

RAMSEY COUNTY  
**History**  
*A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society*



**Spring 2008**

Volume 43, Number 1

*From Swede Hollow to Capitol Boulevard*

**Bethesda Hospital Celebrates Its  
125th Anniversary (1883–2008)**

*Donald B. Swenson, M.D.*

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*A painting of Bethesda Hospital by artist Kairong Liu with the Minnesota State Capitol in the background.  
Photo courtesy of Bethesda Hospital.*

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# RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 43, Number 1

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ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations  
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program  
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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### A Message from the Editorial Board

When we think of “family,” we often think of our close relatives. But this issue explores more inclusive definitions of “family.” Community values shape individuals, who in turn reflect those values. In early St. Paul, ethnic background provided a strong sense of family. Dr. Donald B. Swenson introduces us to the family of Bethesda Hospital—a group of caring people who came together to start a medical facility rooted in the Swedish Lutheran tradition. Swenson follows the rich history of the hospital, with portraits people who contributed their time and talent to the St. Paul institution, which is now celebrating its 125th anniversary. We all know the importance of neighborhood in defining family. Bernard Friel details the extended “family” of the business community at Selby and Snelling avenues, which gave him his first jobs in the 1940s and early 1950s. On the other hand, Janice Quick describes isolated loners like convicted murders Otto Wonnigkeit and Charles Ermisch, who were estranged from friends and relatives when they were executed in 1894. But Quick also provides snapshots of St. Paul community members who signed an unsuccessful petition against the death penalty, foreshadowing the Minnesota legislature’s prohibition of that penalty years later. Enjoy this spring issue, and write a letter to the editor to let us know your thoughts.

*Anne Cowie,*  
Chair, Editorial Board

## *From Swede Hollow to Capitol Boulevard*

### Bethesda Hospital Celebrates Its 125th Anniversary (1883–2008)

*Donald B. Swenson, M.D.*

In 2008 Bethesda Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota, marks the 125th anniversary of its founding. The story begins in 1883, but in reality it began several years earlier in the hearts and minds of Swedish immigrants who recognized the need for such an institution.

Rural Sweden was the origin of the majority of the Swedes who left their homeland and came to the United States. They were seeking a new opportunity for a better life. Theirs is a story of sacrifice and hard work and also a story of ethnic pride and religious zeal. But it is also a story of humor, and yes, even a tinge of envy for those who seemingly had it better. A farmhouse, which needed considerable renovation, was purchased for \$6,000 by the Tabitha Society of the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Lutheran Synod for its hospital. It was located about two blocks east of Lake Como.

The founder of the hospital was Reverend A.P. Monten, pastor of the First

Lutheran Church of St. Paul. The church at that time was located in Lowertown at Woodward and John Streets. The present church is located at Eighth and Maria streets, just east of Swede Hollow and very close to the site of the old St. John's Hospital, which is now the site of Metropolitan State College. With the opening of the hospital, Rev. Monten made the statement, "Together we have succeeded in getting a house for the sick and have given it the appropriate name, Bethesda, which in Hebrew means 'House of Mercy.'" The house is still there, at 1388 North Victoria Street, in a nice residential area. When seen today, few people would realize that it was at one time Bethesda's first hospital site.



*The Reverend A. P. Monten, founder of Bethesda Hospital.*

#### **Bethesda's Early Years**

Swede Hollow was the initial venue for many Swedes when they came to America, beginning in about the 1880s, followed by other nationalities, namely Italians and lastly Mexican Americans. Swede Hollow (*Svenska Dalen*) is a twenty-five-acre ravine and according to historian, Jim Sazevich, this small valley housed as many as 1,000 people in 1905. Phalen Creek ran through the hollow on its way to the Mississippi River. Outdoor latrines, perched on stilts, overhung the creek, which was used for sewage disposal. There were no sewers or other city services available at that time. When the water was low, probably in late summer, one can imagine the stream not working efficiently.

Bethesda's first patient likely came from Swede Hollow, although there is no written documentation of this. His name was Gustav Svård. He was admitted to the hospital on March 1, 1883. The report about him was written in Swedish but has been translated: "We found him in a



*The first Bethesda Hospital, which was located near Lake Como. All photographs are courtesy of Bethesda Hospital unless otherwise noted.*

shanty which was approximately eight feet square. He lay there alone without care, in a bed which also served as his food storage box. His wife and children were still in Sweden. I will not try to describe the horrible situation around him there."

Photographs from this period document the contrast between the condition of homes in Swede Hollow with the Hamm's Brewery to the north and the Hamm family mansion up on the nearby hill. Unfortunately the Hamm's beautiful residence was torched in 1954 by a fourteen-year-old boy who was bored.

For all the terrible conditions surrounding the shacks in Swede Hollow, that area was also home to many happy people, some of whom did not realize that they were poor. Some of the modest houses were even surrounded by pretty gardens and an occasional white picket fence. As their financial circumstances improved, many Swedes and Norwegians moved to the upper Payne Avenue and Arlington Hills area. The Italians moved to the lower Payne Avenue area where several businesses still flourish today.<sup>1</sup> Nancy Apfelbacher, who currently serves as one of Bethesda Hospital's art consultants, tells of her great grandparents living happily in Swede Hollow after their marriage by the pastor of the First Lutheran Church. They later moved to a farm near Pine City.

