Loretto Living Center, a Little Past and a Little Present by Anndavid Naeger SL

Caring for the physical needs of our Sisters was always accomplished in each Convent throughout our mission territory. But by 1927, it was decided that organized care for our sick and aged members in a central place would be advantageous. Therefore a new wing was added to the Convent building at the Motherhouse. The second and third floors of this annex were reserved exclusively for infirmary needs. This experiment eventually revealed the necessity of a much larger and better planned building with modern facilities and equipment, etc. But more pressing problems within the community needed immediate attention. The stock market collapse and the ensuing depression made any hope of obtaining funding for a major building project a lost cause. With the war raging in Europe in 1940, the General Chapter decided that building at that time was futile. Finally in April of 1941, Mother Edwarda Ashe, the newly elected Superior General, urged all the Sisters to do their bit by contributing to a Sacrifice Fund, which by December 31, 1945, amounted to $22,841.68. She promised that every single penny from their fund raising would be recorded and kept in the Archives. Along with the building came the challenge of staffing the facility.

When Mother Edwarda made inquiries at St. Mary's Hospital and St. Joseph's Infirmary in Louisville, Kentucky, as to whether their nursing programs offered a course in practical nursing with a sufficient amount of training for one to act as an infirmarian in a nursing facility, they did not. So it was decided that Sister Sienna Jansing would be released from teaching to study at Nazareth College in Louisville for an RN degree. She completed her studies and passed her state board exams on July 26, 1944, becoming the first of many Sisters to receive their degrees in nursing.

Finally on September 9, 1947, a meeting was held with the architect T.J. Nolan and the general contractor A.J. Schneider to go over the final plans for a building before construction began. It was to be a four-story structure of red-faced brick over concrete block, fire-resistant and sanitary. The floors were of asphalt-tile covering cement. The roof was a built-up composition coated with gravel. First, however, the Middle Building had to be demolished to clear the site chosen for the Infirmary. The wrecking crew began work on September 18, 1947. Leveling this *temporary* structure, built after the fire in 1858, took as long as it had taken to build it originally—two weeks.

Constructing the new building was only one of the major problems: drinking water coming from cisterns and Mary's Lake had to be purified before it could be piped into the building; sewage disposal had to be solved; labor shortages in the post-war job market were a worry; orders for building materials could not always be filled on time; communication was a caution and finally the winter of 1947-48 was particularly troublesome. From January 19 to February 16 snow and zero weather brought all work to a complete standstill and in April extended periods of rain caused more work stoppages.

Meanwhile preparations in the Wardrobe continued at full speed. Sisters Edgarita, Honoratus, Agnes Mary and Eugeniana, along with Miss Vic Mudd spent untold hours sewing the mounds of linens for mattress covers, sheets, towels, etc., that would be needed once the building was ready for occupancy.

By March 1949, a clean-up squad made up of the Sisters and Miss Vic and Margaret and Florence Corbett was able to begin the hard, huge, dirty job of cleaning and polishing the building from top to bottom before the first residents could move into St. Joseph's Infirmary on June 4, 1949. On the ground floor are the diet kitchen, buyer's office, two dining rooms for nurses and employees respectively, laundry, store rooms, deep-freeze, furnaces, etc. The first floor is for ambulatory patients along with the post office; dining room; oratory; 16 private rooms and a sunroom overlooking the rolling pasture land where the dairy herd graze or sleep in the shadow of ancient trees, and on to the encircling woods that rest at the feet of the far blue Kentucky Knobs. Here the Sisters gather for spiritual reading, recreation, knitting, crocheting, embroidery, little parties or for an occasional movie. The second floor is for bed patients or Sisters so feeble as to be in need of constant care along with the pharmacy, utility rooms, linen rooms and a sun porch. The third floor is for the Sisters who are in reasonably good health. Along with the private rooms are utility rooms, a library and a roof garden. Also a dumb-waiter was installed to carry food trays, medicines, etc., from floor to floor, along with an elevator, large enough to hold a hospital bed and two ramps connecting the first and second floors.

Sister Sienna Jansing was the first administrator whose duties, in addition to nursing, were to supervise others who dealt with nursing care, arrange for doctor's appointments, provide for the spiritual needs of the sick, make room

assignments, check on building maintenance, etc. Sisters deLourdes LeHoullier, Stella Mary Bru and Monica Marie Ziemba were part of the nursing staff when the first residents moved in. Sister Cosmas (Virginia Ann) Driscoll, a registered pharmacist, assisted in many capacities over and above her pharmacy duties and also took care of some of the clinical testing.

Sister Rose Alma Shuler was the first Administrator after the facility was licensed and served from 1974 to 1987. Being licensed brought codes, regulations, etc., Sister wrote: "One regulation, which irked everyone from maintenance, staff and residents, was the requirement that each floor leading downstairs or out-ot-doors have a mat with a bell that rang every time anyone crossed the threshold—a total of about ten doors. This requirement lasted about three years, and then without explanation the next time an evaluation team came we were told that such mats were no longer required!" She continued: "There were many amusing instances involving individual patients. One that was particularly memorable was Sister Candida Cecil's experience with pet birds. The first was a canary named Tweedy. Sister liked to walk out in the yard to gather "bird seed" to supplement Tweedy's diet. Aftrer a few weeks the bird began to droop and was unresponsive to all of Sister's coaxing to eat. Finally the nurse, Sister Susan Carol McDonald, was called in for consultation. She offered to give Tweedy a shot to which Sister Candida agreed. With Tweedy carefully cradled in her left hand, Susan Carol gently made the injection which promptly produced rigor mortis in the feathered companion. Sister Candida was inconsolable and Susan Carol, in her efforts to comfort her, said, 'That's all right, Sister, I'll get you another bird,' to which Sister replied without hesitation, 'You bet you will.'"

From those early years until now, there were so many employees who helped the Infirmary to its current life as the Loretto Living Center. Staff help to live out our Mission Statement, "...We provide the highest standard of holistic care that promotes comfort, security and dignity for all residents in a home-like atmosphere."