HISTORY OF THE COMMUNITY
of
THE SISTERS OF THE SORROWFUL MOTHER
of
THE THIRD ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS

Edited by
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Volume I

Convent of the Sorrowful Mother
6618 N. Teutonia Avenue
Milwaukee 9, Wisconsin

September, 1960
DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY

of

THE SERVANT OF GOD, MOTHER FRANCES STREITEL
Foundress of the Community,

and of

THE PIONEERING SISTERS,

Who, with Mother Foundress, laid the
foundations of the early insti-
tutions of the Community
PREFACE

This book on the history of the Community of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother has been prepared for private use for the Sisters of the Community. Since it is not for publication, that is, it is not for sale, the imprimatur of the Bishop is not required by Canon Law.

Volume I of the Community's history will supply a long-felt need in the education of the young Sisters, novices, and candidates. The Sacred Congregation of Religious and others interested in the development of the young Sisters urgently recommend that the history of one's respective religious community be studied during the novitiate. This study should help to arouse in the mind and soul of the zealous novice loyalty, love, respect, and gratitude toward her own community.

Every religious community, no matter when and where founded, has been established on the rock foundation of humility and unspeakable difficulties, if the community has survived through the ages. Divine Providence has guided the Community of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother and has showered abundant graces and blessings upon it because of the heroic prayer-life and humble self-abnegation of the Servant of God, Mother Frances Streitel, and her pioneering spiritual daughters.

May the study of the life and the works of Mother Frances effect that the true spirit of the Community of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother be renewed and preserved and that love and devotion to the Foundress be increased in the hearts of her spiritual daughters.

Editor
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ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL, OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN
1891

When Reverend Roman Scholter—pastor of St. Mary’s Parish, Oshkosh, Wisconsin—heard that German Sisters, who had come from Rome, Italy, had started a hospital in Menomonie and were building one in Marshfield, Wisconsin, he hoped that now his heart’s desire would soon be fulfilled; namely, to have, in Oshkosh, a hospital owned and conducted by Sisters.

In February, 1891, Father Scholter, a man of an imposing personality, resolute and earnest in all his endeavors, called upon Mother Frances, the Superior General of the Sisters of the Sorrowsful Mother, who was then at the Community’s new hospital on the outskirts of Marshfield. He pleaded earnestly with Mother Frances, prevailing upon her to send Sisters to Oshkosh as soon as possible in order to begin a hospital there. He explained that the city of Oshkosh, with a population of over 17,000 people—the third largest city in the state of Wisconsin—should have a general hospital conducted by Sisters.

Mother M. Frances, listening most sympathetically, replied that as much as she wished to acquiesce to his request, she could not do so, because the Community would be unable, at that time, to begin a fourth hospital. She explained that the three hospitals—St. Francis’, Wichita; St. Joseph’s, Marshfield; and St. Mary’s, Menomonie—having been established within the last two years, were still struggling for their very existence. Mother Frances further explained that the Community had neither enough Sisters nor the money to begin a fourth hospital; and if there would be Sisters available, she stated, they ought first to receive the proper education, especially as far as the English language was concerned.
But Father Scholter, a person with an indomitable will, continued to plead his cause and gave his reasons why the Community should accept the offer; namely, because the Church in America was in great need of the charitable works of religious; there were many souls to be saved and God's honor and glory to be enhanced. After carefully weighing this matter and recommending it to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to the Blessed Mother, and St. Joseph, Mother Frances promised that the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother would begin a hospital in Oshkosh.

Father Scholter had assured Mother Frances that he would secure the four lots opposite St. Mary's School and Church in Oshkosh, on the corner of Merritt and Boyd Streets, on which stood an old two-story building, known as the Koebbler building, which formerly had been used as a store and saloon. The Community paid $6,074.71 for the land and building. For the beginning it was planned to convert this house into a temporary hospital.

It is of interest here to state the concern and interest which the public showed in this new enterprise through the Oshkosh Daily Northwestern.

"The City Hospital: The work of changing the Koebbler building on Merritt Street into a hospital will be begun this week, and it is hoped to have the hospital ready for the reception of patients by April. The Sisters of the Mater Dolorosa Order will have charge of it." (The Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, February 23, 1891, p. 4)

"The Mother Superior of the Mater Dolorosa Order is expected to reach Oshkosh this week to look over the house on Merritt Street, which is to be changed into a hospital, and to determine what changes are to be made. The motherhouse of the Order is at Wichita, Kansas, but the Sisters will come here from Marshfield, where a new hospital has been built."
"No extensive changes will be made in the building at present. The rooms and halls will be rearranged to make them suitable for hospital purposes. It is thought that the accommodation of the hospital will be in the neighborhood of twenty patients. Father Scholter says that the hospital will be, in every sense, a city hospital. It will be supported by no church or sect, and patients of all classes will be admitted. They (the patients) will be expected to pay for their nursing. Father Scholter says that some means will be found for taking care of those who are unable to pay.

"The doctors of this city are interesting themselves in the scheme, and there is no doubt that Oshkosh will have another successful hospital within a short time." (Ibid., February 25, 1891, p. 4.)

Under the guidance of St. Joseph, Mother M. Frances, Sister M. Scholastica Demer, and Sister M. Alphonsa Boell came to Oshkosh on Wednesday, February 25, 1891, to plant the seed of the new passion flower of St. Mary's Hospital, the Community's fourth mission in America.

Sister M. Alphonsa gives us a graphic picture of their first evening at the new mission.

