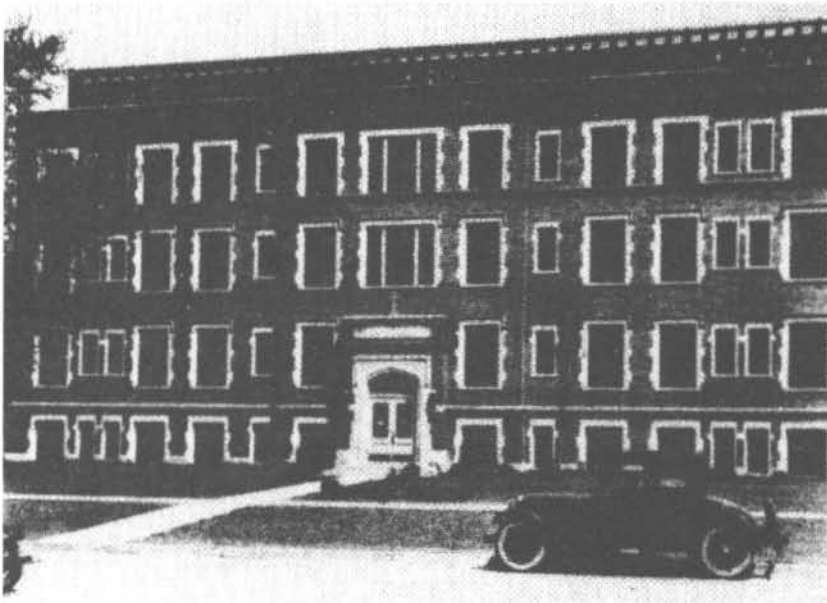


THROUGH THE YEARS

AFRICAN - AMERICAN HISTORY IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

FALL/WINTER 1999

MERCY HOSPITAL SCHOOL OF NURSING



The first Mercy Hospital, circa 1923

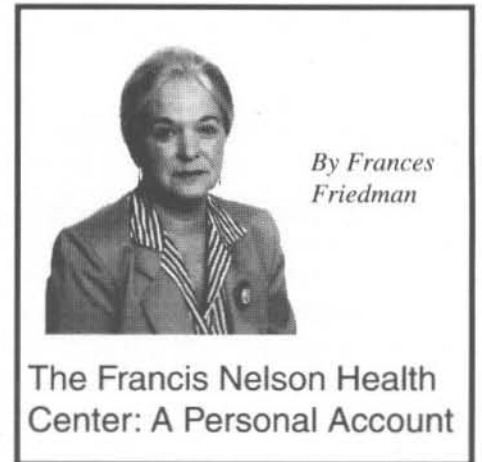
By Doris Hoskins and Sister Esther Matthew

In 1920, the first Mercy Hospital opened its doors with 14 beds in the former Wendt Home on the corner of Fifth and White Streets in Champaign, Illinois. Three years later the new building, operated by the Benedictine Sisters, opened with 50 beds at 1400 West Park Street.

The Sisters of the Servants of the Holy Heart of Mary assumed ownership responsibility in May of 1926. Its mission was to serve the community with Christian love, free from discrimination relating to race, creed or economic status, witnessing the value and dignity of human life.

In the mid 1930's, Mercy Hospital provided space in the basement for a Well-Baby Clinic, manned by two physicians, Dr. L. T. Gregory of Urbana and Dr. William Cooper of Ivesdale. The clinic was the responsibility of the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District and their nurses assisted the doctors in examining and weighing the babies. The hospital supplied formula, baby food, and other supplies. Hazel O'Neil, head nurse from the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District recruited the nurses and furnished

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By Frances Friedman

The Francis Nelson Health Center: A Personal Account

My experience at the Frances Nelson Health Center (FNHC) began in the early seventies when I worked there as a volunteer nurse assisting community doctors who, for the most part, were also volunteers. A few years after I joined the volunteer staff, I was elected to serve on the Center's Board of Directors. While I was serving on the Board, the Executive Director withdrew and the Board began looking for a replacement. I resigned from the Board, applied for the position, and got the job.

My tenure as Executive Director began in 1978 and ended in 1986. During these years, the Center experienced tremendous growth, most of it due to our successful application to the federal government to have the Center location designated as a medically underserved area with a physician shortage. With this designation, we were able to recruit National Health Service Corps physicians and to apply and receive substantial funding under the Urban Health Initiative (UHI), a special federal program for

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FRANCES

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community and health centers. UHI grant money doubled our budget, paid for the revitalization of the physical plant and helped to support salaries and operating expenses.

We built an addition and renovated the original building which more than doubled our space. The addition incorporated six new examining rooms, three for each of the two full-time physicians on staff. This not only permitted us to increase our patient load, but made our medical operation much more efficient. The addition housed a new and bigger lab which allowed us to do more laboratory tests onsite. A nurses' room with a pharmacy was added, giving us the space to accept more pharmaceuticals from drug company representatives to pass on to our most needy patients when ordered by the Center's doctors. A new and larger reception room was built along with an expanded medical record/business area and room for patient education. And, to make the Center more accessible, a parking lot was built to the rear of the new addition.

Moving the medical program to the new addition freed up space in the old renovated Center to expand the Community Outreach Program that provided transportation, advocacy, counseling and other social services to our patients. We also were able to convert the front part of the building into a two-room dental clinic. The small amount of remaining space was then made into administrative offices.

