

# The Great Depression Brings New Medical Developments to St. Alexius



*St. Alexius Hospital occupied its new building on 9th Street between Broadway and Thayer Avenues in Bismarck in 1915.*

a place to get well, rather than a place to die. The hospital was increasing its efforts to educate the public in hygiene sanitation. Employees were increasing their skills for finding cures for diseases that were previously known as killer, like tetanus. There was also an increase in the flow of information from centers of learning to practicing physicians, making new methods of diagnosis and treatment available to the patient sooner.

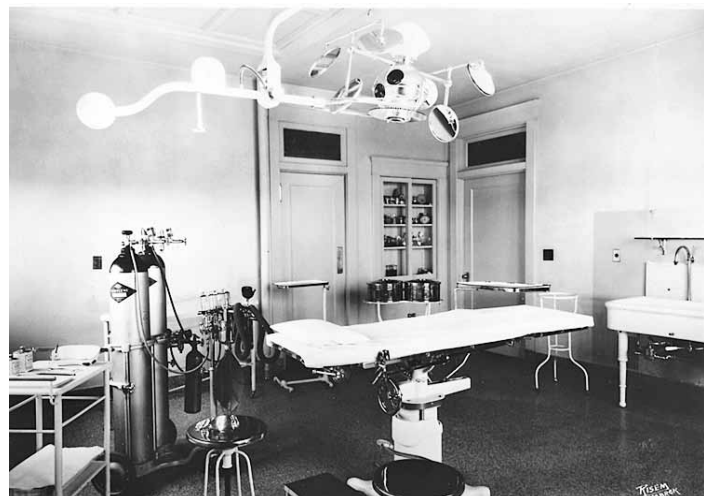
During the Great Depression in the 1930's, the Bismarck area experienced difficult times. The hospital, however, continued accepting patients despite the lack of payment. Many physicians, nurses and other hospitals came close to poverty levels. Quite often, health problems came second to getting food on the table.

Developments in health care continued despite the difficulties. New therapies, such as antibiotic therapy and intravenous therapy, became widespread practices as did blood typing and transfusions. New departments were created, such as physical therapy and medical social services. Radiation therapy was used for many conditions that are treated today with drug therapy, including tonsillitis. The sisters designated a separate house on the grounds as their contagion ward for suspected and proven cases of especially dangerous diseases. They made it clear, however, that it was only for those cases discovered in the hospital. Later, the city convinced the hospital administration to open the ward to those cases discovered in the city.

*(Excerpts taken from North Dakota History: Journal of The Northern Plains; pp. 10-11; Volume 53, No. 1; Winter 1986.)*

In 1927, St. Alexius served more than 2,600 inpatients, performed more than 6,900 radiological procedures, performed urine and gastric analysis, sputum examinations (TB), blood glucose levels, blood cell counts and an ever-increasing amount of surgeries. Patients stayed in bed longer and were expected to be more “helpless” after surgery than now. It was not unusual to be in bed for three weeks after a procedure. The procedures were also getting more complex. In 1915, there were few appendectomies, whereas in 1927 there were 121 done at St. Alexius.

During this time, the public perception of a hospital was also changing; it became



*This surgical suite included the most modern instruments of the 1930's.*