



# Ask the Grey Sisters: Sault Ste. Marie and the General Hospital, 1898-1998

*Elizabeth A. Iles*

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*Ask the Grey Sisters: Sault Ste. Marie and the General Hospital, 1898-1998* tells the story of the creation and one-hundred-year history of the Sault Ste. Marie General Hospital. At a time when Canada's healthcare system is at a crossroads and we are asked to make crucial decisions for its future, it is intriguing and enlightening to look at the colourful past of a typical community hospital.

Throughout the 1890s, Sault Ste. Marie was a town in search of a hospital. Its glory days at the centre of the fur-trade route were long gone and the Sault was in the process of becoming a modern industrial community. Such a community needed a hospital as a centrepiece to attract investors and as a necessary social institution to care for the hundreds of workers who were flocking to town without family support.

The General Hospital was established in 1898 after the town committee charged with developing a hospital had been refused funding by both the federal and provincial governments. In desperation, the committee met with the provincial Inspector of Asylums and Prisons (the only provincial official with hospitals in his mandate). "If you wish a hospital of which the work is serious and lasting," he is reported to have advised them, "ask the Grey Sisters." And so began a fruitful association between the community of Sault Ste. Marie and two orders of Grey Sisters who have operated the hospital through its one-hundred-year history.

Based in part on the extensive archival collections of both orders of nuns, this history includes material from the sisters' Chronicles and their personal reminiscences. The result is an intimate and detailed portrait of a community hospital, placed in the context of an emerging provincial system of health care.

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