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Postcards from the Past: Saint Vincent Hospital, Indianapolis, Indiana

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Postcards from the Past

ESSAY

BY

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- Saint Vincent Hospitals and Health Services, Indianapolis -

In 1878, Bishop Francis Silas Chatard, who himself was a physician before he was ordained, wrote the Visitatrix of the Provincialate in Emmitsburg, Maryland, to promote the establishment of a Catholic hospital in Indiana to be operated by the Daughters of Charity. The bishop was familiar with the Daughters of Charity because he trained under them in Emmitsburg, and his sister, Juliana, also served as a Daughter of Charity.

This new hospital was located in an unused seminary building next to Saint Joseph's Church on East Vermont Street in Indianapolis, which had become Indiana's capitol city less than 60 years earlier. Even before the hospital opened its doors, it faced challenges: neighbors and the local newspaper opposed the hospital's construction, saying it would be ... a health hazard.

On 26 April 1881, the first four Daughters of Charity — Sister Mary Theresa O'Connor, Sister Oswald Spaulding, Sister Albertine Ott and Sister Magdalen Kelleher — came as true pioneers: brave in heart, strong in zeal and poor in pocket, sharing only \$34.77 between them. The



St. Vincent Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind. Published by Indianapolis Post Card Co., Indianapolis, Ind.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois



"Big 4 Freight Yards, showing St. Vincent's Hospital in the distance." Indianapolis, Indiana. Published by The Indiana News Company, Indianapolis, Ind. Postmarked 21 August 1910.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois

bishop gave them \$50 more to begin their Mission, converting the abandoned seminary into a hospital.

The circumstances of their arrival were somewhat unusual. A circus was in town the day the bishop drove them to the church, and the Sisters found themselves at the head of the circus parade. As the townsfolk gathered to watch, they noticed the Sisters' bright white cornettes and broke out in cheers and laughter, thinking the Sisters were part of the entertainment! As the Sisters arrived at their destination, they discovered the infirmary already had three patients, who were being cared for by Bishop Chatard himself.

St. Vincent's Infirmary was incorporated in 1884, and money was tight so the Sisters used volunteers and tracked every penny they spent. In 1885, Dr. Joseph W. Marsee was hired as the first house physician at \$25 per month.

In 1889, just eight years after their arrival, the Sisters moved to a new facility at South and Delaware streets on the southeast side of downtown Indianapolis. This new hospital was like a dream come true, as it had 38 private rooms and eight large wards. It would easily accommodate 150 patients at a building cost of more than \$111,000.

Seeing the growing number of beds at the infirmary, the Sisters decided to create a nursing school to provide a complement of nurses for the future. In 1896, the Saint Vincent School of Nursing was estab-

lished with Miss Emma Hannafin as its first student. Six years later, the infirmary and the nursing school were thrust into the national spotlight as students and staff treated President Theodore Roosevelt, who was admitted with an abscess in his leg while on a speaking tour. Despite being in an unfamiliar city, President Roosevelt immediately recognized a familiar face upon his admission: Sister Regina Purtell, who had cared for his fever-stricken Rough Riders at Montauk Point during the Spanish-American War.

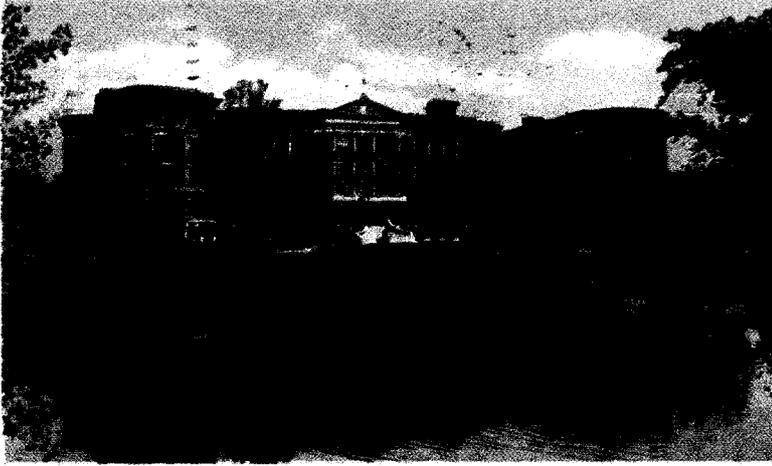
Although the infirmary was far from any war zone, the noise and smoke from nearby rail yards and factories made its location less than comfortable for patients. In 1908 an explosion at a nearby factory shattered the infirmary's windows, further cementing the Sisters' decision to move. They had been in this, their second home, for less than 20 years when it became apparent that they must seek a third location. Before the move was made, however, the infirmary decided to give itself a new name, so in 1911 its legal name was changed to Saint Vincent Hospital. One year later, the hospital broadened its educational base when Dr. Karl Ruddell became the first house physician to teach students and young doctors.