The last remaining houses in Swede Hollow were burned down in 1956, as they were considered health hazards. Swede Hollow is now a city park through the generosity of the St. Paul Garden Club and in particular, one lady, Olivia Irvine Dodge, whose parents, Mr. and Mrs. Horace Irvine, lived at 1006 Summit Avenue, which is now the Governor's Residence. St. Paul in the 1930s, was described by President Franklin Roosevelt's attorney general as one of two cities in America "which needed cleaning up." The Barker-Karpis gang was here, as well as John Dillinger, "Machine Gun" Kelly, and "Babyface" Nelson. There were two well-known kidnappings during the Depression in 1933 and 1934, the William Hamm Jr. kidnapping and the Edward Bremer kidnapping. The Bremer family owned the other brewery, Schmitt Brewery, located off West Seventh Street. Both

were released after ransoms of \$100,000 and \$200,000, respectively, were paid to the Barker-Karpis gang.

Some gangsters were held in the city jail in the new Public Safety Building while awaiting trial. One such foreign-born character was behind bars briefly but was released on a technicality. He was seen in a photo from the *St. Paul Daily News*. It is actually a picture of my father, Perry A. Swenson, who was the general contractor on the Public Safety Building, who was caught on film while inspecting the new jail.<sup>2</sup>

An early lithograph of Lowertown shows two houses on Ninth Street between Wacouta and Canada Streets. The one on the left was the Henry Pratt Upham residence, which Bethesda bought for its next hospital. Because of inadequate finances, the hospital was forced to close for eight years before it reopened in the Upham home in 1891. Originally conventional

ford to do so that the hospital had to close. Next door to the Upham home was the residence of James J. Hill, founder of what was to become the Great Northern Railroad. Henry Upham was president of what became the First National Bank of St. Paul. So, Lowertown was the elite part of town, but as encroachment by industry occurred, the area changed.

The James J. Hill house was a beautiful French Second Empire home. When the Hills moved to their new large home on Summit Avenue, across from the site of the future Cathedral, Mary Hill had some misgivings. This was really home to her; her children were born there, and she was not happy about leaving.

### Bethesda Gets a New Home

When Bethesda Hospital secured the Upham residence, it subsequently made several additions to that house. After the Hills moved from their house at Ninth



*Bethesda Hospital, about 1908 following its relocation to 249 East Ninth Street (the former Upham residence), with early additions. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

wisdom said that a site "out in the country" would be desirable for the hospital because many believed that infectious diseases would be cured at such a site one to two weeks earlier than in an urban location. In its first location, Bethesda took care of so many people without charge that the word got around that they would receive wonderful Christian care and they did not have to pay if they could not af-

and Canada, James J. Hill had the home torn down leaving a vacant lot in its place. The hospital opened its doors to patients at the Upham site on March 8, 1892. Of the patients admitted that year, 68 were Swedes, 30 were Norwegians, 13 were Americans, one was German, and one was African American.

An 1892 Bethesda publication stated, "Already we see that a larger hospital is

needed. Efforts were made to obtain an adjoining residence [the Hill home] which at the present time stands vacant and it very well could be connected with our hospital building. How can we sufficiently thank God, who has in His wonderful way, made possible for us poor Swedes to come into possession of such a valuable property for our hospital? How sad it is to think of all these various maladies which attack people, and since many of our own people, that is the Swedes, become victims of these diseases, we should now thank God that we have an institution of our own, where those who suffer can come and receive scientific medical treatment as well as Christian care, so that in the hour of need they will not be forced to turn to strangers and Catholics."<sup>3</sup> These words convey considerable ethnic pride, some of it engendered by the different languages that the staff and patients spoke, and the need to stick together with your own people.

A telling example of this sort of ethnic diversity and cooperation in caregiving that has been characteristic of Bethesda since its earliest days can be seen in a more recent case. Years ago Dr. Melvin Hammarberg, who was then the Bishop of the Minnesota Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, was a patient at Bethesda Hospital with a serious illness. Archbishop John Roach of the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese heard that Dr. Hammarberg was there and came to visit him. He knelt at the bedside and the two men prayed for each other's work. When word got around that the two had met and prayed, this helped to change the competitive tenor that had at one time existed between St. Joseph's Hospital and Bethesda Hospital. St. Joseph's Hospital had been founded thirty years earlier than Bethesda, in 1853, and a bit of jealousy had arisen between the two hospitals. But Archbishop Roach's gracious visit helped to change that. Sometime after Archbishop Roach was at Bethesda, Gustavus Adolphus College conveyed an honorary doctorate on Archbishop Roach. Today St. Joseph's and Bethesda enjoy a very amicable and respectful relationship with each other in the HealthEast Care System.

The Bethesda Archives reveals the following information about activities at the hospital's Ninth and Wacouta streets location: "The nursing care was given by two



*The Men's Ward at Bethesda during its years at the Ninth and Wacouta streets location.*

Deaconesses from the Emmanuel Deaconess Home in Omaha and a likewise well-trained nurse from Sweden." Acknowledgment of gifts: "From John Nordstrom of Scandia, 25 cents; Mrs. Lagestrom of Minneapolis, 2 pillows; Mrs. J. Chilstrom of Winthrop, a jar of fruit and a glass of jelly. When you are canning fruit, do not forget to put aside and label every tenth jar for Bethesda Hospital, to be brought here at your convenience." 1898: "Committee for collecting debts was reminded to get busy." October of 1898: "There was \$1.67 in the treasury." Some of the hospital regulations: "Free patients are expected to render care according to their ability." Rates: \$5.00 a week in the wards for members of the Minnesota Conference of the Lutheran Church, \$6.00 a week otherwise. (You had to be of the right faith to get a discount!) In case of a major operation, \$5.00 was added. "Patients are forbidden to swear, to play at any games for money, to smoke or chew in the wards or corridors, to spit on the floor or to procure for themselves or others any intoxicating liquors. Patients must not throw anything out of the hospital windows. Servants [employees] must be members in good standing of the

Lutheran Church." 1901: The board voted \$50 for Sister Bothilda Swenson, superintendent of nurses at Bethesda at the time, to go to Sweden. "The superintendent may have a bathroom put in his house if it does not cost more than \$83.00."

