A Well Baby Clinic in Indianapolis

Elizabeth Fee, Theodore M. Brown, and Roxanne L. Beatty

This 1947 photograph depicts the then newly opened well baby clinic of the Herman G. Morgan Health Center in Indianapolis, Ind. The health center was created as part of Flanner House, which had long been a social service center for the city’s African American community. Around 1900, Frank Flanner, a local mortician, donated property to the Charity Organization Society to establish a settlement house for “the promotion of the social, moral and physical welfare of Negroes, more particularly of the young.”

Flanner House was a remarkable place. For many years, its programs included a day nursery, children’s playground, and employment center; self-help projects in housing construction and repair; training programs for women to be seamstresses, milliners, and cooks; training programs for men to be carpenters and waiters; and health programs such as a tuberculosis clinic and a “rescue home” for unmarried mothers and their children. Its members developed a cooperative food store, a woodworking shop, a cannery, a library, and even a full orchestra of 73 pieces. In 1946, the institution received a grant from the Indianapolis Foundation and the Indianapolis Board of Health and Hospitals to construct the Herman G. Morgan Health Center, named after Flanner House’s first manager.

Two physicians, Walter H. Maddux and Harvey N. Middleton, helped establish the center. Maddux (ca. 1892–1978), a native of Kansas City, Kan, had been medical director of Chicago’s Provident Hospital and a faculty member at Meharry Medical College and Howard University; later he would join the United States Children’s Bureau and conduct maternal and child health clinics throughout the South. Middleton (1895–1978) had been a Pullman car porter before attending medical school at Boston University and Meharry Medical College; he then set up his own practice as a cardiologist. These men were well aware of the wide health disparities between African American and White children; from 1940 to 1944, infant mortality rates were 67.2 per 1000 live births for non-Whites vs 29.2 per 1000 for Whites. The program established at the Morgan Health Center was the only health facility in Indiana providing preventive medicine (annual physical examinations and immunizations) and a public health program (education and nutrition counseling) to the community it served.

About the Authors
Elizabeth Fee and Roxanne Beatty are with the History of Medicine Division, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Md. Theodore M. Brown is with the Departments of History and of Community and Preventive Medicine at the University of Rochester, Rochester, NY. Requests for reprints should be sent to Elizabeth Fee, PhD, Building 38, Room 1E21, 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894 (e-mail: elizabeth_fee@nlm.nih.gov).

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References