

## **Sr. Mary Charles: Some Published Comments**

Before leaving PEI Sr. Mary Charles was trained as a teacher but later became a nurse in St Paul's.

Sister Mary Charles was referenced often in the document "The St. Mary's I knew" by Sister Aloysia Ames. This St. Mary's Hospital is in Tucson, Arizona. The document is available on the internet.

A selection of these comments include:

"Sisters of St Joseph of Idaho was founded in 1902. Later Mother Mary Charles was assigned as Superior at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital... Within the next 2 years the exchange of Sisters between the Northwest and other parts of the Los Angeles Providence became a reality. The example of the faith, courage. Generosity, as well as the administrative, teaching and technical skills of the Idaho Sisters made a favorable and enduring impact on the Western Providence of the Sisters of St. Joseph.... Thus it was that when in August of 1929 Sr. Mary Charles was transferred to Tucson she found there a source of vitality with which she was familiar, the qualified Sister nurses from Idaho." ...

### **"A Registered Nurse Manages St. Mary's"**

With her appointment, Sister Mary Charles was the first Superintendent of St Mary's Hospital in Tucson who was a Registered Nurse.

“Succeeding Mother Victoria at St. Mary’s was Sr. Mary Charles McIver, a native of Prince Edward Island. Sister had her novitiate in St. Paul, Minnesota, but was not a newcomer to the West. She was a choice link binding together segments of God’s providential plan for His Sisters of St. Joseph which ultimately proved to be a very special blessing for St. Mary’s in Tucson. ...

The scenario that greeted Sister Mary Charles (1929-1935) was by no means one that allowed for complacency. For one thing, there was an understandable growth in the number of indigent patients coming to the hospital with nothing approaching the modern concept of governmental or societal responsibility to provide adequate medical care at public expense. Coupled with that was the gradual withdrawal of the Southern Pacific patients to the Southern Pacific Hospital on Congress Street. The move hurt the cash flow of the hospital even though it did provide more room for patient care. The remodeling of the vacated wards was carried out as best as was possible. Far better functional space was found, moreover, for the Clinical Laboratory and X-ray services and for expanded maternity and infant care -- providentially, too, because more mothers were looking to a hospital confinement for delivery than had been the case in the past.

Sister M. Charles, as the new Superintendent, was the first R.N. to serve as Chief Executive Officer at St. Mary's, and Depression or no, there were definite changes to be made in routines as she saw them from her perspective.

Foremost was a reduction in the amount of time that nursing personnel had to give to housekeeping tasks, ranging from room cleaning to food preparation. Non-professional people were hired to take over those duties -- with R.N. supervision where necessary. For the more physically demanding janitorial and maintenance jobs, more male personnel was another requirement. There was an added problem here, for as anyone knows, equipment breakdown, power failure, plumbing back-ups, and the like seem to choose nighttime hours rather than daytime to make themselves known. In order to solve this "on call" need for twenty-four hour maintenance help in those early days in the Southwest, Sister Mary Charles built a structure, at a cost of \$10,000, that contained ten sleeping rooms for maintenance personnel directly north of the laundry building. Years later, when better transportation and living accommodations on the west side dispensed with the need for these rooms, they were turned into storage use. Indicative, too, of constant maintenance needs was the erection of a paint shop and a carpentry shop south of the boiler room.

Again, in spite of the financial problems of the economic depression, two stories were added to the North Wing. This increased the capacity of the hospital to 185 beds and 20 bassinets. Two automatic passenger elevators were also installed, as well as a system of silent electric call signals.

Technical proficiency was not being bypassed either. Specialization was spreading to many areas of medicine, and, in the early thirties, both the Clinical Laboratory and

the X-ray Department (the term "Radiology" was just coming into general use ) were put under the direction of physicians who had chosen these respective fields as their areas of concentration. Perhaps it was of equal significance that the year 1931 saw the first intern launch his medical career at St. Mary's. He was Dr. Chester Reynolds who later went on to a practice in child psychiatry in El Paso. An oxygen tent was purchased in 1933, although as Sister Aloysia noted in *The St. Mary's I Knew*, oxygen inhalation therapy by use of individual face masks had been in use for some time. Additionally, a full-fledged Laboratory Technician was added to the Clinical Lab staff.

Shortly before she left in 1935, Sister Mary Charles commissioned a technical study of the fuel needs at the hospital. The statistics are most interesting when one looks back on the beginnings a half century earlier. By 1934, the hospital plant was making annual purchases of 62,000 gallons of fuel oil, tons of coal, and about \$1,000 worth of gas! The study recommended a total conversion to natural gas -- a recommendation the hospital accepted, although it was four years before the transformation was complete. The fuel needs are interesting to repeat, because they demonstrate in one expense area alone what it took to run a hospital whose records for 1935 show 3,036 patient admissions, 169 births, and, 688 operations. That was St. Mary's at the mid-point of its history!...

### **Student Hospital Relations**

The financial crisis of 1929 together with the gradual rising scholastic requirements enforced by professional nurse

organizations greatly affected schools of nursing throughout the country. Some closed; some grew. St. Mary's took the latter course. Several improvements which favored the student nurses were introduced by Sister Mary Charles McIvor, Superintendent of the hospital from 1929 to 1935. A registered nurse, she readily recognized the plight of the students. She provided additional living accommodations by adding a two story brick wing to the residence hall. She increased the non-professional personnel in the hospital to reduce the physical labor of the nurses, especially in the areas of housekeeping and food service. In 1931 she engaged a part-time Pathologist-Radiologist, a laboratory technician, a registered dietitian, Irene Ross, who worked closely with the student nurses and a full time nursing instructor."...

### **“Cooling St Mary’s.**

For the first twenty-five years the hospital was kept cool solely by keeping the heat out. The ledger shows that in June 1934, Sr. Mary Charles invested \$81.00 for a “Cooling System”. This I conclude to be the exhaust fan installed in the dining room she opened in the basement for the staff and private duty nurses. This room had no other ventilation except the exhaust fan,”

### **New Car**

“ it was time to replace the large black one that the de Joine family had given to the Sisters at St. Mary’s. Sister Mary Charles negotiated the purchase of a new car.

Estimates from several local dealers, dated 1934-1935 are on file. The car Sister selected was a sturdy and powerful sedan.” ...