About that time, the hospital board decided to offer \$1,000 to J. J. Hill for the lot where the Hill's home had stood next door to the hospital. This bid was rejected by Hill. They raised the bid on the lot to \$2,000. Later the superintendent was given permission to pay \$3,200 for the lot. Hill again rejected the offer. 1902: "Superintendent is going to get free heat and light [the hospital administrator still gets free heat]." 1904: J. J. Hill informs the board that he is going to build on the lot next to the hospital since they haven't decided to buy it. The board decides that it must buy, trade, or negotiate in any way they see fit to get possession of the lot. J. J. Hill finally decided to sell the lot to Bethesda for \$5,000. He also donated \$5,000 to the hospital, so they had a happy ending.

1904: \$150 a year is set for the fee at the Chisago Old People's Home, \$800 for a lifetime. 1905: The superintendent was to go to Warren, Minnesota, to in-

investigate the possibility of moving the hospital there. Warren, which is located in northwestern Minnesota in Kittson County, would definitely have been a rural location.

### Training for Nurses Begins

Bethesda in these years had its own training school for Lutheran deaconesses. It was located in the Conrad Gotzian residence, which was in the same block as the Upham and Hill houses. Gotzian was a German immigrant who became a wealthy shoe manufacturer in St. Paul. As neighbors at an earlier time, there was also much social interaction between these three Lowertown families. The deaconesses not only did nursing care but also social service work. They even went into homes and did housekeeping for the indigent.

Bethesda's very successful three-year School of Nursing started in 1901. It celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2001. Sister Esther Porter was superintendent of nurses from 1909 until her death in 1926. Dr. Olaf Sohlberg said the following about her: "I remember Sister Esther Porter, a remarkable woman, who put Bethesda's nursing training on a par with any training school in the state. Boy, how she could cut you down to size by just a word or look. Her discipline was very strict, but impartial. The girls who trained under her hated her and chafed under the discipline, but loved her and bragged about serving under her when they graduated."

A large addition was built on the front of the hospital in 1910, which extended from Wacouta to Canada Streets. When the hospital moved to its present site on Capitol Boulevard in 1932, the Lowertown site became the Bethesda Invalid Home. The First Baptist Church, across Wacouta Street to the west, eventually purchased the Bethesda property and razed the building. The land now serves as a parking area for the church.

An old photograph of the men's ward shows the patients dressed in their suits and sitting at their bedsides waiting for the doctor to make his rounds. Hospital stays were a little different in those days. Dr. Olaf Sohlberg recounted how he admitted a patient to Bethesda in the month of September following a minor pedes-



*The surgical team that performed a hysterectomy in 1894. They are, left to right, Dr. Erik M. Lundholm (anesthetist), Dr. Edvard Boeckmann (surgeon), Dr. Olaf Sohlberg (with the lighted cigar), Dr. Harold Graff, P.D. Enke (orderly), and Dr. Tillier (intern).*

trian accident with a streetcar. The accident victim stayed until spring because he found it was cheaper to live in the hospital than in his boarding house.

Another historic hospital photograph, dated 1894, shows a surgical specimen from a hysterectomy for fibroid tumors.<sup>4</sup> The surgical team consisted of Dr. Erik M. Lundholm, who administered drop anesthesia; Dr. Edvard Boeckmann, surgeon; and Dr. Olaf Sohlberg, who carried a cigar into the operating room. Some physicians believed that the cigar smoke would help sterilize the field. Others who participated in this operation were Dr. Harold Graff, P.D. Enke, who was both an orderly and a Swedish masseur and was addressed as "Professor," and lastly Dr. Tillier, the intern, who later returned to Norway. There are no surgical gloves or masks visible in the photograph. A Bunsen burner, which can be seen in the foreground, was used for thrusting the scalpel through, and antiseptic solution in the basin was used for hand cleansing.

Dr. Boeckmann developed a sterile, absorbable catgut which was processed in the laboratory of the Ramsey County Medical Society and marketed nationwide in glass tubes. The photo also in-

cludes a skylight in the operating room that improved the lighting. Some people who have seen this photograph believe it represented an autopsy, but actually it was a successful surgical procedure and the patient survived. The photograph has been reproduced in a book entitled *Doctors of the Old West* as well as in a book published in Norway telling of the Boeckmann family history.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Boeckmann's son, Dr. Egil Boeckmann, married Rachel Hill, one of the daughters of James J. and Mary Hill. Perhaps the marriage of the son of one of Bethesda's staff doctors into the Hill family may have helped to promote the sale of the lot next door. Some of those who have looked at this photograph have wondered whether Dr. Sohlberg's cigar was really lit. A close-up examination of the photo helped to decide this point in favor of the cigar being lit.

During World War II, Bethesda had a Minnesota State Guard nurses' unit. Some of Bethesda's nurses included Eleanor Jahnke and Helen Mae Swanson (later Gingold).

