

Hospital Notes

Two girls have the spotlight this week when one each came for Mr. and Mrs. Norman Fromyhr of Fort St. John and for Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Batchelor of Fort St. John.

The patients admitted this week came from:

Fort St. John, Mr. Jerry Smith; Mr. Elmer Westergaard; Mrs. Mike Dubinsky, Miss Joanne de Tonnacourt, Miss Iren Schreiner; Baby Candus Miskey; Baby Marilyn Anderson; Baby Terrence Large; Mrs. J. Herbert Friend; Mr. Ray Mease; Mrs. Gordon Snider; Mrs. Richard Seales; Mr. John Wagner; Mr. Ray Babcock; Baby Norman Brich; Mr. Stanley Wright; Mr. George Gusulack; Mrs. McKinley Mathias; Mrs. Rupert Roberts; Baby Audy Schaffer. Baldonnel, Miss Sheila Eklund; Mr. William Clovis; Mr. Jack Farr. Blueberry: Baby Mary Ann Davis. Cecil Lake, Mr. Simon Bakstad. Dawson Creek, Baby Carol Braden, Mr. Lyle Dennis, Mr. Beattie McKinnon; Mr. Joseph Wessing; Mr. Donald Hewko. Wonowon, Baby Jacky Bigcharles. Montney, Mr. Clay Martin; Mr. Wm. Kettle; Baby Malcolm Asspasing; Mrs. Hans Espe. Rolla, Mr. Donald Vipond. Rosie Prairie, Mr. J. Albright; Mrs. Robert Jamieson. Taylor, Mrs. Rolf Lee. Truth Lodge, Mr. H. Twizell.

¹⁹⁵⁴ AFTER MAN' YEARS of work and planning the new Pouce Coupe hospital will open its door; The cost of the build-

ing is \$275,000. For the past 18 years members of clubs have been working for a new modern hospital for the Peace River Block. Over \$90,000 has been raised from public subscription.

A NEW 50-bed hospital was opened in Pouce Coupe last week. People of the community have been working for this for many years. The chairman of the first board is Allen Clarke. Mrs E M Gernyn has been appointed matron. The cost of the building, land and equipment is \$275,000.00. JAN 23, 1954

20 YEARS AGO — FEBRUARY 18, 1954

DR GN CORMACK will hold a series of first aid classes in the high school auditorium. The doctor will demonstrate many angles in the saving of life and limb.

15 YEARS AGO — APRIL 22, 1954

TWO NEW graduate nurses have come from Edmonton to work at our hospital. Miss Doris Melanson and Miss Bernice Beaton are from the Misirecordian Hospital in Edmonton.

25 YRS AGO — JAN 25, 1954

WHO OWNS WHAT - & WHAT FOR? For the past few years, since plenty of prosperity and good luck has hit this community, a demonic influence has been aiding and abetting bigotry. For 20 long years all religious groups agreed on one thing, namely the Providence Hospital. They had suffered a long time without hospital - they all had to go to Pouce Coupe for the early years for hospitalization and when the Sisters of Providence agreed to come in and run a hospital there was no bigots around here who could get to first base. No one ever questioned who would own it! The people would use it and the Sisters would be there to take care of the people when they came to be hospitalized. The people put up what they had in the way of kind and the hospital opened and functioned because the Providence Order put up the rest. The people were happy and felt secure in the service and the Nuns went along and kept the place at the disposal of the people day and night. The Nuns saw to it that the larder was supplied, the woodpiles replenished, the water heated for the scrubbing, the halls cleaned, the fires on, the meals ready,

the diapers washed and the community moved along with the Hospital. Prior to 1947, not a whisper of censure was ever heaped on the

Nuns' heads. They gave out charity, they never turned anyone away, they took what people gave them, they kept

track of what people owed them, they kept a vigil day and night and no one ever came to the door that wasn't taken in, treated, and cared

for whether that one hadn't paid his bill or not. But here, a few years ago, the place was condemned not by the Nuns though God knows it was clumsy enough to work in and keep a staff on, but the Provincial Fire Marshall.

