

Historical

HIGHLIGHTS

1855 + 1967

RIVERVIEW HOSPITAL



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EDICAL RECORDS in Grand Rapids, now Wisconsin Rapids, in Wood County, begin with Dr. C. W. Whitney in 1855. As the first doctor, he did all the work of a general practitioner; and, in fact, he was not only the lone physician, but he was a nurse and helper to his patients as well.

The next doctor in this area was Dr. Patrick Hurley. He came to Centralia, then the west side of the river in Wisconsin Rapids, in 1856. He made professional calls in this roadless community on horseback carrying his surgical instruments and medicines in saddlebags. Long journeys were made through dense forests to reach patients. The only way to reach Frenchtown (now Port Edwards) was by a narrow path along the riverbank. Later, when roads were cut and streets were made, he bought the area's first buggy and sulky, made by George A. Corriveau. Dr. Hurley and his family lived in Hurleytown (now the south side of Wisconsin Rapids) for two years, then moved to Centralia.

One incident illustrates the trials of the shopper in that era: Dr. Hurley's daughter, Mary Ann (Mrs. John Collier), wished to purchase calico for a dress and first went to Garrison's Store, (grandfather of Dr. R. E. Garrison) where she found only one piece of calico. She then crossed the Wisconsin River to the east side to try her luck at Kromer and Lunt's Dry Goods Store and found the same amount to select from. With the piece from each store she was able to complete her dress. Ice jams in the river as high as a house were also recalled by Mrs. Collier.



In the 1880's records indicate Dr. George DeMarr, Dr. C. W. Whitney, and Dr. Patrick Hurley were ministering to the ills of 800 Centralia residents.

Another physician who practiced in the area was Dr. G. F. Witter who also served several terms as postmaster. Dr. Byron Robinson, who donated the city park named in his honor, also served the area for a time and went on to become highly renowned for his work on the human body, especially the pelvic area.

Drs. George and F. X. Pomainville were the first natives of Wisconsin Rapids to practice medicine in the place of their birth. They were the sons of Dr. Frank and Caroline Martin Pomainville. Dr. F. X. Pomainville was born in 1871 and his brother in 1880.

To improve the practice of medicine, the Wood County Medical Society was founded in 1902. It started with about 20 members and meetings were held alternately once per quarter at Wisconsin Rapids and Marshfield.

It has been many years since housewives in this community quickly scrubbed away the crumbs to prepare the kitchen table for an operation. Grand Rapids, Centralia, and surrounding area had no hospital facilities until shortly after the turn of the century.

It was an accepted procedure at that time for a baby to be born at home and a common occurrence for a doctor to snip out a small child's tonsils as he lay on the kitchen table or to remove an appendix from his father in like surroundings.



Until 1904 the only hospital service available in this community was provided by Dr. J. W. Rockwell. It could by no means be called a hospital for there were merely four or five beds in a small room above the Otto Drug Store, which was in a building located on the present site of the West Side Branch Library and City News Stand.

A local physician, Dr. F. D. Humphrey, and others of his profession were well aware of the great need for more extensive facilities. They took an important step which ultimately provided for a hospital here. Dr. Humphrey, the record reveals, talked persuasively to a Wautoma resident, Mr. D. R. Evans, and caused him to change his plans to build a house in Grand Rapids. Mr. Evans then changed his building plans to make the house suitable for hospital purposes. If the hospital experiment proved unsuccessful it could later be reconverted to a home. This framed structure opened its doors in 1905 to offer the first official institutionalized care to the sick of this community. It was not extensive but had, for those times, a modern operating room and facilities for the care of convalescent patients.

Another influential figure in the early hospital story was Dr. William Blanchard who became the resident physician of this hospital. His wife, Harriet, was superintendent of nurses; Dr. Humphrey was surgeon-in-chief; and Dr. W. M. Ruckle was staff physician for ear, eye, nose, and throat conditions. Evans operated the hospital until June of 1908 when the structure was sold to Guy Babcock. The following September it was purchased by the Grand Rapids Hospital Association of Physicians. Physicians whose names were known include J. J. Looze, Donald Waters, A. L. Ridgman, F. X. Pomainville, Joe Bellin, and O. T. Hougen, George Pomainville, Ed Hougen, and Hugh Waters. Eye witness accounts reveal that not only were these men adept in their profession but they also fielded a talented baseball team.