## Pastor-Administrators at Bethesda

Over the years, Bethesda has had great continuity in its leadership with Rev. Carl Hultkrans serving as Bethesda's superintendent from 1891 to 1915, Rev. J.A. Kranz from 1916 to 1924, and Rev. L.B. Benson serving as General Superintendent of Bethesda Hospital and Charities of the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Synod from 1924 to 1955. Many remember L.B. Benson for his untiring dedication to the hospital. Some recall that during the height of the Depression he would literally go out into the countryside on Saturdays and collect chickens and produce from benevolent friends and sell them in the city to help the hospital meet its financial obligations. When Rev. Benson retired as superintendent in 1955, Bethesda had become a modern institution with a secure future. He was the last of a breed of Lutheran pastor-administrators who served the hospital. Bethesda's centennial history has this description of these pastor-administrators: "They stormed forth into Bethesda's midst out of the old church, billowing censure and saintly praise. They would go to any length to summon their constituents to higher duty and in less than easy times, inspire them to action and beneficence."<sup>6</sup> One close ob-

server of Bethesda's history, Bernhard LeVander, stated that Rev. Benson's highly charged appeals, during their height and crescendo, would bring tears to the eyes.

Rev. Benson was pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Red Wing, Minnesota, when he was called to become the superintendent of Bethesda Hospital. While in Red Wing he became acquainted with Professor and Mrs. Alexander P. Anderson. They lived at "Towerview Farm" along Highway 61 near Vasa, Minnesota. Mr. Anderson did experiments putting grain into vacuum tubes and received the patent for Puffed Rice and Puffed Wheat. He became a wealthy man after his patent was sold to the Quaker Oats Company. While the Andersons were Baptists, not Lutherans, Rev. Benson felt that they might be good donors for Bethesda and its allied ministries. In the automobile on the way south from St. Paul to visit the Andersons, Rev. Benson and two others from the hospital talked about what size gift they would request. They decided on a gift of \$25,000. As it turned out, the Andersons donated a 400-acre farm and its buildings across Highway 61 from the Anderson property, as well as a total endowment of \$250,000 (in 1920s dollars). This site became the Vasa Children's Home for Orphans. It is now operated by Lutheran



*The Reverend L. B. Benson, who was the pastor-administrator of Bethesda from 1924 to 1955.*

Social Service of Minnesota for disabled young adults.

The cornerstone laying of the Vasa Children's Home in 1926 was a significant event. Crown Prince Gustav Adolf and Princess Louise of Sweden (grandparents of the present king) were present for the ceremony. Princess Louise has a marked facial resemblance to her brother, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who was a renowned figure during World War II as well as serving as viceroy of India. Princess Louise was a granddaughter of Queen Victoria and the aunt of Prince Philip Mountbatten. The name Mountbatten is deceptive. It is the anglicized version of Battenberg, which was German. The present Swedish royal line really is not Swedish but French. Jean Baptiste Bernadotte was one of Napoleon's generals and later became king of Sweden and Norway, which at that time were joined as one country. The present Swedish royal line is descended from him. The library at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter is named in honor of Count Folke Bernadotte of this family.

## Building a New Hospital on Capitol Boulevard

Bethesda Hospital's current site is on Capitol Boulevard, two blocks north of the State Capitol. Several large mansions formerly existed on the site. In 1917 Rev. Peter Magni LeVander (Bernhard and Harold LeVander's father) was president of the hospital board and along with the



*Bethesda's World War II Minnesota National Guard nurses unit.*



*A Bethesda nurse with a young patient.*

superintendent, Rev. A. J. Kranz, recommended that the block be purchased for \$71,000 for future hospital use. To some this seemed to be a terrible mistake and many felt that it was going to bankrupt the Minnesota Conference of the Augustana Synod. But, as it turned out, it was a smart and wonderful move. The LeVander family continued to play prominent roles at Bethesda.

Governor Harold LeVander was president of the Bethesda Foundation while his brother, Bernhard, was a long-time member of the hospital board and for twenty-nine years served as legal counsel for the hospital. Gustavus Adolphus College, the alma mater of both Harold and Bernhard, subsequently awarded Bernhard an honorary doctorate for his many years of public service.

Cass Gilbert was St. Paul's most notable architect in the early years of the twentieth century. Gilbert designed the Minnesota State Capitol building, which is Bethesda's geographic neighbor.<sup>7</sup> He designed the mall at the University of Minnesota which originally was to go all the way down to the Mississippi River and to include an amphitheater and Greek bell tower. His original Capitol approach plans also extended all the way south to Seven Corners, where the RiverCentre now stands. In a personal communica-

tion years ago, St. Paul architect Magnus Jemne<sup>8</sup> stated that when Cass Gilbert heard that the Woolworth family was going to build a large building in New York City and that they were traveling to France, Gilbert booked passage on the same ship. Before they reached port, he allegedly had the contract signed for designing the wonderful Gothic structure of sixty-two stories which became the world's first skyscraper. Cass Gilbert also designed the U.S. Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C. Unknown to most people in the Bethesda family, the Cass Gilbert Memorial Park exists just 250 feet from Bethesda's property. The park overlooks downtown St. Paul.

Dr. O.W. Holcomb was chief-of-staff at Bethesda in 1930. At one time in the 1920s, we are told that he went into superintendent Benson's office and put down a check for \$5,000, which was the first of the money given by the medical staff for the new hospital. The hospital hired Thomas Ellerbe & Company as the architects for the new building. Built for \$500,000 in 1932 dollars including its operating rooms and all its facilities and equipment, Bethesda had 150 beds when it opened.

