A HOPE
A centennial look at the founding and development of St. Elizabeth Hospital.
and a
PRAYER
BY ANNE BARUTH
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A photographic peek at the past. From top to bottom:
- This Little Chute home was built around 1890 and is still standing today;
- The Hotel Hammes is the longest operated hotel in Little-Chute's history, first opening its doors around 1893 and continuing operation until about 1940;
- This 1910 photo shows the origins of the current Simon's Cheese, which was originally begun by the Biersteker family.

had to build a home and try to make a living at the same time, and that wasn't easy."

It took blood, sweat and tears to carve out Little Chute. Van Eperen's research has confirmed many stories he and others have heard through the years. For example, one of the biggest problems was getting rid of the cut-down trees, but the pioneers solved this by burning many. Another story research confirmed was how pioneers had their grain ground into flour. They had to walk a 30-mile journey north on an Indian trail carrying the bags on their backs; in Green Bay, they had it ground into flour, then carried the loads back home.

But their labor paid off. The town flourished. "A telegraph line from Milwaukee to Green Bay went through in 1851, and in 1852 the main street was paved with wooden planks. A post office was built in 1854 with Peter Maas as its first postmaster," writes Kort. "In the early '60s a flour mill, operated by water power, was built by John and Arnold Verstegen, who also constructed a bridge across the river. In 1899, fifty-one years after Father Van den Broek brought his fellow Hollanders to settle at Little Chute, it was incorporated as a village."

It is that 100th anniversary that Little Chute is honoring this year, capping off the celebrations at this year's Kermis Dutch Festival in August. A Centennial Committee was formed, and a branch of eight residents, including Van Eperen, have been working on putting together a 300-page book about Little Chute's history.

Most of the previous books on Little Chute's history focus from 1911 on back, he says, but this one will pull together the more current history as well. Since October, the team has been digging through old books and newspapers, interviewing lifelong Little Chute residents, researching the businesses that have come and gone, and collecting hundreds of photographs.

The group is planning on self-publishing about 4,000 copies and selling them for $12 a piece. The books will be available by the end of October. For more information, please call Van Eperen at 991-1413.

LOCAL ELEMENTS

A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES
When your tired eyes are required to go the extra mile, this desk lamp from Northtown Lighting provides the ideal illumination level while eliminating reflective glare. This lamp features a uniquely-styled saucer shade that will add a distinctive touch to any desk. 720 W. Ridgeview Dr., Appleton. (920) 730-8116.

THE BEST WHEELS IN TOWN
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FROZEN IN TIME
The most common objects still inspire artists to create great works of art. The Stills In Life exhibition organized by the Appleton Art Center intends to prove that the "still life" may be one of the oldest of artistic genres, but it can still be one of its freshest. Aug. 27-Sept. 24, with opening reception Aug. 27, 5-7. Appleton Art Center, 130 N. Morrison St., Appleton. 733-4089.

A PERFECT FIT
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Dresang says physicians previously kept seriously ill patients in rooms adjoining their offices or nurses were sent to sick people's homes. Now, patients were brought to the Fremont Street doors and any of the 15 or so local physicians could treat them.

Stories reveal the hardship and compassion this inaugural year required. But by Christmas, furniture and a couple more nuns had arrived. Local doctors purchased hospital equipment, and neighbors began to assist the sisters. "One neighbor, Mr. Ulrich, delighted Sister Armella with a bread board, meat board and rolling pin," Evans records. "Sometimes the little institution became so crowded that patients had to be refused," she says. Hospital literature indicates they admitted 108 patients and performed 95 operations that first year. Five people died.

Finances remained a challenge. The nuns envisioned a larger hospital — plus there were the daily needs! During their hard-won spare time, the sisters went fundraising. Interesting episodes ensued. Sister Carola, the superior, took over both night-shift nursing and daytime alms gathering. "Mr. Herman Langenberg accompanied her on these trips," Evans notes. One day, the "sister collapsed on the street, she had been up all night and had nothing to eat since the day before, there being nothing available ... the needs of the patients must first be met." Langenberg broadcast the incident and especially St. Joseph's parish "grew very busy, providing help," she concludes. A train alms-gathering trip to Stockbridge netted half a hog, chickens, ducks, cabbages, potatoes, and $190!

On May 1, 1900, excavation began on a larger facility. 1901 became a banner year as the brick hospital — blessed by Bishop Sebastian Messmer — was dedicated, having up to 48 beds, "employee residence quarters, and a convent," hospital records show. That year, a powerhouse and laundry building were also erected. Local people raised nearly $9,000 for the new buildings.

While some worked on the physical structures, others laid a spiritual foundation for St. Elizabeth. Father Andrew Seubert, for instance, became the hospital's first chaplain. Evans describes him as, "an unusual priest," a man of self sacrifice, humility, fasting and prayer. She writes, "He prayed, it seemed, almost ceaselessly, slept little, lived frugally, and apparently existed only for God." He accepted no salary and destroyed all records of his financial charity before he died.

