



## Parked in the Past

### McNamara was replacement for first county hospital in 1966

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The condemned, asbestos-ridden McNamara Building in Fairplay has been in the news recently. Park County's Board of County Commissioners hired the Longmont-based branch of FCI Constructors Inc. to tear down the building and build in its place a new communications building that will also house other county offices.

But what is the history of the building at 824 Castello Ave. in Fairplay, and of the hospital it replaced?

When the McNamara Building was completed in August 1966, it was the McNamara Hospital, named for Dr. Bradley Edward McNamara, or Dr. Mac as he was known throughout the county.

The hospital was the modern replacement to Fairplay's first hospital at 550 Castello Ave., built in the late 1800s as a home and in use today as an apartment building.

#### **McNamara construction**

The McNamara Hospital was built for \$257,289 in 1966. Comparing that to the latest reported estimate to demolish the aged McNamara Building - \$343,130 as reported in the Nov. 11 Flume - it appears

at first glance that the cost to tear down the building is nearly \$100,000 more than what was paid to build it.

But that is before adjusting for inflation. In today's dollars, the construction cost of the McNamara Hospital is equivalent to about \$1.8 million. And in 1966 dollars, the cost to tear it down equals about \$49,000.

In 1966 the county was pinching pennies. The hospital was built at about three-fourths the typical cost for a small hospital at the time. The Denver-based architect, Robert G. Irwin, drew the plans "stripped of all frills," he said in an Empire Magazine article of Nov. 1, 1964.

Of the original cost, \$151,117 came from Hill-Burton funds, a grant and loan program in place from 1946 to 1997 that provided money for hospitals to be built or modernized. The hospitals, in return, agreed to provide a reasonable volume of services to persons unable to pay and to use at least 51 percent of the building area in direct medical care to patients.

#### **Dr. McNamara**

McNamara, "a tall, broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced" 46-year-old, according to

the Empire article, who specialized in emergency surgery, moved from Michigan with his wife, Jean, and four of their five children in 1962. They moved for the same reason many current residents do: "Because we like it here," McNamara and his family said in the Empire article.

Marie Chisholm, a Park County resident since 1944 and a wealth of information on its history, remembers McNamara as a calm man, "a good doctor who never got rattled" when emergencies happened.

McNamara was an Army doctor during World War II, leaving the service with the rank of major. He served as the county coroner and was a member of the original County Planning Commission.

For 10 years beginning in 1962, McNamara had offices in both Fairplay and Bailey, using the most modern medical equipment available. He spent three afternoons per week in Bailey and the rest of his working time at the Fairplay hospital.

The Bailey clinic closed in 1972 when McNamara could no longer commute because he was recovering from major surgery. He died a year later, in August 1973, in the emergency room of his namesake hospital. But he didn't die as a patient. He had just finished saving his second emergency case of the day on Aug. 26 when he suffered a fatal heart attack at age 57.

### **McNamara Hospital money woes**

Both the McNamara Hospital and what is called the "old" hospital in Fairplay were opened to treat emergencies, obstetrics, minor surgery, critical major surgery where travel could be life-threatening, and to serve as nursing homes.

The financial condition of Fairplay's first hospital could not be found, but the McNamara Hospital had money problems almost from the day it opened.

Within three years of opening, the new McNamara Hospital was in the red. In 1969 it was in debt by \$46,000 and by 1973 the debt was \$65,000, according to a letter of Oct. 10, 1972, to then-Governor John A. Love from Roy Cleere, M.D., the then-state director of public health. Adjusting for inflation, the figures seem substantially higher, \$284,000 in 1969 and by 1973, \$402,000. The letter asked for "financial relief from the Governor's Emergency Fund."

An article in the Oct. 30, 1992, Flume recapping the history of McNamara Hospital tells of efforts to recoup losses. Mercy Hospital leased McNamara, and it became known as McNamara-Mercy in 1974. The county commissioners took back control in about August 1980, but it was leased out again, this time to Porter Hospital, in September 1981 until Nov. 21, 1984, when the hospital closed for good.

After the hospital closed, the building was used in succession as the South Park Clinic, the Silverheels Clinic under the auspices of Park County Rural Health, and as various county offices. It was condemned and vacated in 2009.

