



A History of Osteopathic Medicine in West Michigan

Muskegon Osteopathic Hospital started as a small private hospital, which was opened in 1942 by a group of 21 Osteopathic physicians and surgeons from western Michigan.

The group incorporated the hospital as a nonprofit operating organization and purchased an imposing 31-room granite mansion at the corner of Webster Avenue and Third Street in Muskegon. The building, built in the early 1890s by the prominent Muskegon lumberman John Torrent, was one of the community's showplaces for years.

The establishment of the hospital was sponsored by the Muskegon County Osteopathic Association with the assistance of Dr. Carvel O. Shaffer. The Association placed a down payment of \$2,600, in cash, with a land contract of \$23,400 for a total purchase price of \$26,000; and Dr. Shaffer, Mrs. Hazel Shaffer, and Dr. John Wallace signed the Articles of Incorporation. Muskegon had only a few Osteopathic physicians at this time, but they all donated toward the purchase of the Torrent House. The physicians included Drs. Hiram Nutt, Rubin Berg, Abe VanDyke, Georgia and Russell Riley, Martin Friedenbergs and Douglas.

The purchase of the mansion was finalized through Clyde Hendrick Realtors; however, the opening was delayed because the occupant refused to leave. Balbirnie Mortuary operated in the Torrent House and would not leave the premises. The mortuary was eventually evicted, and the opening was accomplished. The hospital installed 20 hospital beds and various other pieces of equipment totaling \$7,500; and on April 19, 1942, the hospital opened its doors. The first patient was George G. Partlow of Ravenna, and the first birth was a boy born to Mr. and Mrs. Claude Johnson of Nunica.

Dr. John Wallace interned at the hospital during its first year of operation. He earned \$12.50 a month. In addition to the duties associated with his education and internship, he also served as an x-ray technician, radiologist, laboratory technician, and occasionally as a cook. He remembered serving a lot of "Mrs. Grass' Noodle Soup" on the days he was in charge of the kitchen.

Dr. Wallace also remembered exploring the mansion shortly after the hospital opened. One day, upon opening a large drawer, he found a body. Apparently, the body had been left behind by the former tenant. Mr. Balbirnie retrieved the corpse and prepared it for appropriate interment.

The operating room was located in the old kitchen of the mansion, because it was the only room with tile floors and walls, which made it easier to clean. On one occasion, the oil-fired furnace, located in the room next to the surgery suite, exploded and blew the door down between the two rooms, showering everyone with black soot. Fortunately, the patient suffered no complications.

Staffing the hospital with nurses proved to be a problem. A decree issued in Muskegon stated that "any nurse working at the Osteopathic Hospital would be immediately barred from working at Hackley Hospital and Mercy Hospital." Another interesting problem occurred as a result of local prejudice when the hospital attempted to secure a street sign, "Quiet, Hospital Zone." In spite of numerous requests, the City of Muskegon officials refused and would not recognize the facility as a hospital. However, despite some



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negative feelings in the community, the hospital continued to grow and had a 100%+ occupancy rate much of the time.

On November 18, 1944, as part of a fundraising campaign, a formal dinner costing \$1.50 was held at the Occidental Hotel in Muskegon. The price included the meal, a speech by the former Governor of Michigan, Wilbur M. Brucker, and music by a barbershop quartet. The R.S.V.P. was returned to the hospital on a one-cent postcard.

In 1952, the Board of Trustees reported that the facilities were inadequate and took the first steps to expanding the hospital. Negotiations started with the Michigan State Hospital Survey and Construction Committee, and a project was developed, plans were drawn, and a financing study made. In anticipation of future hospital needs, the hospital Board established a building fund. In 1953 the hospital Board purchased the property immediately to the East adjoining the hospital. They obtained a federal grant of \$230,000 and negotiated a bank loan of \$180,000. This, combined with \$115,000 from the hospital's general funds, \$100,000 in contributed building funds, and many additional individual contributions, enabled the project to be launched. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held August 30, 1955, and the project was completed with a ribbon cutting ceremony on February 4, 1957.