The Nuns' never threatened to leave, but they told the people they would have to leave unless the place was made to satisfy the Fire Marshall. Caught short, not capable to take it over, the community offered to make it suit, if the Nuns would oblige. (Contd)

25 YRS AGO — JAN 26, 1954

(CONTD) PROVIDENCE HOSPITAL — Now what kind of heels are the people of this North Side to carry on this cruel nagging and accusations about who owns what! Anyone with horse sense knows that to own a hospital is to own a liability! That there is no profit in the best of them, and the most

fortunate of them is run at a loss. We would say the one who has the use of a hospital when that one needs it, finds it ready, clean, stocked, heated and staffed for action, is the one who owns the hospital. That same one, owns it without paying the taxes, filling the wood box, carrying the water, making the beds or a thousand other obligations and duties which one finds already for their use when they step inside the doors under that small cross that points heavenward, known as the Providence Hospital. We are sure crowding our luck! Our Board of Trade has sunk to a very small job, when it takes up the cudgels of ownership of this institution. When it jeopardizes the chances or frustrates the people who are duty bound to make good on the commitment of the improvements. We are letting a red herring drag our reputation into the dust. This is too good a country, rich and blessed as we are,

to welch on our debt and to quibble over who owns what or what for. With such security, who cares who owns it, so long as all can use it when they have the need.

25 YRS AGO — NOV 26, 1954

CECIL LAKE: The former Red Cross Hospital building was the scene of another enjoyable whist drive. Winners were Jean thompson and Bill Jensma. Consolation prizes going to Lorna and Paris MacLachlan. The next card party will be held in the same place... The pie social and dance sponsored by the three schools was a decided success and a good sum raised for the Christmas treats for the children. Pen Powell was the lucky winner of the grub box... Mr Bob Rogers is interested in working with youngsters and has started Sunday school classes for children. These are held in the Transpine School, Sundays at 10 o'clock.

15 YEARS AGO — APRIL 22, 1954

TWO NEW graduate nurses have come from Edmonton to work at our hospital. Miss Doris Melanson and Miss Bernice Beaton are from the Misirecordian Hospital in Edmonton.

ALTHOUGH A VERY inclement day the good people of town and district came to the Anglican Hall for the annual hospital auxiliary bazaar and tea. The affair was convened by Mrs Steve Grey, president of the WA and aided by Mrs Paynter. The sum of \$350 was realized. NOV 13, 1954

ALTHOUGH A VERY inclement day, the good people of town and district came to the Anglican hall for the annual Hospital WA bazaar. It netted \$350. NOV 18, 1954

20 YRS AGO — JAN 29, 1955

THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT of Providence Hospital announced the closure of the third floor of the hospital to patients. This floor had been added during the highway construction.

APR 19, 1955
DR C J MACKENZIE who has just completed a survey of towns and villages along the Alaska Highway reports that the birthrate is highest here. The 554 babies born last year gave us a birthrate of 34.4 per thousand.

DEC 21, 1955
Hosp SISTER SUPERIOR MADE USE of the occasion to not only thank the community for the time but reminded them that the hospital is again short of crutches and icy walks are still with us, so to please bring them back.

JUL 21, 1955
THE HON ERIC MARTIN, minister of health and welfare came to town to see for himself the decrepit condition of our old hospital. Duncan Cran escorted him on his rounds.

JAN 13
1956 - HOSPITAL REPORT shows 12,898 patient days for last year, an increase of 1,533 over 1953. Total staff at hospital was 40, made up of seven Sisters, six registered nurses, five practical nurses, eight ward aids, two maintenance men, five kitchen staff, three laundry staff and four general staff.

25 YRS AGO, MAY 15, 1956

BACK for the first time after six years came Sister Phillipe, who was Superior here during the polio epidemic; here when the Government took over under the BCHIS plan and also when the hospital was condemned by the Fire Marshall. There was no druggist certified in town and Sister Phillipe being a chemist as well as a graduate nurse, filled prescriptions for all and sundry, the hospital doing an out-patient business which between drugs and treatments ran into \$8,000 a year. Sister Phillipe often worked for 16 hours straight, with brief time out for a bite to eat.

