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Congregations of Religious Women and Men in Canada,
their mission in health care, and the founding
and operation of Catholic hospitals.



Livres numérisés sur l'histoire des hôpitaux catholiques

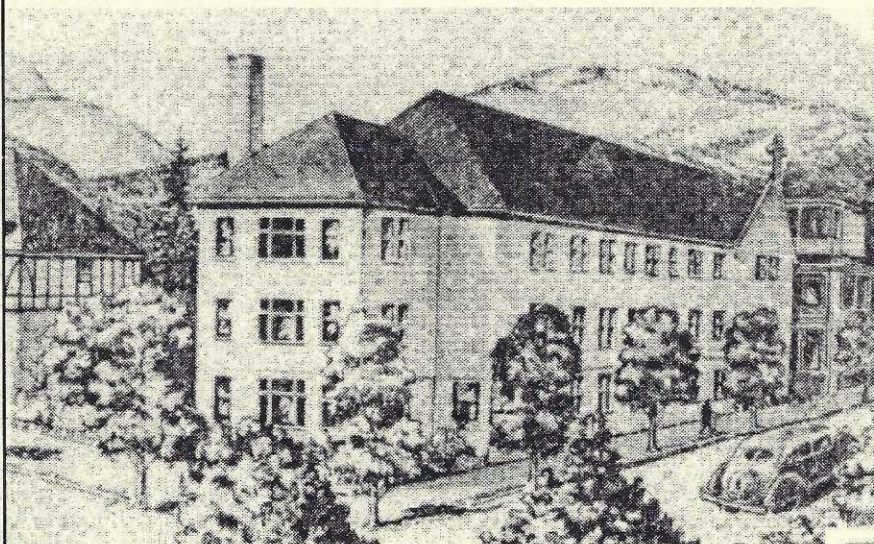
Retracer l'héritage et la contribution
des congrégations religieuses au Canada,
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation
et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques

Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Rossland, British Columbia 1896-1969 Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

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Mater Misericordiae Hospital

Rossland, British Columbia



1896 - 1969



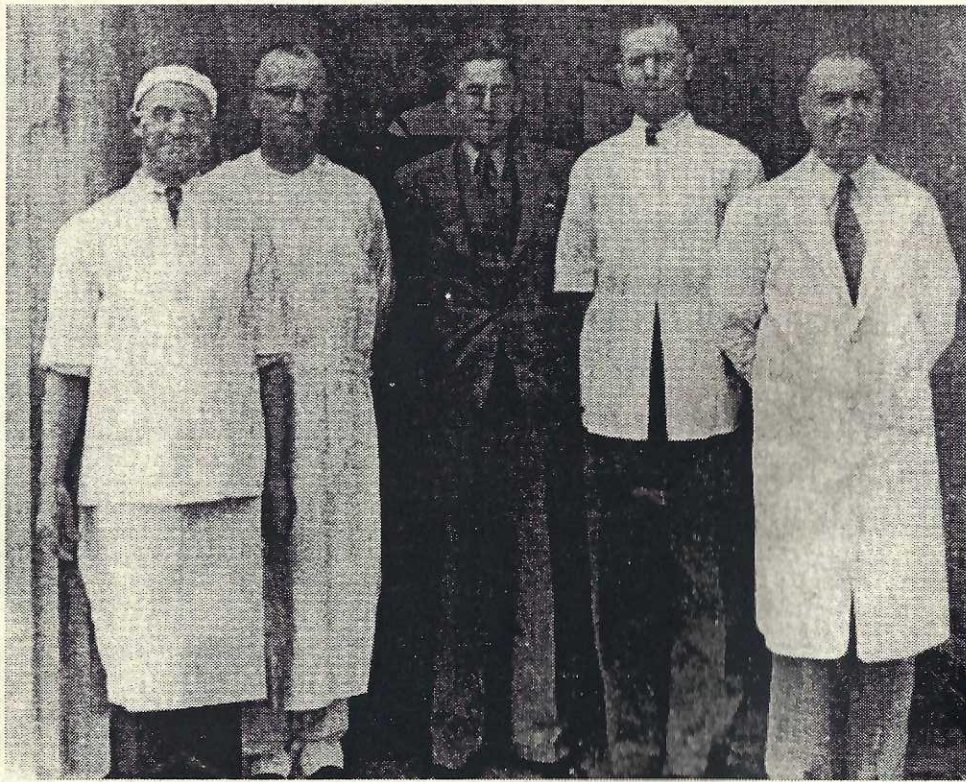
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace

In April 1896, a letter was received from Reverend A. Lemay of Rossland, British Columbia, inviting two Sisters to visit that town with a view to establishing a hospital for the miners of the district which was then developing new fields of gold, silver and copper. The invitation came through the suggestion of Mr. D. H. Morin, a citizen of Fairhaven, who had gone to Rossland as a prospector in 1895, and seeing the need of a hospital under Catholic auspices, recommended the sisters of St. Joseph for the undertaking.

