

CHAPTER 4

Brooklyn Cottage Hospital, This Isn't New York

The hospital was all “slicked up” in honor of my coming. Just as Miss Scott had told me, it was small, crowded, and far from modern. However, it was staffed by warm-hearted, caring, and dedicated people. The staff consisted of Dr. Bowen, three registered nurses, a dietician/cook, and a general helper.



Brooklyn-Cottage Hospital

Dr. Bowen was a handsome woman, a little taller and heavier than I was. She had a great sense of humor and had nicknames for many of the office patients such as “Flat-Foot

Romero," "Gold-Tooth Ortega," and "Trailer-House Lady." She would write these along with her notes in the office day book. This made an interesting book, but it was difficult for me to determine just who she meant. She enjoyed playing jokes as well as having jokes played on her. Her favorite expletives were "My hat!" and "Callooh callay!" Once she was asked if being born in China made her Chinese, to which she replied, "If an old cat crawled into the oven and had kittens, would they be bis-kits (biscuits)?"

Dr. Bowen was a graduate of Oberlin College and the University of Minnesota College of Medicine. She was an excellent physician, a keen diagnostician, and very capable obstetrician.

Charlotte Maisch, the head nurse, was from Cleveland, Ohio. She was a rather heavy-set red head with friendly blue eyes and an infectious smile. Sometimes we called her "Maisch" but most of the time she was "Lottie." She had done post-graduate training in obstetrics and gynecology at Woman's Hospital in New York City, the very place I had left so recently and reluctantly. I felt right at home with her, and it was wonderful to have a nurse with her training and ability in this little, remote hospital. On duty she was very professional. Off duty she loved to laugh and have a good time. She also loved driving out to look at the beauties of nature, particularly the stunning New Mexico sunsets.

The other two nurses were also very competent and well-trained. They were graduates of New Mexico Presbyterian Mission schools (the plaza day schools, Allison James Junior

High School in Santa Fe, and Menaul Senior High School in Albuquerque). They had taken their nurses' training and earned their degrees at Sage Memorial Hospital, in Ganado, Arizona (another Presbyterian Mission). Emilia Romero, "Romy," was rather small, about 5'1". Her hair was light brown and her eyes were gray. Her complexion was olive. She was from Chacon, a small village in a broad valley on the other side of the mountain from Dixon. It had been settled by the Spanish under a land grant from Mexico. Rosenda Naranjo, called "Naranjo," was from Chimayo, a Spanish-American village about 35 miles south and east of Dixon. She was of average height, about 5'5". Her eyes and hair were almost black and her complexion was light. She was a big tease. Romy was fun-loving, but tended to be more serious than Naranjo.

When they were on duty, all three nurses wore white uniforms, white shoes, and stockings. They also always wore their nursing school pin and their school's registered nurses' white cap. Dr. Bowen and I wore white coats over our cotton print dresses. Dr. Bowen wore a long white lab coat and I wore the short intern's jacket. This held no special significance. It just happened to be what I had.

The dietician/cook, Miss Lucille Cole, from Knoxville, Tennessee, was nicknamed "Wally" because of her marked resemblance to Wally Simpson, Duchess of Windsor. My first meal at the hospital was a foretaste of the many wonderful meals to come. Miss Cole was an excellent and imaginative cook. The meals were always delicious and attractively served. For all holidays and any special occasion she would



*Dr. Sarah Bowen, ready to leave
on vacation*



Miss Charlotte Maisch, R.N.



*Miss Rosenda Naranjo, R.N.,
Miss Emilia Romero, R.N.*

decorate the table appropriately. Some of her food was really gourmet. It was here that I was introduced to hollandaise sauce, avocado salad, and Bûche Noël. Miss Cole felt her call to Mission service was to do what she did best—to plan, cook, and serve nutritious meals. She kept our bodies healthy and our morale high. The patients' meals were equally delicious and attractive, but their menus had to be tailored to their preferences and needs.

Miss Cole's cuisine and Dr. Bowen's hospitality were well known. Visitors, drug detail men, laundry men, and others all hoped to make their stop with us around noon. In return for their meal, they brought us news and a glimpse of the world away from the mission. I was once reprimanded by Dr. Bowen for failing to invite a man and his daughter who appeared around 10:30 a.m.

Gladys Plekenpol, the general helper, was indispensable. She chauffeured, ran errands, unpacked boxes and stored their contents, kept books, wrote thank-you letters, helped with patients, helped in the kitchen, helped me make my fires, and was always ready to pitch in wherever she was needed.

