

## HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE NARRATIVE

The Community Health Center at Parole is that community's firm and longstanding commitment to the health and well being of its citizens. With the belief that "Every Child Has the Right to be Born a Healthy Child," Walter S. Mills, principal of Parole Elementary School, encouraged the school's PTA, in 1936, to establish a health care center. Under a program developed in 1930, the Anne Arundel County Health Department would provide free prenatal and postpartum care, as well as immunizations and other medical services, to county residents, but communities had to provide a suitable building for delivery of these services by Health Department nurses and physicians. Parole PTA president, the Rev. John T. Chambers, Sr., worked with Mr. Mills and a committee of PTA parents to create the Parole Health Center. After thirteen years in a local church, parsonage, and church hall, the association's board of directors determined to build a proper health facility, to be maintained by the community. Men of the community did much of the construction and finishing work, and the building at 1950 Drew St. was dedicated on June 5, 1949. It was renovated and enlarged in 2001. Today, after eighty years, the Community Health Center at Parole serves not only the Parole neighborhood, but also thousands of patients from the Annapolis region and across the county who turn to the Center for immunizations, counseling services for teens and adults, pregnancy testing and prenatal care referrals, and communicable disease screening.

## PROPERTY HISTORY

The history of the Community Health Center at Parole property reflects the development of the Annapolis area over more than three centuries. Patented as a hundred-acre tract in the early years of the settlement on the Severn, before the town that became Annapolis was established, the land now at the corner of Drew and Parole Streets was owned for most of the 18th century by the Bordley family of Annapolis. Noted attorney Thomas Bordley and his sons Stephen and John Beale Bordley are known today for their construction of and residence in what we now know as the Bordley-Randall House on State Circle. The 304 acres patented as Sandgate by Thomas Bordley in 1718, which included the original 100-acre tract, was almost certainly used by the family as a source of wood and, perhaps, for agriculture. Stephen Bordley's 1764 will gave his spinster sister, Elizabeth, a life estate in Sandgate, along with use of his house and its contents, so the land must have been important to the running of the house.<sup>15</sup>

Even after a railroad, adjacent to Sandgate on the north, linked Annapolis with both Washington and Baltimore in 1840, the land remained agricultural. What changed matters was the Civil War, which brought hundreds of thousands of Union soldiers to Annapolis. In the late fall of 1861, men camped along the rail line outside of the city, waiting to board vessels in the harbor and head south with General Ambrose Burnside. Less than a year later,

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<sup>15</sup> See the title chain for 1950 Drew Street; Legislative History Project files for Thomas, Stephen, and John Beale Bordley in MSA SC 1138-001-112, 113, 115; Edward C. Papenfuse, et al., *A Biographical Dictionary of the Maryland Legislature, 1634-1789* (1979) 1: 145-147.

soldiers released on their parole from Confederate capture were moved from Annapolis to a “Camp Parole,” somewhere south and west of the city, possibly in this area. Although it is not clear exactly where this second camp was, the men housed there wandered freely over the land south of West Street and along what is now Chinquapin Round and Spa Roads. Finally, in 1863, this camp was in such poor condition that the army leased a 250-acre tract from Charles S. Welsh and established a large, well-organized Camp Parole along the railroad from just west of what is now Chinquapin Round Rd to Old Solomon’s Island Road. Sandgate lay along the east line of the third parole camp, and the Community Health Center at Parole land appears to have been within a few hundred feet of the camp along what is now Parole Street.<sup>16</sup>

There is little doubt that at least some of the black men and women who worked at the parole camps—hauling goods, selling foodstuffs, washing, cleaning—lived nearby. And when the last camp closed in the summer of 1865 and the barracks were dismantled and sold, it is also certain that that wood made its way into housing. By 1882, Parole had a post office with an African-American postmistress, the first in Maryland. Farming may still have occupied its citizens, but Parole was ready for more. A cannery opened about 1903, providing seasonal work. And in 1906, the *Afro-American Ledger* noted that African Americans were purchasing lots in Parole and Germantown because they feared another expansion of the U. S. Naval Academy, where so many of them worked. Expansion in 1902 had taken an entire mixed-race neighborhood between Hanover and King George Streets, with commercial and residential properties. The first subdivision in Parole was 38 lots platted in 1907 on both sides of Parole Street, south of the “shell road” that was West Street.<sup>17</sup>