In that time of "mad rush", Rossland presented a lively, if primitive, appearance. On Columbia Avenue, the main street, Assayer's Offices were doing big business. The street was crowded with speculators and prospectors - some coming in from the gold fields, others going out with little more than their blankets and pack horses. It was truly a new mining town, rough and unsettled, but by contrast, it had a charm of view from its verdant position in the range of the Rocky Mountains. It was approximately 140 miles to Spokane, Washington. In 1896 the population (mostly miners) was estimated at 4,000.

Father Lemay received the Sisters very cordially. He had secured accommodations for them from a parishioner, Mrs. Carpenter. After a satisfactory interview with the pastor, who informed them that the people were expecting them and had some substantial subscriptions awaiting their arrival, the Sisters started the next day to collect in the mines and town. They also went to the town of Trail, five miles from Rossland, where the great smelter was operated.

The visit which was to last but a few days, extended to two months. As a rule, the foreman made the collection in the mine. On one occasion however, the Sisters ventured into the entrance level with their guide, Mr. T. Costello, one of the first loyal friends of the future hospital. Following him with the dim lantern light in otherwise total darkness, they were seized with fear. Suddenly there was a terrific roar, for a number of the drilling machines had begun to operate. Sister Teresa



fled back to the entrance to the amusement of the guide who, with a laugh above the din of the machines, called after her "there is no danger", but she did not return. Sister Stanislaus kept self-control throughout the adventure.

Climbing the steep, rugged hills to the entrance of the mines was a penitential exercise, inseparable from the work of collecting, but as it was said, the miners preferred to see the Sisters and give their contributions directly to them. This was understood and gladly consented to. In the evening, the Sisters returned to kind Mrs. Carpenter, their habits coated with the dust of the red mountain.

The collections amounted to \$2,387 which was placed in the Bank of Montreal in the town. On September 22, the Sisters returned to Bellingham for a short time before starting the new work in Rossland. When leaving, they requested a few

friends to look for a suitable building to be used as a temporary hospital. Returning in October, a new double store on Columbia Avenue, just completed, was recommended at \$100 per month in advance, on a six months lease, at the expiration of which time, the monthly rent would be increased to \$250. The lease was drawn up by a solicitor in Rossland, Judge W. J. Nelson, requiring the owner to pay the costs.

The building comprised two large stores on the floor, which served for wards, medical and surgical, and two rooms in the rear for pharmacy and kitchen. Extra plumbing was installed at the expense of the tenants. On the second floor, were a number of single rooms; an entrance from the street led to this floor through an inside staircase. An attic covered the entire building. Twelve complete new beds and other furniture were sent from St. Joseph's Hospital, Bellingham. The remainder of the necessary furnishing was purchased from Spokane and from local dealers. The temporary hospital was opened on November 4, 1896, and it was soon filled to its capacity of about thirty patients. A cottage was rented in the rear for isolation cases.

On November 12, 1896, Sisters M. Teresa Kiernan, Ursula, Carmelita and Joseph Marie arrived from Jersey City to form the hospital staff. As there was no previous notice received, their arrival at midnight was proclaimed from downstairs with some commotion. Traveling from the station a few blocks away through the snow, brought to a dramatic close the experience of their long journey. Mr. D. J. Farrell, a magnate in mining interests, was at the station and seeing the Sisters stumbling through the snow, their being no public conveyance, he brought them to the hospital. They were heartily welcomed and everything was done for their comfort before retiring in the small hours of the morning. Their trip to Rossland will always be associated with an incident amusing and tragic. When the passengers' baggage was being transferred from the boat on Columbia River to the train, most of it fell into the water. The contents of the Sisters' trunks were badly damaged. Such happenings were taken as matters of course in those pioneer mining camps.

On December 17, the attic was transformed into a chapel; a temporary altar was erected, carpet and chairs were donated by Mr. James Trihey. Father Lemay celebrated the first Mass in the little Bethlehem on the first day of the Christmas Novena, and on that day, the Blessed Sacrament was reserved.

