

DGH is one of the oldest rural hospitals in Alberta

The Daysland General Hospital is one of the oldest rural hospitals in Alberta, being incorporated in 1908. It once served a district stretching from Wetaskiwin on the West to the border towns of Saskatchewan on the East. It was at that time the only hospital in Alberta East of Edmonton on the CPR.

In May 1907, it was decided a hospital was needed and a subscription of over \$6,000 was raised for this purpose. The Daysland Press published this information:

"to all interested in Daysland Hospital". "There is probably no one thing needed more in this thriving town of Daysland than a hospital and to show that our citizens, though limited in number and means, appreciate this, our subscription list, as it now stands, is published for the first time."

Later that summer Mayor E.W. Day, on behalf of the Board of Trade, travelled to Kingston to invite the Sisters of the Gray

Nuns of the House of Providence to establish a hospital in Daysland with English speaking nurses. He promised that the town would donate 20 lots and \$6,000 if the Sisters would build a hospital and assume its administration.

The hospital was primarily established by the Bishop of St. Albert who purchased three blocks of land for the sum of \$1,000 from E.W. Day. One of these blocks was destined for the hospital building, to be managed by the Sisters of Providence. In December of 1907 Mother Gabriel, Superior General, and Sister M. Amable made their first trip to the West to inspect the site of the proposed hospital. They had misgivings about sending any Sisters to so desolate and primitive an area, but on May 13, 1908, Sisters M. Angel Guardian, M. Camillus and M. Assumption and a lay nurse, Miss Davis arrived in Daysland. Miss M. Davis was a graduate nurse of Buffalo, New York. The

following day they set up a hospital in a rented house and four days later admitted their first patient, Mrs. Finlay McLeod. Dr. H.S. Shirreffs was the physician at the time.

Dr. Shirreffs was born near Rockland, Ontario in 1874, graduated from McGill University, Montreal. He arrived in Daysland in 1907 and dedicated the next 35-40 years of his life, serving the people of the Daysland district. On many occasions, the only sleep he got, was in the cutter or buggy while his drivers would be hurrying him from one place to another.

Building of a three storey brick structure that would accommodate twenty medical and surgical patients began in fall of 1908. On March 1, 1909, the Sisters moved into the new "Providence Hospital." The cost of the facility was \$12,800 with the sum of \$9,000 still owing at the time of completion. The hospital had its own power plant and water

system. The Hospital and Church were Blessed on April 25, 1909 with Fr. Leduc, OMI, and Fr. Van Weiten, Chaplain in attendance.

Patients travelled from a considerable distance, Amisk, Viking, Prague, Hardisty, Strome and the surrounding district. The first baby born in this building, Elsie McLeod, was delivered in June, 1909. A Dr. P. Quesnale arrived to join Dr. Shirreffs on staff.

In 1914 the Sisters agreed to a request from the provincial government that they undertake the care and treatment of adult incurables and feeble minded children of the province. To do this the third storey which had not been completed was upgraded to accommodate some of these patients.

In January 1919, a new wing was opened to accommodate sick and infirm men of the Unorganized Territory of Northern Alberta, as well as a number of wounded, invalid, soldiers returning from

overseas. Occupancy was increased to 50 beds and the hospital tended mainly to the chronically ill, though some active treatment cases were admitted.

In the 1920s while the Sisters were attending a hospital convention in Calgary, they learned of a Dr. Borden who was looking for a place to locate. Dr. R.P. Borden who had been with a medical corp overseas arrived in June, 1920 and impressed the Sisters with his advanced surgical skills. Dr. Borden was a graduate of Massachusetts General Hospital.

Funds to maintain and operate the hospital were derived from three sources: the fees of the paying patients, government grants and subscriptions from charitable friends of the institution. It must be noted here that the Sisters had made many "Begging trips" and they continued



.... Daysland Hospital a place of many changes

The doors closed and reopened many times until proper funding was available

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to maintain a farm that supplied eggs, milk, meat, etc. Most of the work in running the farm was done by the Sisters themselves with some help from lads from local farms. Old timers recall seeing the Sisters, clad in their habits, and carrying a lantern, going out in a winter's night to milk the cows.

The Sisters were soon to be faced with another challenge when the House of Providence agreed to build a hospital in Camrose. The Sisters were called upon to assist in the planning and financing of the new institution. In 1924 St. Mary's Hospital opened in Camrose. Sister M. Clotilda was sent from Daysland to become the new administrator and several of the Sisters accompanied her. Also the sterilizer and operating room fixtures were taken from the Daysland Hospital to the new St. Mary's Hospital in Camrose. It was written in the annuals thus:

November 5, 1924 "a woman appendix came from the country. Drs. Borden and Shirreffs operated. This is the last operation in this hospital after 16 years of hard work and memories."

