An Oshkosh family of surgeons has been in operation 100 years, working painstakingly to keep generations of Oshkosh residents alive and healthy.

Dr. David Dick Clark, an Oshkosh general, vascular and hand surgeon, said that, since beginning practice in 1974, he has performed surgery on many people who also underwent surgery by his grandfather, Dr. Burton Clark, and his father, Dr. William “Bill” Clark.

Dick Clark’s uncle, Dr. Burton Clark Jr., was also an Oshkosh surgeon, practicing general and urological surgery until his death in 1950.

“We’ve taken care of many of the same families through the generations,” Dick Clark said. “I see people daily who were taken care of by my father.”

Bill Clark retired from his practice in 1978 after more than 40 years of caring for people in the Oshkosh area.

“I wanted to wait to retire until Dick got back to Oshkosh,” Bill said. He and his son worked and performed surgery together at Mercy Medical Center for more than two years.

The 100-year Clark family legacy began in 1894, when a young surgeon from the Eureka area returned to Oshkosh after graduating from Rush Medical School. The senior Burton began working that year with Dr. Bernard Charles Gudden and Dr. Charles W. Oviatt. In 1909, he began a partnership with Oviatt which lasted until Oviatt’s death in 1912.

Burton Clark was an original member of the American College of Surgeons, one of a group of physicians who established the Oshkosh Clinic and a respected surgeon throughout the state.

His career as one of Oshkosh’s finest surgeons gave birth to tradition.

Bill Clark said he knew when he was a teenager he was going to become a surgeon. Both he and Burton Jr. attended the University of Wisconsin and Harvard Medical School.

Upon learning of his father’s death in 1964, Bill Clark cut his residency at the University Hospitals in Cleveland short and returned to Oshkosh to begin practicing general surgery.

In turn, Bill Clark became the father of two more surgeons — Drs. Dick and William Clark Jr., an eye surgeon now practicing in Maine.

Dick Clark, who attended Marquette Medical School and practiced his residency at the same Cleveland hospitals as his father, is past president of Oshkosh Area Physicians and past chief of staff at Mercy.

The medical field has experienced astronomical transformations in the past 100 years, Dick Clark said. “When Dad’s father practiced, surgery as a science was in its infancy. Ether was the only anesthesia,” he said. “When Dr. Bill began practicing, there were no antibiotics or intravenous fluids, and blood transfusions were new. In my short term, we’ve gone to high-tech, non-invasive laser surgery.”

Bill Clark said he recalls a time when a private hospital room at Mercy Medical Center was $5 a night. Private rooms are now $314 per night.

“And back then, we took care of everybody — whether they could afford it or not,” he said.

Throughout the changing times, Oshkosh area residents continue to seek out the Clarks for care.

“We feel like we’re part of Oshkosh,” Dick Clark said. “It’s a tradition in its truest sense.”