched Governor George D. Clyde symbolically take the reins of a bulldozer to begin construction. And then in September, with the Governor and those who had been involved three years earlier looking on, with mortar and trowel the retiring Dean laid the cornerstone to the promised building that had brought him to Utah and the University twenty years earlier.

On July 10, 1965, some 100 patients were transferred from the County Hospital to the 220-bed, 500,000 square foot University Hospital. By that time, Dr. Price and his wife had returned east where they spent the remainder of their years. Dr. Price died on October 27, 1982 in Lexington, Virginia. The challenge Dr. Price met transformed, in the words of Dr. Price's successor, Dr. Kenneth Castleton, “a small provincial institution into one of the distinguished medical schools in the country (and) although a great many people contributed to the success of the venture, it was Dr. Philip Price who led the fight which resulted in the construction of the Medical Center.”