"We left Marshfield in the morning and arrived in Oshkosh toward evening, finding an empty house. We had no bed, no table, no chairs, not even any dishes, except the three yellow crock earthenware and the spoons which we had brought along for each of us! We sat on boxes in the little hut which was built on to the house to eat the lunch which we had brought with us from Marshfield. We spread the three blankets, which we had also brought from Marshfield, on the floor for our night's rest." (Sister M. Alphonsa Boell, Sister M. Beda's Personal Interviews, Vol. III, p. 11.)
On the day after the Sisters' arrival, the Oshkosh Daily Northwestern carried the following report.

"...The Mother Superior of the Order of Mater Dolorosa and her secretary reached Oshkosh yesterday. They looked over the building on Merritt Street which will be used for a hospital and decided upon the changes necessary to make it suitable for the purpose. The work of remodeling and building will be begun immediately....As soon as it is determined that the hospital will be a success, a larger building will be erected. Father Scholter will have charge of the work until the building is ready to be turned over to the Sisters.

"The Sisters of the Order of Mater Dolorosa devote themselves exclusively to the care of the sick. They work in hospitals and also nurse patients in their own homes when called upon to do so. Their garbs are of ash-gray color with black cloaks." (Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, February 26, 1891, p. 4.)

A few days after Mother Frances and the first Sisters had arrived in Oshkosh, the other Sisters whom Mother M. Frances had appointed for Oshkosh also came—Sisters M. Boniface Goetz, M. Gabriela Ortlieb, M. Salesia Rebhan, and M. Anna Niegel. All the Sisters helped together diligently to clean, scrub, and prepare the two-story building for occupancy.

Father Scholter, an excellent organizer and businessman, directed the Sisters in the remodeling of the building and, in many practical ways, helped to make the building a suitable hospital. A hot-air furnace, a water system, and bathrooms were installed. The Sisters bought furniture and beds at an expense of about $2,980, which was paid with the money obtained from loans and collections. Reverend Scholter donated $600. This first frame building could accommodate about fifteen patients, the first of whom was a
tuberculosis patient, who came on Wednesday, March 11, 1891.

The Sisters were happy to have Mother Frances with them during their first days. Oh, her virtuous example! She, the refined, the unassuming, humble, and well-educated lady, worked so peacefully and joyfully side by side with the Sisters that all were inspired to make any sacrifice in a cheerful manner, no matter how hard it might have been for human nature.

Let us pause here for a moment to reflect on that colossal amount of work which Mother Frances, with a small group of Sisters—all emigrants from Europe—had accomplished during her first visit to America, which was a ten-month stay.

On May 17, 1890, Mother Frances arrived in America to encourage, direct, and help the first group of Sisters, who were struggling in extreme poverty to make a go of the first mission established in America.

In October, 1890, Mother Frances personally, with a few Sisters, founded the second mission of the Community, St. Mary’s Hospital, Menomonie, Wisconsin, by converting a poorhouse into a hospital. In December of that same year, we see her, accompanied by a group of devoted Sisters, going from Menomonie to Marshfield, Wisconsin, to lay the foundation of a third hospital.

In the beginning of 1891, Mother Frances made arrangements for her return trip to Europe. Before leaving America, however, she began the Community’s fourth mission, St. Mary’s Hospital in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. After about a week’s stay with the Sisters at St. Mary’s, she traveled to New York, accompanied by Sister M. Columba Gries, and on March 14, 1891, returned via Norddeutscher Lloyd to Europe, arriving in Bremen, Germany, on March 23. Sister M. Columba remained in Germany for a longer time for the purpose of recruiting vocations. On April 3, Mother Frances, with two postulants, arrived at the Motherhouse in Rome.
Now let us return to our report on St. Mary's Hospital by again referring to the interest shown through the Oshkosh Daily Northwestern.

"St. Mary's Hospital—The New Institution on Merritt Street Will Soon Be Opened. The work of arranging the building for the new hospital was begun yesterday... It will be named St. Mary's Hospital. It is intended to use the present building only long enough to try the plan. As soon as the hospital proves to be a success, a new building, equipped as a model hospital, will be erected large enough for the future as well as the present." (Ibid., March 5, 1891, p. 4.)

Although the Sisters tried their best to make St. Mary's Hospital appear clean and inviting, the sick people of Oshkosh, not being used to hospitals, were slow in coming. Since the patients did not come to the hospital, the Sisters, as was the case in the beginning of the other Community missions, nursed the sick in private homes, where they were generally expected to do other work besides, such as the cooking, the housework, and the taking care of the children. For the purpose of raising their own vegetables and fruits, the Sisters cultivated the fertile piece of land between the hospital and St. Mary's rectory.

The Dominican Sisters of Racine, who were teaching at St. Mary's School, came to the little hospital several times each week to teach the Sisters English.

It had been deeply impressed upon each Sister, beginning in the novitiate, that the work of God is always replete with crosses of every kind—humiliations, apparent failures, disappointments, mortifications, and so forth. This was also the pattern God had designed for the Sisters in their work of establishing St. Mary's Hospital in Oshkosh. Its foundation was one of sacrifices and difficulties of every description. However, this did not, in the least, discourage the Sisters nor make them unhappy; for, having
surrendered themselves entirely to God, they realized that they were instruments in His hands and that eventually everything would turn out for God's greater honor and glory and the salvation of souls.

In order to pay the debts which were accumulated when buying the property for the hospital and when remodeling the old frame building for use as a hospital, the Sisters were forced to beg for alms. In the following letter, which is a translation of the original kept on file at the chancery office of the Green Bay Diocese, the Sisters asked permission to collect alms. The letter is addressed to the Most Reverend Sebastian C. Messmer, who, from March, 1892, to November, 1903, was ordinary of the Green Bay Diocese. This letter did not have a personal signature.

