

The following is a history of the Franklin County Memorial Hospital written in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the hospital. The author acknowledges his utilization of written summaries of G. P. Spence, Verne A. Pangborn, Dr. Hal C. Smith, *Franklin County Sentinel*, and *Franklin County Chronicle*. Also providing references for this history were Dr. William A. Doering, Ardyce P. Fritson RN, Gaylene Wentworth, Cathy Webber, and Maxine Campbell.

No history of the efforts to obtain a hospital in Franklin County should commence without reference to the efforts of Dr. Hal Clarke Smith, who established his practice in Franklin County prior to World War I (1914), and following his service therein continued the same for thirty years after his return. Dr. Smith constantly promoted the need for local hospital services and sought people to support building the hospital. He ran into the common but erroneous idea that "hospitals are for the benefit of the doctors". While Dr. Smith was not directly successful in his efforts, he nevertheless fostered the idea in the minds of hundreds of citizens and this contributed eventually to the success of those who followed him. Let all remember this man for not only serving this county as an excellent practitioner for many years but also for persistently educating the public to the idea.

Shortly prior to World War II (1941-1945), Dr. David S. Rosenberg, a young physician with surgery training, located in Franklin and gave a new impetus to the movement for a Hospital by talking of building a modest sized unit with the assistance of a few friends and business men. This was estimated to cost \$2,000 per bed or less complete! December 7, 1941 and four years of global war interrupted this plan but on the cessation of hostilities, three men of the community of Franklin decided it was time to quit talking, lay plans and proceed to secure a hospital. Gene P. Spence, a lawyer; Harry W. Blank, car and machinery dealer; Carleton Hutchins, furniture store owner were the three community leaders who made plans into a reality. The Hospital was still modest, seeking a twenty-bed hospital be built and construction/equipment would not exceed \$60,000. It was decided to seek a bond election for two-thirds of his funding and seeking the balance from contributions. A petition was prepared and circulated to place the proposition on the ballot and a personal-newspaper campaign was waged prior to the election of November 5, 1946.

The bond issue is noted as being "very close due to the foolish but seemingly inevitable community jealousies". The total vote was 1,417 For and 1,215 Against. Precincts of Washington, Grant, Buffalo, North Franklin, Logan, Antelope, Salem, Turkey Creek, Ash Grove, Lincoln cast majority votes against the bond. Supporting the bond were precincts of Franklin, Marion, Oak Grove, Bloomington, Macon, Farmers, East Bloomington and the mail ballots. The antagonism over the vote was intensified as early vote totals indicated the vote had been defeated however final tally from East Bloomington and Marion precincts carried the vote. The selection of a site of the hospital was in the judgment of the County Board, there was great pressure on the Board to not build the hospital in Franklin. A political faction was seeking building of the hospital in Macon, the center of the county, although there were no municipal facilities whatever, no facilities to take care of the public and no fire protection. The 1946 Bond and the birth of

the Franklin County Memorial Hospital remained uncertain through early 1949. In 1949, Congress passed the Hill-Burton Act providing federal aid in connection with building and equipping hospitals. Thereafter the State of Nebraska set up its legislation and Advisory Hospital Council. Nebraska Governor Val Peterson appointed Gene P. Spence of Franklin to the Advisory Hospital Council.

For the first time, local citizens interested in a hospital learned what made up a modern hospital and also the hard truth about costs. It became painfully apparent that a twenty bed hospital would cost about \$200,000 rather than the 1946 projection of \$60,000. Mr. Spence approached Mrs. Jennie E. Pool, a lady of comfortable means, who resided five miles east of Franklin on the original homestead of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. David Robertson. Mrs. Pool had inherited considerable wealth from her brother, Thomas Robertson, a long time County Judge and Official of Franklin County who died in 1947. Mrs. Pool promptly made the initial contribution of \$5,000 to start the hospital fund drive. With this commitment, a committee was formed of the presidents and chairmen of all the various local organizations. Harry W. Blank was the Chairman who persisted in leading and building a hospital. Hundreds of residents devoted their time and money to seek the funding. "Many gave substantially who were not expected to do so and others who could have contributed generously did little or nothing at all" wrote G. P. Spence. Some gave to detriment of their grocery money, others who had nothing to give in the way of money asked permission to work on mailing lists, canvassing, etc. and cheerfully did anything else they could. Miss Anne Porter presented a check for \$38,000 to the County in 1950, this represented the additional funds beyond the bond issue that were construction costs due from Franklin County after Hill Burton Funds were awarded. There remained on hand at that time sufficient cash and unpaid pledges to make the estimated \$12,000 needed for the county's share of equipment, a easy goal or so thought the Committee.

