

The tornado
headed straight
for Rochester! ~~~~~

CHAPTER ONE



THE NEEDS OF THE PATIENT COME FIRST

"Their duty was to alleviate human suffering ..."

— Sister Joseph Dempsey

THE MAYO-FRANCISCAN STORY BEGINS LIKE MANY GOOD STORIES. Once upon a time, a group of Catholic Sisters, working with a family of Protestant physicians, built a hospital in a cornfield. The hospital grew into a place of healing for people from all over the world. A handshake, not a legal document, sealed the partnership of the Franciscan Sisters and Mayo physicians. Working together, these unlikely partners faced daunting challenges with unwavering dedication to their primary goal of placing the needs of the patient first.



August 21, 1883

time until the makeshift relief facilities closed, Sisters supervised the nursing.

Later, Mother Alfred assessed how care of the sick and injured could be improved. Intelligent and pragmatic, she typically used life experiences to solve practical problems. She was well acquainted with Sisters' hospitals in Europe and America. Her homeland, Luxembourg, indeed most of Europe, had a history of Sisters' hospitals that went back to the Middle Ages. Now a missionary on the American frontier, Mother Alfred witnessed the extraordinary contribution of Sisters' hospitals to pioneer communities. Yes, Rochester must have its own hospital. She would build one.

Mother Alfred went to Dr. W.W. Mayo with her idea and asked him to head the medical staff. "Mother Superior," he told her, "this town is too small to support a hospital." He reminded her that the public shunned hospitals as pest houses where people went to die. Further, it would be a costly undertaking with no assurance of success. Mother Alfred insisted she could build a hospital that would succeed if Dr. Mayo would take charge of it. Reluctantly, he agreed.

The Sisters earned and saved every cent they could. By constant labor and sacrifice, they raised

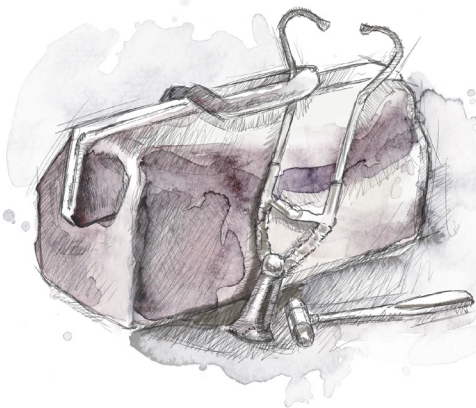
They saved
every cent.



the needed funds. Dr. W.W. Mayo and Mother Alfred chose the site, nine acres, just west of the city. Saint Marys Hospital opened September 30, 1889, with 27 beds, six Sisters and two physicians, the sons of Dr. W.W. Mayo. The father, now 70 years of age, served as consulting physician. Mother Alfred appointed Sister Joseph Dempsey, a Rochester native, as superintendent. The Sisters opened the hospital “to all sick persons regardless of their color, sex, financial status or professed religion.”

The Franciscans had little money to furnish wards and private rooms. They started with a few iron cots, a dozen unbleached muslin sheets and some rough gowns. Mattresses didn't fit the cots and slipped around on the springs. Just keeping the patient on the bed and the bed on the springs was a challenge. The Sisters got

up at 3 or 4 in the morning and worked until 11 at night. When there was laundry to do, they got up at 2 a.m. The hospital had three floors. The kitchen was on the first floor. They carried patient meals to the upper floors as the dumb waiter was broken most of the





time. All the water for the building had to be pumped by hand from the basement reservoir. They carried the water used for cooking, baths and every other need from the basement to the upper floors. When the number of patients exceeded the cots available, the Sisters gave up their beds, pulled out mattresses and slept on the floor.

Demands on the Mayo brothers were equally rigorous. For the first three years, there was no male orderly. In addition to demanding surgical and medical loads, the young physicians nursed male patients who needed special attention. They each took turns on night duty.

*Teamwork from
the 1st day.*

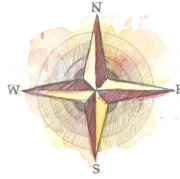
Sister Joseph later recalled the spirit of Saint Marys' nurses and doctors: "Their duty was to alleviate human suffering and to save human lives — and they did it."



ENDNOTES:

Pages 3-5: Clapesattle, H: *The Doctors Mayo*. University of Minnesota Press, 1941, pp. 242-248. Classic account of how the tornado of 1883 brought the Mayos and the Sisters of Francis together as unlikely partners in healing.

Pages 6-8: Clapesattle, pp. 252-253, describes the opening of Saint Marys Hospital. *Annals of Saint Marys Hospital* includes the speech by Dr. William Worrall Mayo and early accounts of the hospital.



CHECK YOUR COMPASS

THE NEEDS OF THE PATIENT COME FIRST

The primary value of Mayo Clinic in our mission to contribute to health and well-being by providing the best care to every patient through integrated clinical practice, education and research.
