

7 5 Y E A R S O F C A R I N G



75 YEARS OF CARING  
A Circle of Care  
ST. MARY'S GENERAL HOSPITAL

Christopher J. Rutty

ST. MARY'S GENERAL HOSPITAL



St. Mary's  
General Hospital  
75th Anniversary

by Christopher J. Ruddy

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Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Rutty, Christopher, 1962-  
A Circle of Care: 75 Years of Caring,  
St. Mary's General Hospital

Includes bibliographical references  
ISBN 0-9685117-0-8

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First edition.

First published in 1999 by  
St. Mary's General Hospital  
911 Queen's Boulevard  
Kitchener, Ontario N2M 1B2

Design and Production by Ampersand Studios  
Printed in Canada by Cober Printing Limited

**Photo Sources**

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St. Mary's General Hospital Photographers:  
Karen Hawthorne, Doug Wood, Mike Lee, Scott  
Hebert, Karl Garner, Dan Meagher

Other sources are identified as needed.



## ST. MARY'S GENERAL HOSPITAL 75TH ANNIVERSARY

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## Postscript

by Christopher Rutty

*In his opening remarks Reverend A.L. Zinger, pastor of St. Mary's Church and chairman of the hospital committee, declared that October 21, 1923 would go down in the history of the Twin City as a red letter day. It was a day that marked the beginning of an institution that would take a large part in the life of the community. It would not be a pile of brick and mortar erected for the purpose of bringing in commercial dividends to the investors but one which would bring the angelic ministrations of self-sacrificing sisters to the suffering.*

Daily Record (Kitchener),  
October 22, 1923

What does it take to build a hospital? How does a hospital grow and evolve within a rapidly changing world? More importantly, how does a hospital maintain, redefine and expand its health care mission in the face of deepening provincial funding cutbacks, sweeping hospital restructuring and threats of closure? This book is designed to tell the dramatic story of St. Mary's General Hospital in Kitchener, Ontario, with these central questions in mind. Its purpose is not only to celebrate the many memorable people and important

events of St. Mary's history, but also to enlighten readers about the challenging financial, technological and political realities involved in building and operating a Catholic general hospital during the twentieth century. October 21, 1999 marks the seventy-fifth anniversary of the opening of St. Mary's Hospital, but it was only on May 14, 1998, that it became clear that St. Mary's doors would remain open to all who needed its special brand of personalized health care.

The St. Mary's story is above all about the many people who have dedicated themselves to fulfilling the special caring mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, who founded and still own the hospital. The St. Mary's story also reflects several important themes in the history of hospitals in Canada, the history of nursing and the history of health care generally. In particular, the St. Mary's story illustrates how the growing influence of the provincial government in funding and regulating health care has shaped the evolution of a privately-owned Catholic public hospital. At the same time, St. Mary's has maintained its Catholic identity within an increasingly secular society and remained open to people of all faiths. Moreover, St. Mary's has secured the intensely loyal patronage of the Twin Cities community and beyond, especially from non-Catholics, and earned the solid financial and political support of local governments.

St. Mary's history can be character-



Christopher J. Rutty,  
Ph.D.  
Photo: D.W. Dorken

ized as a circle of care, defined physically and psychologically by the Queen's Boulevard Circle that surrounds it. While physically confined to a certain degree, remaining within the limits of this circle has reinforced the unique caring environment of the hospital and the personal relationships of the St. Mary's family, particularly after the completion of a major expansion in 1962 and the subsequent decline of the presence of the Sisters. Similarly, St. Mary's history has been shaped by the cycles of events and issues which the hospital has revisited at different times. This cyclical pattern began with the three separate attempts to build St. Mary's between 1916 and 1924, various expansion efforts since the 1940s, and especially the numerous attempts to rationalize services, such as obstetrics and paediatrics,

between St. Mary's and the Kitchener-Waterloo Hospital during the 1970s and 1980s.

Despite all the changes in the particular services the hospital has offered, the St. Mary's spirit continues to be defined by its family of caring individuals who meet the unique health care needs of each person arriving at the hospital's front door. Indeed, among the St. Mary's family and the patients they have cared for over the past seventy-five years, this special hospital has always been more like a warm, friendly and welcoming home.

*Christopher J. Rutty, Ph.D*



## CHAPTER I

# Birth of a Hospital

*You get the hospital and  
I'll fill it for you.*

Dr. Harry Lackner to Father  
Albert Zinger, February 1923.

By the time St. Mary's Hospital officially opened its doors on October 21, 1924, it had already overcome numerous obstacles to transform an open field at the end of a dirt road into a modern health care institution. Although St. Mary's was established by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, who still own and operate it today, they were not the first group of Sisters invited to open a hospital in Kitchener. The Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, based in Kingston, Ontario, were asked to launch a new hospital mission in the summer of 1916. This was a time of great tension for the city, then still known as Berlin. The First World War had cast a cloud over the Germanic heritage and traditions of its citizens, who voted to change the name of the city to Kitchener as of September 1, 1916, in an attempt to prove their loyalty to Canada. Into this charged political atmosphere the Kingston Sisters, rather innocently, thrust themselves.

### Birth of a Hospital, Phase One

The origins of St. Mary's Hospital are directly linked to Kitchener's St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, and especially to two of its pastors, the Very Reverend Albert L. Zinger

(1874–1948), and his predecessor, the Reverend Anthony J. Fischer (1874–1939). Both men were born in small towns in Bruce County, educated at St. Jerome's College in Berlin, ordained in 1901, and were also members of the Congregation of the Resurrection.