By 1909, the old wooden Macedonia AME Church, which had been moved from Franklin Street downtown when Mt. Moriah Church was built in 1875, was in poor condition, and the congregation laid the cornerstone that year for a new building, the first Mt. Olive AME Church, on Hicks Street.<sup>18</sup> In 1910, there were a number of tradesmen in the Parole area: a bricklayer, blacksmith, and an engineer at the water works among them, but most of the people who listed their names and occupations in that year’s Annapolis City Directory were farmers, and none of them were African American. Nor is there any way to tell just where in the area they lived. The 1924 directory shows four people actually residing in “Camp Parole,” but in this directory, there is no distinction made of race.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jane Wilson McWilliams, *City on the Severn, A History* (2011), pp. 146–147, 170–180, 174–175, 184–185; David Haight and Anthony D. Lindauer, separate analyses of the parole camp lands, with plats (unpublished), especially plats by Lindauer done for this project 8 July 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Louis H. Bolander, “When Annapolis Was an Army Town,” *The (Baltimore) Sunday Sun Magazine*, 8 November 1931, for instance; McWilliams, *City on the Severn*, p. 198, 232–235, 236; *Western Appeal* newspaper, 10 Sept. 1887 (courtesy of Robert Worden); AA Co. Circuit Ct. Charter Record, SH 3, 271 [MSA T2787-3; 3/61/12/69]; *Afro-American Ledger* 1906/05/26; Annapolis DPW, plat cards.

<sup>18</sup> Philip L. Brown, *The Other Annapolis* (1994), p. 69; Pearl C. Swann, “Mt. Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church,” in Rhonda Pindell Charles, comp., *Parole Week, Celebrating 130 Years of Spirit*, (Walter S. Mills-Parole Elementary School Alumni and Friends Association, May 1995).

<sup>19</sup> These directories are accessible through the Maryland State Archives, *Archives of Maryland Online* at <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000542/html/am542--1.html> and <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000538/html/index.html>.

Experienced local contractor Thomas McGuckian, who developed the Spa View area on the east side of Spa Road, seems to have understood that the time was right for serious development of what was then outer West Street. McGuckian bought 188.25 acres of Sandgate “farm land” in 1919 and laid out residential lots along West Street that are now part of Germantown. He is also responsible for the original industrial complex to the east of Chinquapin Round Road. But it is the part of Sandgate farther out West Street that concerns the story of the Community Health Center at Parole. Shortly before his death, in 1921, McGuckian laid out a few lots along the east side of Parole Street. This first plat has been lost, but a later resurvey confirmed that the two lots on which the health center sits today date to this period.<sup>20</sup>

By the early 1920s, the state had paved West Street from the city to Parole, three more churches serving the African-American community had moved to the area, and an elementary school was under construction with some financing from the Rosenwald Foundation. In 1923, about twenty Ku Klux Klan men demonstrated on McGuckian land on Camp Parole Road, setting off rockets seen from Annapolis. Is it any wonder the people of Parole decided to help themselves without relying on outside, white dominant, agencies?<sup>21</sup>

## **BUILDING HISTORY**

In 1930, Anne Arundel County had one of the highest infant mortality rates in Maryland. To address this problem as well as to prevent deaths from communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, and scarlet fever, the County Commissioners established a county-wide Health Department. The following year, the first health center opened in Annapolis not only to serve county residents but also to be a model to train health personnel for other Maryland counties. Cooperation with the Rockefeller Foundation, the Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, and the State Health Department in this program brought Hopkins students of public health, and later students from other colleges, to Annapolis to assist registered public health nurses in offering free clinics in child health and “the prevention of contagious and uncontrollable disease.” Death rates dropped in the

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<sup>20</sup> See title chain for 1950 Drew Street; McGuckian plats in Plats.net; Baltimore *Sun*, 15 October 1919; McWilliams, *City on the Severn*, p. 271; Robert McIntire, *Annapolis, Maryland, Families* (1980) 1:463; “Subdivision of part of McGuckian Property,” April 1942 [MSA C2081-730]. A search for McGuckian’s first plat, dated to 1922 and mentioned in deeds for the health center was not successful. It is not listed by the MSA under McGuckian in Plats.net, and in 1963, when the city was widening Parole and Drew Streets, it was noted as “Unrecorded,” see AACo.LR, Liber 1698, folio 397.

