

History of St. Peter's Hospital

St. Peter's Hospital history of service to Helena and the surrounding area dates back over a century.

The history of St. Peter's Community Hospital begins with a woman who arrived in Helena, Montana, Territory in 1880. Mrs. Henrietta Brewer, wife of the Reverend Leigh R. Brewer, an Episcopal Missionary, observed a need for another hospital to care for those in distress. St. John's Hospital, founded by the Roman Catholic Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, already existed in Helena, but was not large enough to meet the needs of the growing city.

Through Mrs. Brewer's determination and effort, St. Peter's Hospital was established in 1883. The hospital began incorporation proceedings in 1884 with a Board of Trustees selected from the parish to serve as incorporators. Bishop Brewer and Reverend F. T. Webb, rector of the parish, served as President and Vice President of the Board. The other Trustees were Samuel J. Jones, William A. Chessman, Governor John S. Crosby, Judge William Chumasero, W. E. Cullen, Dr. J. J. Leiser and E. D. Edgerton. St. Peter's incorporated in 1886.

In the early days, the hospital existed largely on faith and the good deeds of others. Little capital was available and no one involved with the project had any practical experience with hospital management. The earliest hospital building was a former Grange Hall, purchased by Mr. Samuel J. Jones and moved from the valley to near the pacific railroad tracks. The hospital then moved to a more accessible location on Jackson Street, in the former residence of A. M. Holter. Early records are vague as to when these buildings were occupied.

Mrs. Brewer and Mrs. A. M. Holter organized a group of women from St. Peter's Church to assist with the day-to-day work of the hospital. Members of this group who became known as the "lady visitors" included Mrs. Brewer, Mrs. Holter, Mrs. S. J. Jones, Mrs. Major Eckles, Mrs. F. T. Webb, and Mrs. W. M. Biggs. The lady visitors inspected the hospital weekly, made suggestions for improvements, and performed much of the actual cooking and cleaning required. Their selfless dedication and devotion to their humanitarian task carried the hospital through difficult times.

By 1885, Mrs. Brewer recognized the need to have a person trained in hospital work to manage and oversee the hospital's activities. She traveled first to Connecticut, and then to New York to secure the services of Miss Georgia C. Young, a graduate of the Nurse's Training School at Connecticut State Hospital. Miss Young served as superintendent of St. Peter's from 1886 to 1906 when she retired.

With the hospital under sound management, Mrs. Brewer's next project was to build a permanent hospital facility. Property at the corner of 11th Avenue and Logan Street was secured and on December 15, 1887, St. Peter's Hospital occupied a new building constructed specifically for that purpose. The hospital consisted of seven private rooms, a chapel, a reading room, a ten-patient ward and a room for contagious disease cases. An operating room (built and furnished by Mr. B. H. Tatem) was added in 1889. Later, when additional space was needed for general patients, Mrs. Brewer had a small cottage built behind the hospital for contagious cases.

Within a few short years, the hospital was turning away patients due to a lack of room. Mrs. Brewer began to plan for an addition to the hospital. When fire partially destroyed the building in 1901, the need became pressing. Mrs. Brewer worked tirelessly toward her vision of a complete, modern hospital. In addition to a major fundraising role for the hospital, she also provided the hospital's furnishings, household linens and supplies.

Mrs. Brewer did not live to see her dream fulfilled. She died in 1903. The new wing of the hospital was dedicated in 1908 as a memorial to Henrietta Brewer whose unshakeable faith and determination in the face of overwhelming obstacles established St. Peter's Hospital.

St. Peter's provided a training school for nurses from 1909 to 1933.

Another addition to the hospital was constructed in 1932 as a memorial to Conrad Kohrs, a wealthy Deer Lodge rancher. The addition was located between the Brewer wing and the 1887 hospital building. In 1938, Mrs. Harry Child donated funds to construct a dormitory for hospital staff in memory of her husband. The final addition to the hospital was constructed in 1957. The George Cormack Memorial Wing, adjacent to the Kohrs Wing, replaced the original 1887 hospital building.