On January 6, 1912, the hospital came under the jurisdiction of the Riverview Hospital Association. During the change of hands the institution was closed for two months due to lack of funds but this was overcome by contributions of 43 people who joined the association and the assistance of some 13 business firms.

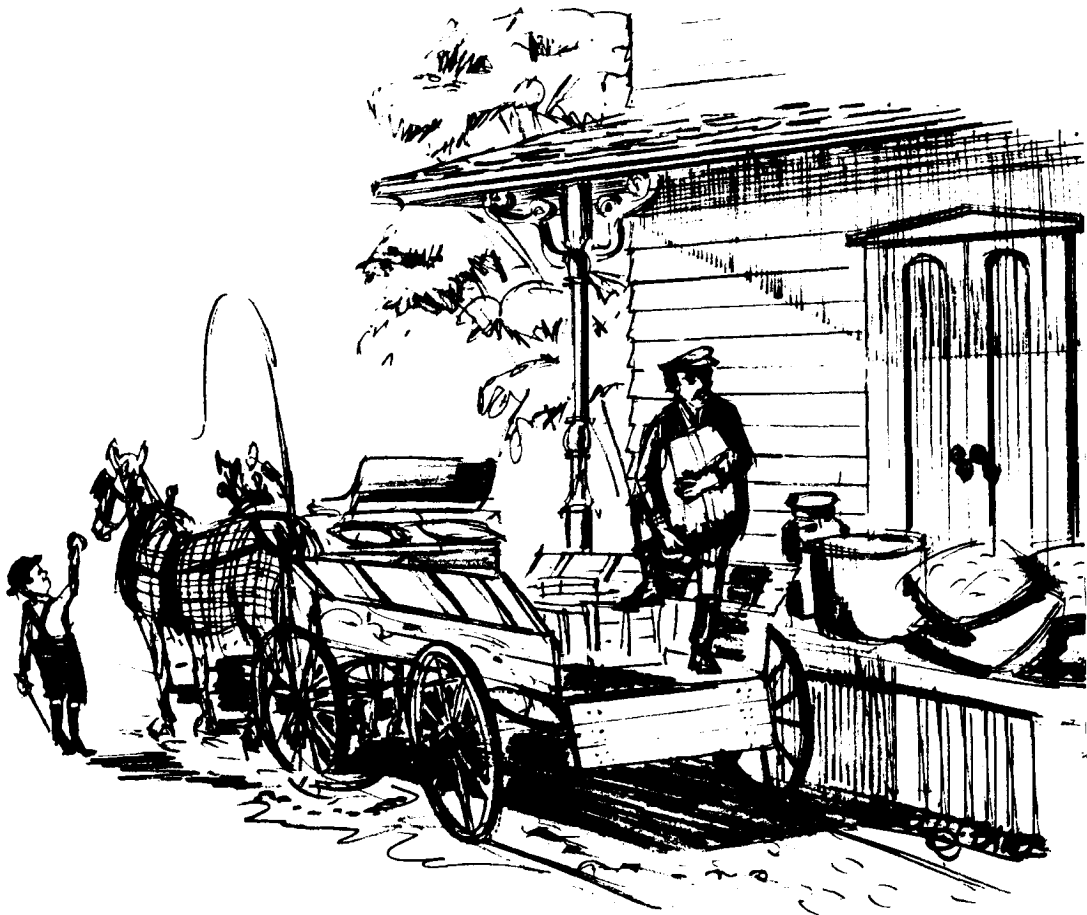
From this rather shaky beginning the association soon got onto firm financial footing and at the first annual meeting was able to report receipts and disbursements balanced off at a gain of \$4,324 including \$150 worth of services rendered to patients unable to pay. A number of improvements were made to the building in the association's opening year to provide for adequate and pleasant surroundings. Money contributions to the new association included pledges by churches and civic groups for the upkeep of specific rooms. The early annual reports also listed gifts from thoughtful residents which ranged from room furnishings to jars of jelly and canned goods. Gifts of staples such as milk and potatoes added to the budget considerably.

