

Tabor Home Society

The idea of having a personal care home in Clearbrook, B.C. (now a part of the city of Abbotsford) was first considered in the 1950s. Some elderly Mennonite Brethren were anticipating the need for a home for seniors once it would become difficult for them to live on their own. The idea was brought forward to the leadership of the Clearbrook Mennonite Brethren Church. The church in turn introduced the need for such a facility to the Missions Committee of the British Columbia Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

The Conference appointed a committee consisting of J.J. Klassen, J. P. Martens, and A.J. Friesen to do a feasibility study. The Committee visited various care facilities. In the fall of 1956 they conducted a demographic survey of members in the B.C. Mennonite Brethren Conference, and also conferred with provincial government officials. In November, 1957 the Committee brought a detailed recommendation to the Conference. It concluded that a 25-bed facility should be built in Clearbrook at a cost of \$100,000. The project lacked sufficient support from the churches to allow for Conference involvement. The Findings Committee of Klassen, Martens, and Friesen then decided to form a society which could build a home for the aged.

The Committee invited interested members from the B,C.M. B. Conference to attend an organizational meeting on September 24, 1959, in the Clearbrook M.B. Church. It was agreed to call the new organization "Tabor Home Society". The home would be named "Tabor Home". A committee was elected to oversee the development. It consisted of Jacob J. Klassen, Jacob P Martens, Albert Dyck, Abe J. Friesen, Jacob Lepp, and Henry P. Hooge. A property located west of Clearbrook road, and a little south of what is now South Fraser Way was purchased from a Mrs. Enns for \$13,500. Blueprints for the building were drawn up and a grant of \$41,253 was received from the provincial government to help cover construction costs. July 18, 1960 marked the occasion of the sod turning celebration for Tabor Home.

Mr. Abram J. Friesen was appointed as the first "house father." The first twenty residents moved in on March 20, 1961, and within three weeks all thirty-nine rooms were occupied. Tabor Home began as a Personal Care facility. The official opening was celebrated April 18, 1961. The Board in 1962 consisted of Abram, J. Friesen, Administrator, Clearbrook; Jacob Janzen, Vancouver; John P. Thiessen, Clearbrook; Frank Peters, Clearbrook; Jacob P. Martens, Yarrow; Jacob Rempel, Clearbrook; Dietrich Friesen, Greendale; Peter Esau, Chilliwack; Abram Nickel, Abbotsford.

Tabor Home has experienced several expansions of its facilities. The first addition in 1963 added twenty-three more rooms. Further expansions took place in 1970, 1972 and 1973. In 1989 an independent living facility with thirty-nine units was completed. Originally called Sunset Manor, the name was changed to Tabor Manor. Residents have the option of a hot noon meal if they wish. The last major development began in 2003 when the Fraser Health Authority and British Columbia Housing accepted a proposal from the Tabor Home Society Board to construct a 104 unit Assisted Living Facility. The government would fund eighty-eight units and sixteen would be user pay. The first residents moved in November, 2006. The official opening of Tabor's assisted living facility, Tabor Court, was June 18, 2007. With this latest addition Tabor has

become a full campus of care and is now referred to as Tabor Village. Over 240 residents now are part of the Tabor Village.

Tabor Home Society and its governance have changed significantly since its inception. At its founding as a society, members of B.C. Mennonite Brethren churches were invited to an organizational meeting. The membership fee was \$50.00. A working committee was elected to move this project forward. The committee consisted of Jacob J. Klassen, Jacob P. Martens, Albert Dyck, Abe J. Friesen, Jacob Lepp and Henry P. Hooge. Though most of the people attending this meeting joined the new Society, the membership remained relatively small. The board that was formed to oversee the operation of Tabor Home sometimes became involved in the day to day operational decisions, and a number of board members volunteered much time at the Home. In order to strengthen the membership base, in 1982 a resolution was sent out to area M.B. churches inviting them to become participating churches by having their members also become members of Tabor Home Society, unless individual members chose to decline. Members needed to be in good standing with their church. The Society required an annual membership fee of \$1.00. Ten churches in the Abbotsford and Chilliwack area accepted this invitation providing the Society with over 3,000 members. Currently there are nine participating M.B. churches: Arnold, Bakerview, Central Heights, Clearbrook, King Road, Northview, Ross Road, South Abbotsford, and Yarrow. Each participating church may provide one board member and in the case of churches with more than 800 members, two board members may be appointed. Three additional board members at large may be appointed by the board. The board now functions as a policy board rather than an administrative board.

Tabor Home began as a personal care facility with the Administrator functioning as “Home Father.” Not only was he responsible for the business and daily management of the Home, he also served as, chaplain, counselor, and as male nurse when needed. It was expected of the first administrators that both the husband and wife serve as a team, with the wife having supervisory responsibilities as well. Even after a chaplain was hired, the administrator assisted in providing spiritual care to the residents. As the Home expanded and its residents needed more specialized care, a registered nurse was hired to serve as Director of Resident Care. In 1987 a government grant was given to upgrade the Home facilities so it could be registered as an Intermediate Care facility. Over the past few years most new admissions require Complex Care. This has greatly increased the work load of the nursing staff. The government’s Ministry of Health provides most of the operational funding for the Tabor Home and Tabor Court. Tabor Manor however receives no government funding.

The social make up of the residents has changed over time. In its early years, Tabor Home’s residents were mainly members of the participating Mennonite Brethren churches. Until 1982, Annual General Meetings were conducted in German. Since the government now pays much of the operational costs and is responsible for the placement of residents in Tabor Home and in the funded units of Tabor Court, the residents now represent a much wider range in terms of ethnicity, nationality and faith orientation.

Some things have not changed. The original motivation to provide care for seniors was rooted in the Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of the Christian faith. In the words of Menno Simons,

"True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant. It clothes the naked. It feeds the hungry. It comforts the sorrowful. It shelters the destitute. It serves those that harm it. It binds up that which is wounded. It has become all things to all people."

Members of the Society continue to believe that spiritual care is integral to caring for the whole person. The current Mission Statement states that, "Tabor Home Society is a Christian health care community providing care from the heart in an environment of compassion, sensitivity, and respect for the whole person." The Board and management of Tabor Campus of Care believe that the values and virtues promoted by the Christian faith greatly enhance the quality of care that can be provided, and positively affect the social context in which that care is given.

Past Executive Directors have been Abram J. Friesen, David D. Friesen, George Loewen, John Isaac, Jean Pearson, Arthur Enns, Jack Pauls, Eldon DeFehr, and Paul Janzen. Currently the duties of the Executive Director have been assigned to the Director of Resident Care, Cheryl Conroy.

At the time of writing the members of the THS Board are Jake Konrad, Chair; John Haak, Assistant Chair; Lillian Toews, Secretary; Herb Braun, Treasurer; Helen Braun; Henry Friesen; Gilbert Gerbrandt; Cheryl Isaac; Doug Kasper; Dick Weibelzahl.

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Sources:

Eric Ratzlaff, *Twenty-five Years of Loving Care at the Tabor Home*; Fraser Valley
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Reports and Minutes from Board meetings and Annual General Meetings

Written by Eldon DeFehr
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