

MOBRIDGE TRIBUNE

City's first doctor came for bridge crew

By Jo Hall

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The building of the first railroad bridge at Mobridge brought a doctor, sent by the Milwaukee Railroad to care for the 500 men and nine women on the work force, according to Vicki Rothstein who presented the program, "A Century of Medicine on the Prairie" for Arts and Travel Club.

A general practitioner, Dr. Edgar Stewart was the first doctor in Mobridge. He arrived in the summer of 1906 and set up a small makeshift hospital at Pontis, the small settlement of railroad workers just northwest of Mobridge. He served as an unofficial health officer and was first on the scene to provide proper diagnosis treatment and co-ordinate preventive measures. Living in tents, as he and the workers were doing, was a hard life. His days were always long and full and his little black buggy was a familiar and welcomed sight criss-crossing the settlement.

The Milwaukee Railroad, knowing the importance of a railroad to cross the nation to provide goods and services to remote areas, provided well for the medical needs of its workers as well as the communities along its routes. This sometimes caused contention between the private and the Milwaukee providers, each feeling the other infringed on its territory. For this reason Mobridge benefited greatly from an abundance of medical practitioners in its early days. Mobridge was seen as a booming, upcoming community.

Dr. Arthur Button moved from Tolstoy around 1910 and bought a frame structure on the approximate site of Dacotah Bank. There he opened his practice and carried a full line of drugs and chemicals. He desired to specialize in obstetrics and pediatrics but Mobridge was too small to sustain a practice of that nature. He served as the city health officer.

Later, he constructed a building immediately north of the Wesleyan Methodist Church (now the New Freedom in Christ Church) on Second Ave. East near Third St. It had the name of Riverside Hospital but was usually referred to as the Button Hospital. Button and his wife Kate were very active in the early Mobridge, charter members of many clubs and organizations

In the 1920s, two smaller hospitals were in Mobridge. There was the Glass General Hospital, under the supervision of Mrs. Isadore Glass, and advertised as "Open to all physicians and surgeons." The other was Jacoby Hospital, founded by W.K. Jacoby, a surgeon. It was located in the Northwest Hotel on First Ave. West and had been one of the first hotels in Mobridge.

Jacoby Hospital served the community for just a few years before it changed back to the Northwest Hotel. Both Jacoby and Glass hospitals served patients regardless of employer.

The Mobridge Hospital, often referred to as the Milwaukee Hospital, was also doing a brisk business but it was open first to the railroad employees. If room was available, others could be accommodated within certain limits.

The large wood-framed, three-story Mobridge Hospital opened May 1912 and could accommodate 40 patients and the basement was used for convalescents. For a time the hospital offered practical nurses training and Mrs. W.M. Potts, mother-in-law of Ivan Bormann of Mobridge, was the first graduate nurse in Mobridge.

Dr. G.H. Twining and his assistant, Dr. R.C. Holgate, were employed by the Milwaukee Hospital Association to operate the hospital. Dr. Twining, who also carried on a private practice, served Mobridge for 27 years. During his watch Mobridge was threatened by typhoid fever. In 1912 the plague, as it was referred to, raged for three weeks.

Again in 1918 a flu epidemic swept through Mobridge. The emergency grew to the point that all medical staff had to take on the duties of other hospital employees. Nurses and doctors worked overtime doing their duties plus those of housekeeping, cooking and maintenance. It was termed "a nightmare." When the epidemic subsided, the community was stunned and depleted throughout its ranks.

The Milwaukee Hospital served the community until 1956 when it was torn down. The railroad felt it no longer viable to maintain a hospital in Mobridge and the frame building could no longer pass state codes.

Dr. Cecil Evan Lowe built a modern brick hospital on First Ave. West in 1930. It was designed for 20 adult patients and six babies. The patient rooms were on the first floor along with delivery and operating rooms. The basement included a kitchen, dining room, laundry, nurse's quarters and a boiler room. The clinic had a reception area, laboratory and dispensary, examining rooms and offices for the doctors.

Dr. Lowe was considered one of the town's medical pioneers. He was born in the later 1800s and came to Mobridge around 1919 to become an associate of Dr. Twining at the Milwaukee hospital. In 1928 he set up his own private practice and his own hospital. His sons eventually joined him at the clinic and hospital, Dr. John Lowe in 1948 and Dr Harold Lowe in 1953. Dr. C. Lowe died in 1956 leaving his sons to manage the Lowe Clinic.

The new Mobridge Community Hospital (now Mobridge Regional Hospital) opened in 1959 and in 1960 the Lowe Hospital was made into a nursing home. Dr. Shockey, pioneer doctor of the Pollock area, was its first resident.

In 1971 its residents were moved to the new Mobridge Care Center (now Beverly Healthcare Canter) and the Lowe building was remodeled into a modern clinic, the Mobridge Medical Clinic. Today it is owned by Kim and Eric Ulmer and is used as a recording studio and offices with a roomy apartment upstairs.

The clinic moved to the present Mobridge Regional Hospital in July 1999.

The new Mobridge Community Hospital was just that. The entire community worked to raise funds for it, the first being a polo game. A very active board and women's auxiliary still hold an annual bazaar and other events to keep the hospital up to date in equipment and services. A new intensive care unit was added in 1973, the year the hospital became fully accredited. Later new surgical units were added.

The hospital opened with 50 employees. Today there are 150 employees and the hospital has a capacity of 24 beds. In order to maintain its professional staff, a scholarship program was established in 1963. Mrs. Jim (Judy) Curran was one of the first recipients of the program. She became a registered nurse working at the hospital, a position she still holds.

Vicki concluded her program by telling about the Hospital Auxiliary whose members put in so much effort and time. The group organized May 23, 1958, with Mrs. Bill (Oonagh) as president. In the early days, members wore cherry pink jumpers and white blouses while doing windows, laundry, mending and operating the Snack Bar at the hospital. It required some 90 women to help with Snack Bar, as there were morning, afternoon and evening shifts. For years the Mobridge Hospital Auxiliary was the largest in the state.

Arts and Travel met Monday, April 10, at the home of Lynn Kuehl. She served a lemon angel food cake for dessert at the close of the meeting