

Just What The Doctor Ordered

Yankton Has A Long History Of Outstanding Medical Care, And That Service Is Poised To Continue Into The Future

BY CASSIE BARTLETT
The Press & Dakotan

Even before South Dakota became a state, Yankton established the start of a long-standing medical community that believed it was most important to provide the best care to patients, as well as educate the medical staff.

Yankton started its medical care to the local area in 1879 when Dakota Territory Gov. William Howard bought buildings to build a mental hospital. Before then, Dakota Territory's mentally ill were treated at mental hospitals in Minnesota and Iowa. When the hospital opened, there were nine men and eight women, but within a year, it had increased to 35 men and 17 women.

At first, citizens didn't realize that patients needed more than just food and clothing, but required actual treatment for their diseases. In the beginning years of the hospital, it was overcrowded and understaffed.

As Yankton grew, more and more general doctors moved to the town to care for its citizens. Since there was no hospital to care for the patients, they had limited space to provide care. In 1895, the Yankton Hospital Association formed with 23 women and four men. Its purpose was to care for the sick and was stationed in a local house. It disbanded in 1897 as a new hospital was opening in the city.

When Bishop Thomas O'Gorman visited Yankton in 1896, he noticed the area lacked a Catholic hospital and decided to change that. After moving an orphanage and school directed by the Benedictine Sisters to Vermillion, the building was remodeled into a hospital. On Nov. 4, 1897, the Hospital of the Sacred Heart was dedicated, staffed by Sisters that didn't have any training because Bishop O'Gorman claimed all women were nurses in nature.

In its beginning, Sacred Heart didn't have the finances to be able to support itself, often giving more charity cases than receiving payment. The Sisters were forced to go to the community to ask for money and held fundraisers like ice cream socials, minstrel shows and charity concerts to pay for their supplies.

Through the years, Sacred Heart was able to make improvements, like buying an ambulance and starting the School of Nursing in 1905.

Certain diseases were not understood and outbreaks of diphtheria, typhoid and polio were common. Appendicitis was especially widespread and was thought to be a contagious disease. Despite the lack of today's standards of surgical tools and unsanitary conditions, Sacred Heart was praised by doctors for its excellent equipment.

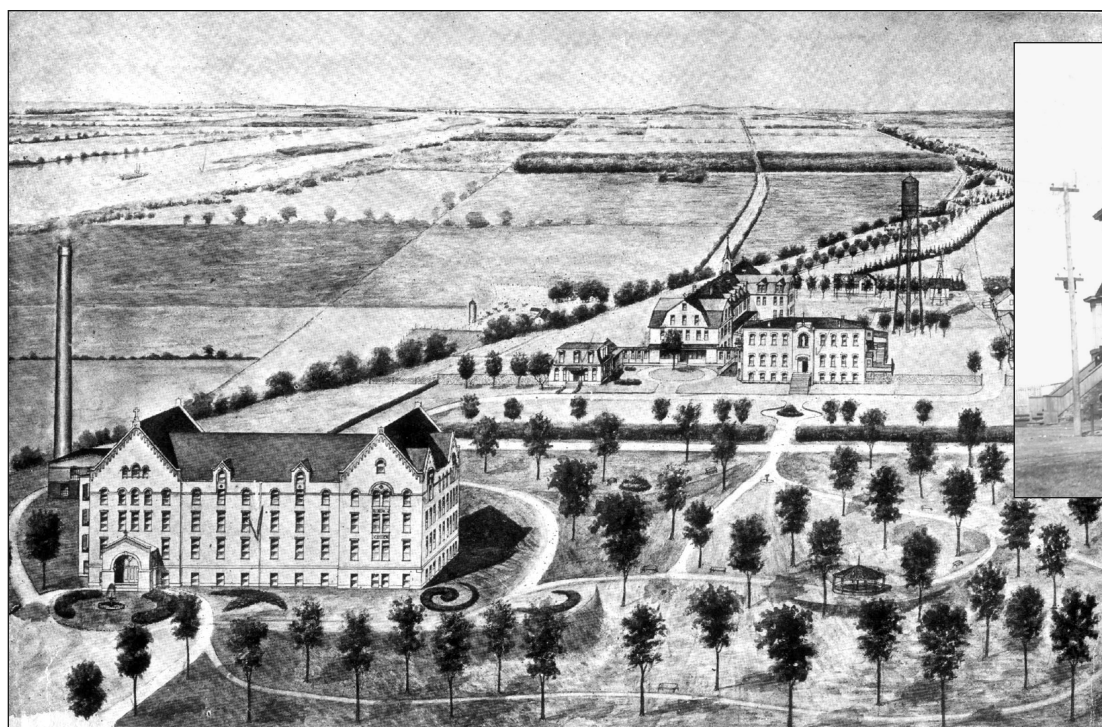
Over the years, the hospital became more and more crowded but the Benedictine Sisters and community members pushed for new hospitals to be built and remodeled to keep up with demand.

