

## Story of O'Neill's New Hospital

### Six-Year Interval in Start to Finish

By CAL STEWART  
Editor, The Frontier

The formal dedication day for O'Neill's new hospital—St. Anthony's—is at hand.

On Friday, September 26, the new and magnificent building will admit its first patients.

With appropriate ceremony and celebration the O'Neill medical center steps into a place of prominence in the ranks of mid-western medical institutions.

But the dedication day fanfare and opening day formalities are not the real hospital story. The real story can never be told in a detailed manner because of the complexities. To recount all the hopes, struggles, problems, even disappointments, would fill volumes.

Turn back the pages to the spring of 1946, the year when the nucleus of hospital interest was formed.

In that year a committee was organized and William J. Froelich, an O'Neill man who enjoys a successful law practice in Chicago, Ill., was made general chairman. At that stage a rough estimate of the cost of the proposed hospital indicated the amount would fall between 210- and 225-thousand-dollars. It was initially thought that the Sisters of St. Francis, who would own and operate the institution, would assume the indebtedness of perhaps 60-thousand-dollars.

L. C. Walling and the late P. B. Harty were designated as co-chairmen of the fund-raising committee. Response to the original appeal was immediate and, to say the least, overwhelming. In a few short months 50-thousand-dollars had been given by individuals from O'Neill and vicinity. Moreover, the money was in the bank! There were pledges coming in, too, enabling donors to extend their gift over a number of years.

At that point the progress was retarded. There was a drastic change in architectural plans and there were problems arising from the federal government grant.

Overcongestion of hospitals in metropolitan areas compelled the government to assist in an extensive hospital-building program through-out the length-and-breadth of the land. After all, expectant mothers had been getting out of the habit of giving birth to babies around the home fireside. It had become fashionable—if not downright sensible and practical—to enter a hospital. The mortality rate of infants dropped sensationally as this transition came about. Moreover, with a swelling population the need for more and



**SUPERIOR OF THE HOSPITAL SISTERS . . .** Mother M. Bertrand (above), the former Alice Fleming of O'Neill, arrived in July, 1952, to head the Sisters of St. Francis who are assigned to St. Anthony's.

better hospital facilities was a critical need in the land; hence, government grants—outright gifts, if you please—were made available.

But, of course, there was the matter of conforming. To conform to government regulations a bigger, costlier hospital was substituted for the 225-thousand-dollar plan.

But let's get on with the story.

Mr. Froelich, whose business kept him away from O'Neill for extended periods of time and out of immediate contact with the hospital move, resigned in favor of an on-the-scene leader. Mr. Froelich, however, had performed a great service. He had helped start the ball rolling and had established the liaison and enlisted the full support of governmental agencies.

In March, 1949, a real hero in the hospital story made his ap-

pearance. James M. Corkle, O'Neill hatcheryman, was appointed general chairman of the hospital building committee.

From that moment until the dedication, Mr. Corkle and a handful of close aides have formed the pillar of strength, have guided the financial drives and they have paid heavily in working out time-consuming problems.

The building committee's first problem was a matter of 44-thousand-dollars to add to the 56-thousand-dollars already gathered. It was agreed that the 100-thousand dollar mark had to be accumulated, hence the 44-thousand-dollar goal.

The quest for the "44" and how it was attained is an amazing story of generosity and cooperation at the community level.

Folks with means, God bless

them, had forthwith produced the "56". The "44" came slowly and laboriously, yet surely, and hardly a man, woman or child in the community did not play a role in writing that chapter in the hospital's history.

The anonymous people who participated are legion. Besides backing up Uncle Sam's participation, which ultimately was to amount to 53 percent of the bill, they contrived and schemed

and many gave until it hurt. The spirit that pervaded the whole scene pointed up the fact the "paper hospital" one day would be exactly what has come to pass—a community hospital of the highest order.

Thus without the help of the entire community the new O'Neill hospital could not have been. And, except for the prospect of the continued universal (Continued on back page).



Discussing blueprints during the earliest construction stages—August, 1950—are Edgar L. Coleman of the Frank N. McNett & Co., architectural firm; Walter Voss of O'Neill, employee of James Davidson & Sons plumbing and heating firm, and Olaf Mathisen of Salina, Kans., construction superintendent.

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—to O'Neill . . . the queen city of North Nebraska . . . now on the march!



**MOTHER ERICA RETURNS.** Mother M. Erica (above), the former Agnes Hughes of Battle Creek, is a St. Mary's academy graduate. She headed the Sisters of St. Francis Provincial Mother House in Denver, Colo., when the O'Neill hospital plan was posed, and actively participated in the various stages of development.

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