Dr. William Mayo was the keynote speaker at the dedication. Five thousand people were present for the outside ceremony. Another notable public figure who attended the dedication was Governor



*Dr. O.W. Holcomb, in 1930, during his years as Bethesda's chief of staff.*

Floyd B. Olson. Dr. and Mrs. Holcomb met the Mayos on that Sunday afternoon in October 1932 in downtown St. Paul at Lampert Landing and drove them up to the hospital. The Mayos had come up the Mississippi from Wabasha, Minnesota, on their yacht, the *North Star*. Later, during the height of the depression in 1938, it is said that the Mayos were so overwhelmed by the ragged and hungry people there at the dock in downtown St. Paul that when



*Bethesda Hospital in 1932, just after it had moved to a new building on Capitol Boulevard. It is now known as the Wold Memorial Wing.*



they returned to Rochester, they put the yacht up for sale and used the funds for social needs in Rochester.

The original 1932 hospital lobby had two stories and beautiful stained glass windows. In the 1970s, however, this lobby was converted to a one-story lobby to provide additional space for the burgeoning obstetrics service on the second floor. At that time I was able to obtain most of the windows without falling off the tall ladder I had to use to remove them prior to the refurbishing work. My father, Perry A. Swenson, was the general contractor for the hospital in 1932 as well as for the 1926 Vasa Children's Home. He came alone from Sweden in 1899 at the age of sixteen from the farm in Småland province, leaving his parents and seven siblings, looking for a new life in the U.S. Sweden lost fully one-fourth of its population to emigration, most of it to the U.S. His mother was born on the same farm in Sweden, named Tubbamåla, as was her cousin, Swan Turnblad, who founded the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis.

In 1999, my three brothers and I gave these windows back to the hospital where they were reinstalled in the lobby in honor of our father on the 100th anniversary of his coming to the U.S. in 1899. Immigrants to the U.S. in the nineteenth century, regardless of their country of origin, usually had little formal education. But it was customary for them to place a high priority on the education of their American-born children. My brother John became a civil engineer; brother Carl became an attorney in St. Paul; and my third brother Sidney also became a civil engineer. The two engineers joined our father in the construction business in St. Paul. I spent my whole medical career at St. Paul Internists, P.A., with Bethesda as our major hospital.

### Prominent Bethesda Physicians and Nurses

Two prominent Bethesda physicians, Dr. Arthur Lundholm and Dr. Olaf I. Sohlberg, followed their fathers, Dr. Erik Lundholm and Dr. Olaf Sohlberg, who were much loved pioneer Bethesda doctors, into medicine and have also been associated with the hospital.



The lower photo on the right is Eleanor Jahnke as a student nurse.

Eleanor Jahnke became a nursing student in 1932. After she finished her nurse's training at Bethesda, she was asked to take a temporary job in medical records. She actually stayed for forty-two years, most of this time as department head. She continues today as an active hospital volunteer (at age 96 in 2008). She also served for many years as the secretary to the medical staff. One staff doctor made the comment that Eleanor knew enough about the hospital that if the whole administration would leave for a month, no one would know the difference.

A much respected physician, Dr. Selmer M. Loken, came to Bethesda from Chicago in 1938 to take his internship and then stayed on in medical practice. The S.M. Loken Humanitarian Award is presented annually to a family practice resident who demonstrates the qualities as exemplified by Dr. Loken during his career at Bethesda. Dr. Steven Skildum was the first recipient of this award.

In 1955 a young man from Cokato, Minnesota, Kenneth Holmquist, would become Bethesda's first administrator who was not an ordained pastor. Prior to that he had been the administrator of Minneapolis General Hospital, which is now Hennepin County Medical Center. With some degree of urging by Bernhard LeVander and Dr. Robert Holmen, Holmquist agreed to come to Bethesda, a much smaller hospital. Given Holmquist's interest in the church and Christian work, it did not take all that much convincing.

Dr. Samuel Hunter received international recognition when he successfully

implanted the first permanent bipolar pacemaker for Stokes-Adams disease in the history of medicine at Bethesda Hospital in April of 1959. The patient's name in that operation was Warren G. Mauston. He lived for another seven years. On the twentieth anniversary of this historic event, a picture was taken at Bethesda that includes Earl Bakken of Medtronic. Bakken started doing pacemaker work in a garage in Northeast Minneapolis. Medtronic is now the world's largest supplier of pacemakers. Next to him is Norman Roth, an electrical engineer who devised the bipolar lead for the pacemaker with Dr. Hunter. Ed Berger, the technician for the implant operation and Diane Roder, the nurse that day are also in the photo. At the time of this implant operation, Dr. Hunter was director of the research laboratory at St. Joseph's Hospital, which was funded by the O'Shaughnessy Foundation. The clinical trials of the Hunter-Roth pacemaker lead in dogs were



Kenneth Holmquist was Bethesda Hospital's first administrator who was not an ordained pastor.

conducted at the lab at St. Joseph's and they permitted its successful application in human subjects. This is another way in which St. Joseph's and Bethesda have collaborated with each other.