Sisters M. Catherine, Aloysius Deignan, Berchmans and Anthony arrived from the East on March 15, 1897, increasing the Community number to eight. Sister Teresa Kiernan was appointed pharmacist. With a view to her assignment to the Rossland Mission, she had been given several months of private instruction in White's Pharmacy, Jersey City. Sister Carmelita was in charge of the kitchen. Sisters Catherine, Aloysius, Berchmans and Anthony were on the nursing staff with Sisters Joseph Marie and Ursula.

Matt. Hoeflerle, a tall young man of respectable appearance, applied for the position of orderly. He made known that he had been a Brother in a religious community. There was no further reference to the matter; his religious training was evident all through his hospital service which he took up as naturally as any expert, which was a blessing to the hospital.

The Hospital was partly maintained by deductions of one dollar per month from the payroll of each miner of the War Eagle and Center Star Mines. An agreement was made with some of the doctors for their services for 1/4% of the mine deductions, necessarily a fluctuating fee. Other doctors received a fixed rate, as they preferred. The largest of these deductions amounted to \$250 to \$300 per month.

The little institution was now well established and earning for itself the loyal and lasting friendship of all who came under its care, as also of the general public. The terms of the lease and the increase of rent to \$250 per month stimulated the sisters to look about for a site for a new building. Every effort was made to secure a donation of land from the Nelson and Fort Sheppard Railway Company, but the site

New- Westminister, B. C.

August 27, 1899,

We hereby authorize the Sisters of the
Mater Misericordiae Hospital, of Rossland,
to collect alms from those who are charitably disposed
to aid them in their noble and laborious work.
We pray Almighty God to bless all those who
shall respond to their appeal.

+Augustin Doutremouill O.M.I.
Bishop of New- Westminister B. C.

selected, being in litigation with the Paris Belle Gold Mining Company, had to be purchased for \$477.50. It consisted of three lots in a quiet part of the town at the upper end of Columbia Avenue and Butte Street. The first item of expense on this location was \$35 paid to a man who, with his team of horses and cart, removed the snow for the building foundation. It took three days to complete the clearance. Ground was broken on April 16, 1897. Mr. Henry Williams of Rossland was architect and builder. The plans provided for a three story frame building to accommodate thirty-five or forty patients. The cost was estimated at \$3,971 exclusive of heating. Additions were made later, and a heating system installed for \$2,000.

On June 4, 1897, the Feast of the Sacred Heart, possession was taken of the new hospital. It was modern and convenient in all its appointments. The task of transferring the patients from the first building to the new one, three blocks distant, was quite an event. There was no ambulance or other

modern conveniences available. Invalid chairs were on hand for convalescents. A patient with an injury to the spine, was removed on a mattress and placed on the floor of an open cart.

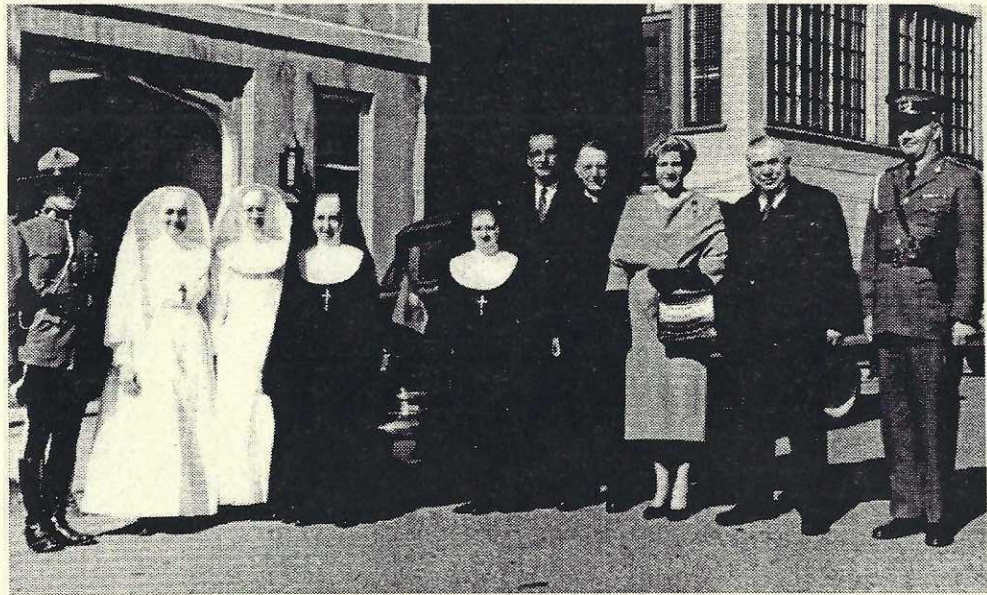
On the following morning, Monsignor Eumelen blessed the hospital under the title of "Mater Misericordiae", celebrated Mass in the chapel on the third floor, and reserved the Blessed Sacrament. Beautiful statues of the Immaculate Conception and of St. Joseph were donated to the new chapel by Mr. T. Costello and his friend.