St. Mary's Church had been founded in 1856 to provide a spiritual focus for the scattered Roman Catholic families in the area who were mostly German immigrants. The numbers of Catholics in the Berlin area grew steadily, especially after 1870, bolstered by families arriving from Poland, Ireland, France, Italy and Syria. In 1871 Roman Catholics accounted for only 13 per cent of Berlin's population, but by 1911 they made up 23 per cent. By 1916 the St. Mary's congregation consisted of about six hundred families, not counting the substantial Polish congregation that used the church basement to conduct its own services.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Hospital had served the Twin Cities area since it opened in 1895. With the growth of the general population, it was clear that an enlargement of the building was needed. To Father Fischer, it seemed that a Catholic hospital, built on the successful models demonstrated by the Sisters' hospitals elsewhere in Ontario, could offset some of the pressure on the older hospital, and also serve the growing Catholic community. Father Fischer's idea of building a new hospital for Berlin had evolved out of

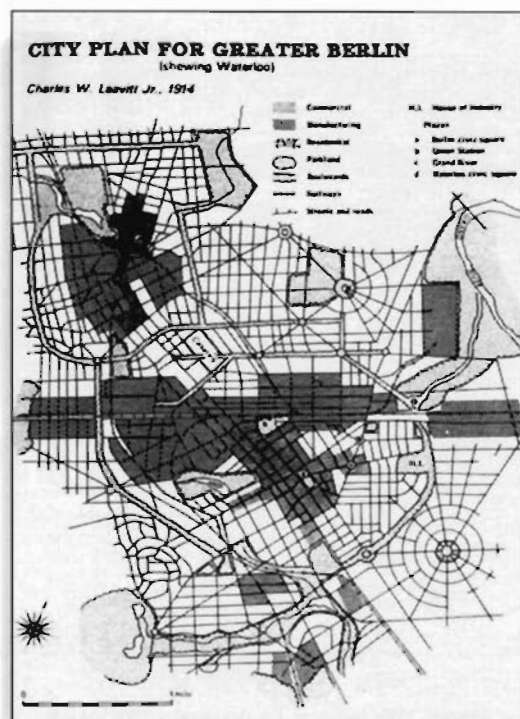
The architectural firm of Watt and Blackwell prepared this sketch of "The Hospital at Kitchener," later named St. Mary's hospital, for the Sisters of St. Joseph. The fountains were never built.  
Source: SSJ



## Initial Attempts

Father Fischer's Invitation to the Sisters of Providence to build a local Catholic hospital came at a difficult time. It was August 1916, and Berlin would become Kitchener, Ontario the next month. The Sisters purchased the hospital site, but it would not be until after the First World War at the local communities could support a new hospital.

Source: KPL



a chance meeting in August 1916 with the Mother General of the Kingston-based Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, Mother Mary Francis Regis Young. Father Fischer suggested that she might "come to Berlin to see the great prospects he considered [there] were for the establishing of a Hospital." After visiting the city, Mother Regis must have been impressed with what she saw, since by early September the majority of the members of her Order favoured undertaking the new mission, pending the approval of the Bishop of Kingston.<sup>1</sup>

The Sisters of Providence had been in Kingston since 1861, after several Sisters were invited by the Bishop of Kingston to extend their Montreal mission to the large and sparsely populated Kingston diocese. The original Montreal mission had been established in 1841–43, derived directly from the Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Paris, France. This non-cloistered order was founded by St. Vincent de Paul in 1642 and was primarily dedicated to the training of school teachers and to working among the sick poor. Building a new mission in Kingston proved to be a great physical, financial and spiritual challenge for the original Sisters. The Roman Catholic population was sparse in the diocese and the Sisters had to travel

far afield to find support for their work.

By 1916 the Sisters of Providence of Kingston had gained considerable experience establishing and managing hospitals. They ran hospitals in Brockville and Smiths Falls, Ontario, Daysland, Alberta, and were even then engaged in building another one in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. As was the case in Berlin, the Sisters had been invited by local priests to build and administer these hospitals, with their efforts supported by local community fundraising campaigns.

Mother Regis' enthusiasm for the Kitchener hospital project was based in large part on the attractive five-acre site that was found. In September, Mother Regis wrote to Father Fischer, stating that "the Community will take over the property proposed for a Hospital there at the price offered (I think it is \$6,000)."<sup>2</sup> This property was known as Queen's Park Crescent, at the southern boundary of the city. Father Fischer and the Sisters announced to the press on October 2, 1916, that the property "will give ample room for a substantial building and spacious grounds." It was in a "beautiful location, high and dry, giving a view of the city and countryside and so situated that the hospital can never be walled in by other buildings, nor deprived of fresh air." Moreover, the presence of the new hospital, to be named "St. Mary's Hospital" after the St. Mary's parish, "will have a quickening effect upon the real estate in the vicinity and will add greatly to the section of the city in which it will be erected." The plan was to build a general hospital similar to the Sisters' St. Francis General Hospital in Smiths Falls, which would accommodate between fifty and sixty patients "from any and every denomination." There was also to be a training school for nurses attached to the new institution.<sup>3</sup>

Mother Regis and Father Fischer quickly began soliciting subscriptions from the Catholic community in Kitchener. However, in early October 1916, Mother Regis became uncertain about the fundraising prospects, "owing to the fact that 80% of the people are of German descent, and the wealthiest Catholics [in the city]...were not in a disposition to do anything that would be a public benefit." The Bishop of Kingston, the Reverend M.J. Spratt, suggested that Father





**ST. MARY'S CHURCH,**  
BERLIN, ONT., APRIL 19TH 1903.

*Green & Co.*  
BERLIN, ONT.

With the completion of construction in 1903, the "new" St. Mary's Church symbolized the vitality of Berlin as a centre for civic, religious and educational institutions.

