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SACRAMENTO'S FIRST MERCY HOSPITAL A DARING VENTURE IN 1896

By Sister Mary Loyola, RSM, printed March 18, 1976 in the *Catholic Herald*

Perhaps the most daring venture undertaken by the Sisters of Mercy at the turn of the century was the operation of the first private hospital in Sacramento.

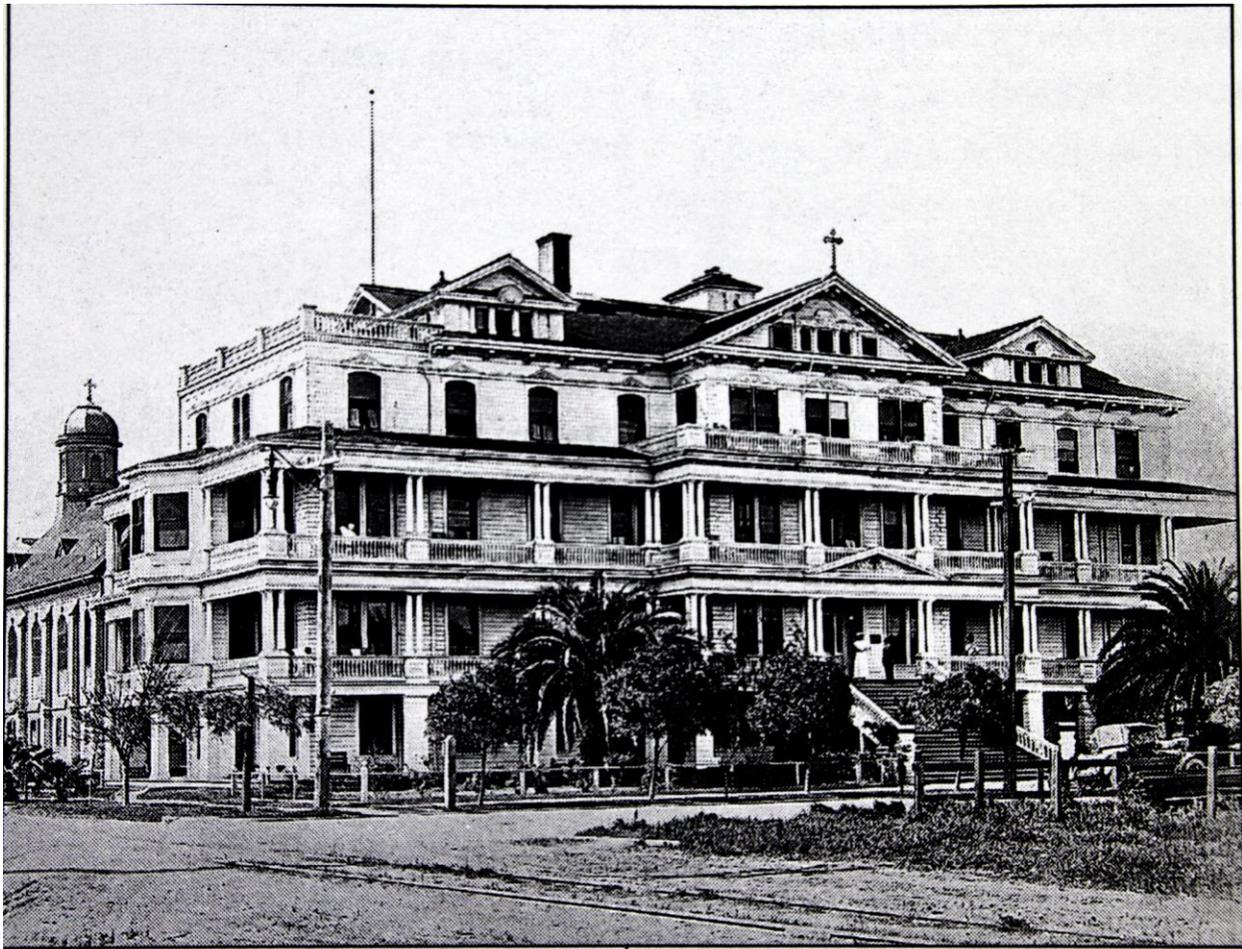
A City Hospital had been opened in 1850 and a County Hospital in 1851 or 1852. Neither seems to have been the answer to the Sacramento physicians' needs, or, at least, not to be sufficient for the needs of the growing city. The Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement appointed a Hospital Committee to study the problem and learn what might be done. When nothing resulted from the group's efforts, Dr. G.L. Simmons erected a small hospital at 23rd and R Streets, the "Ridge Home." Little more than a sanatorium, it lacked surgical facilities for major operations. Under these conditions it was not successful.



Picture from Diocesan Archives

The Ridge Home, taken over by the Sisters of Mercy as a Hospital in 1896

Although Dr. Simmons and Dr. James Parkinson tried to persuade the Sisters of Mercy to build a hospital or take over the Ridge Home, the sisters were unable to provide personnel for both school and hospital work at the time. As months passed, however, the need became more urgent. When there was no indication of a public movement to solve the problem, Dr. Thomas W. Huntington, who was in charge of the Railroad Hospital, called upon Mother M. Ligouri to reconsider the situation. Neither personnel nor funds warranted any such venture; yet Mother Ligouri acquired the Ridge Home to operate it for the suffering of the city. The deed was filed June 24, 1896. Within three months the ground was broken for a new hospital, Mater Misericordiae, the Mother of Mercy Hospital.



