Glimpses into Mercy Hospital's Past

From the Diaries

Sister M. Annunciata Quigley
Sister Mary Annunciata Quigley, RN, was one of the most vital forces in Mercy’s early growth and development. After graduating from St. Mary’s School of Nursing in Lewiston in 1918 and taking her vows as a Sister of Mercy in 1922, she became the hospital’s first administrator in 1934, serving until her death in 1969.

At her funeral, Sister Annunciata was eulogized as a woman of insight, empathy, and understanding, and for her contagious, high-pitched laugh and the twinkle in her eye, her unique walk with head slightly bent to one side, her warmth and humanity. She was remembered first and foremost as a friend and someone who saw Mercy Hospital as her home; the patients and personnel as her family.

But Sister Annunciata also was a consummate professional who was recognized in the healthcare industry. She was a Fellow of the American College of Hospital Administrators (ACHA) and the Maine Regent of the ACHA’s Council of Regents, and served as board chair of the Maine Hospital Association from 1951 to 1953.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of her 35-year tenure as Mercy Hospital’s administrator, however, is the glimpse she provides into her day-to-day life during three-and-a-half remarkable decades in the history of our hospital, our state, and our nation. For Sister Annunciata kept a diary every year of her tenure, jotting down facts and observations that reveal what life at the hospital’s helm was like.
The Early Years: 1934 – 1940
Leading Mercy Hospital into the Future

When Sister Annunciata steps into the leadership role at Queen's Hospital in 1934, it is a pivotal time in the history of our nation and the world. Americans struggle after the Great Depression and unemployment rises to 25%. President Franklin D. Roosevelt spearheads the Social Security Act of 1935, and the minimum wage is established. The American people gather around their radios to listen to the President’s fireside chats and baseball games. Motion pictures are popular, and young people dance to the music of the “big bands.”

On the world stage, Hitler is named Fuhrer, and World War II begins in 1939 when Germany invades Poland, and Britain and France declare war on Germany.

In Maine, Prohibition is repealed (1934), disastrous spring floods cause $25 million in damage (1936) and, in 1938, the first hurricane to strike New England since 1869 makes it all the way to Maine.

In Portland, Sister Annunciata faces her own challenges. The greater Portland community’s healthcare needs are exceeding the capabilities of the original Queen’s Hospital facility. While Sister Annunciata’s day-to-day focus is on the operational details of a busy hospital, she is also looking toward the future – and searching for support to build a bigger, better hospital to serve the community’s needs.
The War Years: 1940 – 1945
Meeting Wartime Challenges on the Home Front

The Japanese attack Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the U.S. enters World War II, which dominates the American psyche for the next four years. The Manhattan Project begins in 1942 to coordinate American efforts to build the atomic bomb. The Allies invade Normandy on D-Day (June 6, 1944). Germany surrenders on May 7, 1945. The U.S. drops the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Japan surrenders on V-J Day (September 2, 1945).

During this period, FDR freezes prices, salaries, and wages to prevent inflation. The GI Bill of Rights is passed, and the United Nations is established. The nation’s first HMO (Kaiser) begins in California. Selman Waksman discovers streptomycin and coins the term “antibiotic.” Doctors begin to use the pap test to detect cervical cancer, and oral penicillin is developed.

In Maine, FDR comes ashore in Rockland in 1941 after signing the Atlantic Charter with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Harry S. Truman becomes President. In 1944, a prisoner of war camp is established in Houlton to house German POWs. Mainers mourn along with the rest of the nation when FDR dies on April 12, 1945.

And in the midst of it all, Sister Annunciata oversees the launch of a $300,000 fundraising campaign for a new Mercy Hospital and construction of the new 150-bed facility, which opens on March 18, 1943.
Air smoky and cloudy and irritating to breathe. We think it is due to heavy fire at Biddeford Pool. General alarm was sounded for that town at 6 a.m. Fire re-kindled on Saco road, due to rising wind. Maine proclaimed disaster unit by President Truman.

