



Patients came to Saint Marys  
from near and far.

## CHAPTER THREE



### INTEGRITY

*"The cause of suffering humanity knows no religion."*

— Mother Alfred Moes

THE PARTNERSHIP OF THE YOUNG MAYOS AND THE FRANCISCAN Sisters began tentatively. At first glance, they appeared to have little in common. The Protestant Mayos may have viewed religious life with some admiration, but it was clearly outside their experience. Despite the diversity of backgrounds, the Mayo brothers and the Franciscan Sisters trusted each other's commitment to a common goal, the care of suffering humanity. Such commitment inspired unstinting effort, tapped creative resources and transcended religious differences. They forged a permanent partnership and in the process overcame formidable obstacles. Anti-Catholicism, however, was an obstacle that even high spirits and great resolve could not overcome.

Three years after the hospital opened, the Franciscans and Mayos faced a critical challenge. Saint Marys opened to serve all sick persons regardless of their color, financial resources or professed religion.

Mother Alfred put it clearly: “The cause of suffering humanity knows no religion ...” When Dr. W.W. Mayo, at Mother Alfred’s request, tried to organize a staff, he met with evasion and outright refusal. The physicians he approached wanted no part of a venture that was sure to fail because of rising anti-Catholicism.

Between 1860 and 1890 the Catholic population in America tripled and continued to grow. Waves of immigration alarmed native-born Protestants who feared for the country’s stability. Nativism centered in the Midwest through the American Protective Association (APA), a secret society, successor to the Know-Nothings

and forerunner of the Ku Klux Klan. “Ardent Protestants would have none of an institution that was managed by black-robed nuns and in which there was a chapel set aside for the exercises of popery.”

A rival physician, Dr. W. A. Allen, built a competing hospital that offered an alternative to one owned by Catholic Sisters. The new institution,



*A new life in America.*

The Mayo brothers  
were loyal to each other  
and to the Sisters.



Riverside Hospital, opened for patients in November 1892. Local Protestants pointed to the rival Riverside as an institution that Protestants and patriots could enter “without doing outrage to their convictions by furthering an agency of the hated and alien Catholic Church.”

At this juncture, two important members of the Presbyterian Church fell ill and were taken to Riverside Hospital. They called on the Doctors Mayo to attend them. The Mayos faced an important decision. To accept patients at the rival hospital would have disastrous consequences for Saint Marys since most of their patients would then choose the non-Catholic hospital. After deliberating, the Mayos refused to attend patients or to operate in Riverside Hospital. “To divert a share of their practice to another hospital seemed wrong,” writes their biographer, “a poor return for loyalty and confidence. Moreover, the Mayos felt a strong moral

Compassion and  
care for  
every patient.



obligation to the Sisters of Saint Francis. And, finally, the Mayos were not men inclined to knuckle under to the public clamor or the pressure of opposition.”

As anticipated, their decision brought highly emotional censure and criticism from a segment of the Protestant community. In the midst of these contentious times, the Mayos quietly focused on their practice and cared for patients. When critics attacked them and waited for a response, they chose to ignore the abuse and appeared unperturbed.

Riverside Hospital was in operation for over two years when Dr. Allen made a startling announcement. For unknown reasons, “at the peak of prosperity and popularity,” he was leaving



his practice and moving to St. Paul. Shortly after he left, the hospital closed and sold its beds and other movables to Saint Marys.

Presumably, this was an extraordinarily difficult time for the Sisters, particularly since they were powerless to do anything about pervasive anti-Catholicism. They wanted their institution to succeed, but in truth, they believed the success of the hospital was not up to them; it was in God's hands. And so, as was their custom in times of difficulty and decision, they fasted and prayed that God would bless the work of their hands.

The strident competition over Riverside Hospital cemented the relationship between the Doctors Mayo and the Sisters at Saint Marys. Despite inexperience, hardship and hostility, they had learned to depend upon each other. The Sisters would never forget how the doctors endured public abuse with steadfast courage on their behalf. The Mayos' unswerving loyalty had almost certainly saved the hospital. The Mayos, forced by circumstances, found they could furnish all the patients needed for the

*The Sisters prayed that  
God would bless the  
work of their hands.*





Plants & flowers made the  
hospital feel like home.

hospital. In turn, the Sisters demonstrated they could provide all the doctors needed in a hospital and nursing care. Each made the decision to rely solely on the other. The Mayos' decision centralized their surgical practice and became a primary factor in their phenomenal success. The Sisters' decision moved Saint Marys Hospital beyond perceived parochial boundaries and into the mainstream of America.

## ENDNOTES

Pages 20-24: The story of Riverside Hospital is included in Clapesattle, pp. 264-267, and Whelan, Volume One, pp. 71-73. In addition, the *Annals of Saint Marys Hospital*, 1892, provides contemporary information.



## CHECK YOUR COMPASS

### INTEGRITY

*Adhere to the highest standards of professionalism, ethics and personal responsibility, worthy of the trust our patients place in us.*

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