It was about this time that the sudden and lamented death of Father A. Lemay occurred from paralysis of the throat. Monsignor Eumelen continued as temporary Pastor.

The hospital staff was composed of a Community of eight Sisters, two secular nurses, an orderly and a Chinese cook. A financial statement was published in the *Rossland Miner* from November 4, 1896 to November 3, 1897 as follows:

Itemized receipts	
including original subscriptions	\$12,719.35
Itemized expenditures	<u>12,709.97</u>
Balance	10.38
Unpaid accounts, new building	\$2,744.32
Sundry accounts	<u>1,501.65</u>
	4,245.97
Number of patients received:	
Males 193 Females 13	Total 206
Deaths 14	

The annual statement was always an item of interest to the general public. The balance on hand, November 3, 1897, of \$10.38 elicited an amusing press comment in the *Rossland Miner*.



A few years after the hospital was established, a general strike was proclaimed by the miners in the Rossland district. It lasted for nearly a year, and the town never fully recovered from its effects. The miners abandoned the camp until only a few hundred were left and general depression resulted. With this decline in mining activities and the local changes which followed, the hospital was scarcely able to carry on its work of mercy. But it could not be decided to close it while there was a patient to be admitted, so with faith and hope, the Sisters waited for an improvement in God's own time. Meanwhile, Rossland gradually became a residential settlement rather than a mining district. It was said that the Rossland mines were practically worked out. However, some of them with others in neighboring districts resumed operations, and families settled in up to date homes. Retail stores in the business sections gradually appeared and gave new life to M. M. Hospital and to Rossland in general.

For the benefit of the hospital, a three day bazaar was held in Miners' Union Hall. It was opened by Mr. A. S. Goodeve, Mayor of Rossland, The ladies of the parish took the entire responsibility and realized \$2,168 which was expended on needed

improvements in the surgery, and the purchase of seven lots adjoining the hospital grounds. Fruit and shade trees on grassy lawns afforded a charming rest place for convalescent patients.

Toward the end of the year 1897, Sisters Teresa and Stanislaus returned permanently to Fairhaven while Sister Teresa Kiernan was appointed Superior of the Rossland Hospital. In the month of January 1898, she, with the strong support of Rossland's leading citizens, namely, H. S. Wallace, Mayor of Rossland, Ross Thompson, Alderman, Dr. Edward Bowes, Chief Surgeon of the hospital, F. W. Rolt and J. R. McCane, filed an application to the Provincial Government of Victoria, British Columbia, for an annual grant to the hospital. The above named gentlemen went as delegates to the Claims for Financial Aid for the hospital, as a public institution in the Province.

After much debate and investigation, an annual grant was promised on condition that the Government be allowed a representative on the Board of Managers. This request was readily agreed to and an allotment of \$4,000 a year was awarded. The first installment was received in the following October. A Government Inspector was to come about twice a year to audit the hospital accounts. The Board of Managers was only a nominal gesture. The Pastor of the Sacred Heart Church in Rossland would stand for this imposing body if necessary. Grateful acknowledgement was extended to the honorable delegates for their success in obtaining this substantial support from an understanding and benevolent government. It is interesting to note that a government grant had never previously been made to a denominational hospital in that Province and almost certainly not in Canada. As a result of Sister Teresa's application, all Sisters' hospitals in Canada are now receiving such grants.

