

Chapter I - The Early Years (1942–1954)

It was a blustery day, that 6th of December 1942, when two well-known men of this district, the late Dr. J. H. MacMillan, and the late A. R. (Sandy) Globe stopped on the Post Office steps, to talk about the weather, and about a vital need for the whole community - a Hospital. It warmed the hearts of those two visionaries that day, as the Hospital has warmed the hearts and cared for and fed the bodies of thousands upon thousands of grateful people since.

Over three years of unflinching faith and untold heartache passed, before the original Hospital (on the Hill) opened its doors. Sandy Globe had used his unbounded enthusiasm, to interest the Lions Club in the project after the late Mr. C. J. Eames, then of Hamilton and also of Grimsby, offered to donate his Deer Park Golf Club property. The clubhouse would be transferred into a Hospital, if the citizens could raise enough money for the work.

Those were mid-war years, when everything - meat, tea, coffee, butter, sugar, building materials, gasoline, paper, etc., was in short supply, but not enthusiasm for a worthwhile project. Almost immediately offers, large and small, of money poured in. Plans progressed and by September of 1943, the first financial drive was announced with \$15,000 set as the top objective.

When it came time to apply to the Government for a company charter, the men behind the project had to submit a name for the Hospital. It was thought that there could be a no more fitting way of honouring the dead, than by dedicating a monument to the living, of present and future generations. So it was called West Lincoln Memorial Hospital, serving the whole area.

It was planned as an 18 bed Hospital, and with that in mind, alterations (including a new heating system) would cost \$11,000, and equipment to start with \$3,500. Mr. Globe stated that it would be a \$50,000 project, including the value of the building and contents donated by Mr. Eames.

Several types of memberships were offered to the public:

1. Ordinary membership of \$2.00 per year;
2. Club or organization memberships of \$50.00 per year;
3. Foundation life membership of \$100.00. These members were to become the owners of the Hospital, who would elect their Board annually.

With scarcity of both funds and materials, it took until Monday, January 7, 1946, before the Hospital was open to receive patients.

Miss H. D. MacRobbie was the Superintendent of Nurses of the Hospital and Miss M. Templin worked half-time as dietician. The staff was principally from the area. WLMH was launched, and 46 patients were treated in the first month. At that time, "The Independent", reported that the "Ontario Department of Health officials claim that it is the model small town or rural district Hospital in all Canada, both from a building and an equipment standpoint". That Spring, Mr. Sandy Globe was presented with the Lions Club Citizenship Award which was well deserved for his area efforts in the establishment of WLMH.

In those days, it was a real struggle to obtain finances for the day-to-day running of the place. It was not until 1959, that the OHSC came into being and took care of this. Grimsby Council unanimously carried a motion to set up \$1 million on the tax rate for WLMH benefit (figuring 11,000 people in the six towns and township concerned, this meant paying .60¢ per year).

In the first year, there were 170 babies born at West Lincoln - divided evenly 85 boys and 85 girls.

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Just as plans were underway to add a small extension which included 10 more beds and laundry, tragedy struck. At noon on January 29, 1948, a patient in OBS heard flames crackling in the walls of her room. Firemen, neighbours, citizens - hundreds of people - responded at once, but it was a losing battle, saving the building. But, 18 adults and 6 babies had been removed quietly, efficiently, and immediately into below zero weather and then were taken to the homes of helpful neighbours - babies complete with their own formula. Also thousands of dollars worth of equipment was rescued by the willing hands of people who had made the Hospital possible.

That was a grim day indeed, for Grimsby and district. And though it gave a forever-after horror of fires to all who were involved, the wonderful part was that all patients were out and away before any thought of panic came.

That "human dynamo" and Chairman of the Board, Sandy Globe, called a meeting for Sunday, February 8th in the Masonic Hall, which included representatives of all municipal organizations, service clubs, women's clubs etc. In his lengthy opening remarks he gave a comprehensive record of the Hospital's brief but brilliant career, and "The Independent" quoted "there is little doubt but what the people of West Lincoln want is another Hospital, just as soon as it can humanly be erected and put into operation".

An estimate of \$150,000 was made for our new Hospital. So with approximately \$100,000 available through insurance and grants from the Department of Health, the future path seemed clear, for \$50,000 raised by the residents of West Lincoln would give the desired \$150,000. Each Board Member was asked where the new Hospital would be built. It was ascertained without a doubt that the new Hospital should "not be on the hill". Asked her opinion, Miss MacRobbie said, "the operation would be much cheaper and more convenient, if we had a central location, and I feel that people would not support the old site. Although it was perfect for convalescence, fresh air, and scenic beauty, low water pressures, difficulty in gaining access to gas and sewage systems, more than made up for these advantages". It was also stated that the Department of Health would have a great deal to say about where the new building would be erected.

Following these discussions, campaign managers were selected to go ahead and plan the campaign with the General Canvas to start February 23rd.

In the meantime, temporary quarters were considered. Nixon Hall - now occupied by Don Awde - was vacant after being used by farmerettes. Miss MacRobbie phoned Mrs. Pearl Walker (the owner), in Florida at the time, for permission to use it, and was given Mrs. Walker's consent. Staff workers painted and set up our beautiful salvaged equipment. The Department of Health gave its approval and the opening of Nixon Hall was to coincide with the opening of the Rebuilding Campaign on Monday February 26th. Contributions of \$4,000 were already in, and considering that in its short career, WLMH had cared for over 2,000 people, the response to the drive was expected to be magnificent.

On Sunday February 25, 1948, CHML in Hamilton, gave a three hour broadcast appealing for funds. Answers came from all over Ontario and across the border. Pledges amounting to \$5,600 came in. The Girl Guides and district gathered over \$500 worth of canned goods to stock the depleted larder.