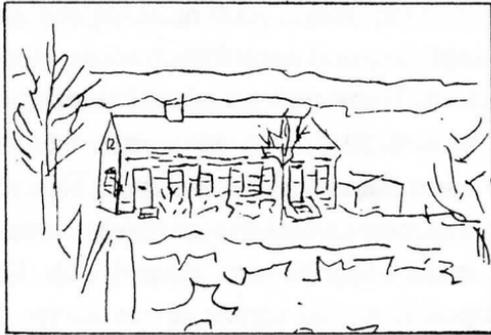
Annie Rendon, a cute fifteen-year-old from Dixon, helped Miss Cole in the kitchen. Salome, the laundress, also helped there occasionally. Miss Cole was not too keen on her help because more than once she removed the sink strainer and let a chore ball (a metal-mesh pot and pan scrubber) go down the drain. The chore ball would clog up the drain. Water would back up and the sink could not be used until

Mr. Archuleta had dug up the drain and removed the obstacle.

Mr. Archuleta was the handyman and part-time janitor. In the winter he fired the furnace during the day. In the summer, he did the outside work of irrigating the lawn. He could change a tire and put on chains. In bad weather, he sometimes went along to the clinic as the driver.

The hospital was a little cement block building which had been erected in 1914 (just two years after New Mexico became a state) with money raised and contributed by the women of Brooklyn-Nassau Presbyterial. It was named Brooklyn Cottage in their honor. The building had originally been planned as a health center and home for two nurses with room to care for one or two patients in an emergency. When Dr. Bowen took charge in April 1932, she rented a house for herself and her staff and turned the little building into a hospital.

When I arrived in 1939, the hospital had eleven adult beds and a flexible number of children's beds and baby bassinets. One large room and a garage with a storeroom had been added at the back (again, with money contributed by Brooklyn-Nassau Presbyterial). Of course, due to limited space, each room had to serve several purposes. (See floor plan, Figure 1.)



Brooklyn Cottage Hospital 1939

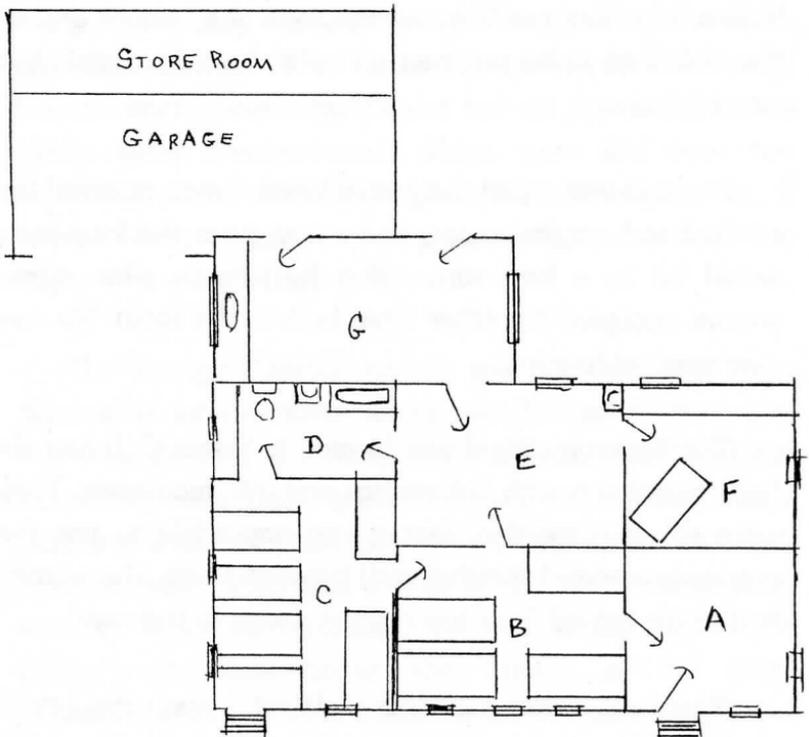


Figure 1

The front door opened into Room A. Sometimes it was a visitor's waiting room, but most of the time it was a doctor's examining and consultation room. Room A was also the drug store. There was no point in writing a prescription when the nearest drug store was twenty-five miles away. All medicines were dispensed on the spot. This room was also the operating room when the occasion demanded. In that case, the extra furniture was moved out. The examining table was pulled to the center of the room. Two big light bulbs were screwed into the drop cord light fixture. The room was disinfected, and the surgeon proceeded. The examining table worked fairly well as an operating table, but if Trendelenburg position was required, the bottom end of the table had to be propped up on a chair. Fortunately, it never fell down.