There was no more sincere champion of Mater Misericordiae Hospital than the Reverend Henry Irwin, Rossland's first Anglican minister, from 1896 to 1901. He

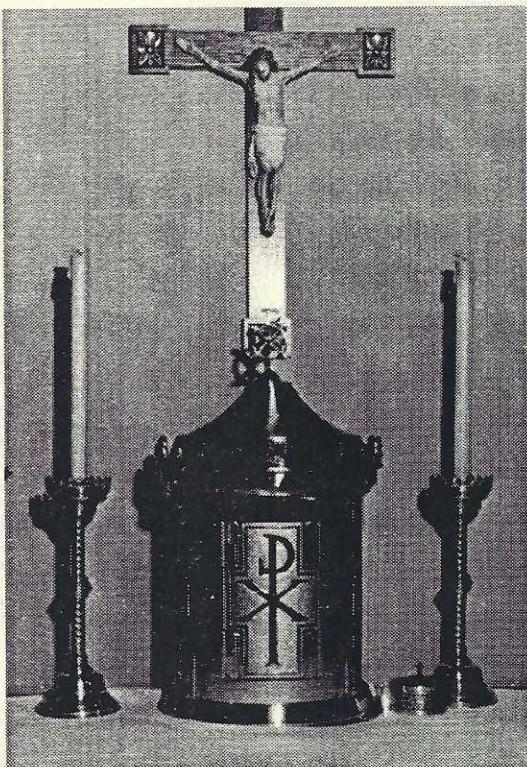
was a prominent figure in those days, and being an Irishman, was affectionately known as "Father Pat". He was like the Good Samaritan, kindly and genial, and a hard worker in the vineyard of the Lord. He won for himself the deep regard of the miners, irrespective of their religious beliefs. His creed seemed to be summed up in the Brotherhood of Man, under God, their Heavenly Father.

On a certain Monday morning, one of the doctors remarked to a Sister in attendance, "What do you think was the text of Father Pat's sermon last night?" - "the Sisters' Hospital".

On the eve of the Feast of Our Lady's Nativity, September 8, he handed in at the door, a bouquet saying "For the altar tomorrow". The Sister received it with a friendly but curious look, which he returned with the remark, "Do you not believe me?", and was gone.

Late in December 1901, Father Pat was called home to County Fermanagh, Ireland, because of his father's serious illness. Going by way of Montreal to sail from New York, he alighted by mistake a few miles from his destination on a cold January morning. He trudged along until his feet became so badly frozen that he could go no further. He was found by a farmer some time later, lying unconscious in the snow. When somewhat revived, he asked to be taken to a Sisters' Hospital in Montreal. He was brought to the Hotel Dieu, in charge of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph, where he died from blood poisoning on January 13, 1902 at the age of 43. Friends were notified and the remains brought to New Westminster, B.C., where funeral services were conducted in the Anglican Cathedral. He was buried at Sapperton, B.C., in the grave with his wife who had died in 1891.

Among other memorials to Father Pat was that of a drinking fountain sponsored by subscriptions from the citizens of Rossland and erected on Columbia Avenue. It



was built of Rossland granite and Kaslo marble bearing inscriptions in sunken letters. In the course of street improvements for increased traffic, the monument was removed several feet south of Columbia Avenue where it stands today, a symbol of the "cup of cold water", recalled by the heroic deeds of Father Pat, and "which shall not be without reward." Widespread eulogies and stories of the life of Father Pat in Rossland, Trail and the Boundary District, were printed in the *Rossland Miner* with his photograph and picture of the drinking fountain, a copy of which

newspaper is preserved in the Chronicles of St. Joseph's Home, Jersey City, New Jersey. Our prayers for an eternal reward follow good Father Pat.

The Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Rossland, B.C., was the scene of a triple activity when Reverend Mother Agatha and Mother Teresa arrived there on July 11, 1921. There were preparations for the annual spiritual retreat to open on Wednesday, July 13, and to which Sisters from Bellingham, Nelson, Seattle, Vancouver and Wenatchee were expected; also for the celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the foundation of this hospital in Rossland, July 22, 1896, as well as the completion of a new addition to the hospital at the east end and connecting with the three floors, adding fourteen rooms in all, and a beautiful chapel on the first floor.

The holy and impressive exercises of the retreat which was conducted by Rev. Father Chiannelli, S.J., of Gonzaga College, Spokane, Washington, closed on the morning of July 22, the Jubilee day. The occasion was celebrated by the Community in peaceful, religious enjoyment and in that recollection of spirit which is the fruit of the annual retreat. A happy circumstance of the Jubilee was the presence of the Sisters from the other houses of the Province, some of whom were of the pioneer days of 1896, especially Mother M. Teresa, foundress of the house and of the Western Province.

On the following day, the 23rd, the public celebration of the Jubilee began with the blessing of the new chapel by Rev. A. K. MacIntyre, Pastor of the Sacred Heart Church, Rossland, who also sang solemn high Mass, the Deacon being Reverend F. X. Teck of Trail, B.C. The halls and rooms were tastefully decorated with ferns and flowers by the Ladies Guild.