In those days — and up until the 1940s — hospital life was a little more colorful. With the addition of two more acres in 1911, for example, the sisters "could have a large garden, space for 300 chickens, sheep, and six cows," hospital records show.

By now, there were at least 14 sisters living on the property, as well as other people. Dresang recalls Kimberly-Clark executive Frank Sensenbrenner as "one of the great benefactors of St. Elizabeth's ... soon his sister, Mary Cavanaugh, we called her Aunt Mary, made her home at the hospital. She just lived here. The chief of the Appleton police department, George Prim, and his wife lived here, too."

"When there was room, the sisters took in immigrants as well," Dresang says. John Buiten and his brothers came from Germany and donated sheep and many years of faithful service to the hospital. Dresang says the property included a picturesque rive where the sheep grazed. It was a somewhat self-contained, compassionate community that lived, worked and kindly cared for one another within those hospital walls.

And there was much to do. For instance, the sisters canned every quart of vegetables used in the institution "from products of their own garden," Evans says. In 1919, "4,000 quart containers had been filled by them with fruits, jellies, preserves, and vegetables." They also prepared store bought meat in their own smoke house and brine.
The Proverbs say, "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." Indeed, with a tiny seed of faith, those who founded St. Elizabeth Hospital one hundred years ago divested themselves of earthly pursuit. In their diligence to serve the Savior, their sacrifice and love led to a greater reward. The story of this beloved institution's centennial is the remarkable story of the people who prayed, worked, gave and endured to give Appleton its first hospital.

According to 81-year-old Anne Dressang, an Appleton native and Franciscan nun who spent 24 years working at the hospital, the story begins in the 1860s when a group of Franciscan Sisters left Germany. The sisters were caught in a famous shipwreck off the coast of England. Those who survived came to St. Louis, Missouri, where they established a school of nursing. After the Civil War, the sisters branched out, starting hospitals in Midwest cities like Racine and Milwaukee.

"The Honorable A. Hamilton Leving, Mayor of the City of Appleton" knew of the sisters' work and, in 1885, invited them to "come to Appleton for the purpose of founding a hospital," according to written records kept by Sister Beatrice Evans, who also devoted much of her life to the health care facility.

Due to financial difficulties — the city needed to put up the money to get the hospital started — it took 14 years for the founding sisters to arrive. "Dr. Victor Marshall petitioned Appleton for the hospital. The need for health care in Appleton was great," Dressang says. In 1899, the city agreed to furnish a piece of land for a hospital and two Franciscan nuns, Sister Carola Lachnicht and Sister Philippa Breidenbach, headed off on a train to fulfill their destiny.

The sisters arrived in Appleton on November 19, the Feast of St. Elizabeth. This is not the Biblical Elizabeth, but rather Hungarian King Andrew's daughter who, according to "The Lives of the Saints," lived roughly 800 years ago and died at age 24. This Elizabeth reportedly built hospitals for the poor and personally fed and provided for hundreds of sick and needy people during her short lifetime. This St. Elizabeth, an inspiration to the Franciscan order, became the fledgling hospital's namesake.

On that November day in 1899, few things other than an 11-room house on a three and a half acre lot had been purchased for the "first hospital in Appleton" effort. Furnishings consisted of a few beds, some bedding and a broken down stove. Those first weeks, the sisters organized the house into a hospital — complete with an operating room, patient bedrooms and a downstairs front office. They slept in the attic and reserved one room for themselves which served as prayer room, kitchen, dining room and laundry. That summer, a dirt floor shed became their kitchen; two barrels and a board their unstable table, Dressang says.

Each sister was assigned multiple tasks. Hospital literature describes them "washing patients and scrubbing floors; praying, cooking, dining and working in the same room ... and walking the streets of Appleton seeking help to support the hospital." Yet despite their labor, their own provisions were sparse. Food was so lacking that a slice of butter for their usual breakfast of just bread was a guarded luxury! "Life was seasoned with the sharp flavor of poverty and hard work," Evans explains.

From the very beginning the sisters had a mission to open their doors "for the admission of all ... each receiving the same kindly and efficient care and nursing at their hands."

These principles were tested a few days after the sisters arrived in 1899. Dr. Willis appeared with a woman in a country spring wagon, "pleading that his patient be accepted. Having no bed, Sister Carola hesitated, but finally agreed," Evans writes. Sadly, however, they discovered the hospital's first patient had already died en route to the new facility.

Photographic archives contain a snapshot of St. Elizabeth's beginnings. At top is the original house that became the sisters home and hospital upon their arrival in town in 1899. The middle photo is Sister Anne Dressang, a Franciscan nun who spent 24 years working at the hospital. The bottom photo shows St. Elizabeth Hospital's new building in 1901, boasting up to 48 beds, employee residence quarters and a convent.