Miss M. L. Zillmer was engaged as head of the hospital in October, 1912, and another innovation on the local scene was the establishment of a nurses' training school. The students served as Miss Zillmer's assistants. This was a regulation three-year course. The first commencement exercises for Riverview Training School for Nurses was held December 10, 1915. Miss Ethyle Emmes (Mrs. Ethyle Ramm) was the first graduate.

Dr. J. K. Goodrich was appointed hospital manager in 1914 and he served as administrator for many years.

As the growing population turned increasingly to the hospital for care of aches and ailments, the hospital itself experienced growing pains. A steady increase of patients from 1912 to 1915 convinced officials that something must be done to alleviate the crowded conditions and inadequate facilities.

During the annual hospital association meeting in 1916 the organization's hopes were outlined: A new building costing an estimated \$25,000. A subscription campaign conducted by volunteers in South Wood County netted approximately \$15,600 in pledges. This, plus a previous bequest of \$10,000 by Mrs. Emily Witter for hospital building purposes, made the plans a reality.



The new hospital, a two story brick structure designed to accommodate 30 patients, was opened in September of 1917. The general public viewed the building during an open house and a special program marked the occasion. The building contained up-to-date operating facilities and delivery room and its rooms were tastefully decorated. The original hospital was attached to the new hospital by halls on either floor.

The older portion of the building was used primarily for nurses quarters although during an epidemic of 1918 of "flu," it was isolated for treatment of "flu" patients. Both structures fronted on Third Street South.

Mrs. May Franklin, the superintendent of nurses was assisted by three graduate nurses and three others in training. She came to the local hospital as superintendent in 1915.

The nurses' training school which was active until the early 1920's provided impressive ceremonies for its graduates each year even though they were often few in number. The records of September, 1918, show the financial status of trainees. First year students received \$12, second year students \$14, and senior students \$16 per month. Prior to that time each received \$6 per month, and a similar amount was deposited to the credit of each girl to be given to her upon graduation.

Riverview Hospital continued to provide hospital care to area patients within the brick building structure framed in 1917 but as the years went by this, too, proved inadequate to meet increasing demand for care.

Prior to 1942 Riverview Hospital consisted of three buildings: The original structure built in 1905 to the south of the brick structure (or second unit) completed in 1917; to the north and across Sherman Street was a nurses' home which was the old Gardner home which was moved down from where the new apartment building is standing at Madison and Third to the present location and it still stands there.

Further expansion was realized with the completion of a major wing in 1942. This increased the capacity to 81 beds and provided two operating rooms and also delivery room, laboratory, technical rooms, dining and kitchen areas. This wing was erected on the site of the original frame hospital building. The original hospital building was moved to Fourth Street South and was used as an employees' dormitory. It was torn down to make way for the new Riverview Hospital.

Under the administration of Mr. Foster L. Riggs, who followed Dr. J. K. Goodrich, previous administrator for many years, the plans for the new hospital were inaugurated and the new hospital building was well along to a good start before he resigned in June of 1965.

Mr. Riggs was followed by Mr. J. Peter Hamel under whose administration the building was completed and the new hospital is now under his leadership.

Looking back over the years, the old hospital has provided care for many thousands of patients and thousands of babies have emitted their first wails within its walls. It has experienced its full share of emergencies. There have been miniature floods in the basement, power failures which have sent employees racing to light auxiliary lanterns, babies born on its doorstep. It has carried its full share of joy and sorrow for the community. It has earned a rest.

L. C. POMAINVILLE, M.D.

The information for this booklet was researched and compiled by Leland C. Pomainville, M.D., and we wish to thank him for the great amount of time spent in gathering this material to preserve for posterity.

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