

# Many Prominent Houston Women Are Active in the Work of Maternal Health Center



No. 1—Mrs. Sam Miller, Houston clubwoman, who is a volunteer typist at the center. No. 2—Mrs. John P. Bullington, finance chairman of the center. No. 3—Mrs. Aubrey Smith, a member of the board, takes a case history for the records of the center. No. 4—Mrs. Alice D. Gregory, registered nurse, who is on the staff of the center. No. 5—Mrs. George A. Ripley of Dallas, president of the Dallas birth control clinic and legislative chairman of the Birth Control League of Texas, is a well-wisher of the Houston institution. No. 6—Mrs. James G. Flynn (left), clinic administrator, and Mrs. Maude Meredith, staff secretary. No. 7—A group of some members of the board of the maternal health center taken as they left after a board meeting. Left to right: Mrs. Lamar Fleming Jr., Mrs. William Walker, Mrs. David M. Picton Jr., Mrs. Ike Friedlander, Mrs. Otis Meredith and Mrs. Ralph Henderson. No. 8—Left to right: Mrs. George Meyer, vice president of the center; Mrs. Raymond Goodrich, secretary, and Mrs. Haywood Nelms, vice president of the center. Mrs. Nelms also is president of the Birth Control League of Texas.

## Mother of 11 Children Died and Houston's Maternal Health Center Was Born

### Local Unit Is Part of Ever-Growing National Organization Offering Care and Knowledge to the Needy

By Bess W. Scott

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"Wait a minute," she begged. "Won't you help me? You wouldn't believe to look at me, but I'm just 35 years old. Look at these—10 of them—" she waved drearily around her arms toward children on the porch and within the house. "The oldest is 15. I'm sick and tired, and we can't afford to have any more children. You're a woman—tell me what to do."

The woman looked 50—her shoulders stooped and her face drawn with suffering. The little boy clung to her and wept. "The wrinkled little face in her arms looked a living skeleton. But lack of precedent and public prejudice held the other woman's tongue in check. She dismissed the plea with evasive answers.

Ten months later the mother died in her eleventh pregnancy. "That mother's face haunts me yet," said the former social service worker recently. "When she died I felt personally guilty. But the case made me see just how desperate was the need of hundreds of women in Houston for information and help to space their children so that both mother and children would have a reasonable chance at health and happiness."

Center Now Organized

Nearly because this third mother died, Houston now has a maternal health center, affiliated with the Birth Control League of Texas and the American Birth Control League. The colonials' ladies of Houston decided to face up to the problem and start a crusade in behalf of the Judge O'Grady's who were not able to pay physicians' fees and the field of medicine.

Opened at 1525 City Park drive in 1935, the Houston clinic is a clinic more than five years has given advice, information and aid to more than 150 women, through cooperation with a medical advisory board which lists some of the most distinguished names in the field of medicine.

Clinic heads say the safe con-

ceptive methods taught these underprivileged mothers have proved 99 per cent effective. The clinic has been the means of restoring health to hundreds of mothers so that they can care for and enjoy the several children they already have. More than that, the work of the clinic has checked in definite manner the appalling toll in human lives taken by the scourge of abortions.

The Maternal Health center of Houston is an incorporated organization and is supported solely by donations from friends of the movement in Houston. The lay board is responsible to the center for this money. Very recently the clinic administrator was surprised by a check from a friend of the movement. The donor said he sent the check because he had been told by one of the clinicians that the center was run more efficiently than any clinic he had ever served.

Officers of the local center are: Dr. Judson L. Taylor, president; Mrs. Haywood Nelms, first vice president; Mrs. George J. Ryan, second vice president; Rev. Elmer Ferguson, treasurer; Mrs. Raymond Goodrich, secretary; Mrs. James G. Flynn, clinic administrator; Mrs. Aubrey Smith, administrator of the white clinic; Mrs. Elen C. Bell, supervisor of the Mexican clinic; Mrs. Perry Akote, assistant to Mrs. Nelms.

Mrs. Nelms is also president of the Birth Control League of Texas; four new members were added by the board last week: Thelma Henry Barron, Dr. Paul W. Quillian, Mrs. Ben C. Bell and Mrs. Sylvia Leach. Other members of the board are Mrs. George Hoover, Mrs. Virgil Scott, Mrs. William Walker, Mrs. J.

L. Taylor, Mrs. Haywood Nelms, Mrs. John Bullington, Mrs. David Picton Jr., Mrs. Aubrey Smith, Mrs. J. G. Flynn, Mrs. W. L. Clayton, Mrs. Ike Friedlander, Miss Rosalie Smith, Mrs. Otis Meredith, Mrs. John Sumner, Mrs. R. H. Goodrich, Mrs. Ralph Henderson, Mrs. Lamar Fleming, Lee Hacer, Lela Poole, Walter Whitson, Rev. J. Elmer Ferguson, Robert DeLong, E. B. Gilmer, Dr. Edgar Altenberg, Frank P. Sterling and Ewing Weirlein.