In February 1931, St. Peter's Hospital Board of Trustees amended the articles of incorporation and transferred ownership of the Hospital to the Helena Community. The Hospital became known as St. Peter's Community Hospital. A 15-member Board of Directors elected from corporate membership governs the Hospital. Although the Episcopal ownership of the Hospital ended, the diocese has maintained close ties to the Hospital. The Bishop, or his designee, has a seat on the Board of Directors.

In 1973, St. John's Hospital closed, leaving St. Peter's as the only adult acute care facility in Helena. A veteran's hospital at Fort Harrison and Shodair Children's Hospital also served the healthcare needs of the Helena area.

The Hospital constructed a new building located at 2475 Broadway in 1968. The current facility is licensed by the State of Montana for 122 inpatient beds. All of

the buildings that comprised the old St. Peter's Hospital were eventually razed and an apartment complex occupies that site.

The current facility has undergone significant change and expansion. A major construction project in 1982 added needed space to the laboratory and emergency services. The hospital also added services based on community need. In 1984, inpatient psychiatry opened. That same year, the hospital acquired ambulance services from a private community provider. In 1986, Shodair Children's Hospital made a decision to not provide pediatric care and the Hospital assumed acute care for children as well as adults.

A major construction project in 1992 added a new medical wing and made way for expanding outpatient services. St. Peter's acquired homecare services in 1994. In 1996, the Cancer Treatment Center of St. Peter's opened, enabling Helena residents to have both chemotherapy and radiation therapy available locally. Prior to that time, cancer patients were transported daily by vans to Butte for treatment.

In 1999, St. Peter's partnered with local physicians to open the Helena Surgi-Center located adjacent to the hospital campus. In September of that same year, the hospital constructed a medical office building connected to the West side of the building. The building is named for the first physician in Helena, Maria Dean.

Through the years, the Hospital received considerable support from the community. For many years, the Junior Guild at St. Peter's Church made layettes for newborns at the Hospital. St. Peter's Hospital Association was formed in 1921 to provide for needs within the hospital. Women from St. Peter's Episcopal Church, along with representatives from the Helena churches, undertook the responsibility that had been shouldered by Mrs. Brewer in the Hospital's early days. The fundraising assistance given to the Hospital by this dedicated group has ranged from providing charity care to furnishing hospital departments with needed equipment. Today, the Association continues its long standing tradition of support for St. Peter's Hospital.

The Hospital in December 2003 announced that it would move forward with a cost-effective expansion project to meet the current and future needs of Helena and the surrounding area due to the increasing population, aging demographics, and changing technology demands. The \$43 million project included construction of an efficient, four-story patient wing which consolidated inpatient services, as well as a new emergency department and intensive care unit, new radiology department, expanded Same Day Services and Cardiology areas, a public corridor offering convenient admitting and registration and easy access to amenities, and relocation of the main entrance to face East. Another \$10 million in new equipment and furnishings was included. The project was completed in May 2008.

The year 2008 marked the 125th Anniversary of St. Peter's. The milestone was celebrated all year with special events for the community and Hospital employees and volunteers, an original painting of the first St. Peter's Hospital building by Helena artist Bob Morgan, commemorative items, and the publication of a historic brochure.

Also in 2008, St. Peter's opened St. Peter's Medical Group-North Montana, a clinic to serve residents of the Helena Valley. The clinic is open seven days a week, including holidays, and is staffed by four primary care physicians and offers X-ray and Laboratory services. An Urgent Care Clinic was opened within the Hospital's Emergency Department in July 2008 and serves about 25 patients daily with three beds.

Another 80,000-square-foot medical office building, St. Peter's Medical Group-Broadway, was opened in January 2009. The three-story, \$14 million building has the capacity for 30 physicians and includes state-of-the-art exam rooms, laboratory services, digital X-ray, and an outpatient pharmacy. In the Spring of 2009, a new 23-bed Behavioral Health Unit was opened in the former Surgical/Oncology/Pediatrics wing that was vacated when the new patient wing opened. Two new Catheter and Special Procedures Laboratories were opened and three new Operating Rooms opened.

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