1956
DEC 11
1956 - PROVIDENCE Hospital is struck off provincial list of grants of \$500,000 for new building as squabble continues over management.

JAN 19, 1956
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FIFTY-TWO PATIENTS CROWDED into the hospital this week despite the fact it has beds for 34. Cots in every corner. MAR 22, 1956

JUL 20, 1956
STORMY TIMES AHEAD ARE FEARED, for plans to build a new hospital. An organizing meeting for a municipal hospital society has been called to take over the building from the Sisters of Providence.

1956 - FOUR HOURS of strenuous debate at a meeting held in the Pro-Rec Hall of the North Peace Hospital Society resulted in a motion calling for a new referendum which may delay the new \$1 million hospital for up to a year. The motion passed by 15 votes to 10 despite advice that October 10 is the last date to approach government for funds. Recently elected MLA Hal Roche votes against the motion. OCTOBER

25 YRS AGO, OCT 22, 1956
IN A LAST minute review of grants in aide, the BC Government struck off the list of hospitals to receive substantial building aid, the Fort St John Providence Hospital. The sum of \$500,000 had been earmarked for the new building but it will now be another year before the department of Health can budget that sum

25 YRS AGO, SEPT 28, 1956
FOUR HOURS OF strenuous debate at a meeting called by the North Peace Hospital Society had the net result of possibly postponing building of a new hospital at Fort St John for a year or more. Meanwhile, the Providence Hospital has been condemned and is greatly overcrowded at a time when Fort St John is entering a period of unprecedented expansion. The widely advertised meeting drew only 25 of the 300 Society members and a score of non-members. The BC Government has already earmarked \$500,000 for the million dollar project and the Sisters have agreed to put forth \$25,000 and to retire at any time upon one year's notice if the trustees would buy out their equity.

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25 YRS AGO, JULY 11, 1956
THE FSJ Hospital Society got off to a stormy start today. A public meeting called to talk about relieving the Sisters of Providence of their responsibility in the hospital steamed, when a member of the Board of Directors attempted to act as legal advisor for the new group. Otherwise nearly all the speakers praised the work the Sisters had done over the years, and stated emphatically that they were not kicking the Sisters out. Plans are in the making for a new million dollar hospital for Fort St John.

25 YRS AGO, NOV 27, 1956
AFTER READING the Report from Providence Hospital in another section of this week's paper, it must be clear to all that something will have to be done at the Hospital to keep treatment rooms clear for patients requiring their facilities. The place is so crowded lately that patients are put to bed on the ex-ray table, the caseroom table, the operating table, or recline in chairs in the labor x-ray room. When fatal accidents occur, the bodies are at once removed to the hospital. When persons collapse on the street, the first move is to get them to the hospital. While every possible care is given, the limited space makes it most difficult for the staff. A modern mortuary with quarters for carrying out of autopsies under proper conditions is urgently needed.

20 YRS AGO — FEB 4, 1957

THE NORTH PEACE
Hospital Society plans to petition the provincial government for an immediate plebiscite in which taxpayers will be asked to vote and determine, once and for all, their preferences or desires in the operation and administration of a new hospital to serve this area. Since the organization of the society in July 1956, they have been constantly in touch with the provincial government, BCHIS and the Sisters of Providence. The directors of the society are working first and foremost for a hospital in this community, and secondly they believe that it is the right of the public to state their choice by vote as to the administration and operation of any public institution, especially a hospital. More tomorrow.

20 YRS AGO — FEB 5, 1957

MORE ON HOSPITAL
Society . . . the society at the present time has over 425 paid members, representative of the entire Hospital improvement district covering Upper Cache Creek and North Pine to Two Rivers, and Taylor, also Hudson Hope. A survey conducted by the group shows that most of the people in the area are in favour of a community hospital. The society, a group which has no connection or interlocking affiliation with the trustees is concerned with the presentation of a money bylaw for a hospital. The First compromise plan, with the Sisters of Providence made last summer, called for them to administrate the new hospital as in the past, be responsible for the supply of a certain amount of the funds required to build the hospital, use the plans that have been started on, build on the same location thereby making use of the existing facilities and be prepared to vacate the community at any time the community was prepared to take over their financial equity, with one year's notice. The plan was voted down at a Society meeting in October, and it was suggested a plebiscite be held. More tomorrow.