Source: SJU

Fischer "ask a number of his parishioners to sign a document testifying [to] their desire to have a Sister's Hospital." Father Fischer assured the Sisters that he foresaw "no difficulty in securing a greater number of names than was required, among them being some of the most foremost business people in the city."<sup>4</sup> On November 17, 1916, the Bishop of Kingston finally gave his blessing to the project, after which the necessary papers were signed by the Sisters to purchase the property in Kitchener for \$6,000, payable in

three installments during 1917. In the *Sister's Annals* was written, "May God direct that, at least, we may not lose."<sup>5</sup> Once the Queen's Park Crescent property was officially secured, Father Fischer recommended that the Toronto architect A.W. Holmes begin drawing up plans for the hospital. Father Fischer was familiar with Holmes' work as he had designed the new St. Mary's Church. Although it is clear that she already had definite ideas about the hospital's design, Mother Regis paid Holmes \$700 to prepare the plans. But when Holmes first met with Mother Regis in Kingston for instructions, she presented plans that she had

already prepared, containing "many things about which he did not like."

Holmes offered to prepare an alternative plan, as well as the one based on Mother Regis' ideas. He later explained to Father Zinger that he has spent considerable time developing "an idea of an up-to-date hospital but it received no consideration by Mother Regis."<sup>6</sup>

By March 1917, Holmes, Father Fischer and Mother Regis had agreed on the general plans for St. Mary's Hospital that were essentially the layout prepared by Mother Regis. According to the initial plans released to the



**The Very Reverend  
Albert L. Zinger  
(1874-1948)**

Father Albert Zinger, also known as "The Builder," was born in the small town of Teeswater in Bruce County and followed a very similar path to the pulpit of St. Mary's Church as Father Fischer. After his ordination in 1901, he joined the faculty of St. Jerome's College as a teacher, became president of the college in 1905 and remained there until his appointment to St. Mary's Church in 1919. While at St. Jerome's College, he built a new administration building, and then a gymnasium and, during the early 1920s, built St. Joseph's School and a new rectory for St. Mary's Church. Father Zinger would strengthen this reputation as "The Builder" by overseeing the building of a new hospital for the K-W community.

Source: SJU



Along with St. Mary's Church, the presence of St. Jerome's College in Berlin since 1866 reasserted Berlin's primacy as the County Town and the prominence of the Roman Catholic community within Berlin. This new addition was opened in 1908.

Source: SJU

press, Kitchener's St. Mary's Hospital was to "be one of the most up-to-date and best equipped in the Province." The main three-storey building was to be absolutely fireproof with a brick exterior that was to be plain and simple in design. Reflecting the Sisters of Providence's long interest in the care of the mentally ill, the plans included a detention room for alcoholic and disturbed patients on the ground floor, along with a special room on the first floor for nervous patients and those with temporary dementia or alcoholic depression. There were also plans for a separate ambulance entrance at the rear of the main floor, an on-site diagnostic laboratory and pharmacy on the ground floor, diet-kitchens on every floor and a system whereby all patients would be given their own personal food tray and set of dishes that they would use while in the hospital to promote sanitation. Also of note was the modest maternity department, which would accommodate six to eight public ward patients and six private patients at any one time. There were also plans for a separate three-storey home for nursing staff and the Sisters, which would include a lecture room for the training of nurses.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the good intentions of the Sisters of Providence, these early hospital plans did not get off the drawing board. The Bishop of Hamilton, the Reverend Thomas J. Dowling, who had initially given his consent for the Sisters to proceed, now decided that "the necessary formalities or laws had not been complied with." Bishop Dowling was particularly concerned about who would own the hospital, how it was to be maintained, and

what the hospital's financial obligations to the Kingston Motherhouse would be. He also wanted to see the Rules and Constitutions of the Sisters of Providence. Once he had this information, he would consult with his Diocesan Council, consent from which was necessary before the project could proceed. The bishop's position seemed strange to the Sisters. After all, they had not volunteered their services, but had been invited by Father Fischer to come and establish a Hospital. It may be significant that Father Fischer was not a diocesan priest, but a member of the Congregation of the Resurrection, whose relationship with the bishop was not without its own problems.

Meanwhile, Bishop Dowling was now insistent that "There should be a written agreement that the Building would always remain a Catholic Hospital, that the greater part of the profits should be expended on the hospital, not be sent to the Mother House."<sup>8</sup> As the Sisters perceived it, a serious misunderstanding had developed between Kingston, Kitchener and Hamilton. Father Fischer hoped Mother Regis would meet with Bishop Dowling in Hamilton to sort out these differences, but she declined. By November 1917, the St. Mary's Hospital project was at a standstill.

Father Fischer was perhaps overly enthusiastic about building a new hospital for Kitchener. More importantly, he was somewhat naive about the political implications involved in inviting a congregation of Sisters from an outside diocese such as Kingston, without first consulting the bishop.

While the local tensions in Kitchener and the wartime economy each played a role in undermining the hospital project, more significant was the financial position of the Sisters of Providence. The previous decade of expansion had left their financial resources stretched almost to the breaking point. Then the Order found itself embroiled in a highly publicized court case which left them "financially and morally crushed in the aftermath of the trial," and thus in no position to proceed with the Kitchener mission even if the other obstacles had been overcome.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these difficult circumstances, the Queen's Crescent property remained in the hands of the Sisters of Providence. Nothing



further took place towards the establishment of a new hospital until June 25, 1919, when Mother Regis' successor, Mother Mary Clement O'Shea, wrote to Bishop Dowling seeking his advice about selling the property. The Sisters had invested \$7,500 on the Kitchener mission and "owing to our increased outlay during the past two years, because of prevailing conditions we are much in need of our money." Mother Clement asked the bishop if he knew of a possible buyer. "That there is a great need of a Catholic Hospital, there is no doubt. Is there any probability of another Community taking up the work?"<sup>10</sup> Mother Clement would not have to wait long to receive an answer, but it would be several years before the Sisters of Providence received any money for their Queen's Park Crescent land.

#### Birth of a Hospital, Phase Two

Soon another congregation of Sisters expressed an interest in the mission to build a Catholic hospital in Kitchener. In August

1919, shortly after becoming pastor of St. Mary's Church, Father Zinger resumed Father Fischer's hospital campaign. In looking for a more local religious community that might be interested in the project, he turned closer to home, to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, to continue what the Kingston Sisters had started.

