

75 Years of Caring

- Celebrating 75 Years over 75 Days •

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CHAPTER 1 - In the early 1940s, Henderson was home to factories employing thousands of workers producing materials for the U.S war effort. World War II ended in 1945 and those factories were no longer needed for defense purposes. Many of the 14,000 employees moved away from Henderson. Enrollment in the town site's schools dropped by two-thirds. More than half the homes built for the workers fell vacant. In 1947, the United States War Asset Administration actually offered Henderson for sale as war surplus property.

Father Peter Moran, pastor of Henderson's St. Peter's Church, took notice when Basic Magnesium Hospital was put up for sale after the war. He envisioned an opportunity for the Catholic church to rise to the challenge of caring for the community. He quickly shared his idea with Bishop Thomas K. Gorman, from the Diocese of Reno, which at that time included southern Nevada.

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CHAPTER 2 - Upon hearing Father Moran's idea, Bishop Gorman was in full support of stepping in and taking up operation of Henderson's only hospital. The Bishop wrote a letter dated May 20, 1946, to Mother Mary Gerald Barry, the Superior of the Adrian Dominican Sisters of Adrian, Michigan.

He explained, "The hospital is the last word in equipment, including even dental facilities. The whole plant would be turned over to begin with at a nominal lease of one dollar per year, which would include free water and power... The hospital is centrally located to serve the whole of Clark County, being equidistant from Las Vegas, a rapidly developing community, on the one hand, and Boulder City, the site of the great Boulder Dam, on the other."

Mother Mary Gerald Barry responded immediately, sending a message by Western Union telegram: "Interested. Would like more information on number of beds, wards and private rooms."

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CHAPTER 3 - As negotiations progressed for the Adrian Dominican Sisters to assume operation of the hospital, the issue of renaming the hospital was discussed. While Basic Magnesium Hospital may have been appropriate during the war effort, it did not properly reflect the spirit of care the Adrian Dominican Sisters planned to offer.

After an array of options were considered, the name *Rose de Lima* was selected. It held great appeal to everyone involved as it honored Saint Rose of Lima, Peru, a Dominican Saint and the first saint of the Americas. Bishop Gorman took particular delight in the name because his birthday fell on the feast day of Saint Rose.

To be sensitive to the community, it was decided to omit the word "Saint" so that non-Catholics would feel welcome to utilize the hospital's services.

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CHAPTER 4 - Basic Magnesium Hospital would be renamed Rose de Lima Hospital when the Adrian Dominican Sisters took over operations in 1947.

Saint Rose de Lima was born April 20, 1586 in Lima, Peru. Taking the habit of the Third Order of Dominic and following the dedicated path of Catherine of Siena, Rose of Lima would become the first canonized saint of the Americas.

Throughout her life, Rose strived to imitate Catherine's prayerfulness and dedication to the poor and sick. She combined her spiritual life with a life of service to oppressed Indians and African slaves. Rose's care was so exceptional that she is remembered to this day in Latin America as a "mother of the poor."

Rose died August 30, 1617. She was beatified by Clement IX in 1667 and canonized in 1671 by Clement X.

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CHAPTER 5 - In May of 1947, the U.S. government made it official and announced the agreement with the Adrian Dominican Sisters to assume operations of Basic Magnesium Hospital in Henderson. The Sisters committed to assume the hospital's \$300,000 debt and to pay one dollar yearly to the government over the next 25 years.

On June 27, 1947, months of “red tape” drew to a close and the hospital was handed over to the Adrian Dominican Sisters without any pageantry. After all the discussions and negotiations, the ceremony, or lack thereof, was quite simple. The War Asset Administration representatives merely stopped in to talk for a short while with the hospital's new administrator, Sister Carolyn. Then, after offering their congratulations to the Adrian Dominican Sisters, the men left and the Sisters went to work.

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*Sister
Carolyn*



*Mother
Gerald Barry*

CHAPTER 6 - Under the leadership of Sister Mary Carolyn Harrison, Rose de Lima Hospital's first administrator, the Sisters took over operation of the hospital on June 27, 1947.

At the end of that first day, Sister Carolyn, wrote Adrian Dominican Mother Superior Gerald Barry. "So far everything seems to be going along smoothly – Deo Gratias. The Sisters are just wonderful, and all act as if taking over a hospital was an everyday occurrence. They are flitting around as busy as bees, and everybody is wondering just what struck the place. As one of the doctors said to Sister Marie Daniel, 'This seems like a real hospital now.'"

The following morning at 6:15 a.m., Father Moran presided over the first mass in a four-bed ward, which was converted to a chapel.