20 YRS AGO — FEB 6, 1957

MORE ON Hospital Problem . . . On January 7, they met again with the Sisters of Providence with the proposal to operate a community hospital at a new and permanent location, the

FEB 9, 1957

A STATEMENT has been made by the newly-formed North Peace Hospital Society with 425 members that will try to clarify the hospital situation as it now exists. They wish the Sisters of Providence to carry on their fine work.

FEB 7, 1957

DR GEORGE CORMACK wishes to announce that his practice will be taken over on or about July 4th by Dr Keith Dixon and Dr Garry Westover, both of Edmonton.

HOSPITAL DRIVE goes over \$7,800 with a handsome donation of \$1,000 from PacPete. Tri Province and Commonwealth also promised donations to George Broadhurst and his committee. This is the community's portion of the alterations.

HOSPITAL W.A. are sponsoring a Halloween Ball in the Elks Hall.

FIRE ESCAPES are being built at the rear of the hospital for the third floor to comply with regulations and when the wiring is complete the third floor will be turned back into use.

PROVIDENCE HOSPITAL'S larder was made richer by several hundred pounds of produce, a gift of the elementary school children.

20 YRS AGO—OCT. 10, 1957

THE PROVIDENCE HOSPITAL'S larder was richer by several hundred pounds of produce, the of the children of Fort St. John Elementary School and the result of their efforts during Harvest Week to bring in produce of garden, field and kitchen marking the Thanksgiving Festival.

Sister Mary St. Patrick Superior and two of the staff sisters attended a short Thanksgiving program just before noon and heard the children sing hymns and harvest songs as well as offer several recitations to mark the occasion.

Saturday Principle Sinclair and Mr. Romeo transported the produce to the hospital.

20 YRS AGO—OCT. 3, 1957

Nov. 29 is the date set for an important day when the Trustees of the Hospital Improvement District no. 13, will present a plebiscite for the endorsement of \$490,000 for the community's one third share of the cost of a 100 bed hospital in Fort St. John. The School District will precede this by a few weeks by offering a set of by-laws for the school improvement and expansion of one and a half million dollars spread over a term of 20 years.

15 YEARS AGO, DECEMBER 12, 1957

The hospital referendum was lost. On a recount it just failed to obtain the 66 and two-thirds majority required.

1957
Sisters to act as administrators, the cost of construction over grants to be borne solely by taxpayers, and that the bylaw of the Hospital Society should govern any decisions not governd by BCHIS or provincial government regulations.

Apparently this idea is not acceptable, and so a plebiscite will be held.

25 YRS AGO, JAN 25, 1957

THE BOARD OF TRADE is dying of apathy, suffering the worst now since a decline in interest showed up in 1955. The board is the oldest and most useful implement in the community, says an editorial. The present fraternity of license holders inherited it from the oldtimers, and with it they got the legacy of good will, trust in God and the progressive intentions of pioneers. The Board of Trade took many a hurdle in the name of democracy that the individual couldn't get away with. The Board sparked many - necessary improvements in this town long before the Yanks came and jerked it out of muddy lanes and off grass roots. The board sparked the incorporation of the village, was the forerunner of development which expedited when the petroleum boom hit the country. Numbered the streets long before the village was mooted, sparked the Hospital Improvement and by it raised the money to put the building on the safety list. And the list goes on.

1957

Hospital Fire

Hospital fire in 1957 brought

Written in THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1997

it out volunteers

Fifty years ago this week, the big news was the fire at the Providence Hospital. Headlines were rather lengthy in those days and this one read:

Hospital Threatened with Fire from Garbage Chute; Hundreds Turn Out of Beds to Help in Emergency

Discretion Proves Better Part of Valor Where Damage by Water Could Mean Thousands - Local Fire Brigade Congratulated On Fine Work.

(Honest, folks, that was the headline and not the whole story. At that time in the weekly field, few had heard of the snappy headline.)