Father Zinger brought considerable experience and personal charisma to his efforts to build a new hospital for Kitchener. Indeed, among the people of Kitchener, Father Zinger was remembered as a "a man of commanding presence, a favorite with old and young, regardless of creed or political affiliations." Among his friends were "many Protestants as well as Roman Catholics, and he enjoy[ed] the respect of all in the community."<sup>11</sup> He assured the Sisters of St. Joseph that \$200,000 could be raised within the local community to facilitate the hospital project.

From the outset, Father Zinger sought the active support and involvement of the local business community to back his campaign. In

late August 1919 he told Mother Mary Martina Long, Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton, that a drive was planned for early September among the Catholic community and businessmen of Waterloo County in support of the new hospital. He asked Mother Martina to find out from Mother Clement in Kingston the lowest price that the Sisters of Providence would accept for their Queen's Crescent property. In order to secure a six-month option to buy, Father Zinger himself paid the \$57.92 outstanding

#### The Sisters of St. Joseph

The Sisters of St. Joseph mission was founded in France in 1650 by Jean-Pierre Médaille, a Jesuit preacher who recognized a dedication to service in a number of religious women who sought his guidance. He outlined a spiritual way of life that would allow them to serve all types of individuals through any activity that promoted unity among all people and with God. The Sisters initially worked in secret as the Church was suspicious of non-cloistered religious women. The Bishop of Le Puy soon sanctioned their mission and gave them charge of a house of refuge for orphans and destitute women. The Sisters rapidly spread across France until the start of the French Revolution in 1789. Many religious orders were disbanded during the Revolution, but the Sisters of St. Joseph mission was reestablished in 1807 by Sister St. John Fontbonne. She recruited a new generation of women, including her niece, Sister Delphine Fontbonne. In 1836, Sister Delphine established the first Sisters of St. Joseph congregation in North America near St. Louis, and then founded the first Canadian congregation in Toronto in 1851.

## NEW HOSPITAL TO BE ERECTED IN KITCHENER BY SISTERS OF CHARITY

Five Acres of Land Purchased on Queen's Crescent, Queen Street, South, for Proposed New Institution —Will Accommodate 50 to 60 Patients.

### TO BE KNOWN AS ST. MARY'S HOSPITAL

This city is to have a new hospital which will be known as the St. Mary's Hospital, according to information given out this morning to the Telegraph by Rev. A. J. Fischer, pastor of St. Mary's R.C. Church. The institution will be erected by the Sisters of Charity, whose Mother Home is at Kingston. The Mother Superior of the Order and the Sister Superintendent of the Brockville Hospital have been in the city for the past week and have completed negotiations previous to the drawing of the plans of the building.

Queen's Crescent at the head of Queen street, south, has been purchased by the Sisters and it is upon this site that the hospital will be erected. Five acres of ground have been secured, which will give ample room for a substantial building and spacious grounds. The institution will have a

nurses' training school in connection with the institution and prospective nurses will be taken in from the opening of the institution and trained for the profession.

This building will have a quickening effect upon the real estate in the vicinity and will add greatly to the section of the city in which it will be erected. It will be a worthy addition to the institutions of the city and the extra hospital accommodation it will afford will be welcomed.

The Order of Nuns, the Sisters of Charity, who will erect the institution have been eminently successful in hospital work in this country. They have an excellent hospital at Smith Falls and another one at Brockville. The Sisters are at present engaged in the erection of a large hospital at Moose Jaw, Sask. Just when excavation for the erection of the hospital in this city will begin has not been definitely



ST. MARY'S RECTORY

25 DUNDAS STREET

Private

KITCHENER, ONT.

About the hospital — I have not called a meeting as yet — there is a time and a place for everything if you want to accomplish results. To those that I have mentioned the matter, all seemed very much pleased that the matter of a hospital here had been given new life.

Dr. Harry Lachar says: "You get the hospital and I'll fill it for you".

We are now entering upon fast, a time of serious thinking. Hospital business is not a matter of levity.

If the Government would not charge business Tax & income Tax on money given by business firms for charity, then we would have much less difficulty in getting some large contributions.

A. L. Z.

This letter of Father Zinger's reveals that timing, faith and taxes were important to his efforts to revive interest in a Catholic hospital in Kitchener. Father Zinger was writing in February 1923. The construction of St. Mary's Hospital began in the summer of that year.  
Source: SMGH

property tax the Kingston Sisters owed the City of Kitchener. Although he wanted to be fair to Mother Clement, if she demanded too much for the property, he would have to find another site.<sup>12</sup>

In early September, Father Zinger chaired a meeting of about thirty men representing the Catholic community of Kitchener and Waterloo to discuss the hospital project. This group was "very enthusiastic that the matter be proceeded with, especially that they now know that the Sisters of St. Joseph, and not 'somebody' else will own the building when erected."<sup>13</sup>

At the meeting, an advisory board of thirty was established to oversee the hospital

6 St. Mary's General Hospital

project, and a smaller committee of seven was chosen to gather information about fundraising prospects. Father Zinger felt that in order to maintain local enthusiasm, and to ensure that an "ideal" hospital would be built, he should work closely with Mother Martina and the Hamilton Sisters. Mother Martina was born in 1860 in Hamilton and had joined the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1888. She was a trained nurse and was involved in the founding of the School of Nursing at St. Joseph's Hospital in Guelph in 1899. She had served also as Superintendent of the Sisters' hospitals in Guelph and Hamilton. As Mother Superior of the Hamilton Sisters between 1917 and 1920 she was an enthusiastic supporter of the proposed Kitchener hospital project. The name of the new hospital was to be left up to Mother Martina to decide. The advisory board was anxious that a name be finalized quickly, "because we do not desire to give too much publicity to the 'Catholic' hospital, but prefer to speak of it as St. Mary's, or St. Joseph's, or St. Tanlac...or some other saint's hospital."<sup>14</sup> The most common name for the hospitals and convents founded by the Hamilton Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph was "St. Joseph's."