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Six new and important names were added to the medical advisory committee for the clinic this year: Mrs. Nelms said, giving the clinic the aid of the best known physicians and specialists in Houston.

The work of the clinic among negro women owes much of its success to the women of the clinic who are not able to pay doctor's fees," said Mrs. Nelms, who has done a marvelous piece of work, bringing health and hope to 450 negro and white women, including their home conditions, teaching them the meaning of personal hygiene and doing much good in the prevention of social disease.

Houston has one of five birth-control clinics in Texas. The others are at Dallas, El Paso, Austin and Fort Worth. Presidents are Mrs. Robert Handwick, East Wichita; Mrs. Ray Bedichek, Austin; Mrs. A. Goetting, El Paso; and Mrs. George Ripley, Dallas. Among those interested in the Fort Worth clinic are Amon Carter, Mrs. J. D. Collett, Mrs. W. W. Thomas, Mrs. Frank Schoonover and Mrs. J. G. Sims Jr.

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Four five months in 1934 Mrs. Ripley gave her whole time to promoting a hearing on a bill to amend the Comstock law and prevent enactment of this legislation. The hearing was set at the request of Congressman Hutton W. Summers

of the Dallas district, immediately following an international conference on birth control.

"It made history," Mrs. Ripley said. "The bill was never voted out of committee, but the testimony of nationally and internationally known authorities was published and the education which came out of this hearing had a wide effect upon public opinion and a direct bearing on the attitude taken since by the legislative and judicial bodies in regard to this movement."

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Largely through Mrs. Ripley's efforts the General Federation of Women's clubs in Detroit convention in 1935 endorsed a resolution in favor of legal dissemination of birth control and endorsement by the Texas Federation of Women's clubs in 1937 of the birth control service in the maternal and welfare program of the Texas department of health.

National Directors

On the national board are such well known persons as Gilbert Colgate, Mrs. Walter N. Rothschild, Mrs. Correll N. Hill, John Dewey, Mrs. Harry Harwood, Eleanor M. Leonard, Dr. William W. Herrick, Mrs. James Lee Leland, Mrs. Thomas W. Lamson, Dr. Edward C. Lindeman, Mrs. Dwight W. Morrow, Mrs. John Stoen, Mrs. Miss Mary E. Weller. These and many more are on the newly formed committee for planned parenthood working in behalf of the American Birth Control League, Inc.

"Because of lack of public understanding, a sumo and social need are subjected to forceful and dangerous exploitation," spokesmen for this national committee estimate that between 50 and 75 per cent of the 22,000,000 married couples in the United States seek to space the births of their children. Yet with 4500 general hospitals, only 70 maintain clinics for this purpose. Although there are not more than 350 clinics in the whole country and they do not reach more than 200,000 married women.

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fullest of means, but the problem is not whether the size of families shall be limited, but whether they should be limited by humane and scientific methods or by crude and dangerous methods. A recent survey in 16 states found the 25 per cent of maternal deaths were due to abortions, the highest portion of deaths from this cause between the 35 and 39 age limit, and after the third child. Modern methods of restriction would have prevented 95 per cent of these deaths.

"As conditions are now, child spacing is a class privilege. Knowledge of child spacing is available only to those who can afford to pay their doctor for it. All women know that for the sake of their health and that of their children there should be a year or more between pregnancies. But the woman who is compelled to do her own thing, scrubbing and caring for herself during pregnancy, and many children are the ones who are denied this privilege.

"Delinquency and crime breed in overcrowded, unhappy homes where both mother and child are neglected. Children are left motherless by means of negligently high maternal death rates, society suffers and the nation must absorb the burden.

"Abortions are estimated as high as 2,000,000 annually. The Academy of Medicine found 17.5 per cent of all maternal deaths in New York city in 1932-33 were due to abortions—in practically all cases criminally induced.

"We know that if all this is true, and if syphilis and other infections are transmitted through diseased parents, the place to fight is at the source of the evil. Today socially minded men and women believe in preventive instead of temporary palliative measures. Birth control has at last won legal acceptance and the formal endorsement of the American Medical association, making it an essential part of medical practice.

The immediate objectives of the committee are to mobilize public opinion and to provide means whereby married couples birth control information can be made available to every married couple which needs it.

The scourge of abortion can be cured only through properly conducted birth control clinics as endorsed by the medical profession, Mrs. Nelms and her coworkers believe.

There were 2,000,000 abortions in the United States last year and 90 per cent of them by married women overburdened with child bearing," Mrs. Nelms said. "Many of these were accomplished under a great many of them resulted in death or hospital wreckage. It is known that 10 out of every 100 second pregnancies end in abortion, and 40 out of every 100 third pregnancies. It is safe to say that attempts at abortion are made for almost every pregnancy after the first."

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No. 7—A group of some members of the board of the maternal health center taken as they left after a board meeting. Left to right: Mrs. Lamar Fleming Jr., Mrs. William Walker, Mrs. David M. Picton Jr., Mrs. Ike Friedlander, Mrs. Otis Meredith and Mrs. Ralph Henderson.



