

HOSPITALS MUST GROW AND ADAPT

By Robert Williamson

In May 2020 this Mountain Memories column told the story of the Long and Bisby Building. It serves as an important reminder of the Chedoke Hospital's Legacy with that hospital's demise. On December 8, 2020 Mark McNeil's Spectator Flashback column alerted readers to the doubtful future of the former Maternity Hospital as part of Mount Hamilton Hospital's legacy. The question arises, at what point do we stand in the way of medical progress. COVID-19 has demonstrated how unprepared we have been to deal with ever changing threats to our medical safety. Our hospital system must constantly adapt. Mount Hamilton like all hospitals has seen many changes.

As a result of overcrowding at the Hamilton City (General) Hospital in 1913, the Board of Hospital Governors proposed that a convalescent hospital be built on seventeen acres of city property on the mountain brow west of Upper Sherman Avenue. But wounded soldiers returning from World War One compounded the problem. The project became a Veterans Hospital and Lieutenant Governor Sir John Hendrie laid the cornerstone for the first building on September 25, 1915. From that single building, visionaries imagined a grand six-winged complex facing the brow with the front entrance on Mountain Park Avenue shown in an artist concept from the Herald Scrapbook, Vol. 143. HPL Local History & Archives



The entrance design was an impractical memorial plaza with twin Arc de Triomphe style observation decks overlooking a memorial obelisk on the edge of the escarpment. The pretentious edifice was never realized because in 1917 the Hotel Brant in Burlington was converted to a veterans' hospital instead and in 1923 the city's memorial cenotaph was placed in Gore Park. The only evidence of the intended veteran's memorial survives in the foyer of the former Henderson building in the form of eight memorial plaques dedicated to soldiers killed in action, whose families donated funds to help equip the original 1917 hospital. The only building in the grandiose plan, the Nurse's Residence, was built in 1918 at the corner of Poplar and Mountain Park Avenues. It provided accommodation for twenty-four student nurses and staff. The Sherman Avenue Hospital Access road was built in 1931 but without the intended electric street car service. Until then the closest access was the Wentworth Street Incline Railway and stairs.

The magnificent, rare 1919 aerial view below, shows Concession Street looking north across the Mountain Hospital site. The 1917 Veteran's Hospital in the centre had 100 beds with one floor assigned to maternity. Today, it serves as the McMaster Clinic housing many physicians and hospital departments. The 1918 Nurses Residence in the upper left eventually became the home of the civic Hospital's Day Care Centre and a branch of the Mohawk College School of nursing along with other medical departments.

Photo courtesy Public Archives of Canada



The space in between the two original buildings became the site of the next phase of the Mount Hamilton Hospital completed in 1932. But due to a lack of money for furnishings and equipment, it sat empty until 1938 when it was decided to make it a Maternity hospital with a premature infant unit added in 1957. However, in 1997, McMaster University Medical Centre became the new home of the maternity unit and the mountain facility now serves the other end of the age spectrum as an extended care facility for the elderly.

The next phase of construction came with the Nora Frances Henderson Hospital in 1954 followed by upgrades and additions with the Juravinski Hospital in 2011. It took almost one hundred years to fulfill the original 1917 hospital site plan, all be it in a hodgepodge of construction and upgrades. But it demonstrates how hospital requirements must continue to expand and improve to meet the growing needs of the community.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson appears monthly for the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. See <Hamiltonheritage.ca> for more information.