Room B was called the Men's Ward. It was reserved for medical and surgical cases, and many times the lone man would be in a bed surrounded by screens while three women occupied the other three beds in the room. No one ever seemed to mind.

The Maternity Ward was located in Room C. It had six beds, metal cots with link springs and thin mattresses. They were so close together that it was impossible to use the gurney (a wheeled stretcher cart) between them. The women had to be carried from the delivery room to the ward.

Room E, the Children's Ward, was the main thoroughfare to other parts of the hospital. It contained the scrub-up sink for surgery and deliveries. It was also the

nurses' duty station, workroom, and sterilizing room. The autoclave (the pressure sterilizer) was run with two kerosene burners which periodically would explode and cover everything with soot. It seemed that this was most apt to happen just after the nurses had washed all of the white woodwork. The laboratory was also located in this room. The "lab" was an antique cupboard which looked like an ordinary piece of furniture when it was closed. Each door was made up of two sections hinged together. When it was completely open, there were six sections of shelves.

Room F was the Delivery Room and Newborn Nursery. Many a new baby was cheered into the world by the howls of earlier arrivals. The nursery consisted of six laundry baskets, each covered by a sheet and set in a row on some planks (also sheet-covered) which were laid over two sawhorses. Most births took place on a low lying cot. If forceps were required, the patient was moved to the "operating room" (Room A).

The sewage disposal system, a septic tank, had been planned to accommodate two people—four at the most—and was always giving us trouble. For this reason, the bathroom (Room D) was used almost entirely as a utility room. Bedpans were emptied into the toilet stool, and dirty (contaminated) linen was soaked in the tub in a sterilizing solution. When nature called, the staff hit the trail to "La Casita," the little house also known as the privy. Occasionally we would disinfect the tub with undiluted Lysol and treat ourselves to a tub bath.

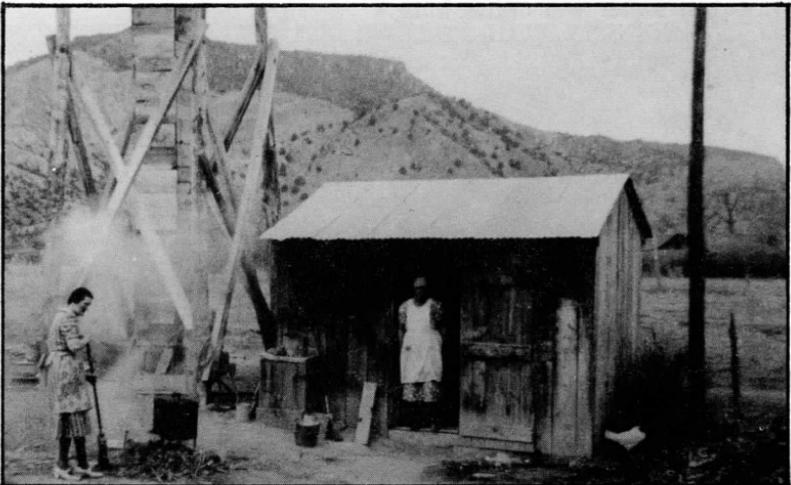
One time, when one of the nurses was using the tub, she stayed in for an interminable time. She also had the door propped shut. The nurses were getting upset because they needed their "utility room." Finally, one of the nurses pushed hard enough to open the door and there, horrors! was some big black thing in the tub. The "thing" was a black fur coat. Somehow the coat rack had fallen over, deposited the coat in the tub, and fallen against the door so it couldn't be opened.

The kitchen (Room G) was the most over-worked place of all. All the food for patients and staff was prepared here. Baby formula was prepared and nursing bottles and nipples were washed and sterilized in this same area. All of the dishes, pots, and pans were washed here. Room G was also the staff dining room, patients' waiting room (when the weather was cold), and private office for Dr. Bowen, the bookkeeper, and me. My private office was an orange crate on top of a file. Reverend William M. Orr, the Joint Field Representative for the Boards of National Missions and Christian Education in both Arizona and New Mexico, said that he had long since learned never to go to the front door of the hospital when he came to visit; he never knew what he might find on the kitchen/dining room table. It could be in use for preparing produce for canning or for butchering a hog. Someone might be cutting out a dress. We might be eating. Once he found a patient stretched out on it.

