



# History of The St. Alexander Hospital and Home: A Collection of Historical Documents

*Angeline Meidl Portner*

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St. Alexander Hospital, the first permanent hospital in New Ulm, opened in November 1883, a pioneering venture of Father Alexander Berghold. Two years before, a tornado killed 12 and injured hundreds. Because no area hospital existed, the Sisters of Christian Charity turned their academy into a makeshift hospital. When the hospital was built, the teaching Sisters staffed the facility on a temporary basis. It was strategically located on a 34-acre site that in the words of Father Berghold, was "on a most picturesque spot under the bluff overlooking the city from the west." Within the year the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, a Catholic nursing order, committed to the healthcare ministry, took charge of the hospital. Their love of Christ motivated them to come to serve the people of New Ulm. Over time, heavy patient loads necessitated modernization of the facility. The first addition was made in 1897 and shortly thereafter a Laundromat replaced old fashioned scrubbing boards. In 1912, a new building was constructed and named Loretto Hospital. During the Depression (1929-1931), the unsalaried Sisters continued to faithfully serve out of love for Christ, updating the facilities with a new laundry, x-ray equipment, and a garage for their first car. After World War II, the Sisters remodeled the kitchen and dining area with stainless steel and modern refrigeration, adding a sprinkler system. The healthcare ministry from the Sisters came to an end in New Ulm when Loretto and Union Hospitals merged under the name of Sioux Valley Hospital in 1980. In 1991 the clinic was annexed to the hospital, and was renamed the New Ulm Medical Center in 1996. An extensive renovation took place in 2005; the New Ulm Medical Center remains today "on a most picturesque spot under the bluff," an enduring tribute to the work of Father Berghold and the Sisters of the Order of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. This book is a collection of historical documents about the development and the people behind the New Ulm Hospital system.

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