The doors of the hospital were closed to the general public.

Dr. Borden had his office in his residence, the Day house (one of the first residences built in Daysland by Mayor E.W. Day).

house as a nursing home and with the closure of Providence Hospital in November 1924, the Day house was converted into an active treatment hospital, St. Luke's Hospital. In January 1926 St. Luke's Hospital was closed and Daysland had no hospital.

A committee was formed in attempts to reopen St. Luke's hospital and canvassing activities followed, making available \$3,140 for hospital use. On May 3, 1926 St. Luke's Hospital was reopened by Dr. Borden, who stayed on only for the duration of the year.

During the 1930s the Providence hospital reopened but financing became difficult due to the depression and because there was no surgeon in Daysland until Dr. M. Geissinger (1932-39) opened a practice in 1932. He left for Hardisty in 1939.

In 1944, it was necessary to close the hospital to active cases although there were still 24 incurable at the hospital.

In 1945 the hospital was reopened with the arrival of Dr. Jack C. Day (1946-48) and later Dr. H. McPhail (1949). At this point the Sisters began hiring RN's locally. The Ladies Auxiliary was formed in 1946 and through the years they have continued to be of great support to the Sisters and later to the General Hospital.

In 1950 the Daysland Board of Trade and the members of the

hospital was to operate as an active treatment hospital, doctors would have to be attracted to the town and office space would have to be provided for them. The district was canvassed for funds and with monies received, a medical centre was built and officially opened in July 1952, with Drs. Hovan (1952-59) and Walker in practice with Annie Fedorowich as the receptionist. Drs. Wayne and Dwan were here for a short time.

In the next few years the hospital was renovated inside and out, new equipment was added and the grounds of the hospital landscaped.

Dr. Harvey Reist arrived in 1955 to join in partnership with Dr. Hovan. Other doctors here for short periods were Drs. Kerr, Gibson, and Gretton.

The old hospital had become outdated and when capital grants for construction were made available, it was decided to build a new hospital. A 30-bed structure was opened in 1961. Daysland now had a well-staffed and well-equipped hospital. Archbishop A. Jordan celebrated Mass at Our Lady of the Prairies Church at 10 a.m. Wednesday, June 28, 1961. The ribbon cutting ceremony was held at 2 p.m. with B.H. Foster of the Provincial Department of Health officiating.

With the opening of the new facility in 1961, the 1907 building

office and equipment storage only. Offices for laboratory, pharmacy, medical records, business and administration were housed here on the main floor. With the passage of time, the walls began to crumble and the existing facility was found to be outdated relative to the practices of the day for provision of medical care. Consideration for a replacement facility for Daysland Hospital was a must.

In 1966 Dr. James Stanners (1966-1987) from Scotland joined the partnership. He was born in Wick, Scotland and graduated from Glasgow University in 1947. Dr. Harvey Renney arrived in 1972 (1972-1977). Dr. George Scott was here for a short time, as was Dr. Vern Chichak, Dr. Malcolm Campbell and Dr. Michael Hancock.

The Providence Hospital was the first mission in the West for the House of Providence and after 65 years of dedicated care to their patients, the Sisters terminated their association with Providence Hospital on December 30, 1973. The name was changed to the Daysland General Hospital and it was administered by the Provincial Department of Health and operated by a Board appointed by the County of Flagstaff and the towns and villages in the County.

A new modern medical centre was built and opened in 1978, Dr. Terry McKinnon joined the

Temporary office space was constructed as an interim relief until approval for a new facility became reality. Options were mobile trailer units, or a temporary building. The later was chosen and once completed in 1985, the 1909 building was demolished.

Dr. Ian Marsh and Dr. Odell Olson joined the medical practice in 1987.

In June of 1985 approval was granted by the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care to enter planning stages for a new acute care facility. This proposal was to be a 25 bed prototypical hospital. Because of the activity of the current facility it was determined that this wouldn't provide the space necessary; so back to the bargaining table and eventually in August of 1986 approval was granted to build a custom designed facility that would offer 31 general medical and surgical beds, six bassinets and three day surgery beds.

April 1, 1987 a reorganization of District Boundaries resulted in the formation of the Daysland General and Auxiliary Hospital and Nursing Home District #68.

Planning and design occupied the time from August of 1986 to January of 1991 when approval was received to proceed to tender. Construction officially began on June 5, 1991. Occupancy date of the new facility is March 16, 1992.