Oshkosh, October 3, 1892

Most Reverend Bishop:

Your Excellency has kindly promised Msgr. George Jacquemin, our spiritual director, that we Sisters may collect in the diocese of Green Bay in order to pay our debts. Since this time after the harvest seems favorable, may we humbly ask you for a letter of recommendation.

We promise to pray daily for Your Excellency and also to keep our holy vows with fervor to make ourselves worthy of the benefits which God gives us through Your Excellency.

Asking for your episcopal blessing, we remain

In highest esteem of Your Excellency,

Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother

Let us objectively view hospital conditions at Oshkosh about 1891 when St. Mary's Hospital had made its appear—
ance, hoping to be recognized and patronized. In general
the public opinion was that a paid nurse would not have
the interest and patience to give proper care to the sick,
and hence the majority of the people avoided hospitals. To
many people hospitals were taboo.

From the recollections of some of the Sisters who
were active at St. Mary's Hospital during its earlier years,
we learn that several doctors conducted small hospitals of
their own in Oshkosh, to which they admitted patients in
order to perform their operations. From the Oshkosh Cen-
tennial we learn that there have been doctors active in
Oshkosh since 1881. Dr. Bernard Charles Gudden, who came
to Oshkosh in 1881, had his own frame-building hospital,
known as the German American Hospital. North of the city
on Jackson Drive Road, Dr. Charles W. Oviatt, a surgeon
who came to Oshkosh in 1887, opened the Maple Lodge Hospi-
tal in the ten-room Wakefield house, which had a bed ca-
pacity of fifteen and was used primarily for operations.
Soon after his arrival in Oshkosh in 1903, Dr. M.E.Corbett
secured a small frame building, which was given the title
Lakeside Sanatorium.

Bearing in mind that, as we have mentioned before, the
majority of the people were not interested in going to
hospitals and that some of the doctors were conducting
their own institutions, it does not surprise us that the
Sisters' hospital was, more or less, disregarded during
the first few years. But gradually both the doctors and
the people discovered that the Sisters, having consecrated
their entire life to God in the practice of Christian char-
ity, had something to give which was above the natural
realm of things. Doctors began to bring their patients to
the Sisters' hospital, who, when once under the Sisters' care,
remained loyal to them in every respect.

From the following letter, copied from the original
on file at the chancery of the Green Bay Diocese, we learn
that the Sisters had a considerable amount of difficulties
in getting priests to attend to the spiritual needs of the
patients.
St. Mary's Hospital
Oshkosh, September 1, 1893

Most Reverend Bishop:

Your Excellency knows that we have a hospital in Oshkosh, and it is self-evident that the sick and the dying should be given the opportunity to receive the holy sacraments. Since we do have considerable difficulties in this regard and have, without any success, repeatedly asked priests to do us the favor of administering the holy sacraments to the sick, we consider it our sacred duty to refer this matter to Your Excellency.

Until now Reverend Father Scholte has taken care of our German patients....(But the Sisters could not get any priest for those patients who did not know the German language.) Therefore, may we ask Your Excellency to appoint a priest who could take care of all of our patients, the German and the English-speaking ones.

May we present a second petition to Your Excellency. Until the present we did not have an extraordinary Father confessor. I think that Reverend Father Joch, who is with our Sisters at St. Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield, would be willing to do this if he would receive the permission of Your Excellency.

We shall greatly appreciate Your Excellency's help in these matters. May the Sorrowful Mother guide us so that in all things God's holy will be done....

Yours very respectfully,

The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother
Sister M. Boniface

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Soon the small makeshift hospital, which could accommodate fifteen patients, became too small; and, although there was no money, it was decided to build a new hospital. The Architect Stevens of Oshkosh was engaged to make the plans for the new hospital, which, being eighty feet by forty feet, would have a capacity of about twenty-five to thirty-five patients. Father Scholter, an exceptionally good businessman, especially in regard to architectural and constructional work, hired the laborers and mechanics and also supervised the work. Father Joch was thus relieved of this heavy burden and could devote his time to the two hospitals of the Community at Rhinelander and Tomahawk, which he had started in 1893.

On September 4, 1894, ground was broken for the new St. Mary’s Hospital, and eight days later the first stone was laid. From the chronicle of St. Mary’s Hospital we learn that the new 1894 building cost $24,355, which, at that time, was considered a large sum of money. Reverend Joseph Joch tried to take up loans but had a hard time because when he was asked, What is your security? he could offer none. (Ave Mater Dolorosa, Vol. I, p. 84.)

On July 1, 1895, Monsignor Jacquemin blessed the new building privately, and the Sisters moved into the new hospital in order to help with the interior work. On October 3, the vigil of the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, Msgr. Jacquemin celebrated the first holy Mass in the hospital chapel, which was dedicated to the Sorrowful Mother on November 17, without any solemnities whatsoever, by the Most Reverend S. G. Messmer.

The Oshkosh Daily Northwestern gives us a detailed description of this first new St. Mary’s Hospital, built by the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother in 1894.

"St. Mary’s Hospital—A Model Institution: To minister to the needs of humanity, as a physician does, is one of the most sacred of human occupations, and at the doctor’s right hand stands the hospital worker. Oshkosh is more
fortunate than many cities of its size in its possession of expert hospitals. Prominent among them is St. Mary's, for which a spacious and new, elegant building has just been erected on Merritt Street. It is almost an ideal hospital. The rooms are large, light, and airy and are arranged with a view to perfect comfort and convenience.