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CHAPTER 7 - In the first half of 1947, much work was done preparing for the day hospital operations would become the responsibility of the Adrian Dominican Sisters. Mother Gerald Barry assembled a community of women religious to move to Henderson. She selected seven Sisters – only four of whom were nurses.

Her first selection was a registered nurse named Sister Mary Carolyn Harrison. Sister Carolyn was sent to spend six months at another hospital to learn hospital operations and prepare her to serve as Rose de Lima's first administrator.

Mother Barry also chose Sister Marie Daniel Lundy, a registered nurse trained in labor and delivery. The two women traveled from Adrian, Michigan to Las Vegas via the Union Pacific railroad. They arrived on May 22, 1947, and were met by Father Moran and a delegation of local government officials.

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CHAPTER 8 - In the days following their arrival in May 1947, Sister Carolyn and Sister Marie Daniel moved into a rented house on nearby California Way. Hospital records show, “the Sisters spent part of each day in the hospital studying the setup and becoming acquainted with the routine and the members of the staff.” The Sisters also began contacting local physicians in hopes of forming a medical staff.

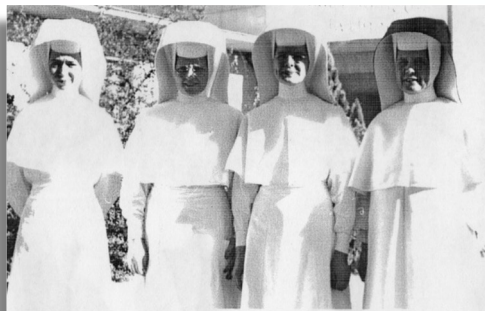
On June 15, 1947 approximately 200 area residents representing Henderson’s Victory Village and Carver Park, as well as Boulder City and Las Vegas, attended a reception welcoming the Sisters.

“The people of this area are accepting the Sisters wholeheartedly and, indeed, it is only right. The coming of the Sisters is the greatest thing that could happen in Southern Nevada,” said Father Moran.

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CHAPTER 9 - With two Sisters already in Henderson making arrangements to assume operations of the hospital, back in Michigan, Mother Gerald Barry continued her selection of the original seven Sisters she would task with the responsibility of operating Rose de Lima hospital in Henderson.

She carefully chose registered nurses Sister Marie Augustine Seissinger (Sister Augustine), and Sister Daniel Therese Smith, both of whom had received their degrees prior to entering the convent.

Three additional Sisters – Sister Marie Felicia Haidysz (Sister Felicia), Sister Marie Joyce Smith (Sister Marie) and Sister Anne Wasco (Sister Angelita) – completed the original group of women who would be sent to Nevada and would have such a profound impact on southern Nevada and its citizens.

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CHAPTER 10 - Seven Adrian Dominican Sisters just learned they would be relocating to Henderson, Nevada to run a hospital. After receiving their new assignments the Sisters were understandably apprehensive, even scared. They had lived a semi-cloistered life focused on truth, prayer, education, and service to those in need. They had great trepidation over traveling to Las Vegas – the wild west – with its legalized gambling, prostitution and organized crime.

“I didn’t have a degree,” said Sister Angelita. “So, I was swept off my feet when Mother Gerald called me to the office and said, ‘Sister, I need you.’” A week later the group was on the train and going west.

Sister Felicia, another of the original seven Sisters, said, “Before we left Adrian, (Mother Gerald Barry) gave us her blessing and said, ‘Now just do God’s will in the new place.’”

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CHAPTER 11 - June 26, 1947 - The train carrying the last five of the original seven Sisters arrived at the Las Vegas rail depot after midnight, just one day before they would assume responsibility for operating Rose de Lima hospital.

They disembarked dressed in their traditional white habits topped with the blackwoolen traveling cloaks that Adrian Dominicans wore whenever in the public eye. Although the sun had set hours before they arrived, the darkness and the late hour did nothing to diminish the oppressive desert summer heat.

The heat that year was unusually brutal, even for the Mojave Desert. According to National Weather Service records, 1947 still holds the Las Vegas record as the year with the most 100+ degree days in a year, with 100 days.

That the Sisters survived the train trip and the heat would seem a successful end to their journey in itself. However, it was just the beginning.

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CHAPTER 12 - June 26, 1947 - Sister Carolyn and Father Moran met the five Sisters at the Las Vegas train depot. It was already after midnight. But after their long train journey from Michigan, the final leg of the Sisters' journey was a drive through the hot desert night from the Las Vegas train depot to their new home in of Henderson.

Seven adults in a two-door sedan. The Sisters, in their wool habits. And no air conditioning.

