

Ridgewood Hospital: Progress Victim

By W.W. EDGAR

Wave after wave of nostalgia has been flooding the Plymouth County since the old Ridgewood Hospital at Geddes and Ridge Road closed its doors several weeks ago.

Once the medical oasis in the suburban desert, it has suffered the ravages of time and no longer meets either fire or building codes. Because of this and the drop in demand for services, it discontinued the operation.

As the doors closed, it marked the end of another chapter in the rich history of the medical profession. The edifice stands as a monument to a group of pioneer osteopathic physicians who made it possible a quarter of a century ago.

THE FAMILIAR bit of architecture had a special appeal for persons in the Plymouth area for it was within the walls of the charming appearing building that many of the generation in their 20s first saw the light of day.

It was there that the late Dr. Aubrey (Ace) Williams, the lovable old doctor with the tiny gray goatee, delivered

more babies than any other physician in the area. And for some years Dr. William Herbold used the hospital as the base of his operations.

But it was Dr. O. L. Brooker, of Livonia, former chairman of the House of Delegates of the Osteopathic Association, who expressed the feeling of the other osteopaths when he sighed, with a shake of his head:

"It's gone, but not forgotten."

ONE OF THE original six who conceived the idea of an osteopathic hospital in the area, Dr. Brooker recalled the early days when the upstairs of an old building next to the church on Ford Road served the purpose.

"The other fellows in the group," he said, "were Dr. Bob Ogden, Dr. Wallace Willman of Garden City, Dr. Steve Gardner of Wayne, Dr. Sam Worthing of Dearborn and Dr. Albert F. Kull, now a resident of South Bend, Ind."

At that time, what was later to become Ridgewood was known as the Leland Sanitarium. Treatment was confined, for the most part, to tuberculosis patients. These unfortunate were the men who worked in auto plants, polishing bodies and being exposed to chemicals.

"But with the medical research that virtually eliminated tuberculosis, the sanitarium fell upon hard times," Dr. Brooker recalled, "and our group of osteopaths, aided by others, purchased the 184 acres and the building. It then became Ridgewood hospital and with it came a change in services."

"IN THE BEGINNING it was strictly a maternity hospital. Many of our residents for miles around were born there. From there we branched out and specialized in special care."

Meanwhile, with the growth of the population, the building of the Beyer Hospital in Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor in the southwest area and the Garden City Osteopathic facility on Inkster Road in Garden City, Ridgewood became more and more outdated — until its closing was inevitable.

Finally, the day came a few weeks ago and the hospital, long known for its "personalized care," passed from the scene.

The facilities and equipment, along with most of the 150 full-time employees, have been transferred to the Garden City Osteopathic Hospital. Until the day of the closing, both hospitals had been operated by the same corporation and governed by a 12-man board of directors.

Charles Ward, assistant administrator explained, "and the board now has agreed to sell the property."

"It would have been much too expensive to repair the old building and bring it up to date. Aside from that, the Detroit Area Hospital Council decreed that the transfer should be made to Garden City — and it has the last word."

had accumulated 407,545 inpatient days. Prior to 1968 when the maternity activities were dropped due to decreased demands 5,864 babies were born there.

Over that same period, conditions changed considerably in the area. Where Ridgewood once was the oasis, more modern hospitals sprang up in other areas, and several of them have been forced to

add large additions to keep pace with the demand.

Among these is the Garden City Osteopathic Hospital which, after a meager start, now is being enlarged to care for 360 patients.

Beyer Hospital in Ypsilanti has developed into a large institution, and Annapolis in Wayne also fills a gap.

Along with the growth of these institutions, St. Mary

Hospital in Livonia is building a large addition to increase its capacity to 280 beds that will serve the entire western suburban community.

WITH THIS type of growth and the advent of modern equipment and facilities, Ridgewood suffered and admissions fell off greatly in the past year or two.

Recently there had been speculation regarding future use of the building. It was hinted that the 42-year-old building would be converted to a convalescent care home, an alcoholic treatment center, or a drug abuse center.

All speculation ended, however, when the board decided to offer Ridgewood for sale.

"The old place just became a victim of progress," Ward stated.



THE DOORS TO stately old Ridgewood Hospital have been closed after serving the western Wayne County area for the past 16 years. Its future now is in doubt. (Observer photo)

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