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Historical Sketch

The Nopeming Sanatorium was opened for tuberculosis patients May 22, 1912. It operated under the direction of a three-member St. Louis County Sanatorium Commission, appointed June 8, 1909 by the St. Louis County Board of Commissioners that was established April 21, 1909 (Minnesota Laws 1909 c437 p398: Act to enable counties to establish and maintain public tuberculosis sanatoria.) The enabling act by the legislature was introduced at the request of officers of the Duluth anti-tuberculosis committee, Bentley P. Neff, chairman, Dr. Edward L. Tuohy, vice-chairman. A bill was drafted by William J. Stevenson, assistant county attorney, and was introduced to the legislature by Dr. A. J. Gates of Kenyon, Minnesota at the request of the St. Louis County delegation.

The St. Louis County Board appointed a three-member Sanatorium Commission of Dr. Edward L. Tuohy and George A. Gray of Duluth and Walter J. Smith of Eveleth on June 9, 1909. The first Secretary and Superintendent, Dr. William "Billy" M. Hart, was appointed and began his duties May 5, 1910. Hart was previously with the Trudeau Sanatorium at Saranac Lake, and had been a tuberculosis patient. He remained until August 10, 1911, when he left for Canada to do similar work. [see SA File for Arthur T. Laird's, "History of the St. Louis County Sanatorium" for a descriptive biography of Hart.] Dr. Arthur T. Laird succeeded Hart.

The choice of location was thoroughly investigated and five principles determine comparative advantages: accessibility, protection, sanitation, scenic environment and agricultural development. The St. Louis County Board appropriated \$19,625 to initially authorize the purchase of an 80 acre site located in T49 R15 section 95 (Midway) for the facility on September 1, 1910, expanding it to 269.72 acres in 1924. The site was reached by state road no. 1 "the new partly paved highway to the Twin Cities". The site bordered the St. Louis river valley, and the Nopeming Station of the Canadian Northern Railway was close by.

Nopeming is an Ojibwe word whose origin and meaning is sought for. The meaning of noopiming is island; in the woods; up in the north [from p. 242 of *ojibzvevi-ikidozvinan: An Ojibwe Word resource Book* [ed. John Nichols and Earl Nyholm LC number PM852.N5] The meaning of No pe ming as suggested by Ojibwe Rev. Frank Piquette of Sawyer is "out in the woods" or "in the forest". [see SA File Arthur T. Laird's paper "The Selection of a Name for the St. Louis County Sanatorium" 1912.]

The contract for the first building was awarded May 22, 1911. The basement of

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the building was completed August 8, 1911, and in the spring, the Main building and a Children's Cottage were finished. Duluth citizens contributed \$5,491 in 1911 and \$5,491 in 1912 for the Children's Cottage. By the late 1920s there were 30 buildings valued at \$500,000. [see following pages for photocopy of Morell & Nichols, Nichols Mason & Cornell, *General Sketch for Arrangement of Grounds*, June 1926]

Beginning in 1913, the Commission's work was supervised successively by the Advisory Commission of the State Sanatorium for Consumptives (Minnesota Laws 1913 c500), the State Board of Control (Minnesota Laws 1925 c426), and the Social Security Department, Social Welfare Division (Minnesota Laws 1939 c431); the state provided an operating subsidy. Patient numbers increased from 45 (August-January) in 1912 to 200 in 1923. A 1924 report states 2000 people, in varying states of tuberculosis, had been admitted in addition to the over 4000 who were examined at a free anti-tuberculosis clinic at the St. Louis County Courthouse in downtown Duluth. The shortest stay at Nopeming, as recommended for some healthful benefit, was 30 days. School was also held at Nopeming resulting in 8th grade and high school graduates.

In 1938 an operating room was installed on the fourth floor of the Chateau to accommodate all needed chest surgeries, a sprinkler fire suppression system was installed, and a \$143,000 levy was voted by the County Board to add two 50 bed units to the sanatorium. An additional \$23,650 was voted against 1939 county property to finance completion of the addition. An investment of \$350,000 was celebrated in October, 1948 with a new 76 bed wing bringing the total number to 340.

In 1954, a study was conducted to determine the possible alteration of a Nopeming building for use as a nursing home for the aged. In August, 1957, nursing home patients began to be admitted, and in December, 1971, the facility ceased to be a tuberculosis sanatorium and became the Nopeming Nursing Home. TB patients became the responsibility of the St. Louis County Health Department, and the Welfare Department started operating the Nopeming facility as a county nursing home. These changes resulted in a \$140,000 remodeling program in 1972.

The financially troubled county-owned facility operated at a loss. St. Louis County decertified 12 beds in March 1997. The management firm Health Dimensions operated Nopeming Nursing Home beginning in the fall of 1997. The seven-member St. Louis County Board of Commissioners advised the state

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Department of Human Services to decertify 33 beds at the home, reducing the total number of beds to 159, due to a decline in occupancy. The Nopeming's name changed again on April 5, 2000 to Nopeming Care Center; in March, a 40 member Long Term Care Task Force was appointed by County Commissioners, and the Eden Alternative was examined for implementation at the facility.

State funding issues resulted in the February 26, 2002 County Board decision and vote to close the facility amid local outcry (summer, fall, winter of 2001-2002) that focused particularly on the need for placement elsewhere of the 50 Alzheimer's and dementia patients. County Administrator, David Twa, put the County Board's decision into the context of eliminating a state surplus of nursing homes and the study that concluded \$5.3 million was needed for the most basic repairs to the 80 year old facility.

Nopeming's 151 patients were moved in November 2002 to the county-owned Chris Jensen Health and Rehabilitation Center in Duluth where approximately 88% of the 235 beds were occupied. Based on \$2,080 annually for each of the 159 Nopeming beds, lawmakers said St. Louis County would gain \$300,000 annually from the State by closing Nopeming and moving patients and staff to Chris Jensen. Nopeming was shuttered November 25, 2002.

Sources:

Arthur T. Laird histories
Nopeming Sanatorium annual reports
Nopeming Sanatorium records
State Board of Control administrative history
Nopeming newsletters
newspaper clippings