When they arrived at the small home rented and furnished for them, the Sisters went directly to bed. Sister Angelita said, "In the morning I opened the blinds to see what was next to us. Nothing... nothing but sagebrush. I remember thinking that if somebody would have said, 'Go home,' I would have gladly walked back.

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CHAPTER 13 - As soon as they arrived in Henderson in 1947, the seven original Adrian Dominican Sisters set a routine at Rose de Lima Hospital:

Rise at 5:00 a.m., say morning prayers, celebrate Mass, eat breakfast and arrive at their stations by 7:00 a.m. to give reports.

The Sisters' routine was often interrupted due to emergencies, but their faith and prayer life got them through the difficult times.

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CHAPTER 14 - Sister Angelita recalls her first day. She was “flabbergasted” when Sister Carolyn introduced her as the dietary manager to the kitchen staff.

“I knew I would be working in the kitchen, but not until then did I realize I would be in charge,” said Sister Angelita.

When the staff asked her what she wanted done, she said a quick prayer, told them to carry on as they had before, then turned and sighed in relief. Her relief would be short-lived.

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CHAPTER 15 - When the Sisters arrived to assume operations at Rose de Lima Hospital in 1947, some hospital employees were skeptical. Some even left.

But Bettylou Anderson liked her job and she was impressed with the Sisters' willingness to not only work, but also take on whatever had to be done. Their work ethic and their spirit of collaboration soon won over the employees.

The Sisters had no shifts. They were just on duty. They worked all day, and often stayed into the night caring for patients.

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CHAPTER 16 - Over the summer of 1947 in the first few months of transition, the hospital's patient count dipped so low that the Sisters had no choice but to call off many staff members – some only temporarily. Thus, the Sisters took on an even wider array of duties.

Sister Felicia worked in both the nursery and medical records, and Sister Marie Daniel was on call twenty-four hours as the nursing director and as the hospital pharmacist. In the kitchen, Sister Angelita frequently found herself as the chief cook and bottle washer.

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CHAPTER 17 - Taking over a hospital was hard work, but Sister Marie Daniel Lundy was no stranger to challenges. She was an obstetrics nurse who loved to work so much she often pulled double duty as the hospital pharmacist.

At first, some people sometimes found her stern. But under the firm façade was a warm-hearted woman who was deeply revered by doctors, staff and patients. After a baby's delivery, she cuddled and rocked each newborn and gave every new baby a piece of her own heart.

All who knew her said that she "was in her glory" whenever an expectant mother was admitted to the hospital. "She had a take-charge attitude and tended to a woman's every need during labor," said Rita Maestas, a fifty-year employee of St. Rose, who considered Sister Marie Daniel Lundy her mentor.

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CHAPTER 18 - As the hospital's obstetrics nurse, many new Henderson residents arrived under the careful supervision of Sister Marie Daniel.

No one knew better the depth of Sister Daniel's affection or the breadth of her influence than Betty Foley, who gave birth to nine children in ten years at Rose de Lima. When Betty's youngest son was born, Sister Marie Daniel came to her room holding the little boy's birth certificate. She had taken the liberty of filling in a name for him – Daniel.

Sister Marie Daniel's namesake, Daniel Foley, continues to be part of the St. Rose family. He recently served on St. Rose Dominican Hospitals' Community Board and previously served as the chair of the St. Rose Dominican Health Foundation.

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CHAPTER 19 - Sister Carolyn, Rose de Lima's first administrator, didn't have to put an end to the practice of patient segregation because she never let it begin.

In the early 1940s, housing was built to accommodate thousands of people working in the nearby manufacturing plants. Two racially segregated apartment complexes were constructed on the east side of Boulder Highway. The Victory Village Apartments housed white families. The Carver Park Apartments housed only black families.

Prior to the Sisters' arrival, Basic Magnesium Hospital, like Henderson's apartment complexes, were segregated. When Sister Carolyn took charge in June 1947, she ended the practice of isolating patients based on race or ethnicity.

Bettylou Anderson recalls a hospital staff member asking Sister Carolyn where she should place a black patient. Sister Carolyn said, "If you are a medical patient, you go to a medical ward." And the subject was settled.

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CHAPTER 20 - When WWII ended, Air Force bombardier Lou LaPorta was stationed at the Army Air Corps' Las Vegas Gunnery School, which later became Nellis Air Force Base. He and his wife Elayne decided to settle near Henderson.