<sup>21</sup> *Evening Capital* 2 November 1914 in Michael Parker, *Presidents Hill* (2005), p. 16; Charles, comp., *Parole Week, Celebrating 130 Years of Spirit* (1995), histories of Second Baptist Church, King’s Apostle Holiness Church, Asbury Methodist Mission (now Cecil Memorial United Methodist Church); Sherri Marsh, “Rosenwald Schools of Anne Arundel County, Maryland (1921–1932),” National Register of Historic Places (draft May 2003), Section E, pp 10, 14, 17; *Evening Capital* 29 May 1923.

first five years by 50 percent.<sup>22</sup> Within just a few years, the model program had drawn attention from the U.S. Public Health service, which contributed to venereal disease programs and maternal and child health. Health centers were organized in a number of county neighborhoods, served by Health Department nurses under supervision of Miss Margaret C. Wohlgenuth. One of these centers was funded by a private individual, and another received support from a nearby industry. The rest were supported by the communities they served. One of the first of these centers was the one established in Parole.<sup>23</sup>

It was Walter S. Mills who, with the Reverend John T. Chambers, Sr., determined to bring this exciting new health care program to the Parole community. In 1936, Mr. Mills was principal of Parole Elementary School and Rev. Chambers was president of the school's PTA. Together they organized a committee of PTA parents to figure out how to make this happen. Maternal and child care were a special concern, and Mills is credited with the statement that defined the purpose:

**"Every Child Has the Right to be Born a Healthy Child"**<sup>24</sup>

Anne Arundel County's only hospital, known in the 1930s as Emergency Hospital, had treated African-American medical and surgical patients of any age since its founding in 1902, but it did not offer maternity care to black mothers until a large wing was added to the building in 1955. Parole-area mothers could choose a physician-run maternity ward in Annapolis, a midwife-assisted delivery at home, or the long, dangerous trip to a black-owned hospital in Washington or Baltimore. Free prenatal and postpartum care were available from Health Department nurses, which in the early days, included a nurse-midwife, but this care was provided only in approved health centers. To meet Mr. Mills's objective, Parole needed a health center.<sup>25</sup>

Still administered by the PTA parents' group, the center's first clinics in 1936 were held monthly in the sanctuary of Asbury Methodist Church (now Cecil Memorial United Methodist Church) with sheets hung for privacy. In 1938, the clinics moved to the parsonage of Mount Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church, and two years later Mount Olive's Church Hall became the health center. The hall was a long, wooden building set on blocks with only a space heater to warm the large room in cold weather. However, a sink with running water was a big

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<sup>22</sup> Stuart M Christhilf, Jr., "Health Care," in James C. Bradford, ed., *Anne Arundel County, Maryland, A Bicentennial History, 1649–1977* (1977), pp. 255–256; Baltimore *Sun* 20 Sept. 1931, 11 July and 9 Sept. 1934, 16 April 1939; *Evening Capital* 20 Dec. 1948, 20 Nov. 1980; Quotation from Christhilf, p. 255.

<sup>23</sup> *Evening Capital* 20 Dec. 1948; J. Howard Beard and Margaret C Wohlgenuth, "Maryland Citizens In Action for Community Health," *Public Health Reports*, 76 (1961): 67, courtesy of Elin Jones, AA Co. Dept. of Health.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence L. Harris, Jr., "The Community Center at Parole, Inc., Our History," (2013), Baltimore *Sun*, 21 July 1994 (Obituary for Walter S. Mills by Fred Rasmussen. Mills's suit against the county Board of Education, argued in the Maryland Court of Appeals by Thurgood Marshall in 1939, resulted in a state law giving equal pay to teachers and principals, no matter what their race. Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall, American Revolutionary* (1998), pp. 90–91.)

<sup>25</sup> Jane Wilson McWilliams, *The First 90 Years* (1992), p. 57; McWilliams, *City on the Severn*, pp. 302–303; *Evening Capital* 20 Dec. 1948; Harris, "Our History."

improvement. The health center remained in this building, where 978 patients were treated in 1947, until the new one opened on Drew Street.

