



Springfield Hospital and Training School

— "...for I was sick, and ye visited me." —

Seminary student Henry Knabenschuh was walking along a Springfield street when he came upon an abandoned young black lad. Not only was the small boy crippled, it was obvious he was diseased. Henry's heart went out to the child, and he took him to his seminary room and nursed the boy. It turned out that the child was suffering from typhoid fever, and Henry contacted the disease. Soon the dreaded scourge spread through the rest of the seminary, and the majority of the student body fled Springfield. Henry and the child recovered, but nine seminarians succumbed. Four died at the seminary and five of them at home. It was 1888 and hospital facilities were not readily available to seminary students.

This tragedy and similar incidents made it obvious to area Lutherans that a hospital was very much in demand. The only hospital in Springfield was Catholic and was not generally open to non-Catholics. However, in a reoccurrence of the typhoid plague in 1889, several seminarians were treated there. At any rate, a major impetus to establish a hospital was concern for the care of seminary students.

Trinity's pastor, Rev. Martin H. Luecke, became the leading figure in the drive for the hospital. The first meeting to form an association (Hospital Geselishaft) was held February 7, 1897, with seven people attending. (The German minutes for the first few meetings have been translated by Prof Kramer and recorded for us by Kal Klammer.) Of the seven in attendance, six were Trinity members. In addition to Pastor Luecke, there was a Miss Nagel and a Mrs. Bolte, two church officers - C. Timm and H. Maurer, and Prof. John S. Simon. Prof. Simon would act as secretary for the organization and provide tremendous help to Pastor Luecke. His young son, Edward, would be the first janitor at the hospital and would later become a practicing physician.

Also at the original meeting was a Presbyterian physician, Dr. W.O. Langdon; and it was decided that his



"Tell of all his wonderful acts!"

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large, Italianate style home at 5th and North Grand, built in 1860, would be used for the hospital. The association agreed to purchase the home for \$10,000; and Dr. Langdon, who was the first superintendent of the hospital, agreed to donate \$1,000 out of his fees for the building. The hospital was incorporated under the sponsorship of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of America, and Trinity provided all of the leadership for the association. In addition to the above names, Trinity's Henry Zapf, a drug-gist, served as treasurer while a Mr. Schnepf acted as attorney. In addition to Dr. Langdon, the association hired a matron, Miss Helena Hanser, whose father was a Lutheran minister in St. Louis and was a founder of the Lutheran hospital there.

The hospital began operations during April of 1897 with twelve beds available. Usual treatment cost the patient \$3.00 a week or \$7.00 to \$10.00 for a private room and special care although there were instances where destitute cases were not charged. How the early hospital was financed is uncertain, but it appears that the bulk of the funds came from patient fees and individual contributions. Trinity never made direct financial contributions but did have an anonymous donor who paid the church's annual \$100 association fee. By 1900 Pastor Luecke was urging membership in the organization by every central Illinois Missouri Synod church. He cautioned that if there was not enough Lutheran support, the hospital "might fall into the hands of the sects." Trinity's paternal attitude to the institution is reflected in the minutes

where it was often referred to as "our hospital." Although its official name was always Springfield Hospital and Training school, many referred to it for years as the Springfield Lutheran Hospital. However, the association was independent; Trinity did not own it or have direct ties to the hospital.

Only two years after its beginning, it was necessary to add a large north wing to Dr. Langdon's former residence; and a similar south wing was added in 1905. Truly, the efforts of Trinity's members had met an urgent and long neglected need for the city of Springfield. For some reason, the dedication of the 1899 wing was held in our church. On two occasions Trinity dropped Sunday services so we could join "Festival Services" at the hospital. During these early years of the century, Professors J. I-Ierzer, F. Streckfuss, and O.C.A. Boecler served on the hospital board.

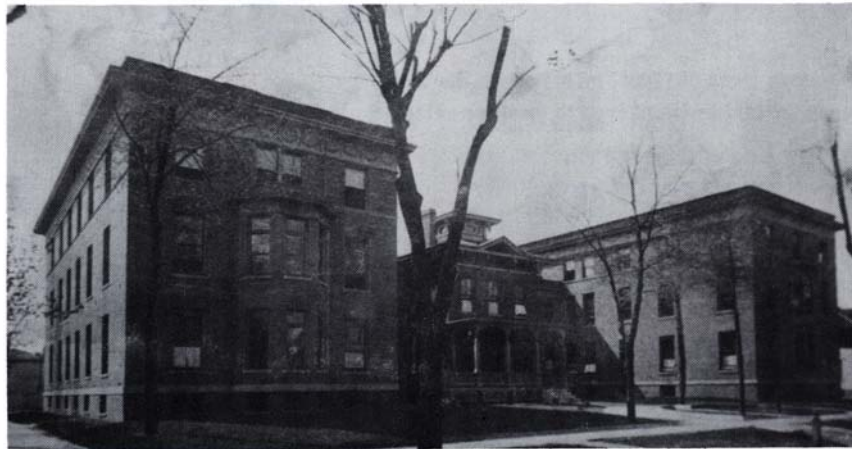
But in 1903, despite determined efforts on Trinity's part to retain him, Pastor Luecke accepted the call to the presidency of Concordia College, Fort Wayne. The man responsible for Springfield Hospital was also a scholar in the study of New Testament Greek and Biblical history and published several textbooks. Occasionally he returned to Springfield to attend the annual hospital meetings and was overjoyed at its success although he refused to take any credit. When he passed away in 1926, our Pastor Schulz attended the funeral in Fort Wayne as a representative of the hospital and of Trinity. A freshman student, Lewis Niemoeller, was also in attendance.

It is uncertain if Rev. Luecke's successor, Rev. Brand, served on the hospital's board; but during the twenties Pastor Schulz, William Schnepf, Frederick VanHorn, Frank Siebert, and Harry Koopman were on the board. As such they were associating with some of the most prominent names in Springfield Bunn, Lanphier, Wanless, Keys, Hay, and Hatch. These names reflect the fact that the hospital was increasingly being viewed as a non-denominational institution. In 1932 the association was totally reorganized and lost its Lutheran denominational bearing. It appears that Trinity did not oppose this development as it was not even noted in the minutes. In 1943 the hospital was moved to a grand seven story edifice at 1st and Miller Streets and renamed Memorial Hospital.

From the very beginning the hospital included a nurses training school. Four students were in the class that completed the two year training in 1899. When the hospital moved, the training school remained at the 5th Street and North Grand facility until 1958 when it also moved to be closer to the new hospital. For various reasons the training school ceased operations and closed in 1976 after graduating 1,552 nurses, including some male nurses. The 5th Street edifice stood abandoned until March 1966, when it was designated a "hazardous building" by the Commissioner of Public Safety, and the compound building was razed.

Scores of Trinitarians were born in the old hospital, and many Trinity ladies, even today, recall the maternity procedures there. In addition, the hospital cared for hundreds of Trinity members with various ailments. Trinity people who attended the training school include Virginia Hargis Owens, Wilma Fricke, Ruth Niemoeller Gaister, Viola Market, Alma Ritter, and Pauline Horror. Other ladies associated with the school were Emma Leëser, Edna Huelskoetter, and Kathryn Mathew.

Memorial Hospital today is a huge sprawling complex of medical care facilities, but its legacy is a direct tribute to Trinity's dedicated commitment to a caring ministry.



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The operating room of Springfield Hospital in 1903



The nurses class of 1903. The matron in the black dress in the middle is believed to be Helena Hanser

Among several Trinity people who attended the Training School was Virginia Owens.

