

Sisters Respond to the Call

The Community of The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis traces its heritage to 1860 and Herford, Germany, where the Sisters first taught school and cared for orphans.

Life was not easy for them in those days. It was the era of Bismark, the so-called "Iron Chancellor" of the country, and his "Kultur Kampf," which persecuted the church violently. Eventually, the Sisters were banished from their homeland.

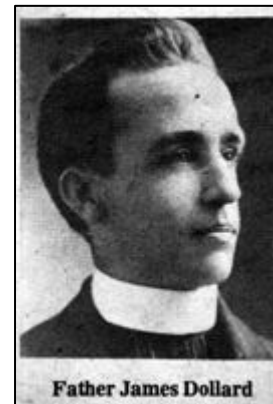


The tiny band of 25 Sisters and four postulants, led by Mother Mary Xavier, took refuge in America and finally settled in Iowa City, Iowa, in 1875. Just as they did in their native Germany, the Sisters settled in to teach. But they struggled with great poverty.

A pastor in Peoria became aware of their plight and, in an effort to help, asked them to establish a much-needed hospital there. After the Sisters had begun their work in Peoria, young women from throughout the state, as well as Germany and Holland, sought entrance into the Community.

Soon, new missions were established and Sisters were sent out to begin new hospitals. Among them was Saint James, which opened in 1907.

On January 29, 1907, The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis came to Pontiac to begin caring for the sick. The Sisters came from Peoria upon the request of Father James Dollard, assistant at St. Mary's Church, Pontiac. Father Dollard had personally approached Bishop John Lancaster Spalding, in Peoria, about his concern for the spiritual and physical care of the sick in Pontiac and the surrounding area.



The Bishop agreed wholeheartedly and advised that a Catholic hospital be built, provided there were Sisters available to staff the institution and that sufficient funds could be raised prior to planning a building. The Bishop set the latter stipulation because two previous attempts to develop a hospital had failed due to financial problems.

Meanwhile, on the same day Father Dollard met with the Bishop in Peoria, he also went to see Mother M. Anthony, mother general of The Sisters of The Third Order of St. Francis in Peoria. Mother Anthony assured Father Dollard of the Sisters' services if a hospital was provided. The zealous curate spent many long hours of work before his plan was realized. He obtained a permit from city officials to legally canvas for funds. He also arranged for a meeting between the Sisters and the doctors.

In the summer of 1906, a resolution was adopted and signed by physicians and surgeons of the county emphasizing the need for a hospital in the area and inviting the Franciscan Sisters of Peoria to establish such an institution. At the same time, the resolution called upon the citizens of the county to give the project their encouragement and support.

The site chosen for the hospital was the property on East Water Street owned by Mrs. Mahala Bradish. It had 10 lots with an alley and cost \$20,000. An old mansion stood on the property. This house also served for the hospital's use.

The name of Saint James was in recognition of the work done by Father Dollard. Mother M. Anthony sent seven sisters to Pontiac. She accompanied the sisters on their journey by horse and buggy.

It was a very difficult beginning. Often, there was no money to buy food. On one such occasion, Sister M. Alberta, Superior, sent two Sisters to a grocery store to ask for food. The first grocer denied their appeal and suggested another grocery store. The second grocer gave them a large supply of food for their 35 cents.

The first patient, Mrs. Mary Daldy of Pontiac, was admitted by Dr. Crocker on January 31, 1907. Records indicate that she was 80 years old and was a Methodist. By the end of the first year, 147 patients had received care.



Epidemics Impacted Hospital Through the Years

Pontiac's first cholera epidemic came in late summer 1849.

The grim disease had gripped New Orleans in December 1848 and moved north along the Mississippi River, fanning out into nearly every major city in the nation. Barely more than six months later, St. Louis alone had suffered over 3,200 deaths due to cholera.

Augustus Fellows, having completed Pontiac's first hotel a little more than a year earlier, returned from an extended visit to New York and he and his wife settled into running their new establishment on the northeast corner of Chicago and Washington streets.

In less than two weeks during late August and early September, 14 people in the Pontiac area had died in the epidemic. The victims included Fellows and two of his children; Dr. Josiah D. Holland, who came in from Rook's Creek to tend the Fellows family; five members of the Garrett M. Blue, Sr., family; William Garner; three members of the John Blue family; and Miss Ann Oliver (sister of Franklin Oliver of Chatsworth Township), who was teaching school at Owego when she came into Pontiac to nurse the sick.