"The Arrangement and Attendant Facilities: In the basement of the hospital are the laundry, kitchen, pantry and dining room, and the boiler room, the entire house being heated by hot water. The basement also houses a large bathroom, where the Kneipp water cure will be given. On the first floor are situated the office, the large parlors, and some of the rooms which will be devoted to the patients. Located on the second floor is the minor operating room, which opens directly out of the drug room, and further down the hall is a room where the more dangerous operations will be performed.... The chapel, with its stained glass windows, lends an air of sacredness to the second floor....

"The third floor is devoted to private rooms and wards. In the babies' ward are little white iron bedsteads, entirely enclosed, that the wee ones cannot fall out. All the rooms are furnished with bedsteads of white enameled iron, relieved by brass railings and knobs. The fourth floor is as pleasant as any, commanding a fine view of the city and the lake. The Sisters' dormitory is a large, airy room, ascetic in the plainness of its furnishings.

"To perfect the arrangement of the house, an elevator has been put in, and a dumb-waiter running from the kitchen to the top story was also installed. On each floor is a bell indicator and speaking tube. The closets and bathrooms,
with their granite basins and porcelain tubs, are convenient to all the rooms. All the floors are hard wood, and the walls are calcimined.

"The Hospital Force: Owing to the increased facilities for surgical operations, Doctors Oviatt and Mixer will move the department to St. Mary’s and will convert Maple Lodge into a sanitarium for nervous diseases...."

"Ten Sisters of the Order of the Sorrowful Mother, who came here four years ago, act as nurses at St. Mary’s Hospital, Sister Boniface being the Mother Superior. The following is the personnel of the hospital staff: Attending physicians are Doctors M. E. Corbett, M. D.; Wm. F. Wegge, M.D.; and Harvey Dale, M.D. Attending surgeons; Doctors C.W. Oviatt, M.D. and M. E. Corbett, M.D.; assistant surgeon, Dr. E. R. Wilson, M.D.; attending neurologist, Dr. Wm. F. Wegge, M.D.; oculists and aurists, Doctors W.E. Searles, M.D. and L. P. Allen, M.D.; consulting staff, Doctors H.M. Mixer, M.D., H.B. Dale, M.D., and J.C. Noyes, M.D. The success of the hospital is assured; it is an ideal sanitarium. The staff of nurses and physicians is an efficient one, and the building itself is perfect in every respect." (Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, June 22, 1895, p. 2.)

In regard to the Sisters’ education, it is generally asked, Where and how did the early pioneering Sisters receive their nursing education? Some of the Sisters who had a first-class nursing education in Germany before their entrance in Rome taught the other Sisters. At Marshfield Sister M. Xaveria Niederbruckner, an exceptionally well-educated nurse and an excellent practical teacher in all the nursing subjects, taught Sister M. Bartholomea Betzen and many other Sisters before they came to Oshkosh.
About 1895, when Sister M. Boniface Goetz, an efficient manager and prudent leader, assumed the duties of superior at St. Mary's Hospital, the impressive new building was attracting the attention and interest of the physicians and many people as well. The public was beginning to realize that it was a blessing from God to have a hospital in their city conducted by women who had dedicated themselves solely to the spiritual and physical welfare of suffering mankind.

When Dr. Charles W. Oviatt, the best surgeon and medical doctor in the city, became a member of St. Mary's Hospital staff in 1894, he brought great prestige to the institution and attracted other physicians as well. He was a personal friend of the Mayo brothers, William and Charles, who were as famous in Rochester and beyond the state of Minnesota as Dr. Oviatt was in Oshkosh and beyond the state of Wisconsin. Because of the wonderful success he had in his medical work, patients came to him from far and near.

Dr. Oviatt used to say that he had no faith. But he was so generous, charitable, and just in his dealings with the sick that the Sisters who daily worked with him were convinced that gradually he would receive the gift of faith, for God is never outdone in generosity. In her recollections Sister M. Assunta Janssen said the following about Dr. Oviatt.

"He had lofty ideals, being heart and soul for his vocational work. His patient was a person who needed a doctor; that principle was his guiding star. It made no difference to him whether the individual was a pauper or a millionaire. His loyalty to his patients was an outstanding characteristic.

"Long after his death, the other doctors used to tell how kind he was to the poor. When he had patients who could not pay, he used to say: 'Never mind, we will lay that up where neither rust nor moths can eat it.'" (Sister M. Assunta, Sister M. Beda's Personal Interviews, Vol. IV, p.47.)
During his first months at St. Mary's Hospital, Dr. Oviatt was opposed to the Sisters' praying so much because he was of the opinion that thus they were neglecting the patients. But he soon found out by actual experience that the very opposite was true and he began to take a great interest in their spiritual life. On September 1, 1901, when Sisters M. Cornelia Springob, M. Lioba Hildebrand, and M Dyonisia Griebel made perpetual vows, for which occasion he had bought all the flowers for the chapel, he was already in chapel at 5:00 a.m., an hour before the ceremonies began. He was deeply touched by the sublime and impressive celebration.

Dr. Oviatt was quite impulsive. It was not unusual for him to scold about something one moment and to be all smiles the next. Once in the forenoon he had an argument with Sister M. Clotildis Paul, the Superior, and in the afternoon when he returned to visit his patients, he stuck his head into Sister Superior's office and said: "Is she here?" Smiling, they shook hands and everything was as good as ever.

Sister M. Dyonisia Griebel relates the following incident concerning Dr. Oviatt.

"On the floor for which I was responsible, we had a lady about forty-eight years old who, because of kidney trouble, had to be catheterized three times a day. Once when I took care of this, the glass tube broke in the bladder and remained there. Dr. Oviatt, who had gone for his week-end outing, could not be consulted. Sister M. Cornelia Springob, the Superior, very frightenedly said, 'Pray, that's all we can do.'"

