

## Baker House in Transition

Space problems loom large on the local as well as the international scene. With Duke Medical Center growing as rapidly as the cost of building, the need to make the most of every nook of the existing facility is felt everywhere.

This spring Baker House again bends with the needs of the Medical Center and ceases to be primarily a residence for house staff personnel when about fifty rooms will be converted to much needed office space for the Medical School faculty. Within the month no one will be able to call Baker House "home." Roughly half of the space in the building will be occupied by offices with the remaining half used for call rooms and lounge facilities for house staff officers on duty at night.

While this may move many sentimentalists to grieve over the fact that things aren't the same anymore, a closer look at the history of this building shows it to be a remarkably adaptable edifice. Built back in 1931, it was known only as the Nurses' Home for almost 12 years. The opening of the Nurses' Home at the end of the Nursing School's first year of existence was a welcome relief for the students who had previously been housed and fed on the East campus.

Back in those years Baker House was separated from the main hospital by about 200 feet of woods. At this time the building was a residence only—the nurses had classes and ate in the hospital. During the first twenty years few changes took place except for the renaming of the build-



BAKER HOUSE

(Duke photo by Sparks)

ing in 1943 in honor of Miss Bessie Baker, the first dean of the Duke School of Nursing.

Although Miss Baker held her post as dean for only eight years (when she resigned due to illness), it is apparent from talking to any of the original members of the hospital staff that this woman left a lasting imprint on both the hospital and nursing school. As former Dean Wilburt C. Davison says, "Miss Baker was a dynamic personality, a forceful character and compelling leader with a sense of humor who left a lasting imprint." Miss Baker was lured to Duke in its opening year by Dr. Davison (with the help, he says, of a southern, spring day in March) from her job in Minnesota. She came here with an enviable reputation among medical educators across the country for her work in the midwest and as head of Johns Hopkins Hospital's World War I Field Hospital.

Her Irish background was easily recognizable in her ability to work hard, her temper and her sense of humor. She was a member of the old school who believed whole-heartedly in the role of nurse as one trained in

the art of service to the patient and the doctor. To make sure that patients were being well taken care of, Miss Baker made daily rounds on every patient in the hospital. In spite of this constant striving for professional excellence, friends like to recall her inability to learn to drive a car. She kept trying, but accu-

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(Duke photo by Sparks)

This portrait of Miss Bessie Baker, painted by Mary Tillery, was presented to the University by the Alumnae of the School of Nursing on June 4, 1939. It hangs in the lobby of Hanes House.