The staff grew from a small group of paid workers and volunteers serving the community on an abbreviated schedule to a full time staff including two physicians, four nurses, a dentist, dental hygienist, podiatrist, laboratory technician, health educator, certified social worker, and six community outreach workers.

In my opinion, writing the UHI grants and getting them funded year after year was crucial to the Center's success during my tenure.

MERCY

continued from page 1

other supplies. The clinic was free to all mothers who brought their babies.

The Mercy Hospital School of Nursing opened in 1928, as an in-house apprentice program. In 1948 the new building was completed just across the street from the hospital and was named The Mercy Hospital School of Nursing. Sister Esther Matthew, Director in 1951, guided the program toward becoming an Accredited School of Nursing. In 1955 she made application to the National League of Nursing Education and accreditation was granted.

More than 500 students attended and graduated from the School of Nursing prior to its closing in 1970. Among the graduates were six African-American women from various areas: Vivian Grundy, Tamms, IL - Class of 1955;

June Walden, Paris, IL - Class of 1956; Mildred Elizabeth Evans, Chicago, IL - Class of 1957; Christine Thomas, Milwaukee, WI - Class of 1957; Charlotte Yvonne Meeks, Centralia, IL - Class of 1962; Miriam Scantlebery, Champaign, IL - February though May, 1964; Deborah Gay Tinsley, Urbana, IL - Class of 1968.



Sister Esther Matthew



Left: Well Baby Clinic in the basement of Mercy Hospital, circa 1935

Right: One of the graduating classes of the Mercy Hospital School of Nursing



Frances Nelson Health Center Then and Now

By Erma Bridgewater and Doris Hoskins

Research findings in 1962 by two Master's Degree candidates in the University of Illinois Jane Addams Graduate School of Social Work (namely Arnetta Collins Rodgers, African-American and James Dudley, Caucasian) titled *Prenatal Care Among Champaign-Urbana Illinois Negro Mothers*, told of the adequate and inadequate care of some 76 expectant mothers. Further research in 1964 showed the mortality rate of the African-American births in Champaign-Urbana as greater than that of the white community and much higher than the national average.

In view of these findings and the hypothesis thereof, the message was LOUD and CLEAR that some action by the African-American community needed to be taken to remedy the situation, not only for the prenatal care of the mothers, but also for the care after birthing for both mother and child.

Concerned citizens, both African-American and White, including a young African-American men's group named S.O.U.L. (Security, Opportunity, Unity and Love), Vernon Barkstall, Director of the Urban League of Champaign County, Drs. Ruth Hyphus and Elsie Fields of the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District, Sue Ellen Jacobs from the University of Illinois Urban Planning, local physicians and nurses,

all worked together on plans to establish a facility to provide health services for the indigent and needy in north Champaign.

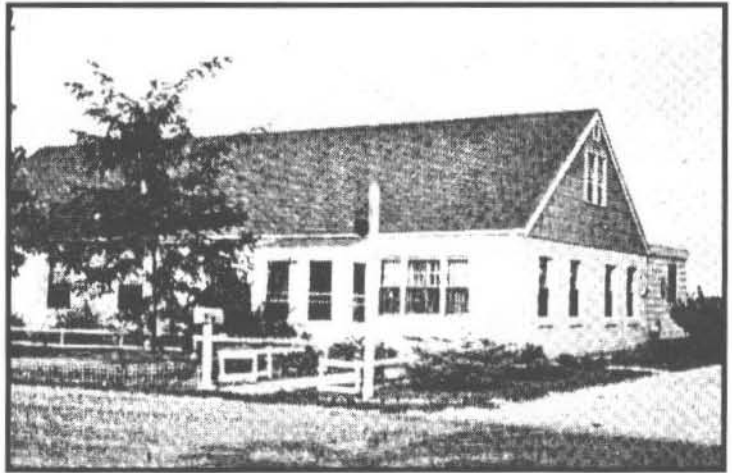
At the time, the Urban Renewal Department of the City of Champaign was clearing the area surrounding Douglass Park to make room for the expansion thereof. On these grounds was a house at 908 North Fifth Street, in good condition and awaiting removal to another site. It was leased to the City of Champaign Economic Opportunity Council (E.O.C.) for \$1.00 per year. This house became the first home of the "North End Health Center". The doors opened at 6 p.m. on Tuesday, July 2, 1968, staffed by local volunteer doctors, nurses, lab technicians, and office personnel. Christine Washington brought the first patient to the facility. It remained

at this location until 1969.

Due to the expansion of needed health services, the increase in the number of patients, and the need for more space, the Center moved to its present location, the former Frances Nelson Children's Home at 1306 North Carver Drive in north Champaign, and assumed the name Frances Nelson Health Care Center. Services were resumed on November 19, 1969. Community volunteers, Ora and Mel Mitchell, Erma Bridgewater and Wilda Herndon, along with many others, served as receptionists, lab technicians, carpenters and maintenance persons.

Ms. Elsie Easley was named its first director and served from 1968 to 1973, followed by Mr. Tom Brown, who served from 1973 to 1978. In 1978, Frances Friedman who had been among the first volunteer nurses and later a board member became Director, and served until 1986.

Through the years, many directors have come and gone, and the Frances Nelson Health Center still stands today as a monument in the community and through these 31 years has served many thousands of patients - both African-American and others - with a dedicated staff of medical professionals, office personnel and volunteers.



Community Home for Children (Frances Nelson), 1969



Frances Nelson Health Center, 1981

African-American History:
Today and Tomorrow

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