### **Old Fairplay Hospital**

The building at 550 Castello Ave. that was later to become the first Fairplay hospital was built as a home. The construction date was either 1875 or 1899 (sources differ on the year). It was later converted to a boarding house and at one time was headquarters for the local Ku Klux Klan, according to the Empire article. It was converted to the Fairplay Hospital in 1929 and was used

for that purpose until January 1965, when it was condemned as a firetrap. The building is used today as an apartment building.

As a 16-year-old Fairplay High School student in the winter of 1946-47, Chisholm was a nurse's aide on the night shift at the old hospital. She was hired to make beds, give baths and serve meals to the patients.

But her duties turned out to be more than that. Many times Chisholm was the only staff member on the floor. When an emergency came in, Chisholm would admit the patient and inform whichever doctor or nurse was on call. They would give her instructions and get to the hospital as soon as they could.

Sometimes the care from Chisholm, only a teenager, was all the patient received for hours.

Chisholm was working alone one night when a woman who was seven months pregnant came into the hospital. She had been helping fight a fire that broke out in her home and the activity had brought on labor pains. The doctor on call was in Boulder, at least a three- or four-hour drive on the then-two-lane U.S. 285. The woman was able to walk up the narrow stairway to the delivery/operating room, but nearly bled to death from complications of the pregnancy. The doctor made it back in time, and mother and baby survived.

"I don't know how he got there so fast," said Chisholm. But she was glad he did. The family still visits Fairplay; they own a second home on Front Street.

Another of her duties was assisting during surgeries.

One time she was working the suction machine during a child's tonsillectomy.

The child bled a lot and the suction machine got full. She yelled to the cook in the kitchen to bring a large pan. He did and she emptied the suction machine. The cook just about fainted - he was holding the pan.

There was an area of the hospital that was called "the back porch." This area was used as a nursing home where indigents and those on old-age pensions lived out their lives. But it wasn't called a nursing home; it was just called "the back porch," and was an addition with lots of windows around it, like a covered porch. On slow nights Chisholm was able to get a few hours sleep as long as she woke up when the back porch residents needed her.

Another high school girl from Fairplay worked when Chisholm was off duty. Chisholm said that one time when the other girl was on duty a man was brought in who had nearly cut off his leg in a ranching accident. The leg couldn't be saved and the decision was made to amputate. The high school girl assisted with the surgery by holding the man's leg. She later told Chisholm: "It sure felt strange to have that leg come off in my hands."

Chisholm helped with surgeries frequently, but she said she never delivered a baby. Except, she said, her own. Her first child, Keith, was born at the old Fairplay Hospital in 1955.

See next page for images.



## Old Hospital in 1965

This is the old hospital at 550 Castello Ave. as it looked in 1965, the year it was condemned as a firetrap. This hospital was in use from 1929 to 1965 and was previously occupied as a home, boarding house and headquarters for the Ku Klux Klan. Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, source: South Park Historical Society



## Surgery/Delivery upstairs

This interior view of Fairplay's old hospital, used from 1929 to 1965, shows the narrow staircase that led to the operating, emergency and delivery rooms. Most patients, some with help,

Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, source: South Park Historical Society could walk up the stairs. For those who were on gurneys or stretchers, the hospital staff often had to call the volunteer fire department for help in transporting patients upstairs.



## Mcnamara Hospital

As it looked in 1974, the McNamara Hospital was having severe budget problems and its namesake doctor was dead. In an effort to get out of the red, the hospital was leased by Mercy Hospital in 1974 and became known as McNamara-Mercy. Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, source: South Park Historical Society



## Mcnamara Today

A shadow of its former self with its importance to the community forgotten, the McNamara Building today awaits demolition. Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume



## The back porch

This modern-day shot of the side of the old hospital shows "the back porch" which was the nursing home area of the hospital. Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume



## Improvement over first hospital

The wide hallways and no stairs made walking much easier in the new McNamara Hospital in comparison with the narrow stairway and no halls of the first Fairplay Hospital. In this photo a man, possibly a nursing home resident, walks the hall. Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, source: South Park Historical Society