

A HISTORY

Pr. Ed. Co. Memorial Hospital

(This History of P. E. Hospital, was researched and written by Brenda Sharpe and Suzanne Pierson for the P. E. County History Publication).

The progress of medical practice in Prince Edward is closely wrapped up with the development and settlement of the county by the UEL (United Empire Loyalists), who came to this part of the province at the close of the Revolutionary War. It is reasonable to suppose that the first doctors to serve the scattered colonists were army surgeons and civilian practitioners.

The first settlers themselves acquired from the Indians some knowledge of the use and medicinal virtues of the native roots and herbs, so that it was common practice to have these products on hand, in dried form, stored away for use as the occasion demanded. Among the most common roots used were Dandelion, Burdock, Golden Seal and Tanzy.

Some of the wives of the colonists who had a natural ability, attained a considerable skill in the handling of maternity cases, and their services were in demand, as a medical man was not always available nor could the patients afford his more costly services in these cases.

The difficulties in the practice of medicine in the pioneer days were many. Poorly constructed roads necessitated travel on horse-back, transporting the necessary supplies in saddle-bags. With widely spread communities the journeys were strenuous and tiresome. As transportation improved, a two-wheeled gig replaced the more primitive mode of travel, with the use of a sleigh or cutter in the winter. Gradually conditions improved until on the advent of the present century, the automobile replaced the slower horse-drawn vehicles.

These modes of transportation were important, because in the early days, the doctor went to the patient instead of the patient coming to the doctor. When he made these house calls the doctor had to be prepared to do anything from bandaging a finger to performing major surgery. Therefore, it was necessary for him to take with him all the medical equipment he might need for medical treatment.

During the winter, in the bad weather, the doctors often found it necessary to spend the night at the home of the patient, in case the patient's condition became worse and due to the storm, he would be unable to reach him soon enough.

However during the war of 1914-1918, the world became very hospital conscious, for much had been learned in the way of improved methods for caring for the sick and wounded. At that time Prince Edward County had no hospital so in order to encourage the building of one in Picton, Miss Sarah Minetta Walt willed the sum of two thousand dollars on the condition that a start must be made before the end of 1918.

Under the direction of Mr. H. B. Bristol and Mr. W. J. Carter, an option was taken on the home of Mr. George Alcorn. A general meeting of the public was called and eighty-eight became charter members of the non profit organization known as Prince Edward County Hospital, Incorporated on April 6th, 1918.

Early in 1919, patients were admitted for treatment and before the year was over, it was necessary to add increased accommodation. Again in 1921 the new East wing was added bringing the capacity up to twenty-seven beds, but many more were crowded in.

In 1919 a Nurses Training School was established under Miss E. Wood, R.N., the first Superintendent. Miss Laura Gaden, R.N., took over a short while later and remained for several years, a capable teacher and strict administrator. Most of the local physicians and surgeons donated their time in teaching the student nurses and from the first graduation in 1922 until the last in 1944 when the training school was discontinued, seventy-five girls earned their diplomas and have taken their places as efficient nurses. The training school furnished not only a home town training, but also helped to promote and retain a friendly co-operative spirit between the staff, doctors and the citizens of the County, but had to close when stricter requirements were placed on training schools, by the Ontario Minister of Health, during the period when many nurses were out of work.

Although there were originally thirty Directors on the Hospital Board most of the work was managed by the President and Secretary, the latter being one of the local Bank Managers who acted in that capacity without pay in return for his bank getting the hospital account. However, there came a time when a more efficient arrangement became necessary, and when Mr. A. E. Calnan, editor of Picton Gazette became President, the services of Mr. R. B. Small, who had an excellent banker's training, were secured in 1934.

In October, 1959, thanks to generous grant, pledges, and donations the Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital was officially opened. The new building, with fifty-five beds, gave not only more room for patients but also more adequate room for the expanding

facilities. The lab, which had been in the garage, now had room to do the necessary research. A room was also provided for Physio-Therapy, and X-ray, operating, and nursery facilities were increased.

In February, 1965, a new wing was added. This addition provided forty more beds, a larger lab and pharmacy, and more room for Pediatrics. Thus today the Hospital in Prince Edward County has a ninety-five bed capacity, with excellent facilities and equipment readily available.