"With outstretched arms I prayed to the Infant Jesus of Prague. I gave warm Zimmkraut tea to the Lady three times a day. Oh, the power of prayer! On the third day the lady passed water, which she had not been able to do for a long time, and the broken piece of
glass, consisting of half the catheter, passed also. From that time on the lady was well and soon afterwards went home, never finding out what had happened. When Dr. Oviatt had heard this, he was surprised and kept the catheter, bearing a label on which the remarkable story was related. From this time forward Dr. Oviatt believed in prayer and Zimtkraut tea! How often did he say, 'I wish I had the faith you have!''

(Sister M. Dyonisia Griebel, Personal Interviews of Sister M. Bede, Vol. III, p. 73.)

Once after Dr. Oviatt had diagnosed another doctor's patient, the lady said to him: "Doctor, I leave it entirely to you; do what you think is right and best." The patient's doctor, astonished at hearing this, said to Dr. Oviatt, "Say, Dr. Oviatt, why is it that people have such great confidence in you the minute they meet you? This patient never saw you before, and she is at once ready to put her life completely in your hands." Dr. Oviatt answered: "Well, well, don't you know yet? That is because I am bald-headed."

Things were proceeding well at St. Mary's Hospital, and the Sisters were extremely busy. Because of Dr. Oviatt's reputation, St. Mary's received patients from almost all the neighboring cities and even from more distant places. St. Mary's Hospital was patronized by most of the city doctors, among whom were Doctors Bernard Charles Gudden, Burton N. Clark, Clarendon J. Combs, and H. W. Morgenroth. There were so many patients that the original frame house had to be used. Thirty-five patients could be housed in the new building. Both places were filled to capacity and single rooms had to be made into double rooms.

Already in 1900 the first floor had an X-ray room, in which X-ray pictures were taken and treatments given. One of the Sisters stated that one of the X-ray machines, when applied to the patients, made their hair seem alive.
To the Sisters it seemed quite natural that at times there were arguments among the doctors. Yet as far as the Sisters were concerned, peace reigned supreme throughout the hospital.

Then it happened! One day Dr. Oviatt presented himself to Sister Superior, Sister M. Boniface Goetz, and announced that he had decided to leave Oshkosh and to go to Fond du Lac. Shocked as Sister M. Boniface was, she did not ask him to remain. When his patients got well, they went home and no others took their place. The hospital had been filled to capacity, but rapidly the number of patients dwindled down to a few chronic cases. While the Sisters suffered from lack of patients, Dr. Oviatt did not suffer less. Not finding in Fond du Lac what he had expected, he returned to St. Mary's Hospital after six weeks, never to leave again; once more St. Mary's had recovered from a crisis.

For a second time the hospital became too small, and it was decided to buy the adjoining property for the erection of a new chapel and a new addition to the hospital. But since the neighbors refused to sell to the Sisters except for an exorbitant price, Mr. John Springob, the father of Sisters M. Cornelia and M. Jacoba, bought the land in his own name at a reasonable price. When everything was conveyed to him by deed, he deeded it over to the Sisters. Mr. Springob, being the overseer of the building project, had no enviable job. Because of continuous strikes, there was endless trouble with the laborers, some of whom were union men and others not. The Sisters, being frequent witnesses to the quarrels and fights of the men and sometimes even seeing them defend themselves with bricks, increased their prayers and sacrifices that God might restore peace among the workers.

We are, indeed, very grateful to the Oshkosh Daily Northwestern for having preserved very interesting and informational material concerning the growth of St. Mary's Hospital. Here let us listen to what was said about the
Sisters and their hospital in the beginning of 1902 when the Community planned to build this second addition to the hospital (the 1904 addition).

"Addition to Hospital: St. Mary's is filled as never before in its history, and plans are being formulated for an addition to the present structure. St. Mary's Hospital on Merritt Street is a remarkable institution in more ways than one. Those who have never visited its interior have no idea of the great advantage it offers the sick and injured or the extent of its influence for good among those who suffer from the ills to which flesh is heir. This hospital is a center of modern surgery, and great have been the successes in this line.

"Since the beginning of St. Mary's in July, 1895, until now (1902), the hospital has had 2,300 patients within its walls. Of this number the percentage of those who have died is very low indeed. At present (January 28, 1902) there are fifty-one patients in the hospital. This number is a record breaker and is larger than has ever been reached at any one time before. The result is that the institution is crowded and every available bit of space is utilized. In some instances several patients are quartered in one room. The hospital parlors immediately off the main hallway on the first floor are also filled with patients. Even with these crowded conditions, the patients are getting along nicely, and the accommodations are as complete as usual so far as the service and attendance is concerned. Because of the crowding condition in the hospital, plans are being made to increase the facilities by the erection of an addition in the near future.

"Religion Cuts No Figure: Although St. Mary's Hospital is a Catholic institution,
patients in the institution are of all faiths, and the religious part of the institution is never pressed upon them. If patients do not want it, they are not even made aware that there is any religion connected with the hospital, but its existence is evident through the countless errands of mercy and the kind acts of attendance for the slightest want that are performed by the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, who pass in and out of the rooms and are seen in all parts of the building at all times of the day and night, ready to assist at a moment's notice. There are twenty Sisters in the institution, with a Sister Superior in charge. They all wear the garb of the Order, which is always as clean and spotless as are their characters. They always have a smile and a kind word for everyone and something cheerful and encouraging to say to the patients under their care. These women are remarkable in that they do practically every bit of work in the entire institution, from shoveling coal into the furnaces to assisting in delicate operations, redressing wounds and, in fact, performing all the services that do not require the skill of the physician or the surgeon, besides answering the call bells located in every room and keeping these apartments clean and wholesome. They receive no pay for their services, and their work makes the hospital practically an inexpensive institution outside the cost of its maintenance....