On Monday, February 26th, 160 canvassers began their work.

There was mention in the press at this time of "working under adverse conditions at Nixon Hall" which is no overstatement, but WLMH staff have always had willing hands. A winding staircase led to OBS upstairs - a challenge to patients and food carriers. Formulas were

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made in the upper hall, with veins into bedrooms on either side. The utensils had been boiled on the kitchen stove and done up in sterile wrappers. The Grimsby distillery then on Oak Street, kindly helped with sterilizing. The OR instruments were kept handy on the marble mantelpiece of the OR (formerly the living room).

By April 1948, the present site on Nelles property was chosen from four available sites. It was approximately 3 acres with 400 foot frontage, the building to be back 100 feet from #8 Highway. North Grimsby Township Council granted the permit for the building of WLMH. According to the application the Hospital would cost about \$180,000.

The first sod for the present building was turned on the 12th of August 1948, and excavating started in the peach orchard. Cornerstone laying was done by Hon. Russell T. Kelley, then Minister of Health, on Sunday, October 3rd. The cornerstone contains a jar of wheat from the Smithville area, a bottle of wine distilled from Grimsby grapes, a jar of peaches from the Beamsville district and a bottle of tomato sauce from Winona. Also coins, stamps, newspaper records of the opening of the original Hospital and of its destruction by fire, an account of the new Hospital to come, a story of the drought in the Niagara Peninsula that year, and a program of the Cornerstone Laying.

There was one other article in the cornerstone besides those already listed. As it said in the "The Independent" of that date, "All these are temporal". So a copy of the New Testament salvaged from the fire, was put in "to remind us of things spiritual".

CHML and CKTB had broadcasting trucks to relay the ceremony out over the area. More than 1,000 interested people from the district came to join in the service though the day was grey and lowering. Rows of chairs were set up on what is now the front lawn and parking area. The Ladies' Choir of Smithville, led by the Beamsville Bank, sang thanksgiving numbers accompanied by a pianist performing from a truck.

Mr. Globe concluded his speech that afternoon with these remarks: "As Chairman of the Board of Directors for 6 years, I wish to thank you all for the response to my many requests and seldom have I come away empty handed".

After the cornerstone laying there was the raising of the Union Jack, and the sounding of reveille to "herald this new day of greatest care for our sick".

By November 1948, work was progressing well on the new building. Thirty tonnes of steel had arrived in one week with more to come as soon as possible. Weather conditions that winter were very good for construction work - with very little snow.

A front page picture in "The Independent" showed a sketch of the new building. Nixon Hall was still functioning on a temporary basis. A very understanding group of patients, over 700 had received care by the end of the year. They were very appreciative of our difficulties.

Early in February of 1949, the Dr. Addy Testimonial Fund set up by the Women's Institute of Jordan where he practised, paid for furnishing a children's room and established a Maintenance Endowment Fund of \$2,600 invested in Government Bonds. It was found necessary, by the middle of May 1949, to phase out Nixon Hall. The financial situation was not good, and the difficulties were legion. Over 1,000 patients had now been cared for there, including 288 maternity patients. The equipment was sent to one part of the new building for storage. A few members of the Dietary and Maintenance staffs spent the summer months preserving and canning for future needs. Their home base was Bennett Hall in Beamsville. Some donations of fruit were received and processed and in between times they picked fruit from the crab trees on the median of the Queen Elizabeth Way, having received a letter of permission from the Department of Highways to do this. Miss Templin carried the letter with her in case someone questioned it. But aside from curious looks, nothing else happened. The resulting jelly was beautiful and we called it Queen Elizabeth Crab.

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A staff of 15 nurses was planned for this new 34-bed Hospital. A Nurses' Residence was obtained nearby for out-of-town nurses. It was the former Aitcheson home, where Dr. Henry had an office, two doors west of the Hospital, (it is now occupied by the Podwinski family). As it had been damaged by fire, it was completely redecorated. The budget did not stretch to buying furnishings, so an appeal was made to the public for beds, chairs, tables, rugs, dressers, anything practically. And as usual they were forthcoming.

It is interesting to read why the basement was added to the original plans. A full basement was included at the insistence of the Government, which desired that this precaution be taken in the interest of civilian defense. Thus, an unforeseen \$33,000 was expended to ensure citizens against peace or wartime disaster. Only a very small part was finished. It was the section under the kitchen and staff dining rooms (the little north wing). In it were the original laundry, fruit store room and maintenance shop. Under the other wings was dirt floor with evidence of underground streams visible.

Restored at this time was the X-ray service which we had on the hill. Mr. Andy Sherwood took charge of this department, and it was under his tender care until his death. A Lab was added. It had the total space of the Quiet Room inside the Main Front Door now. A glass partition separated it from the Formula Room, now OBS showers, and many thousands of formulae were made and autoclaved there before pre-fab formulae came to replace it in 1965 (removing a Dietary department headache).

Well, the opening date was finally set at Sunday, October 23, 1949, and there was an Open House for the continuously interested public from all around.

So now, we had this present building officially open in October 23, 1949, with two complete wings - OBS, and what is known as A Ward (office space now) which took care of medical and surgical cases. We were so grateful for, and so impressed with, the size of it. Among other advantages were two dining rooms, one for the Maintenance staff, and one for everyone else. There were two sittings in each. The latter was where the ground floor lounge is, and the former where the extended Coffee Shop is. After the patients were served, a line-up formed by the hot serving table in the kitchen, and proceeded with their plates to the dining rooms.

Miss Louise Oldershaw was in charge of the OR. Except for a year's course in OR work at Toronto, and a year working in Vancouver General Hospital, she had been on the staff since June 1946 and was the Nursing Service Director for 17 years before her retirement in 1980.