During the initial 1949 fund drive, Mr. Spence approached then Mayor Perry L. Slocum of the City of Franklin concerning the donation of a building site on a tract owned by the City. Mayor Slocum and the City Council agreed to convey the property for the sum of \$1.00 and the hospital now stands thereon. Much to the friendly disgust of Mr. Blank, Mr. Hutchins, and others, Mr. Spence paid the \$1 consideration, took a receipt therefor, and then made much of the fact that he had 'bought the hospital site' which was of the actual cash value of \$10,000. The County Supervisors, under Chairman E.T. Siel of Riverton stalled for several weeks about accepting the building site thus offered. Some of the County Supervisors, including all who would do so, were taken to modern hospitals at Clay Center, Kansas and Nebraska hospitals at Chappell and Kimball. The purpose was to learn the facts concerning construction, operation, and maintenance of a hospital. After much pressure and education, having been informed that no federal money would come to Franklin County unless construction occurred in Franklin as this city has municipal services such as sewer and fire, site selection was nearly complete. Paul Spence and Leon Samuelson represented the Hospital viewpoints. Franklin County Attorney H. B. Long provided a opinion that a hospital must be built, with the vote of the people this was no longer a question whether to build a hospital but simply of how to build. The location in Franklin was approved 4 to 2 with Chairman Siel not voting at the

November 22, 1949 meeting. In order to obtain this vote, the Committee agreed that if humanly possible, the county would not be called upon to invest over and above the \$40,000 bond issue although in passing the bond proposition the County was authorized to issue up to \$20,000 additionally for equipment and other facilities.

Some of the difficulties encountered seemed inconceivable to those who thought a hospital the most wonderful gift possible for humanity in general, and for the citizens of Franklin County in particular. Here was the answer to the culmination of years of dreaming, planning and working-a \$200,000.00 complete, modern, and fully equipped twenty bed hospital offered to the county at the original estimate of \$2,000 per bed as far as the county was concerned in 1946. Federal aid (Hill-Burton Act) provided 53.26% of the cost, the building site was donated by the City of Franklin, the county was to expend only the \$40,000 of bond funds and all of the remainder of the county's share of construction contracts had been raised by subscription and the county's share of equipment was to be so raised. G. P. Spence wrote, "this is the answer to our collective prayer. Yet every method of persuasion, short of using a blackjack, had to be employed to get the County Supervisors to move".

The next difficulty was a realization that the equipment estimate was low and yet another \$9,000 would be required. The hunt for \$17,000 rather than \$12,000 was commenced and resolved like all the problems here to fore by the citizens of the county.

Even though a majority of the County Supervisors were at all times against the construction of the hospital, or under heavy pressure from their constituency to fight Franklin, the Board did at all times recognize the efforts of the men heretofore mentioned and in consequence appointed them as a Hospital Advisory Committee. As such Committee, these men, with the consent of the County Supervisors, selected the architect. obtained and reviewed his plans and specifications, and eventually determined what was to be built. In January, 1951, Guff Harrison of Naponee replaced Mr. Siel as Chairman of the County Supervisors and he continued the Committee in force to take care of the completion of the hospital building and the purchase of equipment.

The Hospital Advisory Committee then learned that the County Supervisors in 1950 had been seeking a church organization for operation and maintenance of the new hospital . The Committee had previously investigated and reported that such a church affiliation was not for Franklin, noted that many of the contributions would be promptly canceled if such a plan was put into effect. The Committee insisted that in view of its promises and foreseeable difficulties, the hospital should be operated for at least a reasonable time by a statutory board of trustees just as a vast majority of contributors had been advised. When this did not sway the evidently formed judgment of a majority of the County Supervisors, Harry W. Blank flatly announced that if the County Supervisors persisted, the Committee was all done and would return to the contributors the money in its hands, take no further action to raise funds, and ,if necessary, would force the county to issue the additional \$20,000 bonds which had been voted to equip the hospital unless the church organization then seeking a contact wished to raise the additional funds. Carlton Hutchins and Gene P. Spence promptly concurred, This would end the argument

as neither the church organization in question or the County Board had any desire to face that prospect.

Gene P. Spence wrote, " for those who have been wrapped up in this matter, it is troublesome to write objectively or perhaps intelligently! We have therefore put down our thoughts and recollections in the secure knowledge, thank the Good Lord, that under any ordinary circumstances the same will never be read during the lifetime of any now living. Some day in the unforeseeable future some one may perhaps read, and chuckle at all our passing trials and tribulations. We sincerely hope so as the project has been pure enjoyment to all of us except for passing setbacks".

This story would not be complete without the recitation of a most pleasant occurrence, former Chairman of the County Board Mr. Everett T. Siel came to Mr. Spence of the Committee and stated, "Paul, I have been against this hospital and I have made you and the others for it a lot of trouble. After thinking it over long and carefully, I have concluded I was wrong. I am sorry and I apologize for my past actions and you can just rest assured that from now on out I will do anything and everything I can for the hospital". This is the beginning of the trend of change in those who have opposed.

DEDICATION

The Franklin County Memorial Hospital was dedicated at Two-Thirty O'clock P.M. on Sunday, June 8, 1952 at the Franklin City Park. The Committee in Charge included Chairman J. H. Naden, Armand Lheureux, Glen Spacht, C.G. Eshelman, Leon Samuleson, Leland Fritz, S.E. Ely, F. G. Hutchins, George Lynch, George C. Soker, Verne L. Dunn. T.R. Blank and Harlan Harrington.

The Franklin County Memorial Hospital is dedicated to God and the service of mankind, and held forth in memory of our pioneers and members of the armed forces of the United States of America, who built and defended our community.