The formal Parole Health Center Association was incorporated in 1941 with a Board of Directors to guide its future — a future that would include a purpose-built structure to house the clinics and serve the community. The Community Health Center at Parole (initially named “Parole Health Center”) was the first in Maryland to be financed entirely by African Americans. Fund-raising for the new building began in 1944, with Walter S. Mills making the first donation. As Lawrence Harris described it: “The citizen response was overwhelming. Dinners, bazaars, raffles, and a variety of entertainment events were sponsored by groups to raise funds for the building. To provide an opportunity for everyone to participate, a door-to-door solicitation was conducted with every person contacted contributing something.”<sup>26</sup>

Groundbreaking on Sunday 30 June 1946, with parades, prayers, and speeches, was followed by the laying of the cornerstone on 16 May 1948, and then construction, almost all of it done by local volunteers. Among those volunteers was experienced building contractor James Marchand, head of the industrial arts department at Wiley H. Bates High School. Mr. Marchand, who was also treasurer of the health center association, was soon able to add to the balance on hand a contribution from the local American-Legion chapter and proceeds from a baby show, a softball game, and a school play.<sup>27</sup> The building would have a basement room for recreation with showers and lavatories, and a first floor with three examining rooms, a waiting room, and offices for a clerk and nurse. One of the examining rooms could be used for x-rays or dental work. One Saturday volunteers stuccoed almost the entire building, and more volunteers came in at night to lay floors. This industry caught the attention of the *Baltimore Sun*, which editorialized “that it is both surprising and refreshing to find a group endeavoring to meet its own medical needs. The Negro community in Annapolis appears well on its way to having a new and larger health center of its own making. When completed, the new center will replace a makeshift center that was also built and run by the Negro community without public assistance, save for the visits of county nurses and doctors . . . all Marylanders who still find something particularly commendable in undiscouraged private initiative will hope that the leaders of the medical center project will get everything they need to make a go of it.”<sup>28</sup>

Dedication of the new building took place on 5 June 1949 with ceremonies and speakers and the crowning of the queens of the health center. Greetings from Dr. William J. French, county health officer, and Miss Margaret Wohlgemuth, head of the nursing service, were followed by remarks from the architect, Charles Henry, and important members of the local African-American community, including the principal of Wiley H. Bates High

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<sup>26</sup> Harris, “Our History”; *Evening Capital* 27 March and 24 August 1944, 9 February and 21 March 1945.

<sup>27</sup> “*The Beacon*, Wiley H. Bates High School yearbook, 1948”

<sup>28</sup> Harris, “Our History”; *Evening Capital* 26 June 1946, 2 March and 1 May and 20 December 1948, *Baltimore Sun*, 13 June 1948; *Evening Capital* 29 January, 2 August, and 8 August 1949; *Washington Afro-American* 30 June 1959. Quotation from the *Sun*.

School and Bates faculty member Frank B. Butler. Dr. Aris T. Allen and nurse Mrs. Myrtle Jackson, who would serve in the new building, also spoke.<sup>29</sup>

Fundraising continued with rallies and concerts, suppers and contributions from Annapolis businesses, which also donated equipment and amenities not supplied by the county Health Department. Of the \$20,000 cost of construction, only \$2,000 remained unpaid in October 1951. In 1951, the Parole Health Center Association applied for and was included in the Anne Arundel County Community Chest, thus benefiting from annual county-wide fundraising. By 1956, the Association “proudly announced it had paid up and burned its mortgage.” At that time, the center offered clinics in maternal and child health and immunizations for diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, and smallpox, with 25 to 40 patients being served at each clinic. Volunteers from the community worked in the center, assisting the nurses and part-time physicians. In 1961, there were two public health nurses assigned to the center and three part-time local physicians, among them Drs. Aris and Faye Allen and Dr. Antonio Rivera.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to clinics and other health services, the building was in demand for Boy Scout meetings, Red Cross classes in childcare for Girl Scouts and teenagers, and other community events. Grants from government and the community allowed the center to increase its service to young children, first as a Child Development Center and, later, as the Drew Street Head Start Center. When the Head Start program moved to another facility, the teacher, Mrs. Helen Chambers, opened a day-care center.<sup>31</sup>

Over the years, the community of Parole continued to support its health center financially and through volunteer activities. Repairs, improvements, and maintenance of the building required continuous fund-raising and attention by volunteers who gave hundreds of hours to make sure their center continued its mission successfully. In 1995, five health department nurses treated 3702 patients in the center, gave 2349 immunizations, and visited 1214 in homes throughout the central county. Four years later the center had approximately 4,000 walk-in patients, provided 3,000 immunizations, and made more than 1,700 home visits. All of these services given without charge.<sup>32</sup>

By the late 1990s, the age of the building and the increase in patients and services made expansion and renovation necessary. Again, the Community Health Center at Parole received support from both public and private resources, and again, the Parole community itself contributed money and time to the effort. Successive organization presidents Lawrence L. Harris, Jr., France A. Pindell, and Alice K. Wright, R.N., gave the center continuity and

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<sup>29</sup> *Evening Capital* 31 May 1949.