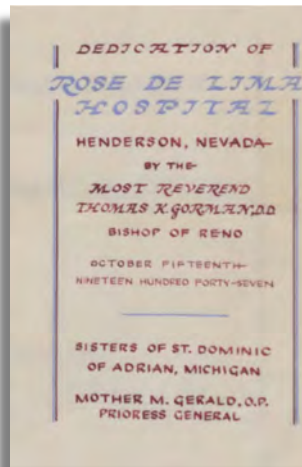
"We were from a small town in upstate New York and Henderson seemed to offer that same sense of community," said Lou. They quickly became part of the St. Rose family when Elayne LaPorta gave birth to the first baby born at Rose de Lima on June 29, 1947.

In the decades that followed, Lou LaPorta served in a number of roles supporting the hospital. When the Sisters established a hospital community board in the 1960s, Lou stepped up to serve as its first chairperson. He would later sit on the finance committee and the committee that assessed the need for a second St. Rose campus.

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Dedicating Henderson Hospital



CHAPTER 21 - As the record desert heat of 1947 finally began to fade, a date was set for the formal dedication of Rose de Lima.

Mother Gerald Barry and many other Adrian Dominican Sisters, as well as other religious from around the land traveled to Henderson to celebrate the event.

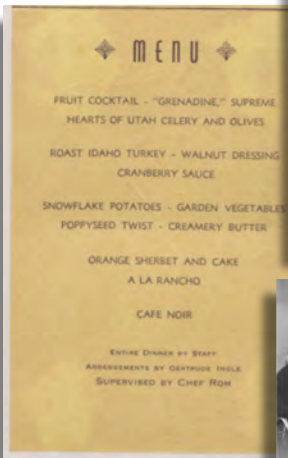
On a breezy October afternoon, Bishop Gorman presided over the dedication of Rose de Lima, giving a community Mass in the chapel followed by the Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament held on the hospital's front lawn.

Dr. Gerald Sylvain, president of the Clark County Medical Society, and LDS Bishop Edwin Hickman, were among several community leaders who spoke before an audience of public officials, physicians and clergy.

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CHAPTER 22 - To avoid the summer heat, the formal dedication of Rose de Lima Hospital was held until October 15, 1947. After the speeches, ceremony, and formal dedication of the hospital ward, guests enjoyed a special meal and a large cake designed by Chef Rom of the El Rancho Vegas Hotel. The cake was baked in the shape of the hospital.

A cascade of telegrams, letters and cards arrived from well-wishers unable to attend, including Sisters, Fathers and Archbishops, as well as religious, civic and government leaders from around the state and nation.

The Sisters preserved the outpouring of goodwill in a memory book which is a treasured keepsake of St. Rose Dominican Hospitals' rich heritage.

The memory book from the October 1947 event has been archived with the Henderson Libraries and is available to view online, along with many other documents and images.

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CHAPTER 23 - Among the many achievements in its early years, Rose de Lima hospital performed Clark County's first successful blood transfusion to a newborn with RH factor incompatibility.

Born three months premature, at one pound, eleven ounces, the newborn girl was the hospital's smallest surviving infant. Sister Marie Daniel kept a near twenty-four-hour vigil over her and with Sister's support, she lived and thrived.

Some eighteen years later the mother brought her now-grown baby to visit from their home in Arizona. She was a beautiful young lady who graduated from high school with honors and could fluently speak three languages.

Dr. Harold Miller recalled said, "She was somewhat amazed that we found her so special."

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CHAPTER 24 - Excerpts from hospital notes on June 26, 1952:

- "Rose de Lima's fifth anniversary"
- "More than 8,600 patients were cared for in the first five years."
- "Working in conjunction with the Sisters are fifteen registered nurses and five aides. Among this group, Mrs. Edith de Montague, R.N., Mrs. Hilda Muelheisen, R.N., Mrs. Beatrice Zimmerman, Mrs. Dora McAnally and Mrs. Ada Newton have been employed through the five years."
- "Twelve doctors comprise the active medical staff and an additional twenty-six doctors and dentists from Las Vegas hold courtesy staff membership. James B. French, M.D., selected as the chief of staff."

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CHAPTER 25 - Now home to 7,400 people, Henderson was officially incorporated on May 23, 1953. Dr. Jim French, who had also served as Rose de Lima Chief of Staff, was sworn in as the town's first mayor.

That same year, Sister Felicia Haidysz, OP, was appointed as the hospital's second administrator. As one of the original seven Sisters, she had already worked for six years in the hospital nursery and medical records before taking the position of hospital administrator.

The title "Angel of Mercy" fit Sister Felicia perfectly. Local banker Selma Bartlett said that the compassionate Sister "always forgave the medical bills of those who could not afford care."