"The hospital is a modern one in every respect, and much of the success of the operations performed there of late has been due to the complete facilities and the care that is taken to avoid infection of wounds. Everything is done to make all the conditions perfectly aseptic before and after operations."
"That a perfect aseptic condition is obtained is proved by an inspection of the operating room, which is located on the southeast corner of the third floor of the hospital. This room has a marble floor, which is as smooth and as polished as it can be. The wall, ceiling, and woodwork, the chairs and tables, the operating table, and, in fact, every object that comes in view of this room is a pure white enamel. The enamel is thick and highly polished, and the room can be thoroughly washed and disinfected throughout. Upon entering the operating room the visitor is almost led to believe that it has been carved out of the purest white marble, so immaculately white and clean it is. There is not a speck of dust or dirt anywhere. In a large enameled case at one side of the room are shelves upon shelves of surgical instruments, all highly polished and as clean and aseptic as possible. Near the operating table is an apparatus for supplying pure oxygen to patients after they come out of the influence of an operation. This application of pure oxygen assists in reviving and stimulating the patients.

"In a room adjoining the operating room is another room equally as white and clean, in which there are three sterilizers. These sterilizers were the first of their kind to be put into a hospital in this portion of the state. One is a steam sterilizer where all dressings are thoroughly sterilized and rendered aseptic, another is one in which filtered water is boiled and kept hot, and a third is used to allow boiled water to cool. The fabric for dressings and the animal ligatures for sewing shut wounds are also kept in this room. The latter are prepared in the hospital....
"Proposed Addition: The past year has demonstrated to the physicians, as well as to the Sisters of Charity, who have the management of the hospital, that immediate steps for the enlargement of the institution are necessary if the hospital is to retain its prestige among the medical fraternity as a thoroughly up-to-date hospital with ample accommodations. The present well-equipped structure was erected in 1892 and was designed to meet all the requirements of a first-class hospital. The structure is a four-story building of brick and stone, 60 feet by 85 feet, at the corner of Merritt and Boyd Streets. The cost of the hospital, exclusive of furnishings, was $25,000 and in addition the grounds represent a valuation of $6,000. There are twenty-six rooms with accommodations for forty patients. The equipment is complete, including a perfect system of hot-water heating, electric lighting, passenger elevator, electric call bells, speaking tubes, baths, treating rooms, etc.

"The proposed addition, to cost fully $60,000 alone, calls for a structure twice as large as the present hospital with fifty-one rooms and accommodations for seventy-five patients. With the present accommodations this would provide a total of seventy-seven rooms for 115 patients and would result in an institution second to none outside of Milwaukee..." (Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, January 28, 1902, p. 6.)

"Raising of Funds: The Order of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, although expecting to raise the larger part of the 60,000 or 70,000 dollars necessary to build the addition, hopes for assistance from liberally disposed citizens. In order that such citizens should
receive something in return, a plan has been formulated whereby free beds will be maintained in the institution. Any resident, lodge, or charitable organization, by the payment of $5,000, will have a free bed maintained perpetually. If the Sisters receive $10,000, they will establish two beds and so on—one for every $5,000 received. For instance, in the case of a lodge, if a member is taken ill—as is the case frequently—he can be taken to St. Mary's Hospital and there will be given, free of charge, the best of care from the Sisters. In case the sum of $5,000 is unobtainable, a free bed may be maintained for a year on payment of $300.

"Any balance remaining after using the funds as far as they will go toward the endowment of perpetual free beds will be used for establishing a temporary free bed for as many years as the funds extend at the rate of $300 per year. This system is in vogue in all large cities, and many free beds are maintained. In some cases employees of factories unite with the employers to maintain free beds for the use of the injured. The Sisters expect to secure several thousand dollars in this way and, inasmuch as the project has the endorsement of many in the medical fraternity, there is no reason why it will not be successful." (Ibid., January 28 and August 19, 1902, p.6.)

This second building project was begun in 1903 and completed in 1905 at a cost of $56,000. The bed capacity of the hospital was raised to about eighty-five. The fourth floor of the new addition was equipped by Dr. Oviatt, according to his own plan. He had his own operating room, recovery ward, anesthetic room, bath and shower lavatory, small rest room, and a private office.
Dr. Oviatt's daughter, Mrs. Nieta O. Friend, tells us in a letter she wrote on October 13, 1959, to Sister Mary Capistrana Uhl that Dr. Oviatt "took Sister Boniface and Sister Cornelia to Chicago and escorted them through the most up-to-date hospitals and then took them with him to order the equipment. When they were all through and had returned to the Palmer House, he handed them a $100 bill and told them to go out and buy anything they wanted. When the Sisters came back and reported that they had purchased a statue of St. Joseph for the operating room, my father stormed (and he could storm): 'But you can't have it in there; it isn't sanitary!' 'Oh! I took care of that,' Sister Cornelia said. 'It will be covered with several coats of varnish, so we can wash it with antiseptic!'"

Sister M. Boniface Goetz, the Superior, took great interest and diligence in providing educational opportunities for the Sisters. She engaged a certain Miss Stoney to teach hospital procedures to the Sisters during 1902 to 1903. From 1904 to 1905 Miss Mary P. Hardy, a graduate of John Hopkins' Hospital, Baltimore, taught the Sisters the one-year basic professional program leading to the nursing diploma. From 1913 to 1914 some of the Sisters from St. Mary's, Oshkosh, went to St. Joseph's Hospital, Marshfield, where Dr. Victor Mason lectured four to five evenings every week in order to prepare the Sisters for the state board examinations, which they wrote at Fond du Lac in the spring of 1914. A few weeks later they received their certificates as registered nurses for the state of Wisconsin.