January 3, 1948
Scare on oil scarcity. Randall & McAllister suggesting that we convert one boiler to coal. Mr. Tyler tells us not to worry – they will take care of us.

May 16, 1946
Bids submitted for converting coal to oil in one boiler...Lovely spring day... One of the headaches of the day – typewriters tipped over in record room – cost $60 to repair.

The Post-War Period: 1946 – 1949
The Faith to Move Forward

The Marshall Plan is implemented and the first meeting of the U.N. takes place. President Truman ends racial segregation in the U.S. military in 1948, and South Africa institutionalizes apartheid in 1949. The Communist People’s Republic of China is formally proclaimed and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) is established under Soviet rule (1949).

In the U.S., Benjamin Spock’s childcare classic is published (1946), the Hollywood “Black List” is created by the House Un-American Activities Committee (1947), “Meet the Press” debuts on NBC (1947), and Milton Berle hosts the first telethon, which benefits cancer research, in 1949.

Closer to home, the Maine Turnpike opens from Kittery to South Portland in 1947. Major forest fires sweep the state, destroying 200,000-plus acres, and more than 1,200 homes and cottages. In 1948, Margaret Chase Smith is elected U.S. Senator from Maine, becoming the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress.

October 25, 1947
Air smoky and cloudy and irritating to breathe. We think it is due to heavy fire at Biddeford Pool. General alarm was sounded for that town at 6 a.m. Fire re-kindled on Saco road, due to rising wind. Maine proclaimed disaster unit by President Truman.
The Fifties: 1950 – 1959
A Decade of Growth

This decade began with the Korean War, Charles Schulz’s first “Peanuts” comic strip, and the first successful kidney transplant. Other notable events on the world stage: Edmund Hilary reaches the summit of Mt. Everest (1953), Egypt takes control of the Suez Canal (1956), General Charles de Gaulle becomes French premier, and Nikita Khrushchev becomes premier of the Soviet Union (1958).

In the U.S., color television is introduced (1951), Dwight D. Eisenhower is inaugurated President (1953), the Supreme Court bans racial segregation in public schools (1954), Rosa Parks refuses to sit at the back of the bus (1955), and Alaska and Hawaii become states (1959).

In Maine, Senator Margaret Chase Smith denounces the tactics of the House Un-American Activities Committee (1950), Edmund S. Muskie is elected as the state’s first Democratic governor in more than 20 years (1954), and the Maine Legislature passes a bill giving Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Indians the right to vote in state elections (1959).

Sister Annunciata, meanwhile, oversees the opening of a new wing in 1952 – in addition to the countless other details of running a busy hospital.
A Turbulent Time

This decade began with 900 U.S. military advisors in South Vietnam, the election of John F. Kennedy as our first Catholic President, the erection of the Berlin Wall, and Alan B. Shepard, Jr., becoming the first American in space.

By the end of the decade, President Kennedy and his brother Robert have been assassinated, along with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; racial violence explodes in Watts (Los Angeles), Detroit, and other U.S. cities; the Tet offensive marks a turning point in the Vietnam war and the My Lai massacre makes headlines; and Apollo 11 astronauts take man’s first walk on the moon.

In the medical world, the first liver transplant is performed; the U.S. Surgeon General affirms that cigarette smoking causes cancer; the first human heart transplant is performed; amniocentesis is developed; and the first in vitro fertilization of a human egg is performed in England.

Rachel Carson publishes “Silent Spring,” the Beatles appear on the Ed Sullivan Show, and “60 Minutes” debuts on CBS.

Maine’s Edmund S. Muskie is the 1968 Democratic nominee for vice president on a ticket headed by Hubert Humphrey. And Sister Annunciata enters the final decade of her tenure as Mercy Hospital’s administrator. She passes away on July 28, 1969.
July 28, 1969
Sister Annunciata died at 9:15 a.m. today.
Sister Johnette with her at time of death.
All meetings canceled.