The cholera continued into the 1850s, following water courses, well-traveled roads and weary railroad construction gangs.

A young couple arrived from the East in the summer of 1854 at the Pontiac hotel known as Buck's Tavern. Within two days, the travelers' cholera-stricken bodies had been buried on the knoll northeast of town and, once again, the scourge hovered over the community, claiming the lives of 10 others before it was snuffed out.

Scarlet fever, diphtheria, typhoid and many other communicable diseases touched the community in years preceding the age of "miracle drugs." A quarantine would often squelch an infection, yet, through the years, local health officials would periodically need to take more drastic action, like closing schools, churches and all public gatherings in order to check a rampant disease.

When the influenza pandemic occurred in the United States during World War I, flu-related deaths began appearing on the casualty lists. Pontiac boys were fighting overseas and training at boot camps. Each week, more local boys climbed aboard trains on their way to report for duty.

By September 1918, Illinois was hit with the flu in points both north and south and it spread rapidly over the state.

In Pontiac in the first week of October, the health board closed all moving picture shows, all churches and public gatherings. Schools remained open, but teachers were required to inspect their students each morning and send suspect cases back home. The Livingston County Chapter of the Red Cross offered free face masks.

In the second week, schools were closed, along with all pool halls. Dr. Bawden of the Board of Health, just up from a bout with flu himself, said he thought the local epidemic was under control and appointed Dr. James Mitchell as "health officer in charge." He refused to give an estimate on the number of influenza cases in Pontiac.

Absenteeism due to the flu forced the A.M. Legg Shoe Company to halt production indefinitely.

The War had already caused a shortage of doctors and nurses and on Friday, October 11, orders came from Springfield prohibiting Saint James Hospital from admitting influenza patients or receiving visitors.

Within 22 hours after a call from Dr. Bawden, the local Red Cross secured the use of a residence at 319 E. Washington Street, and converted it into an emergency hospital for influenza patients. Seven beds were made ready while donations and food came in from townspeople.

Across the town, entire families had been stricken and small children were without sufficient care. Disregarding the hazards, 40 girls previously trained by the Red Cross nursing service helped not only in the hospital, but also in homes.

During October's third week, the Chicago and Alton freight depot lacked enough employees to stay open and the Central Union Telephone Company received help from operators in Forrest, who were repaying help given them during their own epidemic in late September. All funerals were restricted to family members only.

On the warmest day of the month (82 degrees), beds were added at the emergency hospital, along with an assurance from the Red Cross Central Department in Chicago that more nurses were on their way.

At the beginning of the last week in October, the local Red Cross reported on the 12-day-old emergency hospital. Thirty-three patients had been received, of which 10 remained in the hospital. Seventeen patients had been discharged completely cured. The six who had died had been seriously ill on admittance.

Also, 130 calls providing food and care had been made to various stricken families in Pontiac. Many miners had been sick and when the temperature dropped to 35 degrees, officials worried about a possible fuel shortage. Doctors reported an increase of influenza cases in the rural population while cases were diminishing in the city.

Finally, the quarantine lifted in early November for everyone except those living with persons ill within the week. Yet all buildings had to be well ventilated before and after any public gatherings. Funerals remained private.

Illinois felt a new wave of influenza during the first weeks of December 1918, but it was not as severe.

Fire Guts Hospital in 1919

On May 4, 1919, the entire Saint James Hospital burned out, leaving only the outside shell standing.

The fire began early in the morning, following a large bolt of lightning. All 15 patients in the hospital were removed to safety and carried through heavy rain to private homes near the hospital.

All of the equipment owned by the doctors was lost in the fire, including a \$1,200 X-ray machine belonging to Dr. John D. Scouller and operating instruments and appliances owned by Drs. Marshall, Middleton, Ross and others.

Firefighters worked until 11 a.m. putting out the blaze, which was fed by chemicals in the operating room and a 300-pound tank of gas which exploded.



The displaced patients were cared for by the Sisters and by the Red Cross secretary, Mrs. Alice Walker, who recruited help and equipment for an emergency hospital on East Washington Street.

After the fire, A.N. Smith loaned a building on North Main Street for six months to the Sisters while the hospital was being rebuilt.

On the afternoon of the day of the fire, \$33,333 was raised for the reconstruction of Saint James at a public meeting in the opera house directed by A.M. Legg, president of the Chamber of Commerce.

