

Historical society hears

program on early hospitals in Poweshiek County

The monthly meeting of the Poweshiek County Historical and Genealogical Society was held Sept. 4 at the genealogy library in Montezuma. The roll call was to share a story about one of our ancestors.

It was a very busy meeting with lots of discussion about projects that need to be completed and coming up with ideas for landscaping of our school-house which has recently been moved to Montezuma.

Pat Rowell shared a very interesting program about our early county hospitals. We all take for granted the fine facilities we have available to us today but it took a long time for this to happen.

Before 1900 doctors made house calls and had rooms in their homes to treat patients who needed more care. When people began to understand the need for sanitary conditions hospitals were considered in Brooklyn, Montezuma and Grinnell.

A large home at 154 West Front Street in Brooklyn, built in 1875 by John Byers as a private home, was purchased in 1905 by Dr. Charles Busby. His family lived in the lower part of the house, but the upstairs was set up and used as a hospital for his patients for several years. When Dr. Busby died unexpectedly in 1937, his ashes were strewn from the back door of the house to the Community Hospital in Grinnell, the route he had taken many times during his career.

In 1918 Emma Groenboom and her husband Frank came to Montezuma, where they rented a large home in the south end of town. Mrs. Groenboom was trained as a nurse in St. Paul, Minn., in 1909 and had operated a private hospital in 1912 at Warroad, Minn.

By 1925, the home was converted into a five-bed hospital, known as the Gronenboom private hospital. In 1938 the Gronenboom's remodeled it into a six-bed hospital with an operating room and nurses on round-the-clock duty. The hospital was converted into a nursing home in the 1940s.

Early in 1947, a group of citizens began investigating the possibility of raising the needed funds to build a county hospital in Montezuma. Plans were drawn up, committees formed and the proposal was presented to the public to raise \$100,000. The plan went no further.

Grinnell's first hospital was established in 1901. Dr. Pearl E. Somers converted his house at 1127 Park Street into an eight-bed hospital. It was closed in 1904 when Dr. Somers was unable to

maintain the hospital and also his private practice. The community pushed for another larger facility and after a fund-raising campaign a hospital was opened in April 1908 at 1030 Elm St. and was supported by private donations, stock investments and tax money. The facility had six private rooms, an infant room, nurses' room, kitchen, reception area, dining room, laundry facilities and an operating room.

A public shower was held asking the public to help stock the hospital with linens, cooking utensils and food.

Due to increasing costs, the hospital was no longer able to fulfill the needs of the community and closed in 1919. The void created after the closing of the hospital was soon filled by two new hospitals: Community Hospital and Saint Francis Hospital.

Construction on the Community Hospital was started in 1918 and the hospital opened in 1919. The Grinnell Community Hospital Association raised more than \$105,000 and a 35-bed hospital was built on the corner of Reed Street and Fourth Avenue.

The Sisters of Saint Francis, a Roman Catholic order based in Clinton, Iowa, established St. Francis Hospital about the same time as the Community Hospital was established. Mrs. J. B. Carney was the first to step up and offered the sisters five acres of land and \$15,000. The offer was accepted and the hospital started construction on the corner of Penrose and Fourth Avenue.

In the late 1960s the idea of a merger between the two hospitals became attractive. In 1965, the State Board of Health advised that only one hospital was needed.

In September 1967, the two hospital boards announced a merger. Community would become the site of acute care, while St. Francis would become the home of a long-term care facility. In 1977 St. Francis built a new facility and became St. Francis Manor. The hospital was demolished in 1977.

Grinnell General Hospital was dedicated in February of 1968 with a staff of 125 employees in 18 departments.

Many changes took place over the next few years. Grinnell General Hospital continued to expand and in January 1994, the name of the hospital was changed to Grinnell Regional Medical Center. We have much to be thankful for in having such a fine facility to take care of our medical needs. We should also be very thankful for all the dedicated people who came before and contributed so much to the beginning of our modern day hospitals. — Sandy Cooper