The new site lay on the north bank of Fall Creek, between Capitol Avenue and Illinois Street on the north side of Downtown Indianapolis. In tune with the current philosophy and mission of the Daughters of Charity and Saint Vincent Hospital, one of the daily papers stated at the time of the move to Fall Creek Parkway:



St. Vincent's Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind. Majestic Publishing Company, Indianapolis.
Vincentina Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois

ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL INDIANAPOLIS, IND.



St. Vincent's Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind. From the back: "St. Vincent's Hospital is beautifully located on Fall Creek. Indianapolis has 9 hospitals (major), 1 state, 1 city, 7 general." Published by DeWolf News Co., Indianapolis, Ind. Postmarked 8 October 1934.

Vincetiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois

Although the Sisters of Charity are going into a new home, they say that this does not mean the adoption of new policies in their hospital and charity work. Long ago they took up the task of helping people without regard to caste or purse, and in the future as in the past, the lame and the halt, the sick and the afflicted, the rich and the poor, may turn to the new hospital with the assurance that its helpfulness will be given to them.

Thus, Saint Vincent Hospital moved to a new 250-bed hospital on Fall Creek in February 1913, a location that served as Saint Vincent's home for the next 61 years. The first birth at Fall Creek occurred on 3 February, when the appropriately-named Vincetia Connor greeted the world. The legacy of Saint Vincent de Paul stayed with this child throughout her adult life as she later went on to graduate from the Saint Vincent School of Nursing. Bishop Chatard had seen his dream grow through three incarnations, presiding over the new hospital's dedication on 5 February 1913.



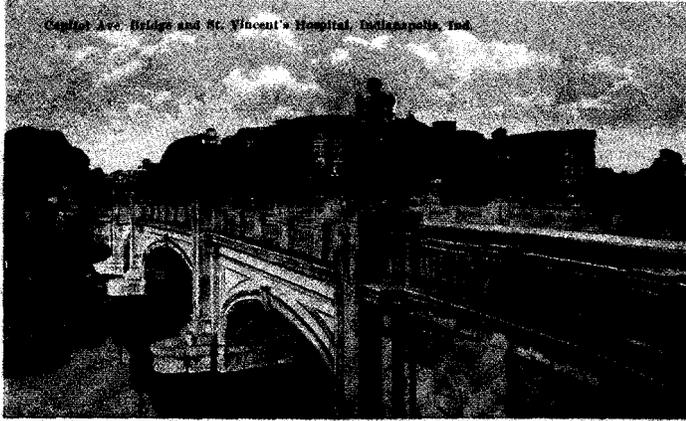
St. Vincent Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind. Published by the Indiana News Company,
Indianapolis, Ind.

Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois

Five years later, as the United States entered World War I, 11 Saint Vincent Nursing School graduates and several doctors volunteered for duty at a Base Hospital in Indianapolis. Others were assigned to various government installations at home and overseas. Also in 1918, Saint Vincent joined hospitals around the world in treating the influenza outbreak. More than 200 admissions and 36 deaths were flu-related at the hospital. The hospital also lost one of their greatest supporters that year when Bishop Chatard passed away.