The Hamilton congregation was part of a network of independent motherhouses in Ontario that worked under a common constitution and common customs. Their mission was based on the model of St. Joseph, who held an honoured position in the Catholic Church as the patron saint of teaching, nursing, care of orphans and the elderly and all efforts to help the less fortunate. The Sisters owned and operated their own network of institutions in the Hamilton diocese, such as hospitals, orphanages and homes for the elderly. They also served as teachers, nurses and administrators in these and other institutions throughout the diocese.

The Hamilton congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph began in April 1852 after three Sisters from the Toronto Motherhouse—Mother Superior Mariha von Bunning and Sisters Mary Joseph McDonnell and Mary Aloysius Walker—responded to an urgent appeal from Vicar General Edward Gordon to assist with caring for the orphans of Hamilton. The Hamilton Sisters began their work as teachers in Hamilton schools in

1853, and in 1858 began their service outside Hamilton through the opening of convents elsewhere in the diocese.

By 1919, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton were well experienced with hospital building, although they had not undertaken such a mission since 1890 when they established St. Joseph's Hospital in Hamilton. The Hamilton Sisters had been involved in caring for the sick since shortly after arriving in the city. In 1854–55 major typhus epidemics in the area sharply tested the courage, nursing skill and faith of the Sisters, who cared for the stricken in railway sheds that served as temporary hospitals. In 1861, the Sisters were invited by a local Jesuit priest to establish a more permanent health care facility in Guelph, which was the first Catholic hospital in the diocese.

Despite the growing enthusiasm locally and the apparent interest of the Hamilton Sisters, by 1920 it was clear that the timing was not yet right for the Kitchener hospital project. Outside forces unrelated to the Sisters or the Kitchener community resulted in the sudden curtailment of the project. It is unclear what these forces were, although in February 1923, when the project was revived for the final time, Father Zinger noted in a letter to Mother M. Thecla Padden, the new Superior of the Hamilton Sisters, that

*In fact, the hospital would be built now and the Sisters of St. Joseph would be located here if our plans of 1919–20 had not been blocked by someone not resident in Kitchener.*

*However, that, perhaps, was providential because as a result of it we got a new rectory [for St. Mary's Church] which would not have been built if the hospital had succeeded.<sup>15</sup>*

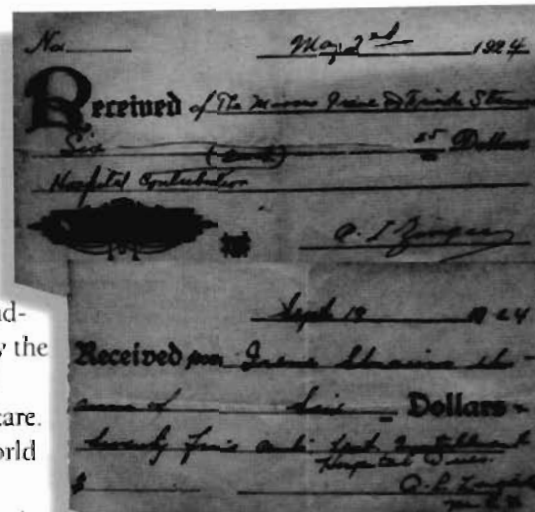
While Father Zinger's building projects and community work outside his church were widely celebrated in Kitchener, there were others within the Congregation of the Resurrection who were not always as happy about it.<sup>16</sup> Because of this opposition, the St. Mary's Hospital project would have to wait until a more favourable time, not only for Father Zinger and the Congregation of the Resurrection, but also for the Hamilton Sisters, and for the broader Kitchener-Waterloo community.

### Birth of a Hospital, Phase Three

The years surrounding the opening of St. Mary's Hospital coincided with the final development of the Canadian hospital. By the 1920s the traditional charitable institution of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries that provided free care primarily for the poor and needy had been transformed into a modern scientific, bureaucratic, and professional health care institution designed to serve an entire community. This transition period involved new tensions and challenges for Father Zinger and the Hamilton Sisters of St. Joseph. The greatest tension was financing and building a brand-new modern building that would meet the increasing standards of the 1920s. The hospitals earlier established by both the Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of St. Joseph, among others, were almost always founded within existing buildings or institutions. It was not until the turn of the century, with the emergence of scientific medicine, new theories of disease and the Nightingale system of nursing, that hospitals gradually became perceived by the public as institutions that offered superior medical care. At the end of the First World War, the beginnings of a health care system in Ontario

had emerged, monitored by a provincial inspector and dependent upon an evolving system of municipal and provincial funding. By September 1924 there were 122 public hospitals in Ontario (including ten tuberculosis sanatoria) and fifty-one private hospitals. A year later, twelve new public hospitals had been built, including St. Mary's Hospital, along with six new private hospitals.<sup>17</sup>

During the first two decades of the twentieth century the pace of medical science accelerated, especially in the areas of preventative medicine and public health, diagnosis and medical technology, surgery, drug treatments, nutrition and mental health. Medical specialization also increased, as did bureaucratization and the costs of medicine. There were also growing calls for various forms of



From its first years, St. Mary's Hospital depended upon a wide range of community support. Father Zinger signed hundreds of these receipts for those who pledged to pay as much as they could, often through installments.

Source: SMGH





W.J. Motz, publisher of the *Kitchener Daily Record*, began a long association with St. Mary's Hospital when he pledged substantial financial support for the building of a hospital.  
Source: UW/KWR

socialized medicine and government regulation. For hospitals, it was a serious challenge to keep pace with such change and adapt to it successfully, especially for hospitals funded by modest religious and charitable organizations.