The first patients were admitted in November 1920 to the new hospital, which had been built with fire precautions, such as lightning rods and terazza floors instead of wood.

1950

Did you know that in 1950:

- One out of 12 patients at Saint James Hospital had to be treated in tile hallway or on the sun porch because of the growth in the hospital's patient census.
- Eighty-three percent of the patients treated were not Catholics.
- Meds could be obtained at Saint James for \$5 per day. The average cost in Illinois was \$11 per day. The difference was largely due to frugal management of resources and the duties performed by the Sisters, who took no payment for the work.
- An 11-member non-sectarian, non-professional group of civic leaders was formed to advise the Sister Superior of St. James Hospital on community relations and hospital services. Today, this group exists as the medical center's Community Advisory Board.
- Any bequests made to the Saint James Hospital Advisory Board were jointly administered by that board and the hospital administrator. Its approval was necessary before any expenditure of such funds could be made. All funds were to be spent for hospital improvement.

Celebration Marks Dedication in 1953

Three days of festivities marked the end of two years of hopeful planning and fund collecting, when Bishop William E. Cousins dedicated the new \$600,000 addition to Saint James Hospital.



The blessing of the four-story wing was in May 1953, following a Pontifical Low Mass offered by Bishop Cousins.

Open house ceremonies, celebrating the completion of the new addition, were Saturday and Sunday, May 30 and 31, from 2 until 5 p.m. and from 7 to 9 p.m. Men of the Advisory Board, under the direction of Tony Price, president, acted as hosts to the visitors, and women of the VFW Auxiliary and the Franciscan Sisters at Saint James Hospital served refreshments.

Assisting Bishop Cousins at the Mass were the Rev. John Shields, pastor of St. Mary's parish in Pontiac, and the Rev. Richard Raney, pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul's parish in Chatsworth, as chaplains. St. Mary's choir, composed of the seventh and eighth grade students at St. Mary's parish school, under the direction of Sister Mary Laurelle, sang during the Mass.

Following the blessing Friday morning, Bishop Cousins was the guest of honor and gave the main address at a dedication luncheon at the hospital. Other special guests were the Rt. Rev. Monsignor B.J. Sheedy, dean of the Bloomington deanery; priests from parishes in the service area of the hospital; the medical staff; the advisory board; heads of the Pontiac Elks and Moose lodges; commanders of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts in Pontiac; and chairmen of the various township fund drives.



Edward Zorn, general chairman of the fund-raising drive for the new addition, spoke at the luncheon, and Reed Tornbaugh of the advisory board acted as toastmaster. James Maloof of Peoria entertained with vocal selections, accompanied at the organ by Miss Letitia Luther of Pontiac High School.

Forty-six beds were added to the capacity at St. James Hospital by the construction of the new building, bringing the hospital capacity to 100 beds. The new wing added a modern kitchen and cafeteria.

The original intention of the fund-raising campaign was to add a kitchen, cafeteria, Sisters' dining room and a first and second floor for medical and surgical cases. The drive was so successful that a third- and fourth-floor section was added to the plans. It housed the obstetrical department and operating rooms.

In 1951, a grant of \$125,000 was made available to Saint James Hospital from the estate of Fritz Bolander to improve hospital facilities. This amount was matched by The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis.

Shortly afterwards, a drive was begun by the Pontiac Lodge #1019 of the Elks to provide further funds for the addition of the facilities needed. Administrative costs of this fund drive were absorbed by the Pontiac lodge.

Edward Zorn, who was appointed chairman of the campaign, worked with the Advisory Board instituted by Rev. John Weishar, diocesan superintendent of hospitals.

Composed of prominent business and professional people of the community, the Advisory Board also worked in conjunction with Sister Mary Adelgunda, superior of Saint James, at the drive's beginning and later with the superior, Sister Mary Concepta.

Architect was Hamilton B. Dox of Peoria. Wroan and Sons company of Deer Creek was general contractor.

Grant Allowed Maternity Modernization

In February 1956 a growing Saint James Hospital announced that it would use its \$33,200 grant from the Ford Foundation for modernization of its maternity floor. Figures released at the same time indicated increased service by the hospital during 1955.

The starting date for the job, estimated cost of which was \$25,000, depended on a final approval of the project by the Foundation, according to Frank Lehman, president of the hospital's lay advisory board.