Following World War I, Yankton saw many changes in its medical care. Automobiles and motorcycles were more common and the hospital saw more injuries related to them than runaway horses. In 1922, Sacred Heart celebrated its 25th anniversary and in 1923 became an accredited hospital through the American College of Surgeons. By 1924, the hospital had admitted 2,387 patients but because it gave so many charity cases without money in return, the Sisters were pressured to charge payment.

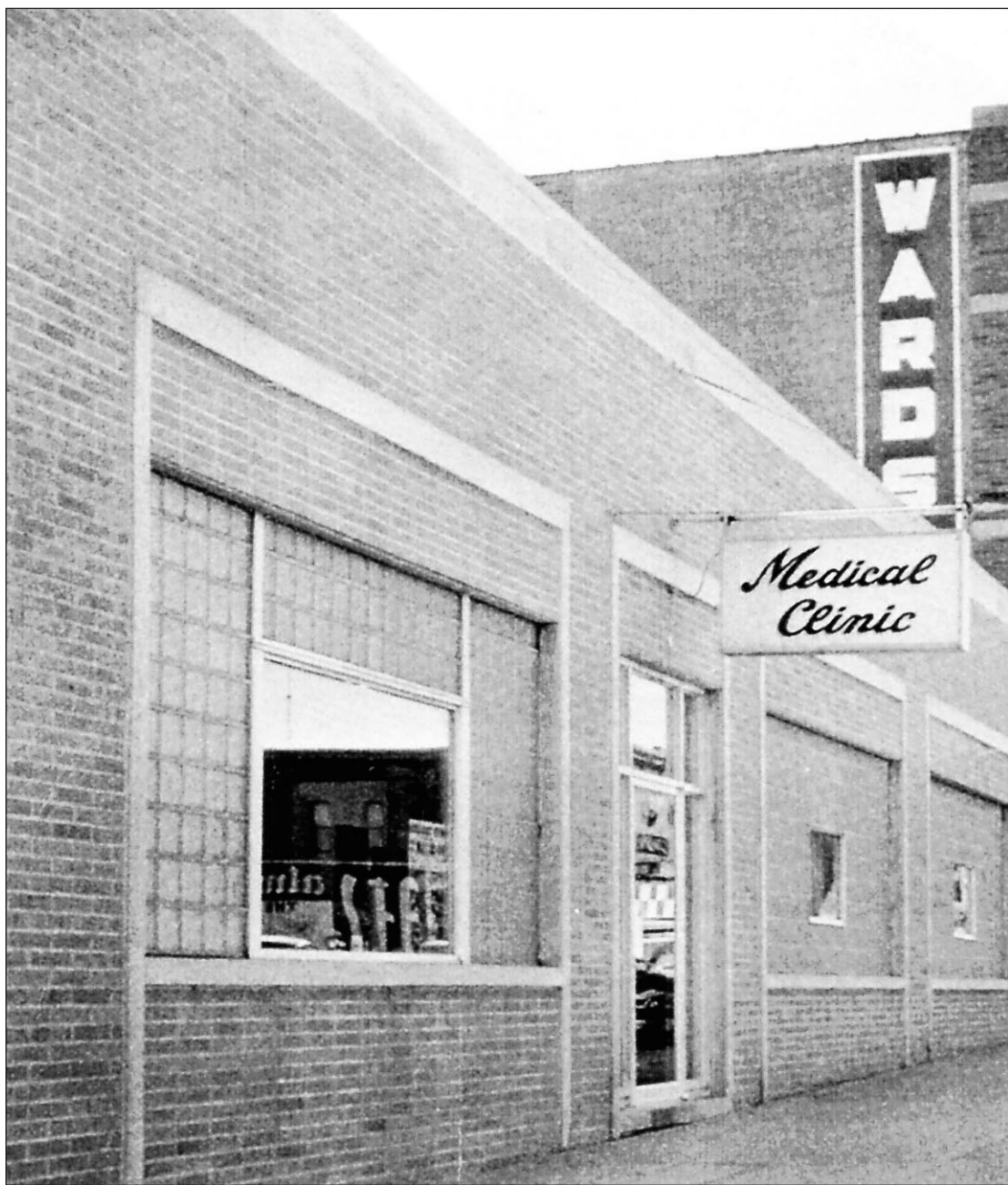
The 1940s saw many changes in the Yankton medical community, not only at Sacred Heart, but in the emergence of medical clinics as well.