At a symposium at the University of Minnesota on December 13, 2007, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the invention of the electronic pacemaker by Earl Bakken, the latter praised Dr. Hunter for his pioneering work, stating that it

opened the floodgates for the implantation of permanent pacemakers

A student nurse from Benson, Minnesota, Mignette Anderson, finished her training at Bethesda in the class of 1949. She later moved to California where she met her future husband, Dr. John Najarian. They returned to Minnesota when Dr. Najarian became head of the Department

of Surgery at the University of Minnesota. He literally lived at the hospital for several years at the invitation of the superintendent, Rev. L.B. Benson. It is said that the nurses washed David Tozer's socks and underwear. Upon his death, the hospital was given several houses in the area as well as a five-figure monetary gift from his estate. Superintendent Benson had hoped that the bulk of Tozer's

fortune. He literally lived at the hospital for several years at the invitation of the superintendent, Rev. L.B. Benson. It is said that the nurses washed David Tozer's socks and underwear. Upon his death, the hospital was given several houses in the area as well as a five-figure monetary gift from his estate. Superintendent Benson had hoped that the bulk of Tozer's

as "primitive at best." When one student nurse complained that she was not comfortable with her living conditions, Rev. Benson allegedly answered, "You're doing the Lord's work; you're not supposed to be comfortable!"

Helen Swanson Gingold was a student nurse at Bethesda, class of 1935, and later became the charge nurse on the medical station where David Tozer lived. She participated actively in his care. Helen met her future husband, the highly respected Ramsey County Juvenile Court Judge, Archie Gingold, while he was a patient under her care at Bethesda. They had a wonderful marriage built on Judeo-Christian principles with each one respecting the other's faith and background. These principles, incidentally, are part of the Mission Statement of today's HealthEast Care System.

Bethesda's highly respected three-year nurses' training programs existed from 1898 to 1958, with the first five nurses completing their training in 1901. One tradition the student nurses had took place when they had successfully completed their first two years of training. At that time they were able to discard their black shoes and stockings and wear white. Frequently those student nurses who had reached this point in their training chose to throw their old black shoes and stockings over the railing of the Wabasha Street Bridge in downtown St. Paul. In 1956 Gustavus Adolphus College established a four-year bachelor's degree program in nursing with Bethesda Hospital as its major clinical facility. This program continued until 1988, at which time Bethesda Hospital joined the HealthEast Care System. A highly successful program in the training of licensed practical nurses was based at Bethesda from 1957 to 1973.

Bethesda has benefited greatly over the years from its active Auxiliary as well as from a large contingent of dedicated volunteers. A significant community event, the Festival of Trees, was initiated by the Bethesda Hospital Auxiliary in 1984 and is now sponsored by the entire HealthEast Care System. Bethesda, St. John's, St. Joseph's and Woodwinds Hospitals are all now part of HealthEast.



*This twentieth anniversary photograph of the team that was responsible for the first successful implantation of a permanent bipolar pacemaker included, left to right, Earl Bakken, Norman Roth, Ed Berger, Diane Roder, and Dr. Samuel Hunter.*

of Surgery at the University of Minnesota. He became a world-renowned transplant surgeon. Dr. Najarian was the keynote speaker at Bethesda's centennial celebration in 1983.

The Tozer Plaza contains the main entrance to the hospital and its circular drive. It also is the site of Paul Granlund's inspiring sculpture *Bethesda Angel*, which is located on the east side of the building. Granlund, a world-renowned sculptor from Gustavus Adolphus College, took the inscription for this sculpture from the fifth chapter of the Book of John, in which the gospel writer tells of an angel coming down to the pool in Jerusalem and stirring the waters. The first person who entered the pool thereafter would be cured of whatever disease he had.

The plaza is named in honor of David Tozer, the heir to a Stillwater lumbering

estate would finance the proposed new nurses' home. Instead it went to establish the Tozer Educational Foundation, based in Stillwater, Minnesota. Bethesda did, however, benefit from the Tozer scholarships, the most noteworthy being awarded to Judy Taplin from 1956 to 1991 and who served at Bethesda from 1963 to 2000 as director of the Department of Physical Medicine (a post now held by Michael Sandman). Following her retirement, Judy continues at Bethesda as an active volunteer, primarily in the History and Resource Center, along with Eleanor Jahnke and Lenida Sandahl.

Before the new nurses' residence (Mattson Hall) was completed in 1954, student nurses lived in several old houses near the hospital. These houses were at times inhabited by various four- and six-legged species and were described



*This undated photograph shows Bethesda nurses who had recently completed two years of training tossing their black shoes and stockings into the Mississippi from the old Wabasha Street Bridge, St. Paul.*

### **A Time of Transition in the 1960s**

The West wing of Bethesda Hospital, built in 1967, is designated as the Holcomb Lundholm Sterner Memorial Wing, in honor of these prominent Bethesda physicians: Dr. O.W. Holcomb, Dr. Arthur Lundholm, and Dr. E.G. Sterner. The South wing of the hospital, built in 1962, is designated as the Rev. L.B. Benson Memorial Wing in honor of Superintendent Benson's untiring devotion to the hospital during his thirty-one-year tenure.

Between 1962 and 1968, young physicians came from Sweden to intern at Bethesda. This program was arranged by Dr. Robert Bjornson, Bethesda's Director of Radiology, and his wife, Ann Marie, who was a Swedish medical school graduate. The first Bethesda scholar was Dr. Carl Magnus Kjellstrand. Dr. Nils Alvall of Sweden, who was one of the world's pioneers in renal disease and invented the artificial kidney in 1961, lectured at Bethesda during the time Dr. Kjellstrand was doing his internship. Dr. Kjellstrand later returned to Sweden to the Karolinska Institute, where he became a member of the committee to confer the Nobel Prize in Medicine and nominated Dr. Alvall for that honor. The prize that year, however, went to another recipient.

While at Bethesda in the fall of 1963, Dr. Kjellstrand set up the first kidney dialysis unit in St. Paul. This was made possible with a grant from the Louis W. and Maude Hill Foundation, which continued the Hill family's association with Bethesda.