Any money left over was to be applied toward finishing the fourth floor of the building's south addition. Estimated cost of that project, which would equip the floor for surgery, was \$130,800.

Maternity patients in 1955 numbered 544, according to figures released by Sister Superior M. Concepta. The total represented an increase of 22 over 1954's figure, she said. The total of patients admitted jumped to 2,752 from 2,340 in 1954, she added, while the average length of patients' stay was reduced to eight days. Outpatients were up to 2,354 from 2,316.

The Ford Foundation grant provided money for an enlarged delivery room, a modern formula room next to the new nursery and remodeled doctors' and nurses' rooms. Rooms were rearranged for more efficient obstetrical service. Several of the changes brought the hospital in line with state regulations.

Other figures in the yearly report for 1955 revealed that 985 inpatients and 981 outpatients had received X-ray service, as compared with 879 and 980 in 1954. Laboratory inpatients increased to 3,330 from 3,074 and outpatients receiving laboratory services was down to 861 from 981. Major operations performed increased to 271 in 1955 from 243 in 1954, while minor operations went up from 396 to 459. There were 315 emergency outpatients, and 457 pints of blood were used.

The hospital used 63 full-time and seven part-time employees during the year ending June 30, 1955, according to a report to the Illinois Department of Public Health. Included were 32 graduate nurses and an equal number of practical nurses and aides. Also

employed was a registered X-ray technician, a medical technologist, a registered anesthetist, a pharmacist and a record librarian, Sister Concepta said.

Hospital Praised for Addition

This is the exact text taken from an editorial printed in the August 18, 1969, edition of the Pontiac Daily Leader:

"Pontiac has many assets, and we believe one of its finest is St. James Hospital.

"On Tuesday, the latest of many additions and improvements to the facilities of the hospital was dedicated. This new wing of the hospital, which will provide 32 additional beds and greatly advanced emergency, X-ray, laboratory and therapy facilities, was built at a cost of \$1.7 million without a fund drive from the community.

"The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, who operate the hospital have financed the cost with the aid of a federal-state grant of \$387,470. This alone is a most noteworthy and unique aspect to the whole undertaking, in this day when there are so many calls for contributions.

"We would not want to imply that gifts would not be welcome. They are needed and we are certain would be most welcome. Just a few days ago there was good news of the hospital's being one of the beneficiaries from a charitable trust which the late Mrs. Blanche Finley set up in her will. Such generous gifts will always be needed and be welcomed by the hospital.



"There are many aspects to the value of St. James to the Pontiac area. Its facilities and its staff provide for fine medical care for ill and injured. It is one of the larger employers in the city, with 172 hospital employees - skilled and dedicated individuals.

"Salaries for this staff totaled \$631,112 last year. The hospital provides a workshop for a medical staff of 17 physicians, plus the courtesy staff of eight physicians and dentists, and a consultant staff of 14.

"Then, too, the hospital draws people from a wide area to Pontiac. In admission lists for just a week we noted there have been patients at St. James from Flanagan, Odell, Chenoa, Minonk, Onarga, Forrest, Graymont, Saunemin, Cornell, Dwight, Fairbury, Kempton, Streator, Campus and Long Point, in addition to Pontiac. Also there had been a number of accident patients from outside this area.

"All these factors mean that St. James has a considerable economic impact on this community, in addition to its primary purpose of healing.

"Also in the last few years, the facilities at St. James and the plans for this fine new wing have been major factors in the decisions of four new doctors to move here.

This is a considerable achievement for this community at a time when there is a shortage of physicians so many places.

"Today, even though the hospital is operated by the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, it is primarily lay people who are the employees. But the Sisters hold a special place in the affections of people of the community.

"This was evidenced at a dinner Tuesday night following dedication of the new wing when only two people received standing ovations from those present--Sister Virginia, the beloved and devoted nun who has been at St. James many years, and Sister Frances Marie, a native of this area who was administrator of the hospital when plans were started on the new wing.

The Pontiac community can be very proud of these new hospital facilities. We congratulate all those who have had a part in planning and developing this addition.

"On Saturday afternoon, there will be an open house at the hospital. We recommend that you pay a visit to see for yourself these fine new facilities, and we recommend careful reading of the special tabloid section of today's Leader which is devoted to the hospital."

Second Blaze Struck in 1979

A fire of undetermined origin destroyed an X-ray file room on a Saturday in December 1979 at Saint James Hospital and threatened evacuation of the hospital's patients, but the hospital was in full operation again by Sunday. No services were closed down because of the fire.

