

OPEN FORUM

LAST DAYS OF SISTER MARY

6. 3-27 AUSTIN 1927

(Editor's Note: The Herald-Register has received a letter regarding the last days of Sister Mary Austin, written by Eeryle Henderson, a nurse, who cared for her during her last illness. It gives so many details regarding a woman who made such a great impression on the life of Grinnell during her years as superintendent of nurses at St. Francis hospital, that we are glad to reproduce it here.)

Sister Mary Austin was "best friend" to so many of the Grinnell people that if you can find space to tell them a bit about her last days on earth it will probably bring some comfort and solace.

For almost five years I was night nurse at St. Francis hospital in Grinnell. When Sister Austin was operated on I was on vacation and she herself wrote to me and asked me to come and be her nurse. The three weeks that she lived following her operation must always remain in my memory and probably her nearest and dearest in Grinnell will be somewhat comforted to know that most of her waking thoughts were of Grinnell and she often dreamed of Grinnell when sleeping.

was perfectly rational and conscious to the very instant of her death.

Eeryle Henderson.

I think my connection with Grinnell made her last days happier. She was completely her natural self, joking and laughing all the time. I could recite one thing after another endlessly, but must not take too much time. Sister Austin was in an oxygen tent the last 11 days; sometimes she called it her dog kennel, sometimes it was her ice house and always she made a joke of herself being so exclusive that she lived in a little separate tent; she said she was going to have one to sleep in next summer.

Sister Austin had two splendid doctors and always had two nurses, with many extra nurses helping at times.

She rather expected to die, it seemed, but didn't ask for either life or death. It was always "God's will be done."

Her illness was a source of inspiration to all who watched. She was so patient and cheerful; never a murmur or a complaint. She asked me continually, "Do you remember?" concerning the five years I was in Grinnell and then "Did I ever tell you?" about the time prior to my time there.

The many, many letters and cards and some flowers which she received from Grinnell friends pleased her so much. Many letters she had me write for her and some I must still write.

Much as Sister Austin loved Grinnell, I believe it would have been her wish to die in Macomb. She said she started there and would finish there. Many people remembered her from 25 years ago and the newer ones loved her just as Grinnell people did.

Her death was quiet and peaceful; she was sleeping quietly and awakened. It must have been another heart attack. She passed away in about 20 minutes. She