The hospital was heated by a furnace located in the basement and reached by an outside stairway. During the day it was fired by Mr. Archuleta, the part-time janitor, but

during the night, the night nurse had to look after it. Water was pumped from a well by a noisy gasoline pump into a tank on a hill behind the hospital. Gravity brought the water to the building. Direct current electricity was generated by a small Kohler plant, also powered by gasoline. Someone had donated a small electric refrigerator designed for indirect current. Because the refrigerator could not be used for its intended purpose, it was used for storage of stationery and other office supplies. The staff rooms were lighted by kerosene lamps, so we spent many evenings in the kitchen/dining room where we could read, write, or sew by good light. The very attractive big dining room table and chairs, decorated by hand carving, had been given to the hospital in payment for an obstetrical fee.

The nearest real telephone was at Rogers' Tourist Court on the highway, a mile and a half from the hospital, but there was a battery-operated intercom telephone to connect the hospital and Dr. Bowen's bedroom.



Hospital laundry

Most of the laundry was sent to a commercial laundry in Santa Fe, but a lot of it was done by hand on the premises by Salome Gurule. She stood about 5'9", unusually tall for a Dixon woman. A laundry shed had been built, but even on the coldest days, Salome preferred to work in the open. Wearing a red bandanna on her head, an apron (usually a yellow print), and a sweater over her cotton dress, Salome worked for hours. She heated the water over a bonfire, scrubbed the clothes on a washboard, wrung them by hand, rinsed, and wrung twice again. Then she hung everything on a line to dry in the breeze and sun.

After I had been shown the hospital that first day, we sat down to a delicious dinner of roast pork with potatoes and carrots browned with it, gravy, cabbage salad, bread, butter, jelly, prune whip, and tea. This did not seem like the simple food I had been led to expect.

"Ah well!" I thought, "This is to impress me. The beans and pot likker will come later."



Staff home

Our house was about a city block from the hospital and set back from the road about twenty feet. It was adobe and was plastered with a light pinkish brown adobe mud. The pitched roof of corrugated metal was a soft faded pinkish-red. It looked as though it had successfully weathered many storms and could weather many more. Obviously, New Mexican adobe mud was quite different from Iowa mud and I did not need to worry about the house melting away. The exterior wood work was painted green. The inside woodwork was brown. The house was "L" shaped and contained eight rooms, each one heated by a sheet-metal wood burning stove. My room was very pleasant with curtains at the window and two wool rugs—one gray and one red. They had been woven on a home loom by local Spanish-Americans and taken in on hospital bills.

The furniture was no special style but quite adequate. There were a dresser, a washstand, a bookcase, a rocker, a straight chair, two wood boxes, a twin size brown metal bed with Simmons springs and mattress. There was also a small built-in closet. Two kerosene lamps (one made of pottery), a washbasin, and a slop jar completed the appointments.

I quickly fell into the routine. After the evening meal, most of us stayed on in the kitchen/dining room until bedtime. Dr. Bowen and I would have patient records to write up, letters to write, accounts to add up (the old school way, without an adding machine), reports to make, and so forth. The others read, wrote letters, or worked on embroidery or other hand crafts. Some times I would have lab work to do. Occasionally, if a book of general interest

had come into our hands, we would all sit around the table and listen as we took turns reading aloud to each other.

When bedtime came, we would all set out together to walk to our house. Each of us had a flashlight and carried a quart jar of cold water for drinking and a gallon jug of hot water for bathing—for a basin, as Charley McCarthy called it. We had to care for our own lamps and stoves. This meant washing the lamp chimney and replenishing the kerosene. It meant keeping our wood box full, carrying out ashes and building our own fires. I never did master the trick of getting a fire started in a hurry, even with Lottie's "ashes of roses" (ashes mixed with kerosene). I could start a fire in the evening but in the morning it was better for me to leap out of bed, dress hurriedly, and dash to the hospital.

One time Dr. Bowen said to Dr. Harper C. Donaldson (the Superintendent of Menaul School and Director of Medical and Educational mission work for our area) that she thought the hospital should have a surgeon. She realized that the surgeon would very likely be a man who would not care to serve under a woman, so she would be glad to step down from her position of physician-in-charge.

Dr. Donaldson replied, "Why, Dr. Bowen! You couldn't expect a man to live under these conditions!"

I suspect that he was teasing, but Dr. Bowen took his remark seriously and never forgave him.