The fire was discovered at 6:41 p.m. in a first-floor room of the hospital's two-story, east wing, a 1969 addition to the main building. Smoke from burning X-ray negatives spread to the second floor, forcing the evacuation of nine patients.

Firefighters had the fire under control within 15 to 20 minutes, containing it to the X-ray file room. The room and its contents were destroyed. No damage estimate was available.

An automatic alarm, tripped by a smoke detector, summoned firefighters to the scene. Pontiac firefighters called for mutual aid from nearby fire departments.

"We needed help in case we had to evacuate," Fire Chief James Myers said. Firefighters did help in moving the nine patients from the east wing.

Even with the prompt action by the hospital personnel, "by the time we got the last patient out, the smoke was real heavy," Myers said. The patients were moved to the second floor area of the main building.

While employees were cleaning up the mess left by the fire, an investigation to determine the cause was continuing. State Police Detective Al Lindsey, Pontiac Police Detective Lt. James Edinger and Pontiac firefighter James Roberts were conducting the investigation, Myers said. Myers would not speculate on what might have started the fire.

Moving patients from the smoke-filled area caused no space problem because the hospital had a low number of patients due to the Christmas season.

Files destroyed contained the hospital's 1979 X-rays and reports of the film. The files only recently had been moved into the room where the fire occurred.

A hospital maintenance worker went to the room where the alarm sounded but retreated when he saw smoke pouring from under the door. The two-story, brick wing also houses the hospital's emergency room, outpatient services and X-ray equipment and a laboratory.

The emergency room was back in operation late Saturday night. The second floor's 15 patient rooms were cleaned that morning.

Seven fire departments sent a total of 71 firefighters to the hospital to back up the Pontiac department in case an evacuation was necessary. It was nearly 10 p.m. before the firefighters left.

The fire was controlled in about 15 minutes, but ventilation--getting the smoke out of the building--was a problem.

Chief Myers said seven ambulances were standing by in case of evacuation. "We were prepared for it. The armory was ready to take any supplies of people," he said.

A Special Act of Love and Compassion

In April of 1983, with pediatric hospitalizations declining across the country because of medical advances, Saint James Hospital closed its dedicated pediatrics unit. A three-year-old girl from Odell was a patient at that time, and with an inoperable brain tumor, was not expected to live much longer. Out of concern for her comfort and that of her mother, who naturally wanted to stay with her daughter around the clock, a room for Jessica and another next door for her mother, were kept open and nurses took turns staying with them on the otherwise empty unit for an additional few weeks until Jessica passed away. This story typifies the dedication of OSF Saint James and its Community of Caregivers to serving persons with great care and love throughout its 100-year history.

Remodeling of the Hospital

On May 4, 1986, 67 years after a fire that almost destroyed all hope, Saint James Hospital hosted a rededication ceremony, celebrating a \$4.5 million remodeling of the hospital, which included a facelift for the main lobby and Emergency Department waiting area, a new intensive care unit, the addition of an ambulatory care unit and 32 patient beds, new state-of-the-art equipment for the Obstetrics Department, the addition of birthing rooms, and a renovation of the Surgery Department. All of the intensive care rooms became private and the obstetrics rooms became combination labor-delivery-recovery rooms, improving the privacy and comfort of patients and their families during their hospitalizations.

By this time, the Sisters' Mission in Pontiac had grown to include more than 385 employees and 80 OSF Medical Group employees.

The Generosity of Mr. John W. Albrecht

OSF Saint James - John W. Albrecht Medical Center was completed in 2002. This entirely new "replacement facility" became a reality through the generosity of others. A large portion of the cost of building the medical center was provided through the estate of a farmer who wanted to give back to the area in which he had always lived ... John W. Albrecht. Mr. Albrecht's Last Will and Testament set aside a major portion of his estate for the explicit purpose of building a healthcare facility in or near the community he loved.

Employees, physicians, area residents, organizations and businesses also donated willingly to the "Partners in Progress" campaign, along with significant support from The Sisters of The Third Order of St. Francis. While the architecture, equipment, services and infrastructure is beautiful and modern, however, it is the OSF Saint James' Community of Caregivers --- over 500 strong --- that makes it a place of genuine caring, love and commitment to its patients and their families, and to the Mission of The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis.