Mercy Sisters Archives

Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Sacramento

The “Sisters’ Hospital” was finished and ready for occupancy in April 1897, 40 years after the Sisters of Mercy’s first foundation in Sacramento. The patients were moved from the Ridge Home, which continued in use as an old people’s home with the sisters in charge until 1925 when the new Mercy Hospital at 40th and J Streets was opened.

Bishop Grace provided funds for a modern surgery center in 1900. Previous to this, surgical operations had been performed in a room fitted for the purpose. "Grace Surgery," was one of the best equipped operating rooms in California at the time. Through the generosity of the Late Rev. Alexander De Campos, a beautiful chapel with a seating capacity of one hundred was given to the sisters in 1905. It ran parallel to R Street and connected by a "bridge" to the second floor of the south wing.

More room became a pressing need by 1907. The doctors appealed to the sisters, and in 1908 the wing was completed, giving the hospital a capacity of 60 beds. The surgery center was enlarged: X-ray was organized. By 1918, further additions brought the bed capacity to 90, besides 20 bassinets in the maternity department.

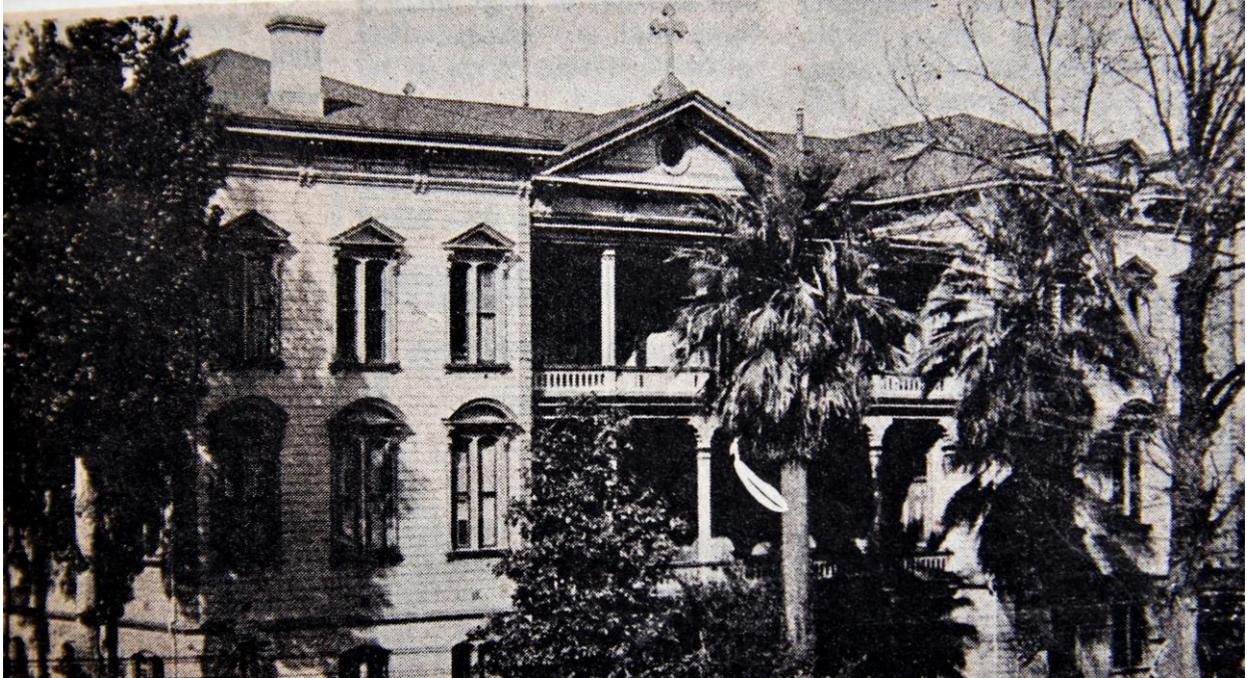
To keep adding to a frame building was impossible for the proper development of the hospital. In May 1921, consequently, a seven-acre tract reaching from J to H Streets on 39th and 40th was purchased by the Sisters of Mercy. Thanksgiving Day, 1923, Bishop Patrick J Keane laid the cornerstone and on February 11, 1925, the hospital was dedicated and opened to the public.

Six years later Mercy Clinic opened its doors to under privileged children. Dr G.N. Drysdale, then Chief of Staff, was chosen first director of the Clinic. It served hundreds of children in the years of its existence.

The training school, started with the beginning of the sisters' work on 23rd and R Streets, became Mercy College of Nursing. Student nurses, who numbered over a 100 during the "cadet nurse days of World War II, were housed in a three story brick building at the rear of the hospital. The college was discontinued in 1950, and the building converted into Mercy Children's Hospital in April of 1953.

A state-wide drive for \$1,000,000 was successfully completed by the medical profession and other friends of the Sisters of Mercy in 1951. With these funds a new wing was added to Mercy Hospital, increasing the bed capacity by 100.

From these early beginnings the hospital apostolates of the Sisters of Mercy in Sacramento, Redding, and Carmichael have risen. So too, the schools and catechetical centers operated by the Sisters of Mercy today are but a continuation of the spirit of these pioneer religious women who, in serving the people of early Sacramento, built for the Church and the city of the future. Mother Baptist Russell, the California Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, died in 1898. How could she have dreamed that cold spring night as she traveled up the Sacramento River that the future would hold so much?



Diocesan Archive File

St Joseph Academy, 8th and G Streets, Sacramento 1861 - 1949