Hospital Advisory Board

Harry W. Blank, Chairman
G. Paul Spence, Secretary

Carleton Hutchins, Assistant Chairman
Anne Porter, Treasurer

Board of Trustees

Philip Schwartz
Harry W. Blank
John B. Fritson

County Board of Supervisors

Fred Steinkruger Chris DeRiese George Casper Jr. Everett T. Siel
W. L. Drummond George Zuellner Guff Harrison, Chairman

Hospital Superintendent

Opal C. Johnson, R.N.

Program

Band Concert.....Franklin, Hildreth, Campbell High School Bands
Invocation.....Rev. A. J. Duis
Welcome.....Glen Spacht, Mayor, City of Franklin
Greetings.....Carleton Hutchins
Introductions.....G. Paul Spence
Presentation of Keys.....Guff Harrison
Acceptance of Keys.....Harry W. Blank
Introduction of Speaker.....Leon Samuelson
Dedication Address.....Honorable Hugh A. Butler, U.S. Senator
Franklin Barbership Chorus....M.D. McKenney, Director
Flag Raising.....Boy Scouts of Franklin County, Lyle Manchester
Salute to the Flag.....Servicemen of Franklin County, Henry Steinkruger
Benediction.....Father Anthony Turek

Patients will be accepted on June 9, 1952.

Franklin County Memorial Hospital
Operated by County of Franklin, Nebraska
A Beacon to All Who Come Regardless of Race, Color or Creed

The first baby born in the hospital was Denise Kleen, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harmie Kleen of Franklin. The first medical patient was Tom Haskin of Franklin. (*Franklin County Sentinel, June 28, 1962*)

1957

Board of Trustees

Ben W. Harrington, Chairman Philip Schwartz, Secretary
John B. Fritson, Member

Administrator

Virginia A. Blecha R.N.

Active Member of the Medical Staff

William A. Doering MD C.J. Thomas MD L.S. McNeill MD

The 1957 report indicated in cash receipt for 1956 were \$56,335 with \$5,927.72 in tax collections and \$575.53 in Memorial money. At the year end, the hospital had a net loss of \$2,470.71. Air conditioning was added in 1957 doing much to add to the comfort of the patient.

1962

Board of Trustees

Ben W. Harrington, Chairman W.P. Schwartz, Secretary
John B. Fritson, Member

Administrator

Maxine M. Campbell
Active Medical Staff Membership was unchanged.

1962 Business

As of 1962, 4,240 patients utilized the hospital during the first ten years of operation. The hospital employed twenty-seven residents. A focus in 1962 was the Walking Blood Bank, noting that 120 pints of blood were given to patients this past year. Mrs. Irene Schriener is the technician in the laboratory. The 10th Anniversary Open House was held on July 1, 1962. The Franklin County Medical Association held a Sabin Oral Vaccine clinic, giving vaccination to 1,000 people the first hour. It was noted that Dr. McNiells office in Campbell would provide the vaccine for a 25 cent fee. In total, over 2,700 took advantage of the vaccine in Franklin on Sunday, June 24, 1962. I

Franklin County Sentinel, June 28, 1962

1965

June 10, 1965, the Franklin VFW Post 5757 presented a wheel chair to the hospital. The *Franklin County Sentinel* carried a picture of Chester Beck, Commander and Dean Steinkruger of the County Board of Supervisors making the presentation to Maxine Campbell, hospital supervisor.

1970

Board of Trustees

Harmie Kleen, Chairman John B. Fritson, Secretary
Dr. J.J. Palmer, Member

Administration

Maxine M. Campbell

Active Medical Staff

Dr. William A. Doering & Dr. K. O. Garner

The Franklin County Memorial Hospital reported that 7,658 patients have been admitted for treatment since June 8, 1952. The hospital has forty employees. Major expenditures were for an anesthesia machine, defibrillator, and a cardiac monitor. Miss Bertha Slepicko of Crete, Nebraska approached the hospital regarding placement of a kidney machine here. In the *Lincoln Evening Journal* the project was reviewed, noting that 600,000 Betty Crocker coupons were needed for the kidney machine. "The project was undertaken following an accident the past summer that forced a young man to go to Omaha for the nearest machine", said Carleton Hutchins. It takes 600,000 coupons to raise \$3,000 and donors were urged to give cash to the Rotary Club Coupon Drive.

1971

The March 4, 1971 issue of the *Franklin County Sentinel* indicates the Kidney Machine Project Fund Plan has been finalized, a cardiac monitoring machine would be more practical. All Betty Crocker Coupons, designated for the kidney machine, were turned over to the Nebraska Kidney Foundation. Remaining coupons and donations were applied towards the Cardiac Machine. On September 23, 1971 the Cardiac Monitoring machine was installed with Mrs. Robert Potter, Chairwoman of the Women's Extension

Club and Alvin Lamb, president of the Rotary Club, Rotary Representative Carleton Hutchins, and Maxine Campbell pictured in the *Franklin County Sentinel* .

1975

June 12, 1975, the observance of 25 years of operation was held at the hospital.