

Muskegon's First Hospital

In 1882, The City Missionary Association (CMA) thought a hospital was needed in Muskegon to treat the sick and injured people. With the increase in population for the City of Muskegon from 6,002 in 1870 to 11,262 in 1880, came the increase in the need for a hospital. People needing care they could not get in Muskegon were sent to Mercy Hospital in Big Rapids that opened in 1879. The CMA started making plans for a hospital expecting cooperation from all the town's people. They tried to involve churches and businesses also. Their enterprise was Christian & philanthropic and intended to benefit both employee and employer. In 1883, the Chronicle published an editorial that stated a hospital was much needed because Muskegon had more accidents than most cities twice its size and that most workers lived in boarding houses and could not get the same care as someone who had family to care for them.

The CMA was not able to get the support from the community so the matter was dropped.

In 1888 there was still no hospital. An editorial regarding the need for a hospital again appeared in the Chronicle. It informed the community that even though there was a "Home of the Friendless" it was not a solution because of its laws of incorporation. It was a private charity and can't meet the needs of a public institution and because of that, the sick had to leave the "home". The editorial called for a united effort to provide funds for a much-needed hospital and those funds should come from public funds.

In 1889, the CMA again starts working on a hospital. By now, the population for the *city* alone had grown to approximately 22,000. They leased a former rooming house at the corner of Franklin and Washington Avenue that belonged to Alexander Rodgers, a lumber manufacturer and vice president of Lumberman's Bank. The CMA wanted the hospital to be self-supporting so they decided to sell tickets to fund it. The ticket holder would be entitled to the benefits of the hospital, whether sick or injured, for the cost of \$4 per year (\$106.00 in today's money) which could be paid, in installments. No ticket holder would be asked for any more money than what they had paid for the ticket. They also solicited donations of furniture, fixtures, and other articles from the community.

The mill owners and other employers were asked what they could contribute each year in finances to help support the hospital. They explained that it would be a great convenience to employers, because having a hospital here would allow the patient to get prompt and efficient attention which would allow them to return to work sooner.

A Board of Trustees was appointed to assist the CMA in the management of the hospital. Those members were: Alexander Rodgers, JW Moon, Thomas Hume, AF Temple, HN Hovey, and CJ Hamilton.

A medical staff was elected. Dr. Garber was appointed as the house physician with the following doctors as consulting physicians: JP Stoddard, CP Donelson, G Chaddock, OC Williams, JM Cook, J Vanderlaan, and S Bloch. Mrs. Pettigrew was hired as nurse and head of the nursing department.

June 1889, the hospital opened for public inspection and named, "Muskegon City Hospital". The hospital was in good condition and neatly painted. The rooms included a bed, nightstand, and chair. There was no carpeting so as to keep down on germs.

In January 1892, a report was issued for 1891 that showed 75 cases had been treated, with 2 deaths and several important operations. There had been a number of hand and foot amputations due to injuries from railway employees. Treatment equivalent to 1000 days was given at a cost of \$1,200. There was a fire in September, and all the repairs still hadn't been made. The largest expense for 1891, was the expense of keeping a trained nurse.

Even with the ticket sales, donations, and money from other fund-raising efforts, the hospital under the City Missionary Association could not afford to continue and it closed its doors.

In November 1892, Dr. Sigmond Bosh of Muskegon and Dr. Carl Hauber of Chicago decided to reopen the hospital. They leased the same building, and spend thousands of their own dollars to make what they felt, were necessary changes. Repairs were made to the building, and rooms were painted and rearranged. They purchased new furniture, new curtains, new beds and bedding. They set up a private doctor's room on the 2nd floor and a private office on the 1st floor. They purchased new and complete surgical instruments, medical appliances, drugs, and a new chair for moving patients. They also acquired a new ambulance similar to the ones used in Chicago. There were 20 regular beds for everybody rich or poor. Those who can, will pay \$5-\$7 per week depending on what room is used, and that includes medical attendance. There is also a poor ward so no one will be excluded from the hospital. Any doctor can bring and treat patients. Dr. Bloch was the house physician, with others attending as needed. A staff of nurses was also in attendance.

October 1893, partly due to the depression (that would last several years), the hospital is unsuccessful. During the 1st year of operation, they had 97 patients, and 47 of them were charity cases, with 18 being partial charity. Both doctors had incurred a great deal of debt. (Apparently, by this time, Dr. Bloch is no longer associated with the hospital because there is no further mention of him.) Dr. Hauber was waiting on an inheritance of property, that he intended to sell to help pay the bills, but it was held up in legal battles. Another editorial by Rev. Banker appeared in the Chronicle defending Dr. Hauber because of criticism from some in the community. The article stated how Dr. Hauber had put all his money into the hospital, assuming he would get support from the community but he didn't get it. Apparently, people wrongly thought the hospital was private and run only for his profit. It goes on to say that in an effort to keep the hospital going, Dr Hauber moved the hospital to a home formerly occupied by George Erwin in Muskegon Hts. The house had 9 rooms and a basement with a large barn. Dr. Hauber had not received a salary, and sometimes had to go without food. It told how he became ill and while trying to get help for the hospital, he walked downtown and passed out on the sidewalk.

By January 1893, the needs of the hospital were urgent. They had no fuel and were cutting wood stumps to heat the hospital. At the time they had 5 patients, and people were urged to make donations of money and provisions.

In February 1894, in an effort to assist the hospital, a board of trustees are named: Rev. Banker, JD VanderWerp, JA Miller, RK Mann, Carl Hauber, Mrs. Anna Miller, Mrs. HO Lange, Mrs. Wm Heap and Mrs. Wiswell. All property was assigned to the board. The board also took on the battle for the estate that was willed to Dr. Hauber, that he still had not received.

By March 1894, the hospital is moved to the property willed to Dr. Hauber at the corner of Southern and Hugart (now known as 8th Street). The hospital was referred to as the "city hospital" or "Hauber's hospital".

Dr. Hauber continued to try to keep the hospital going. He suffered a nervous breakdown, and is taken to Chicago for treatment, treatment that must be paid for by his friends, because he had no money. Although he returned to Muskegon to recover, the hospital eventually closed. The city directories continue to show Dr. Hauber and the hospital until 1903, but there was no mention of him or the hospital in the Chronicle after 1894.

There were other small hospital endeavors that came and went. It was not until later that Muskegon got sustainable hospitals. In 1903, Mercy Hospital opened and in 1904, Hackley Hospital opened.

The original hospital, at Franklin and Washington, is still at that location. For years, it has been used as an apartment building.

(Information for this article was taken from the Muskegon Chronicle through genealogybank.com, and "An Account of Muskegon" edited by James L Smith)