"Fire which broke out at the rear of the Providence Hospital here Sunday night at about twelve o'clock was quickly brought under control by the Fort St. John Fire Department. After an exciting several hours, patients returned to their wards, nurses to their duties, the sisters to the chapel where they gave thanks for deliverance from danger.

(It must be remembered that this was not the modern hospital of today built of cement and steel but a three-storey frame structure built in the 1930's - at least two storeys were built in the '30's and a third was added in the early '40's after the American army and all the Alaska Highway contractors were headquartered here. Fire was an ever-present hazard in those days.)

"Little damage was done to the building and apart from the menace of smoke and from the shock to the patients, the hospital carries on, little the worst for the outburst.

Opinion varies but it would seem that the fire started in the waste materials which are discharged through a wooden chute to the pavement at the rear of the institution.

EXPERT FIRE FIGHTING
Fort St. John has a well-organized fire fighting outfit and a community of people who work harmoniously together in event of danger. More than 300 men and a good number of women turned out of their beds to answer the fire siren alarm which sounded just before the midnight hour.

Each offered to help and many did personally engage in the rescue of patients as well as in manning the equipment

Glancing Back

BILL DYER



employees of the Bowes & Herron firm were first on the job. The big red fire wagon was wheeled out of the Bowes & Herron garage. Water tankers were quickly on the scene and Ernie Carriere kept supplies of water to feed the nozzles.

PATIENTS HURRIED INTO CORRIDORS

Patients were hurried out of the wards and taken to the front of the building, ready to be evacuated if the flames had got under way. Ambulances and closed cars were ranged at the front door and Dr. Cormack was ready to have all patients placed in make-shift quarters in the event of the hospital being lost.

The Sisters were calm and quietly carried on under the straining smoke pouring in from the north wing.

Firemen had difficulty locating exactly the source of the smoke. It appears that rubbish in the waste chute had caught fire and that the draught of the chute acting as a chimney had drawn the smoke into the walls of the building.

GOOD ORGANIZATION THROUGHOUT

The R.C.A.F. fire-fighting unit from the airport hurried in to the scene of the excitement and did good work.

Police Const. Bill Lumsden was early on the scene and helped to spot the danger zones assisted by Constable Gordon Youngberg. The burly figure of the senior constable in his Cowichan sweater gave the nurses and patients a feeling of confidence.

Experienced observers said that the volunteer force had worked with clock-like precision. There was hesitancy on the part of Fire Chief Bowes to allow the men to hack through doors or tear down walls. It took a lot of nerve to hold the men back from shooting a stream of water into the hospital and flooding the wards and thus doing great damage. Had the X-ray equipment been

without mentioning all. Sister Superior expressed her thanks that the danger had been met with such a generous contribution of assistance. The hospital has been running shorthanded and there has been a waiting list for some time. Sisters and nurses are overwhelmed with the near-tragedy simply adding to their burdens.

An investigation is being made by the B.C. Fire Marshal's Office with a view to making the hospital premises immune from such danger in the future. To repair the damage done by the fire, many citizens have already come forward with offers of donations.

Providence Hospital is the finest institution of its kind north of Edmonton and draws patients from 300 miles to the east, west and north."

* * *
Perhaps a few more details of how many patients were in the hospital and how many were ambulatory at the time of the fire would make this story even more interesting today but we presume that the editor felt that saying there was a waiting list indicated that the hospital beds were full, whatever that capacity was.

We can recall being in the old hospital a few times before the new hospital was built - not as a patient but a visitor (my second son was born in the old Providence Hospital just before it was torn down and I had occasion to visit the emergency ward with various family illnesses and accidents). Having come from southern Ontario where the hospitals were big brick buildings even then, we were amazed at the economical use of space - read that crowding in of beds for patients and the steep stairs which must have made use of stretchers for patients difficult if not impossible.

The story certainly emphasizes the community spirit which existed in those days with over 300 men - they didn't count the women - turning out to help. This must have been most, if not all, of the able-bodied citizens of the community at the time. And they turned out as willing workers rather than the spectators that gather quickly at a blaze today.

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