The bishop would have been pleased with Saint Vincent's growth during the 60-plus years at Fall Creek. The School of Nursing's success required construction of a separate facility – Marillac Hall – in 1927. The wartime years of the 1940s required austerity with rationing, energy savings and safety improvements. By the 1960s, overcrowding, expansion and renovation were the rule and talk was beginning about a new building. Land along 86th Street between Ditch and Township Line roads on the far-Northwest side was purchased for a new hospital. By the end of our 60 years at Fall Creek, more than 645,000 patients had been admitted! Our years at Fall Creek ended with mixed feelings when, after more than 70 years of teaching and training over 2,400 nurses, the Saint Vincent School of Nursing closed in 1970.

The population growth on the Northside of Indianapolis in the 1960s, and accessibility to major highways in the area, made the 86th



Capitol Ave. Bridge and St. Vincent's Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind. Published by Indiana News Company, Indianapolis, Ind. Postmarked 31 May 1921.
Vincentiana Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois

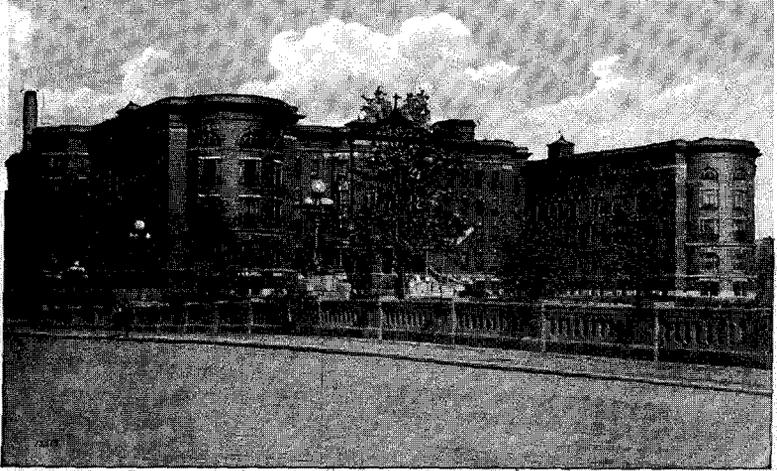
Street location a logical one. Ground was broken for the new hospital on 8 January 1971.

On 31 March 1974, through a massive community effort headed by Administrator Carlos McDonnell, D.C., medical resident Dr. Philip Eskew Jr. of the U.S. Army Reserve, and aided by the 337th General Hospital Unit of the U.S. Army Reserve, the transfer to hospital number four was made in three hours and 20 minutes. When the Sisters and others joined the caravan to their new home they carried with them much more than the patients, equipment and supplies needed to perpetuate their service. The most important element they transferred was their spirit. This spirit would carry them to even greater heights in their new location on the Northwest side.

Following the move to 86th Street, Saint Vincent continued to expand:

- 1981 – Added an ambulatory facility on the hospital's south side.
- 1982 – The Stress Center opened on the campus' east side for those with mental health and chemical dependency needs.
- 1983 – The Family Life Center opened on the main building's northwest corner.
- 1985 – Opening of Saint Vincent Carmel Hospital.
- 1988 – Saint Vincent acquired the New Hope facility for the physically and mentally handicapped.

St. Vincent Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind.



Not the window I have marked

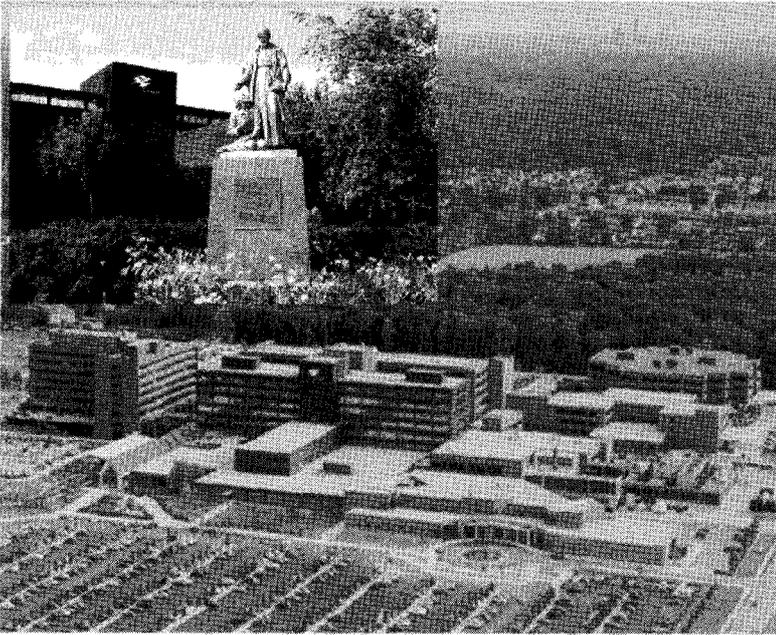
St. Vincent Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind. Published by DeWolf News Co., Indianapolis, Ind. Postmarked 24 July 1929.

