

Fairmont's Hospital – 1927 to the 1970s

Hospitals are an integral and vital component of any community and have evolved extensively over the course of the past century. The following is a brief historical account of the early development of Fairmont's hospital from its inception and original location up to the construction of the present hospital that took place in the early 1970s.

What was at one time called the "Fairmont Community Hospital" came into existence in 1927 as a privately owned venture. The hospital was started by Dr. V. H. Gardner, a Fairmont physician who came to Fairmont from Dunnell where he had practiced medicine and surgery for four years. Originally from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Gardner became familiar with this area as a result of his acquaintance with an Estherville, Iowa, doctor during his internship.

The hospital overlooked Ward Park and Lake Sisseton and was located on the present site of the condominiums on Albion Avenue. That lot, including the house, was purchased at that time for \$15,000. Dr. H. A. Miller and Dr. A. G. Blanchard from Waseca joined Dr. Gardner in forming a corporation. Construction of the hospital began in 1927 and it opened in August of 1928. The total cost of the building and equipment was \$175,000.00.

Dr. Gardner was with the hospital for only one year when he decided to return to private practice. That left the hospital in the hands of his former partners, Dr. H. G. Blanchard and Dr. H. A. Miller.

In 1940, as a result of accumulated debt in excess of \$90,000.00, Dr. Blanchard and Dr. Miller turned the hospital over to a group of local citizens willing to sign notes retiring the indebtedness. That group included Einer Nelson, E. E. Zemke, E. A. Thayer, Maud Brodt, J. C. Musser, and others. Their goal was to eventually turn the hospital over to the community, debt free, at some point in the future. They operated the hospital until 1956 and successfully liquidated the debt in addition to reorganizing the hospital.

In October of 1956 a new board of directors was elected and a new set of by-laws was enacted. The new board hired an administrator and a professional fund raising agency to raise \$500,000.00 to remodel the existing part of the hospital and build a new addition.

Partial funding for the hospital expansion included the support of 440 persons purchasing \$25.00 memberships to form the Fairmont Community Hospital Association as well as a pledge from the county of \$150,000.00 over a three year period of time. The project, totaling close to \$800,000.00, was completed in 1958 and included two new operating rooms, a then up to date emergency room, and eleven additional patient rooms.

The 1960s ushered in a new era of change for the hospital. Although additional services were added, it soon became obvious that more services and space was needed than the site on Albion Avenue could accommodate. Consequently, the Board of Directors of the Association voted to purchase land on the southeast edge of Fairmont for \$80,000.00 to build an entirely new facility. A special \$2,295,000 bond issue was approved by a vote of 1,958 to 71 in December of 1968. This made the projected \$3.9 million dollar hospital project possible with construction scheduled to start in June of 1970. The new hospital opened its doors to patients in September of 1972.

Many changes have taken place with the hospital, including the health care industry as a whole, since the early 1970s when private room rates peaked locally at \$40.00 per day. Change will undoubtedly continue both on the local and the national scene regarding all aspects of health care.

For more information on this topic, or to become a member, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.