The threat of infectious diseases had the most impact on hospitals and their work. Indeed, many hospitals founded during the latter half of the nineteenth century, including the Sisters of St. Joseph hospitals in Toronto and Hamilton, were established during or in the wake of major epidemics, including cholera, typhoid, diphtheria and smallpox. Such diseases dominated the patient registers of these hospitals until the 1910s and 1920s, when significant improvements in public health infrastructures and the introduction of new antitoxins and vaccines had lessened much of their threat. However, there were older disease dangers, such as influenza, along with newer ones, such as epidemic poliomyelitis [polio], that would have a major impact on hospitals in Canada and their evolution during the first part of the twentieth century.

The influenza pandemic of 1918–19, which killed more people worldwide than had died in the war, was a major threat for all of Canada. In particular, it presented a dramatic challenge for the Kitchener-Waterloo Hospital. The epidemic, which peaked in October 1918, demonstrated the practical value of this hospital during a difficult period in its history and established it as an essential community resource. It also highlighted the limits of the hospital's physical capacity to meet the health care needs of a growing population in the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Since its opening in 1895, the people of the Kitchener-Waterloo area had relied on the seventy beds of the K-W Hospital for their health care needs. It had been founded as a community hospital, built through local subscriptions at a time when similar institutions had been established in Galt and Guelph. There were other hospitals in the area, such as the Freeport Sanatorium, as well as those in Hamilton and London, but the K-W Hospital was the primary institution for most citizens of Kitchener and Waterloo during this period. Between 1914 and 1920, K-W Hospital had experienced a period of

growth following an expansion in 1913. In particular, the numbers of babies born in the hospital's new maternity ward had tripled. This reflected not only a rise in the local birth rate, but also the increasing public confidence in hospitals as desirable places for mothers to give birth. Another reflection of the growing public confidence was that paying patient revenues increased by 150 per cent during the 1914–20 period. The number of indigent patients being treated was also increasing, placing financial pressures on the hospital and on local governments to pay for their care.

Thus, despite the growth of the K-W Hospital, by 1919 its financial situation was unstable. The hospital had a significant deficit, due to rising costs and post-war inflation which resulted in significant changes in its management. In 1922, the hospital's long-serving Lady Superintendent, Maude Horner, was replaced by a professional man with a business background, Dr. John J. Waters. The following year the hospital almost closed because of its financial problems. The Kitchener and Waterloo local governments were forced to take control of the hospital and establish the K-W Hospital Commission. As of May 1924, the K-W Hospital became municipally owned.

The final resurgence of the St. Mary's Hospital project began in February 1923. In view of the problems involving the K-W Hospital, the physicians of Kitchener-Waterloo were interested in seeing a new hospital and they assumed an active role in supporting the efforts of Father Zinger to bring in the Sisters of St. Joseph from Hamilton to complete the job. Indeed, Dr. Harry M. Lackner, who was perhaps Kitchener's busiest and most prominent physician, told Father Zinger in early February 1923: "You get the hospital and I'll fill it for you."<sup>18</sup> Harry Lackner's father, Dr. Henry G. Lackner, had practised medicine in Kitchener from 1876 until his death in 1925. He had played a key role in the founding of the K-W Hospital and would be the first of four generations of Kitchener doctors who will practise at St. Mary's Hospital. Joining Dr. Harry Lackner in support of additional hospital facilities was a growing number of young doctors who had



set up new practices in Kitchener and Waterloo after the end of the First World War.

A key factor behind the more active support of the local doctors for a new hospital was the continuing financial uncertainties at the K-W Hospital, as well as the ongoing political battle for its control. When Father Zinger heard of the Council's proposal to take over control of the hospital,

new hospital, with A.R. Lang appointed as its first chairman.<sup>19</sup>

At this meeting in February 1923, it was clear that Father Zinger had a much broader base of support for the hospital than in 1919, and interest went beyond the Catholic community. As he told Mother Thecla, "All the Catholic people here and very many non-Catholics are very anxious to have a Sisters' Hospital here." He also stressed the



he immediately called a meeting of twenty representatives from the Kitchener and Waterloo parishes, all of whom were enthusiastic about the proposition for a new Catholic hospital. They pledged themselves to contribute \$30,000 to the project. Among this group were such community leaders as August A.R. Lang, a prominent manufacturer and one of Kitchener's wealthiest citizens, John Schwartz, Alois Bauer, Henry Braniff and W.J. Motz, the owner and publisher of the *Daily Record*. These men would form the Building Committee for the

encouragement of nearly all the physicians, almost all of whom were non-Catholic. At the same time, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton were willing to purchase the original Queen's Crescent property, assuming that the Building Committee decided to build there. The Sisters would also take responsibility for payment of the debt, pending permission from Rome. Father Zinger also had the support of the mayor of Kitchener, Louis O. Breithaupt, who asked Father Zinger to ensure that news of the meeting would be made public the next day.<sup>20</sup>

The shadow of famed Kitchener photographer Ernest Denton and his box camera dominate this shot of the hospital excavation, dated from September 1923. The hospital was built on the western outskirts of Kitchener; beyond lay the woodlots and rolling farmland of Waterloo Township.

Source: SMGH

Over the next few days a Finance Committee began planning a fundraising drive for the new hospital, now officially "St. Mary's Hospital." With the hospital mission once again revived, Father Zinger asked Mother Thecla to contact Mother Clement of the Kingston Sisters to ask what price they would accept for their property.<sup>21</sup> By March, support for the hospital was growing steadily, even before public canvassing had begun. When Father Zinger met with representatives of the Waterloo parish, "those present subscribed \$21,200 which is considered very good." At the same time, all adults present at the Masses at St. Mary's Church were given subscription cards that were to be signed and returned on the following Sunday. As Father Zinger emphasized to Mother Thecla, "There appears to be no doubt that the hospital proposition will be a

Hamilton in 1863, she had joined the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1887 and had spent the greater part of her religious life teaching boys in the higher grades. As a teacher and Superior of the Congregation, she was considered "zealous, patient, kind and an excellent disciplinarian," qualities that were a great asset in the challenging task of building a modern new hospital.