Sacred Heart had added two new wings by 1940 and miracle drugs were introduced in Yankton and the hospital received an iron lung in 1941.

When the United States became involved in World War II, doctors in the Yankton area were not de-



LEFT: An artistic vision of the second Sacred Heart Hospital, eventually dedicated in 1915 to replace the original 1897 hospital (shown above). The first facility was built by the Sisters of Mercy, a monastic order who preceded the Benedictines in Yankton. It was also used as a boarding school for Native American boys. (P&D archive images; from the book "Yankton: The Way It Was!" by Bob Karolevitz) BELOW: The Medical Clinic, the forerunner of today's Yankton Medical Clinic, is shown at an early location at 109 E. Third St. in 1947. (Photo: Yankton Medical Clinic)



manded to join the forces, but urged to help in any way they could. Following the end of the war, doctors returning from Europe started clinics and improved medical care in Yankton.

Two clinics emerged with returning war doctors — the Yankton Clinic and the Medical Clinic. The Yankton Clinic was started by Drs. Frank Abts, Chester McVay, Ted Sattler and Brooks Ranney. Doctors Roland Hubner, Merritt Auld and George John-

son joined forces at the Medical Clinic. While the two clinics sought to provide quality care to the Yankton community, they differed in their ways of care — the Yankton Clinic had more specialized doctors while the Medical Clinic was more general practice.

"They brought more modern medical care into the Yankton community," Dr. Michael McVay, son of Chester, said. "The level of medical care began to elevate. The doctors at both clinics had been

trained either right before the war or right after it, so they were on the cusp of new medical knowledge. Back then, and to compare it to now in terms of technology, they were on the leading edge of it."

Despite the increased knowledge brought in by the returning doctors, they still worked without many important advances. Buildings lacked air conditioning so doctors were forced to work with windows open, allowing bacteria and dust into the hospital and operating rooms. Penicillin was introduced in 1943 and because there were no resistant strains of bacteria at the time, it totally changed the way infections were treated.

Dr. Duane Reaney, one of the original founders of the Medical Clinic, said Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays were the busiest days at the clinics because that's when people would come to town.

There was still no known treatment for cancer and people weren't aware of the consequences smoking and excessive alcohol had on the body. Dr. Jay Hubner said. It was common for doctors to smoke as they visited with patients and prevention methods like exercising and eating healthy weren't pushed in those days.

Education for the medical community in Yankton greatly increased during the 1940s. Sacred Heart introduced numerous schools such as Radiographic Technology and Anesthesia and Dr. Chester McVay received surgical interns from his alma mater, Northwestern University in Chicago.

"After World War II and because of (my father's) connections with his previous professors in Chicago at Northwestern, they began sending him surgical residents to train," Dr. Michael McVay said. "Over the years, he developed a surgical training program here. Yankton and Sacred Heart hospital started to be put on the map because of the training."

From its start before South Dakota achieved statehood, the Hospital for the Insane, renamed Yankton State Hospital in 1918, saw a lot of changes, not only in its care, but also in the way society viewed people with mental illnesses.

Before patient rights were considered in laws, people would drop off family members at the State Hospital and workers would be forced to take in the patients because they had nowhere else to send them. Halls were filled with patients who didn't fit the criteria for mentally ill and patients significantly outnumbered workers.

For Mary Walloch, a registered nurse who started working at the State Hospital in 1956, the biggest change has been in the treatment of patients.

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