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Mariposa Weekly Gazette

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Local Hospital Has Rich County History

By Matt Johnson, Assistant Editor | September 10, 2020 | Reprinted with Permission

Editor's note: With Measure N on the ballot in the upcoming election which would, if passed, provide sales tax revenue to John C. Fremont Hospital, this newspaper will be featuring various stories over the next few weeks about the hospital. This is the first of a four-part series and features the history of the hospital. It was compiled by Tom Phillips, local historian, and outlines how the current hospital came to be located in Mariposa.



This photo is from September 1965 and shows Kathy Trabucco, Debbie Palmer, Denise Seely and Beth Meese. Photos courtesy Tom Phillips

Early medical care in Mariposa rested with the doctor who had the county contract to take care of the sick. A doctor's home was often used to house the sick when other facilities were not available.

The first permanent County Hospital was located on the west side of Mariposa Creek across from the end of Eighth Street. It was purchased from L.A. Holmes, the editor of the Mariposa Gazette, for the sum of \$2,000.

The building was erected in the early 1850s as the home of Rufus Lockwood, attorney for the Fremont Grant, before it was established as the county hospital in August of 1860. The earliest admission records, at the Mariposa County Library, find that Charles Todd from Denmark was admitted to the county hospital on Oct. 3, 1865.

The county improved the hospital by purchasing water pipes, so water could be brought from the spring. Dr. Grandvoinet was granted permission from the county to allow private patients to be admitted to the hospital. In 1866 a bathhouse was added to the hospital. In 1865, medical services and the furnishing of board for the patients were separated. On March 4 1865, Dr. W.W. Ward was awarded the contract for medical services. Other County Physicians included; Dr. A.J. Lasseter, Dr. B.S. Scriven, Dr. William D. Cowan, Dr. J.A. Grandvoinet, Dr. J.H. Burnett, Dr. W.J. Kearney, Dr. Richter and many others. John McGrann was contracted to provide board and upkeep for the patients. The title Steward of the County Hospital was the name given for that position.

Over the following years many people held that title including John F. Harris, George A. Hayes, Carla G. Lind, George Stewart, A.B. Turner, George Bertken and Theodore Arndke. The Steward and his family generally lived at the hospital.

In August 1900, the county built a Women's Ward at the hospital. It was constructed by J. A. Walker and Frank S. Clow. After completion, J.A. Walker was contracted to build an additional 10 rooms onto the male ward.

In 1898, Dr. Conrad Richter purchased a piece of property located on Pine Knoll, which is where the present-day Mariposa County Recreation Department is located. There he built the Richter Sanitarium in 1901.

In 1903, the county purchased the property and added a new hospital building next to the Sanitarium. A walkway between the buildings was built and a small building was added to the complex called the "pest house" for those with communicable diseases.

In 1919, state and county agencies investigated the hospital and found that it was substandard and closed the facility. Patients were transferred under county contract to hospitals in Merced and later Madera.

At first this practice was a saving to the county, but as time went on, it became more and more expensive.

In 1946, May Kleiman, County Welfare Director, discovered that a bill passed in the legislature that would provide matching funds for communities in need of hospitals. She approached the board of supervisors and a special election was held to form a hospital district.

The county transferred \$70,000 into the hospital district. After a bond was passed by the county voters, \$225,000 was added to that amount and another \$13,500 was added by a special election tax.

The Hospital District Board purchased 19 acres from C.R. Phillips for \$6,500 near the Mueller tract subdivision on the north side of Mariposa. Construction started on June 19, 1950.

At a cost of \$460,000, John C. Fremont Hospital was dedicated on Sept. 30, 1951. It was built to accommodate 20-25 patients.

John C. Fremont was not the only hospital in Mariposa. The W. B. Lewis Memorial Hospital was located in Yosemite Valley. It started as an Army Camp hospital in 1913. The Lewis Memorial Hospital was dedicated to the memory of Superintendent W. B. Lewis, the first superintendent of the hospital under the National Park Service. It is still open today.

Here is a timeline of some of the important dates in the history of hospitals in the county:

- Aug. 24, 1860 — County buys ranch for first county hospital.
- 1901 — Richter Sanitarium built.
- 1903 — County buys sanitarium for new county hospital.
- 1913 — W.B. Lewis Memorial Hospital in Yosemite Valley opened.
- 1919 — County and state close down hospital; patients transferred to Merced and Madera.
- 1946 — Mary Kleiman, welfare director, finds state bill to provide matching funds for new hospitals.
- Nov. 13, 1947 — Hospital buys Phillips tract.
- Sept. 27, 1951 — John C. Fremont Hospital dedicated.
- May 21, 1954 — Improvements on Hospital Road.
- July 21, 1958 — New solarium built.
- Aug. 27, 1959 — Dr. Nichols new office built (across the street).
- June 11, 1964 — New annex built (Ewing Wing).
- Sept. 1, 1964 — Gift shop planned.
- March 8, 1973 — New ambulance purchased.
- April 24, 1975 — Medicare regulations require more expense. Income \$394,944; Expenses \$454,488.
- April 24, 1975 — Know your hospital article, staff photos.
- Aug. 28, 1980 — Hospital bankruptcy article published in Mariposa Gazette.
- Nov. 30, 1980 — Hospital open house held.
- Nov. 4, 1980 — Measure A passes; \$35 per tax parcel.
- Feb. 26, 1981 — First meeting of hospital foundation executive board.
- March 24, 1988 — New heliport for hospital.
- Aug. 27, 1992 — Dr. Nichols' old office redesigned as Fremont Clinic.
- Feb. 19, 1998 — Water tank removed from hospital grounds.

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