<sup>30</sup> *Evening Capital* 11 and 18 April 1950, 5 October 1951, 9 October 1957; *Washington Afro-American* 30 June 1959; *Baltimore Afro-American* 14 September 1963; Beard and Wohlgemuth, “Maryland Citizens in Action,” p. 70; Mrs. Frank G. Baldwin, chairman of the history committee of the Lay Health Council, “Stream of Life, the Story of the Public Health Lay Council of Anne Arundel County,” (typescript, n. d., but probably 1957), courtesy of Elin Jones. Quote from Baldwin.

<sup>31</sup> Harris, “Our History”; *Washington Afro-American* 30 June 1959; *Baltimore Afro American* 8 August 1959.

<sup>32</sup> Harris, “Our History”; *The Capital* 31 May 1996.

focus, and dedicated volunteers continued their efforts in service and fundraising. The present facility on Drew Street was dedicated on 15 June 2002 as one of the “most modern, well-equipped health centers in Anne Arundel County.” The relationship between the center and the Health Department has always been strong and many of the nurses have worked at the center for years.<sup>33</sup>

Over the years, the Community Health Center at Parole has modified its purpose according to the needs of the community. Increased access to government insurance, especially Medicaid and the Maryland Children’s Health Program, begun in 1998, allow families to obtain health care and family planning assistance from private providers. The federal Affordable Care Act, signed by President Barack Obama in March 2010 gave uninsured Americans access to health care and expanded coverage of Medicare and the Children’s Health Insurance Program. In 1956, there were eleven active community health care centers; in 2015, only two remained, one of them Parole. Tuberculosis treatment and HIV/AIDS testing are still important public health issues, and the Community Health Center at Parole continues to offer these services along with immunizations and the Healthy Start program for pregnant women, infants, and toddlers.<sup>34</sup>

Demographic changes in the Parole area have affected the patients served by the center. Where once the majority of patients were African-American, today the center attracts the county’s immigrant population, many of them Latino, without insurance or access to private health care. No matter their race, ethnicity, age, or ability to pay, hundreds of county residents living both in and out of the Parole neighborhood avail themselves of services at the Community Health Center at Parole so generously provided by the people of Parole.<sup>35</sup>

The Community Health Center at Parole has received accolades and awards from national, state, county, and city governments and private groups. Among them are letters of congratulation from Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski (2013); citations from the governor of Maryland (1999) and the Maryland General Assembly (2009, 2011), the Executive of Anne Arundel County (2005, 2011), and the City of Annapolis (2002, 2011) as well as the appreciations from the Beacon Light Seventh Day Adventist Church (1987), Gamma Chapter, Chi Eta Phi Sorority to Alice Wright (2012), and the National Community Award from the National Delicados (2010). In 2016, the City of Annapolis named the Community Health Center at Parole a Living Landmark.<sup>36</sup>

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29 September 2016

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<sup>33</sup> Harris, “Our History”; *The Capital* 23 April 1999, 13 October 2000, 29 July 2002; telephone conversation with nurse Eileen Marmon, retired public health nurse at Parole, 13 July 2016. Quotation from Harris.

<sup>34</sup> Telephone conversation with Elin Jones of the AA Co. Dept of Health, 24 August 2016; Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene website at <https://mmcp.dhmh.maryland.gov/chp/Pages/Home.aspx>; AACo. Dept of Health Statistics for the Parole Health Center, FY 2013, 2015; Baldwin, “The Stream of Life,” passim; AA Co. Health Dept. website at <http://www.aahealth.org/about>.

<sup>35</sup> James Houck, “More than Mortar and Brick,” *What’s Up, Annapolis*, December 2009, p. 53;

<sup>36</sup> See plaques and letters at the health center.