In 1912 Dr. M. E. Corbett, who had practiced for several years at St. Mary's, selected a beautiful location with a picturesque view of Lake Winnebago and built his own hospital—the Lakeside Hospital—at a cost of $150,000. Many of the doctors, being stockholders of this enterprise, left St. Mary's Hospital and directed their patients to Lakeside Hospital, which had a bed capacity of about forty-five patients and was modern in every respect. One doctor drew the other doctors from St. Mary's to Lakeside Hospital. Indeed, these were dark and trying days for the Sisters.

In that same year, on October 30, 1912, Doctor Charles
W. Oviatt died after a sickness of a few months. Patients who had been in St. Mary's before and who sincerely wished to be with the Sisters when re-entering the hospital were forced by the doctors to go to Lakeside Hospital.

When the Sisters lamented to Sister M. Boniface about the detrimental effects this situation, if prolonged, would have on the hospital and the Community, she admonished them to trust in God and now, since they had less work to do, to spend more time in prayer. She told them that, in the end, all things would turn out for God's honor and glory and the salvation of souls. Indeed, Christ, the Bridegroom of virginal souls, was addressing these valiant women with the words: "Come and rest with Me awhile." There were many things for the Sisters to do during that time, and most of all they had a fine opportunity to renew their consecration to God with greater fervor.

When some of the people referred to St. Mary's Hospital as a "Sinking Ship because the doctors, joining together to patronize Lakeside Hospital, seemed to be causing St. Mary's to become an unnecessary institution, the epithet was correct but not its application. What Sister M. Boniface had so hopefully promised—that things would get better—happened sooner than the Sisters had expected. Patients again came regularly to St. Mary's Hospital and activities soon returned to normal and progressed smoothly.

In the summer of 1914 St. Mary's Hospital officially opened its three-year professional school of nursing with an enrollment of twelve Sisters. Sister M. Bartholomea Betzen was the directress and general instructor of the school, and the doctors taught in their specialized fields. In 1917 these twelve Sisters received their diplomas and wrote their state board examinations.

In the summer of 1917 the three-year professional school of nursing was transferred from St. Mary's Hospital, Oshkosh, to Marshfield under the title: St. Joseph's School of Nursing. Sister M. Bartholomea became the instructress, and the doctors from Marshfield taught in their specialized fields.
In 1894 ground was broken for the new St. Mary's Hospital, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, which was completed in 1895.
The city of Oshkosh was indeed grateful for this second new addition to St. Mary's Hospital, which was completed in 1905.
The chapel of St. Mary’s Hospital was included in the building project of 1905.
Chapel of St. Mary's Home for the Aged, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, which was renovated and enlarged in 1958.
Rear of the chapel in St. Mary's Home for the Aged. There is plenty of space for wheelchair accommodations.
St. Mary's Home for the Aged after the extensive renovation and rebuilding program carried out from 1957 to 1960. A new wing can be seen on the extreme right of this picture.
Some of the Sisters at St. Mary's Home for the Aged gathered before their grotto of Mary Immaculate (1938).
Sisters in care of the aged at St. Mary's Home in Oshkosh, Wisconsin
In the meantime, however, things were not proceeding so well at Lakeside Hospital. The institution was not successful financially. Through sad experience Dr. Corbett and the other doctors who had left St. Mary's in 1912 to patronize Lakeside Hospital came to the realization that the sooner Lakeside Hospital would become property of a religious community the better it would be for the doctors who were stockholders of the institution.

In 1917 Dr. Corbett with other doctors began negotiations with the Community of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother concerning their taking over Lakeside Hospital. He entreated the superiors several times to buy and manage the hospital, but for a long time Mother K. Wendelina Bauer, then Commissary General of the Community, manifested a disinterestedness in the project and opposed buying the hospital. Finally, having been repeatedly urged by the Most Reverend Paul P. Rhode of Green Bay and the priests of the diocese, the Sisters bought the hospital.

In the spring of 1918 the Community assumed the administration of Lakeside Hospital, the name of which, at the suggestion of Bishop Rhode, was changed to Mercy Hospital.

St. Mary's Home for the Aged

In truth, from that date on St. Mary's Hospital did become a "Sinking Ship" as far as hospital activities were concerned. But as it was sinking in regard to the diminishing number of patients admitted each year, it was rising more gloriously as an institution of mercy and charity for God's favorites, the aged.

In the course of years, as Mercy Hospital was enlarged, patients from the different departments of St. Mary's Hospital were transferred there. Thus as one wing after the other of St. Mary's became vacant, aged people were happy to obtain permanent homes therein. Since 1934, when the last patients—the obstetrical cases—were transferred to Mercy Hospital, St. Mary's has become, in the
Plot of St. Mary's Home for the Aged

Boiler room Laundry Help's Quarters Garage

Boyd Street

Merritt Avenue

Garden Toolshed

Garage

Rectory

Greenhouse

Workshed

New north wing

Main

Chapel hospital

New west wing

(Sketch by Sister M. Stephen Martens)
true sense of the word, a home for the aged—a haven of peace and rest for them.

Between 1955 and 1956 the great need of remodeling and renovating St. Mary's Home for the Aged was brought to the attention of the Superiors of the Community by the Oshkosh Fire Department and the Industrial Commission of Wisconsin. The estimation of the cost of the building and remodeling project was, at first, $500,000. But after the work was well underway, it was evident that the rebuilding would go far beyond the $1,000,000 mark.