Dr. Harry Lackner was very enthusiastic about the project. Although himself a Presbyterian, he assured Father Zinger that "the entire medical fraternity here are anxiously looking forward to the completion of the Sisters' hospital," and "that a great many of the leading Protestants will support our hospital." Keen to ensure that the new hospital would be as up-to-date as possible, in April 1923 Lackner even took a trip to the famous Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, to gather useful information about how St. Mary's should be put together.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, a quiet fundraising effort had raised about \$80,000 from the Kitchener and Waterloo Catholic parishes. Nothing had yet been solicited from "the merchants and manufacturers, i.e. non-Catholics—nor have we asked individual Protestants, quite a number of whom have expressed themselves as being willing to help us." A potential complication emerged in early April, when the K-W Hospital announced plans for a summer fundraising campaign to raise \$150,000 for its own expansion program. Fortunately, when the plans for St. Mary's were announced in June, K-W Hospital dropped its campaign. Father Zinger was confident that the general public was behind the St. Mary's Hospital project, although it was clear that it was time for the fundraising work to expand beyond the Catholic community. By now the Queen's Crescent property had been purchased from the Kingston Sisters for \$8,500, and the architectural firm of Watt and Blackwell of London had been hired to design the hospital.<sup>24</sup>

Watt and Blackwell's plans and specifications for the new three-storey, pavilion-style red-brick hospital were unveiled to the public through the *Daily Record* on June 16, 1923. As the paper stressed, "The proposed new hospital to be erected will not only be a great acquisition but a credit to the



Another Denton photo, this one taken from the box of one of the horse-drawn wagons, emphasizes the construction methods of the time. Source: SSJ

success. All the Catholics want the hospital and many non-Catholics have expressed a desire to assist us." But he reminded her that "We shall have to move fast if we want to get the hospital under roof before next winter's cold weather sets in."<sup>22</sup>

Mother Thecla, who had succeeded Mother Martina as Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Hamilton in 1920, had no previous experience with hospitals, but she was more than able to oversee the financing, design and construction of the hospital through to completion. Born in





community and with its 100 beds, besides its other facilities for looking after the sick, it will certainly be a boom to those afflicted." Highlights of the layout included two operating rooms in the front wing of the third floor, illuminated with natural light through large north-facing windows, and an entire wing of the second floor devoted to a complete maternity section. The front wing of the first floor was to accommodate general offices, waiting rooms and doctor's consultation rooms. The rear of the first floor would serve as the home for the Sisters working at the hospital, who could visit the hospital's chapel by a private stairwell. As the newspaper report noted, "This chapel, although severe in its design, will be one of the most attractive chapels in western Ontario." The basement level was to accommodate a complete kitchen, along with bedrooms for the staff and lecture rooms for nursing students.<sup>25</sup>

As the city then had only three X-ray machines, each owned by private physicians, St. Mary's X-ray unit was a valuable attraction to new physicians and patients.<sup>26</sup>

The contract for building St. Mary's

Hospital was awarded to W.M. Sutherland Co. Ltd. of Toronto, for a cost of \$258,000. Work began on the Queen's Crescent a week later, in July 1923, when Mother Thecla, along with several Sisters from the Hamilton Motherhouse, turned the first sod. News coverage of the ceremony included an artist's conception of the Sisters' new hospital, complete with lush gardens, trees, and a fountain in front. By early August, the *Daily Record* reported, "Visitors to the scene have been forced to remark the unusually rapid progress that has been made with the work." But despite the rapid progress in construction, the challenge was to complete the main structure before the snow fell.<sup>27</sup>

With construction underway, the next step was to launch the hospital's public fundraising campaign in September, to be targeted mainly to the industrial plants and businesses of the Twin Cities. Campaign headquarters were set up at 21 King Street West in Kitchener, and everyone was invited to use the mail or to visit the office, or any of a variety of stores, to make a donation. As the campaign advertisements emphasized, the "Twin City secures a \$500,000 hospital

Surveyors and excavation crews pause briefly in the hospital's foundations during the summer of 1923. Under Father Zinger's watchful gaze, construction moved quickly; by Christmas of 1923 the hospital building had been closed in.

Source: SSJ



of 100 beds at a minimum of cost." The Sisters had committed \$350,000 to building the hospital and the Catholic congregations of Kitchener and Waterloo had already donated \$100,000. This left \$50,000, which the people of the Twin Cities were asked to provide.<sup>28</sup> The promotional literature emphasized the need for a second hospital in the K-W area by pointing out that such cities as Guelph, Kingston and Peterborough, which were all smaller than the combined Kitchener and Waterloo populations, each had two hospitals with a total of 175 to 180 beds; the 30,000 people of the Twin Cities had only 70 beds available. It was also stressed that other hospitals built and operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph in Ontario were actually providing health services more often to non-Catholics than to Catholics. There would be "absolutely no interference with religious convictions of patients. Clergymen of any denomination have access to the institution at any time to visit members of their flock."<sup>29</sup>

The St. Mary's Hospital public fundraising campaign was a great success, raising over \$20,000, or almost half of its goal, by February 1924. The Sisters insisted on writing thank-you letters to most donors, although Father Zinger told them that "It is not necessary to write letters to all on the

enclosed list in one day. Take your time at it. You are doing a tremendous amount of writing."<sup>30</sup> Among the major supporters of the hospital were the Economical Mutual Fire Insurance Co., which gave \$5,000 to the building campaign, and the Mutual Life Assurance Co., which gave \$2,500. The next largest donations were for \$500 from the Waterloo Mutual Fire Insurance Co., the Dominion Life Assurance Co. and Schreiters Ltd., furniture manufacturers. A variety of local businesses and many members of the medical community also gave donations between \$100 and \$300.<sup>31</sup>