The new addition doubled the capacity of the hospital. It added 41 beds, bringing the total to 67 adult beds, 8 pediatric beds, and 10 newborn beds. The new facility consisted of three floors. The first level contained the emergency room, communications center, information desk, central sterilizing, supply rooms, 2 surgery suites and 6 patient rooms containing 17 beds each. The second floor was the obstetrics department including 2 labor rooms, 1 delivery room, and 8 rooms with a total of 24 beds. The sub-floor housed the laboratory, radiology department, cafeteria, and kitchen. The old section of the hospital, the original mansion, contained the administrative offices, pharmacy, medical records, meeting rooms, and maintenance department. There were 25 beds in 10 rooms, including a pediatric department with 8 beds, still in use in the original building. With the addition, there also came improvements to the boiler house and laundry in the back of the hospital. Two gas-fired boilers were installed, each with the capacity to heat the entire hospital as well as an auxiliary electric power plant.

The continuing rapid growth of the greater Muskegon area and a growing medical staff created a greater demand for hospital services, thus motivating additional expansion and the construction of a new hospital building. They selected a site for the new hospital building just east of Interstate Highway 31 and north of Apple Avenue, and purchased it in October, 1962. In February of 1964, the estimated cost of the building was \$1.8 million; and by the fall of 1964, predictions were made for a spring start of the 134 bed hospital.

The starting date moved in January of 1965 to May and increased the estimate to \$2.3 million. Bids were accepted in August and contracts awarded in September, 1965, with the final bids topping \$3 million. The groundbreaking ceremony took place on October 5, 1965, and the hospital was re-named Muskegon General Hospital. The building was dedicated on May 29, 1967, and opened to patients on June 1, 1967.

The new hospital anticipated employing 300 persons. The 137-bed facility located on a 20-acre tract had 5 floors and offered the latest in medical, surgical, and therapeutic equipment. In 1967, it was described as "one of the most modern new hospitals in the state." The new facility included 12 private rooms, 37 semi-private rooms, 10 three-bed wards, and 5 four-bed wards. The supporting services included x-ray, laboratory, pharmacy, nuclear medicine, physical therapy, and inhalation therapy.



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Further expansion was completed in 1982. A three-story addition allowed for expansion of the Emergency Department, occupational and physical therapy, ICU and Coronary Care Units, the laboratory, radiology, and nuclear medicine. It also provided for classrooms, administrative office space, and a new Board room.

In 1988, Muskegon General Hospital established the Muskegon General Foundation, primarily for the purpose of providing academic scholarships to Osteopathic medical students.

Further expansion took place in 1995 when the Special Delivery Birth Center, a state-of-the-art Labor/Delivery/Recovery/Postpartum unit, was added to the east side of the building.

Two significant activities took place in the mid-1990s. The first was in 1995 when Muskegon General Hospital and Mercy Health Services entered into a Joint Operating Agreement and combined the operations of Mercy Hospital in Muskegon with Muskegon General Hospital. The success of this joint venture led to a decision in 1998 to fully merge the two health care systems. The new health care system was named Mercy General Health Partners.

As part of the merger agreement, the Muskegon General Foundation became the Muskegon General Osteopathic Foundation (a public charitable foundation) and received a one-time contribution of \$7.5 million from Mercy Health Services to preserve the Osteopathic legacy in West Michigan. In exchange, the Muskegon General Hospital campus became the Oak Avenue Campus of Mercy General Health Partners.

After 1998 the services, programs and activities of the Foundation expanded much beyond its original role of supporting the hospital and its graduate medical education programs. The Foundation became more regional in its efforts and expanded its commitment to funding community health initiatives. To reflect this change, the Board of the Foundation changed its name to the Osteopathic Foundation of West Michigan in December 2005.

The Osteopathic Foundation of West Michigan is a public charitable foundation and supports programs designed to produce advances on problems and issues of importance to Osteopathic medicine and the regional community's health and welfare. Further information is available at www.osteopathicfoundation.org.