It was planned that the construction would go on while guests were living in the home; hence, one section was undertaken and completed before work was begun in another section, so that the guests could be moved from one area to another as the work was completed.

The first building project was the erection of a new five-story fireproof addition at the north end of the building, facing Boyd Street. This new building provides the home with nine additional, beautifully equipped private rooms, three on each of the second, third, and fourth floors. A fireproof stairway, an elevator, well-equipped utility rooms, and a clothes chute and an incinerator, which serve all the floors, and many other facilities were installed in this new north wing. There is a large "walk-in" refrigerator on the ground floor and also an attractive recreation room which is used as an auditorium for movies, programs, and other activities for the guests. Among the contributions of the first floor are the priest's dining room and additional office facilities.

Under construction at the same time was an enclosed corridor on the rear of this new north wing and a beautiful new laundry, powerhouse, and employees' quarters, facing Monroe Street. The laundry, having the latest and best equipment, was constructed for service as well as beauty. Six large windows, which line the west side facing Merritt Street, give the appearance that the walls are constructed of glass.
The rooms for the women employees are located on the second floor of this new service building above the new laundry, and the male help are on the ground floor. Each room is furnished with a sink, running water, wardrobes with adequate storage space and wall and ceiling lighting fixtures. Facing Honore and Parkway is a large recreation room, furnished with a piano, radio, and other recreational equipment for the enjoyment of the employees living at St. Mary's Home.

The powerplant, which has the latest or most modern equipment for safe and convenient heating, is in the sub-basement of this service building.

At the end of the Merritt Street wing an addition was made to include an enclosed fireproof stairway. Again in this area the guest rooms were provided with sinks, water, wardrobes, and other conveniences, as were the rooms in the new addition on Boyd Street. The Boyd and Merritt Street building was raised one story. The corner room of each floor facing Merritt and Boyd Street provides a parlor for the ladies to visit, play cards, or listen to records and watch television. The corner room on the first floor is the Sisters' community room. The Sisters have private quarters on the first floor and a large portion of the fourth floor of the Merritt Street wing.

The chapel and the sacristy of St. Mary's Home was completely remodeled and enlarged. Now St. Mary's chapel is truly a picture of simplicity. The tabernacle is the one object that holds your attention. Located in the rear of the chapel is a completely enclosed confessional, electrically equipped with lights, a fan, and a hearing aid. There is also a spacious area in the rear of the chapel for wheel chairs.

A new kitchen, refectory, diet kitchen, lunch room, food storage room, and vegetable room were also constructed. The kitchen has all of the facilities to provide nutritious, attractive, and flavorful meals with a minimum of energy expenditure as far as equipment is concerned. The
Sisters' refectory is small and simply decorated so that it still retains a touch of the ancient monasticism so dearly loved in the old refectory. The new diet kitchen, located on the second floor, is equipped with an electrically heated cart, in which the food is kept hot during the serving period; a one-tank Hobart dishwasher, a waste disposal, and many other convenient features. The bakery has been remodeled and is on a par with the other newly built departments of St. Mary's Home.

To insure the finest and safest accommodations for the guests nothing of the old St. Mary's Home has been overlooked in this renovating and remodeling program. All of the guest rooms have a nurses' call and telephone facilities. Each floor has a centrally located nurses' station so that the nurse on duty is nearby if and when she is needed.

In a glass enclosed niche above the new entrance a beautiful statue of the Immaculate Conception greets the guests of St. Mary's Home, which is now one of the most modern and most pleasant homes in its area. About seventy-five aged people live at St. Mary's, where they receive good meals and excellent care. If the guests are able, they may go and come as they please. The order and cleanliness of St. Mary's, both inside and out, are some of its special features. "Order is heaven's first law."

The good aged people at the home have laid aside their cares, worries, and disappointments of earlier years and live in peace and contentment, calmly looking forward to meeting their God and Redeemer. Indeed, St. Mary's Home is an ideal place to prepare for the journey to a happy eternity.

The chapel is filled to capacity during holy Mass, Benediction, Holy Hour, and other services. The majority of the aged at St. Mary's go to Holy Communion daily. In the eyes of the world these people do not do anything great materially, but spiritually they are able to accomplish much for the world. In truth, "more things are wrought by
prayer than this world dreams of."

Many of the aged pioneering Sisters of the Community, who in their youthful fervor and strength started the early missions of Wichita, Marshfield, Oshkosh, Tomahawk, Rhinelander, and Denville, have spent their last years in solitude at St. Mary's, leading a holy and prayerful life. They are now, as we sincerely hope, united with Mother M. Frances, their spiritual mother, enjoying eternal happiness in the Vision of God.

**Chaplains at St. Mary's Hospital**


**Superiors at St. Mary's Hospital**

Sister K. Scholastica Daemer, 1891; Sister M. Boniface Goetz, 1893-1903; Sister M. Seraphina Eberth, 1904-1906; Sister M. Clotilda Paul, 1907-1910; Sister M. Cornelia Springob, 1911-1913; Sister M. Rita Wehner, 1914-1915; Sister M. Cornelia Springob, 1915-1918; Sister M. Wendelina Bauer, 1919-1920; Sister M. Dominica Betzen, 1921-1923; Sister M. Remigia Sontag, 1924-1925; Sister M. Keinrada Gehring, 1926-1927; Sister M. Eucheria Langold, 1927-1932; Sister K. Immaculata Arendt, 1933-1938; Sister M. Cornelia Springob, 1939-1944; Sister M. Keinrada Gehring, 1945-1949; Sister M. Pancratia Tenfel, 1950-1955; Sister M. Christoph Olga, 1956-
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