Bethesda hospital had a very successful internship program. Dr. Donald Asp, a member of the 1963 intern class, was for many years the highly respected director of the Family Medicine Residency program at Bethesda. Dr. Hans Åberg from Sweden also interned at Bethesda. When he returned to Sweden, he started that country's first family practice residency at the Karolinska Institute and Hospital in Stockholm. He also served on the committee for selecting the winner of the Nobel Prize in Medicine. Dr. Robert Bjornson was the director of the intern program.

In one of the more humorous operations of that time, Dr. Paul Dickinson, a gastroenterologist, was called to the emergency room at Bethesda to see a two-year-old child who had swallowed a quarter. He put a gastroscope down into the child's stomach but was not immediately successful in retrieving the quarter. Various doctors and nurses gathered around to give advice, such as, "Is it really worth it for just a quarter?" Another one said, "Why don't you put down

two dimes and a nickel and see if you can't exchange it for the quarter?" He did not give up because every time he looked through the eyepiece, he could read "In God We Trust" on the coin. It was successfully retrieved.

There were three Brown brothers on the Bethesda medical staff. Dr. James Brown, ophthalmologist, Dr. John Brown, ob-gyn, and Dr. Robert Brown, general surgeon. Of course some wag had to point out that there were so many Browns on the medical staff at Bethesda because brown genes are dominant over blue.

Dr. Richard Yadeau, former Chief of Staff at Bethesda, worked with Dr. Robert Brown and Dr. Donald Foss in the field of surgery and oncology. They started the very successful hospice program at Bethesda, said to be the second in the nation.

Dr. Joseph F. Borg and Dr. David M. Craig were the hospital's internists when I joined them in medical practice in 1955. Dr. Borg was known to come onto the medical stations swinging his stethoscope. The nurses felt he was pretty stern and rigid and were really afraid of him, as was I, for the first year or two while in practice with him. Underneath this bravado, however, he had a kind heart for his patients and was a respected internist and cardiologist.

The Reverend Richard L. Hillstrom was head of the Chaplaincy Services at Bethesda for over thirty years. He arranged for the commission of the beautiful Louis Safer mural depicting scenes from Christ's life and teachings that was



*An X-ray showing a quarter that was lodged in a two-year-old patient's stomach.*

painted on the Chancel wall of the hospital chapel. Rev. Hillstrom also initiated Bethesda's art program, which had the goal of having one piece of original art in every hospital room. The Hillstrom Art Museum at Gustavus Adolphus College is now named in his honor. Today Nancy Apfelbacher and Barbara Piotrowski carry on this program. They may be seen from time to time moving about the hospital with "Artie," the art cart. This mobile approach to bringing art to patients enables them to choose a painting for their hospital rooms. A beautiful stained glass window on the 5th floor of the hospital was given by Barbara Piotrowski in honor of her uncle. Hillstrom Hall at Bethesda is named in Richard Hillstrom's honor, but Rev. Hillstrom likes to remind people that "this hall is the old laundry." Rev. Marlin Stene succeeded Rev. Hillstrom as chaplain and later became vice president of HealthEast for Chaplaincy Services.

Gustave Larson, St. Paul attorney, was a long-time president of the Bethesda Hospital board. When he retired from this position, he handed the gavel to the new board president, the Reverend Gary Langness. Both of these men are much admired for their accomplishments and their devotion to Bethesda.

### **Bethesda Today**

Following the retirement of Kenneth Holmquist in 1974, Donald Mills served admirably as Bethesda's administrator until 1982. Mills's time as the hospital's administrator included the difficult years when several other St. Paul hospitals were closing, largely due to shorter hospital stays with a lesser need for as many hospital beds in the city. Timothy Hanson then served as administrator from 1982 to 1986. Tim has served with distinction as CEO of HealthEast since 1989. Beginning as an assistant hospital administrator in 1971, Tim has served Bethesda Hospital or HealthEast for a total of thirty-seven years as of 2008.

Other fine hospital administrators at Bethesda have included Martin Paul (1986–1987), Sergei Shvetzoff (1988–1990), Scott Batulis (1991–2002), and Dr. Frank Indihar from 2003 until his retirement in February of 2008. Bethesda's new administrator, Catherine Barr, as-

sumed this position upon Dr. Indihar's retirement. Cathy came to Bethesda with an impressive background in health care administration.

Dr. Indihar also served as the medical director for Bethesda, where he founded the highly successful long-term respiratory care unit. While he represented Minnesota in the U.S. Senate, David Durenberger, who is very interested in health

care on a national level, helped obtain the necessary funding for this unit.

Dr. Karl C. Wold was chief-of-staff at Bethesda three different times during his long association with the hospital. He began as an intern at Bethesda from 1914 to 1915. His son, Dr. Keith C. Wold, also interned at Bethesda from 1951 to 1952. The senior Dr. Wold married Mabel Lundgren of Warren, Minnesota, who

## *Betty Wold Johnson Recalls How Bethesda Played Matchmaker*

Early on in the years when Dr. Karl C. Wold was practicing medicine at Bethesda Hospital, his daughter Betty Wold Johnson recalled that the hospital was planning some sort of social event and needed music for the entertainment of their guests. Dr. Wold had a beautiful tenor voice and was asked to sing for that occasion. He agreed but asked that the organizers find an accompanist who could play the piano while he sang. Seeking help among the hospital's nursing students, someone identified Mabel Lundgren of Warren, Minnesota, as capable of playing the piano. So they began practicing with Karl Wold singing to Mabel Lundgren's accompaniment.