The climax of the fundraising campaign came with the laying of the cornerstone of the new hospital on October 21, 1923. This occasion was reported at length in the *Daily Record* and proved to be a large community celebration of several thousand that combined "all of the impressiveness of the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church and...all of the dignity of civic ceremony." The afternoon festivities began with a large procession from St. Mary's Church, consisting of members of the Kitchener and Waterloo Catholic congregations and led by the Kitchener Regimental Band. Joined by the young and old of the community, the parade made the trek from downtown up Queen's Boulevard, which was then a dirt

Several hundred people braved the cooler weather and the dirt of Queen Street to see dignitaries lay the cornerstone of St. Mary's Hospital. It was Sunday 21 October 1923; the hospital accepted its first patients exactly one year later.

Source: SMGH





Kitchener mayor (and future Ontario Lieutenant-Governor) Louis Orville Breithaupt speaks at the hospital's cornerstone laying. Despite later additions to St. Mary's, the original cornerstone is still visible just outside the hospital's emergency entrance.

Source: SMGH

surrounded by a half a mile of open field in front and miles of farmland behind.

Among those who made the trip by other means were three teenage girls whose lives would become closely entwined with St. Mary's, especially as volunteers. The Esbaugh sisters, Johanna and Loretta (later "Mickey" Heric and Loretta Killion) took a streetcar from Waterloo to downtown Kitchener, and then a "jitney" for a nickel up Queen's to the event, while Jessie Zlak (later Riedel) got a ride from her father. Sixty-five years later, Jessie's strongest memory of that day was "all the dirt in the field and hoping I wouldn't get my good dress dirty because I knew my mother would be annoyed if I did."<sup>32</sup>

Dignitaries on the official platform included Kitchener Mayor Breithaupt and Waterloo Mayor W.G. Weichel, members of the Kitchener-Waterloo and Waterloo county councils, members of the clergy from various Catholic parishes in the diocese, the Vicar General of the Hamilton diocese, Monsignor John Kelly, Monsignor Joseph O'Sullivan, Chancellor of the diocese, who represented Bishop Dowling, and the Superintendent of the Ontario Hospital in Orillia, J.P. Downey, who gave the main address.

Daily Record and some of the Toronto newspapers of the day, along with parish directories and a sketch of the occasion, was placed jointly by the mayors of Kitchener and Waterloo. Father Zinger declared that this day "would go down in the history of the Twin City as a red letter day...that marked the beginning of an institution that would take a large part in the life of the community." St. Mary's Hospital would not just be a pile of bricks and mortar built to generate profits, but a building "which would bring the angelic ministrations of self-sacrificing sisters to the suffering." He paid tribute to the Sisters of Providence, who had chosen the Queen's Crescent site,

*for it was one which abounded in the beauties of nature and it placed the hospital on an eminence from which the sick might look out upon the beauty of an imposing scene and be cheered in the days of convalescence. They could see the city laying at their feet with churches and industries and homes and the sight would be an inspiration to them in their convalescing days.*

Others spoke about the ecumenical mission of the hospital and the unifying effect it

would have on Catholics and Protestants of the area and on the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo in general. In particular, Mayor Breithaupt emphasized that "the event was a splendid testimony of the unity existing in the community. A new hospital had long been needed and the spectacle of Catholics and Protestants joining in such a splendid enterprise spoke well for the balance of the community."<sup>33</sup>

Hospital construction progressed ahead of schedule and Father Zinger kept a close eye on the entire building project. He visited the site almost every afternoon, and on November 14, 1923, was able to tell Mother Thecla that "This fine weather [is] very suitable for the growth of the new hospital building. Everything is going along nicely." The new building had grown beyond the first storey and would be under roof by Christmas. As a reporter described it then, "A slight idea of the size of the structure was gained at the time of the corner stone laying but a visit to the site now is a complete revelation as to the size of the edifice." From the second floor "an inspiring panorama is unfolded to the eye of the observer stretching from the confines of Waterloo to the vicinity of Doon."<sup>34</sup>

Work on the hospital progressed smoothly, to such an extent that by early October 1924, construction was nearly complete and preparation began for opening

the hospital to patients. On October 14, Father Zinger and the Building Committee joined members of the press, a group of local councillors and other public leaders for a preview inspection of St. Mary's. All were impressed, including the reporter, who was struck by "the general atmosphere of cheeriness. Light and airiness pervade corridors and rooms alike while an abundance of sunshine pours through the many well-arranged windows. The architectural keynote of the entire building is sounded in the two health-giving mediums of light and fresh air." Although not all of the equipment and furnishings had been installed in the maternity department, "tiny enameled cradles already await the little newcomers who will be ushered into the world under the most favorable conditions, while in another wing white-painted cots in cheery surroundings accommodate older children in their hours of pain."<sup>35</sup>

The following day, Father Zinger celebrated the first mass in the hospital chapel in the presence of Mother Thecla and the eleven Sisters who had been assigned to St. Mary's, including the newly appointed Superintendent, Sister M. Bonaventure Halloran. There were no public ceremonies to mark the official birth of St. Mary's Hospital on October 21, 1924. Characteristic of the Sisters, the formalities were modest. A banquet was served by the Sisters at the

The St. Mary's chapel dome, a familiar architectural feature to generations of visitors, takes shape.  
Source: Private







hospital, to which they had invited the doctors of Kitchener, Waterloo and surrounding area, along with the Mayor and City Council of Kitchener. Beyond receiving

the first patients, opening day seemed strangely quiet. The business of caring for the sick took priority on that important day, as it would for the next seventy-five years.

The new hospital, seen here under construction, was at the end of a dirt road on the outskirts of Kitchener.  
Source: SMGH

# Footnotes

## CHAPTER I

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