Vincentina Collection, DePaul University Special Collections, Chicago, Illinois

- 1998 – Saint Vincent Seton Cove Spirituality Center opened at the edge of a woods south of the 86th Street Hospital. Seton Cove serves as an interfaith center for spiritual formation and renewal, with a focus on spirituality in the workplace.

In July 1998, Saint Vincent Hospital entered a new era with the creation of the Central Indiana Health System (CIHS), led by Saint Vincent and Saint Joseph Hospital and Health Center in Kokomo, Indiana. The network includes Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Hospital, located at the Carmel facility (1987); Saint Vincent Mercy Hospital in Elwood (joined Saint Vincent in 1994); Saint Vincent Williamsport Hospital (1997); Saint Vincent Children's Specialty Hospital (1998); Saint Vincent Jennings Hospital in North Vernon and Saint Vincent Randolph Hospital in Winchester (1999); Saint Vincent Frankfort Hospital (2000); and Saint Vincent Clay Hospital in Brazil (2001). CIHS also includes numerous ambulatory outpatient facilities and primary care family physician practices located throughout the metropolitan Indianapolis area.

Both Saint Vincent and CIHS continue to devote a substantial portion of their budgets for charity care and community benefit both lo-



A photograph of the St. Vincent's Hospital complex as it appears today.
Courtesy Saint Vincent's Hospital

cally, regionally and internationally in keeping with the tradition of Saint Vincent de Paul. Every two years, CIHS publishes a Report to the Community, a summary of its goals and accomplishments reflecting our member hospitals' efforts to build healthier communities. This report is shared with business and community leaders in the areas we serve, as well as with our own associates.

One of the consistent highlights of our Report to the Community covers the accomplishments of Jubilee Center, which serves inner-city children and their families in the area that the Fall Creek Hospital once minded. Jubilee Center, a joint program of Saint Vincent and Tabernacle Presbyterian Church, has been a part of our commitment of building healthier communities for more than a decade. Saint Vincent Unity Development Center is one component of Jubilee Center and provides various services for local families as well as connections to other organizations that promote independence and encourage healthy living and personal growth.

In 1999, a new health ministry, based on co-sponsorship between the Daughters of Charity National Health System, Saint Vincent's sponsoring organization, and the Sisters of Saint Joseph Health System of

Kalamazoo, Michigan, was created. Ascension Health is a faith-based healthcare organization dedicated to the missions of the four provinces of the Daughters of Charity and the congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Nazareth, Michigan. Based in Saint Louis, Missouri, Ascension Health has more than 87,000 associates in 15 states and the District of Columbia.

Saint Vincent Hospital is dedicated to spiritually centered, holistic care, which sustains and improves the health of individuals and communities. Rooted in the loving ministry of Jesus as healer, we commit ourselves to serving all persons with special attention to those who are poor and vulnerable. We are advocates for a compassionate and just society through our actions and our words. The ageless mission of Saint Vincent remains unchanged: to minister to the minds, bodies and spirits of those in need.

What great hidden treasures there are in holy Providence, and how marvelously Our Lord is honored by those who follow it and do not try to get ahead of it! – Yes, you will tell me, but it is on account of God that I am worried. – It is no longer because of God that you are worried if you are troubled because of serving Him.

*(Saint Vincent de Paul,
letter 31, To Saint Louise, Around 1629)*