Very soon thereafter the young doctor and the nurse in training realized that they were interested in each other. Fraternalization among physicians and nurses at the hospital was, however, strictly forbidden. To comply with this rule, but also communicate with his accompanist, Dr. Wold made an arrangement with the hospital's elevator man by which he would be the conduit for passing notes between the doctor and the nurse. With this unusual method of communication in place, the romance between the singer and the pianist flourished. Shortly thereafter, they were married on February 2, 1918.

Dr. Wold was subsequently inducted into the U.S. Army during World War I and was scheduled to go overseas, but then the terrible influenza epidemic of 1918–1919 broke out and many were dying from this dread disease. Consequently Dr. Wold was ordered to remain here and treat those who were afflicted with the flu on the home front. The former Mabel Lundgren never graduated from nurse's training, but she did use her nurse's skills when she later taught her daughter how to make tight corners on bedsheets so that a quarter would bounce off them.



*Dr. Karl C. Wold.*



Chaplain Richard L. Hillstrom in Bethesda chapel.

had been a student nurse at Bethesda, and wrote a book entitled *Mr. President, How Is Your Health?*, which documented the health histories of the presidents from George Washington through Franklin Roosevelt. He stated in this book that Roosevelt had had strokes before he met Stalin and Churchill at the Yalta Conference. This was vehemently denied by the Roosevelt family and the White House. Dr. Wold was later proven to be correct.<sup>9</sup> After the death of Mabel Wold at the age of 101, the Wold family made a major gift to Bethesda in honor of their parents. The gift was used for significant renovations to the interior of the hospital. In appreciation of this gift, the North Wing of the hospital, which constitutes the entire 1932 building, was named the Wold Memorial Wing.

Dr. Robert W. Holmen, a Gustavus Adolphus College graduate, was chief-of-staff in 1945. He was a past president of the hospital's board of directors and served on several national committees for the Lutheran Church. He was named a "Bethesda Builder" for his exceptional contributions to the life and growth of the hospital. In 1953 the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* published a photo that shows Karen Holmen Hubbard handing her father, Dr. Robert Holman, a sack containing \$150 in coins and small bills contributed by her fellow students at Gustavus Adolphus Col-

lege for Bethesda's building fund. It accurately exemplifies a long tradition of financial support for the hospital from a wide range of donors. This photograph includes in the background the hospital's Nurses' Home, which was named Mattson Hall in memory of Dr. Henning Mattson, a much loved physician, who died while serving in the military during World War II.

The Bethesda Lutheran Care Center was named in honor of Kenneth Holmquist, one of Bethesda's greatly admired administrators. Both Mattson Hall and the Holmquist facility served their purposes extremely well, but to show that nothing in life is permanent, they were razed in 2003 to make way for Bethesda's Therapeutic Park and Garden, which occupies a full city block.

The dedication of the Therapeutic Garden took place in 2003. Mr. and Mrs. Cy Sheehy were major donors for this project. The park is named in their honor. For patients with extended hospitalizations during rehabilitation, a change in environment from their hospital rooms helps to promote the healing process. Extensive donations of materials and labor came from Southview Garden Center and the Mortenson family. It also serves as a sculpture garden with displays which change periodically.

In 2003 Bethesda also celebrated its 120th anniversary. Nancy Wigdahl,

chief of Chaplaincy Services, arranged an outdoor program at which Herbert Chilstrom, former bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was the keynote speaker.

In my opinion, there are few hospital sites as beautiful as Bethesda's on Capitol Boulevard. People often ask, "What is Bethesda's role in the HealthEast Care System?" It is now a long-term acute care hospital with national recognition in several areas. These areas include chronic respiratory care, brain injury services, medical behavioral services, complex medical care and rehabilitation. It is also the site of the Dr. Terrance Capistrant Parkinson's Center.

In conclusion, the words of Bethesda Hospital's founder, Rev. A.P. Monten, spoken in 1883, are just as appropriate today as they were back then, "May the Lord continue to bless us and our work so that the hospital may hereafter be a cherished institution and a blessing to the many who are ill."

*Donald B. Swenson, M.D., is a Bethesda Hospital historian, a retired member of the hospital's medical staff, and a past member of the hospital's board. He is also an Emeritus Clinical Professor, University of Minnesota Medical School. He practiced with St. Paul Internists, P.A., from 1955 to 1994. This article grew out of public talks he has given on Bethesda's history.*

## Endnotes

1. This information is from Angela and Karin DuPaul, "A Swede Hollow Walking Tour."
2. Perry A. Swenson, St. Paul general contractor (deceased), personal communications.
3. Bethesda Archives, located in the History and Resource Center of Bethesda Hospital, St. Paul, Minnesota.
4. Ibid.
5. Robert F. Karolevitz, *Doctors of the Old West: A Pictorial History of Medicine on the Frontier* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1967).
6. Bill Hakala and Nancy Skaran, *Bethesda: Bethesda Lutheran Medical Center: A Century of Caring, 1883-1983* (St. Paul: Bethesda Foundation, 1983), 51.
7. Ernest R. Sandeen, *St. Paul's Historic Summit Avenue* (St. Paul: Living Historical Museum, Macalester College, 1978), 82.
8. Magnus Jemne, St. Paul architect (deceased), personal communications.
9. Karl C. Wold, *Mr. President, How Is Your Health?* (St. Paul, Bruce Publishing Co., 1948)



*Paul Granlund's sculpture of the Bethesda Angel in place on the east side of the hospital. Photo courtesy of Bethesda Hospital. See Dr. Donald B. Swenson's article on page 3.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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