

Sisters 'Beg for Change'

The Lamborn Hotel served 66 patients of all nationalities and types during its first year. The hospital had contracts with the county for the sick unable to pay and with the United States Marine Service for the coverage of Missouri River boatmen who needed care. The area served by the hospital was roughly a circle encompassing Jamestown and as far west as Medora. The first years saw meager patient numbers. To make ends meet, the hospital was served as a temporary boarding house. The sisters also solicited funds far and wide:

“At last the sisters resorted to begging. Two sister nurses were released at intervals to go on begging tours to the nearby Fort Lincoln Railroad Construction camps as well as Dakota towns. When these excursions took them to that area West of Bismarck where the railroad was in the process of being built, the sisters had to resort to queer modes of travel. The construction crews used handcars when traveling from section to section or from their work to their camp. This was the only mode of travel available, and this the sisters took. The sight of a couple of sisters aboard a handcar propelled by sturdy railroad laborers was said to have won them many friends.” – *“St. Alexius Commemorative” written by McDonald for May 6, 1985 issue of the Bismarck Tribune*

Little is known about the relationship between the city's physicians and the hospital, but no doubt it was a welcome addition to a practice accustomed to seeing patients who had been nursed by a friend in a room over a saloon or in a local boarding house. One physician used the hospital as a sanitarium as evidence by an early picture of the hospital with a sign “Upper Northwestern Sanitarium” on an upper story. In this case, the disease treated was probably tuberculosis, a malady that reached epidemic proportions in the 19th century.

By 1885, there was a working hospital staffed with personnel of an untrained nature but willing to work and learn as well as 11 doctors, who all practiced independently. These changes came slowly to the northern plains. Doctors who had obtained their training before 1880 often resisted change and relied on themselves for all cases that came their way. In Bismarck, the physician in town made use of the hospital only for those patients with no one to care for them at home or for those with contagious diseases.