Through the day there was much rejoicing among the good people who came with their assurances of interest and their sincere congratulations. Those of the earlier days had reminiscences of novel experiences in connection with the first establishment of the hospital, 25 years previous.

In the evening the hospital grounds presented a fairyland of Japanese lanterns and bunting. White decorated tables dotted the lawns where refreshments were served to the sweet strains of music from the Rossland Band. The festivities were kept up until a late hour, announcing the departure of a "perfect day", and the beginning of Sunday morning.

Newspaper editorials were genuine in their congratulations, expressing a just pride in their civic institution's arrival at its quarter century of service to humanity. Reverend Mother M. Agatha and Mother M. Teresa left for Rosary Hall, Vancouver, B.C., on August 15, 1921. Their visit was greatly enjoyed by all the Sisters.

In 1938, further expansion of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital became necessary, requiring a loan from a Nelson Bank, which together with the Government Grant from Victoria, and donations from the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company, the West Kootenay Power and Light Company, Trail, with local donations, an A-1 fireproof wing was constructed on the northwest end of the original building. Ground was broken on the Feast of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, June 27th, 1938. Mr. H. Whittaker of Victoria was the architect, and Mr. A. Sullivan of Vancouver, B.C., the General Contractor.

This wing added to the first floor, a new administration department, surgical department with solarium for conferences and staff meetings, X-ray and pathological laboratories, with all new equipment and facilities.

On the second floor, a complete new obstetrical department was added, also with beautiful solarium for visitors. On the top floor, patients' rooms, including pediatric department.

A new heating plant was added, the first elevator in Rossland, which was a Westinghouse-Turnbull, as well as a fine new modern Nurses Home, the gift with furnishings complete, of Mr. S. G. Blaylock of the Trail Smelter. The Nurses' Home was blessed by Msgr. A. K. MacIntyre, V.G., and the first home social was held in the large living room. Guests included Mr. L. A. Campbell of the West Kootenay Power & Light Company, Trail.

February 1, His Excellency, Bishop Johnson of Nelson, blessed the new hospital, leaving soon afterwards for Rome.

February 11, Mr. and Mrs. S. G. Blaylock visited and inspected the new hospital, also the Nurses Home, where they were served tea by the nurses.

February 12, opening of the new hospital, when over 1000 people came and were served tea by the Ladies Auxiliary.

In 1952-53, another fireproof wing was added providing complete new kitchens, refrigeration, diet kitchens, nurses' dining room, and a new modern laundry which is served by a new modern elevator. Many felt a tinge of regret when plans were made for the demolition of the original wing of Mater Misericordiae Hospital to make room for construction of a new addition to the building in 1962. The original building of 1897 was still in good condition but not suitable for a modern hospital. So the work of tearing it down was begun. Before the snow came in October, the old building had disappeared and space was available for a new wing. The Provincial Government gave approval to proceed with the plans for an addition to the



building at a cost of \$90,000 with the Provincial Government paying half of this amount. The addition included an admitting and accounting office, board rooms, and other facilities. The people of Rossland were very proud of their modern hospital.

But as the 1960s progressed, it became more and more evident that the Sisters would eventually withdraw from the hospital in Rossland. The two main reasons were the shortage of Sisters and the concern of the Government with the health care of the people. When Sisters first went in to hospital work, it was at a time when no one else was taking care of the sick, but in 1965, the government was making good care available for all. The very fine hospital in Trail was in a position to provide this care and there really was no need of duplicating services with the hospitals only a few miles apart.

So in 1968, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace announced that it was no longer in a position to provide Sisters to staff the Mater Misericordiae Hospital. On May 25, 1969, a farewell was said to the Sisters. The Sisters, past and present, were honored at a special High Mass in Sacred Heart Church, and also at a reception in MacLean School auditorium during the afternoon. Monsignor A. K. MacIntyre paid tribute to the Sisters' work, and Mayor H. S. Elmes conveyed the thanks and best wishes of the City of Rossland to the Sisters who had contributed so much to the community. Tokens of appreciation came from the priests of the diocese, the Knights of Columbus, Ladies of the CWL, the Hospital Auxiliary, the medical and hospital staffs, the Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Legion, St. Anthony's Parish in Trail, Teen Town, and the Merciettes. To all of these the Sisters replied, "...a little of our hearts will remain here with you and we hope just a little of our spirit will remain with you too." On June 1, 1969, after 73 years of service, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace turned the administration of Mater Misericordiae Hospital over to the Regional Hospital District.

(This are excerpts taken from several historical documents)