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Opened at 1202 City Park drive in 1935, the Houston clinic in a little more than two years has given advice, information and aid to more than 1500 women, through cooperation with a medical advisory board which lists some of the most distinguished names in the field of medicine.

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ceptive methods taught these underprivileged mothers have proved 99 per cent effective. The clinic has been the means of restoring health to hundreds of mothers so that they can care for and enjoy the several children they already have. More than that, the work of the clinic has checked in definite manner the appalling toll in human life taken by the scourge of abortions.

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"Surveys reveal the shocking fact the great majority of these married couples are forced to choose between the 1500 and 2000 devices and preparations available for the uninformed purchaser—a great majority

of them ineffective, some injurious. Millions of dollars worth of this material is being distributed by drug stores, cosmetic shops, pool parlors, gas stations and house to house canvassers.

#### Citizens Victimized

"Our citizens are being victimized by worthless remedies as were the sufferers of cancer and tuberculosis until public opinion awakened to their plight.

"Why should the medical help easily available to those who can go to a private physician be virtually inaccessible to the millions who are probably in greater need but who can not afford to pay for the same advice?

"Delinquency and crime breed in overcrowded, unhappy homes where low moral standards prevail. If children are left motherless by reason of needlessly high maternal death rate, society suffers and the nation must absorb the burden.

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is not whether the size of families shall be limited, but whether they shall be limited by humane and scientific methods or by crude and dangerous methods. A recent survey in 15 states found that 25 per cent of maternal deaths were due to abortions, the highest proportion of deaths from this cause between the 35 and 39 age limit, and after the third child. Modern methods of contraception would have prevented 95 per cent of these deaths.

"As conditions are now, child spacing is a class privilege. Knowledge of child spacing is available only to those who can afford to pay their doctor for it. All women know that for the sake of their health and that of their children there should be a year or more between pregnancies. But the woman who is compelled to do her own washing, scrubbing and caring for many children are the ones who are denied this privilege.

#### Given Best of Care

"It is this type of woman who has welcomed the Houston Maternal Center and health clinic where she gets the same careful consideration as if she paid for it. It is through the unselfish consideration for the underprivileged on the part of the best professional advice in the city that this is possible.

"Ten clinicians give free time to the center. Clinic leaders and clinicians feel that every mother and father owe it to the country to have as many children as the mother can safely bear and adequately rear. This is one of the important aims of the child spacing movement."

Very recently a national woman's magazine conducted a survey that reached 37,000,000 women, all races and creeds represented, to find what American women think of birth control. The results, briefly stated, were as follows:

American women believe in having children; 98 per cent are glad they had children. Only one per cent believed in having only one child, and most of them thought four children made an ideal family.

American women believe in birth control; 79 per cent said "yes," without reservations.

American women believe that young married children should not have a child until after the first year of married life; that parents should not have more children than they can care for properly; that birth control will decrease the number of feeble minded children; and that birth control will make for better health of women who otherwise grow old prematurely under the burden of bearing too many children.

It is of interest to note that on

Egyptian papyrus dated 1850 B. C. is a reference to contraceptive medicine that contained physical or chemical properties existing in modern commercialized birth control products.

#### Contraceptives Explained

Birth control was discussed in print as early as 1798, when the first edition of Malthus' "Essay on Population" was issued. In 1833 Dr. Knowlton published in Boston his "Fruits of Philosophy," in which he described contraceptive methods. The book became internationally known.

In 1875, through the efforts of Anthony Comstock of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, congress enacted a statute excluding information concerning contraception from the United States mails and declaring such information illegal and obscene. That physicians today are exempted from this law has been upheld by court decisions.

The first birth control clinic in the world was opened in 1878 in Holland by Dr. Aletta Jacobs. In 1910 Havelock Ellis in England gave his approval of birth control in his "Psychology of Sex."

America's first birth control clinic was opened by Margaret Sanger in Brooklyn, N. Y., in 1916. It was closed a few days later as "a public nuisance." In 1918 Judge Crane of the New York court of appeals decided that legally practicing physicians may give contraceptive advice in New York state "for the protection of health and prevention of disease."

In 1921 the American Birth Control league was organized and incorporated and the first American birth control conference met in New York. A public meeting announced in connection with the conference was stopped by police, but later held after public opinion had been aroused by the tactics of the opponents of birth control, leaders say.

#### Courts Hold It Legal

The first birth control clinic to function effectively, the birth control clinic research bureau, opened in New York city in 1923. Six years later the police, raided the bureau and seized the records. But the courts declared the bureau legal under New York state law, and it was reopened.

In 1930 there were 40 medically-directed birth control clinics in the United States. Suffering of poor families during the depression gave impetus to community movements to establish clinics and further encouragement was given the movement when in 1931 the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America indorsed birth control. A spirited discussion of the

subject in 1935 brought prominent ministers forward as proponents of birth control.

A high spot in the history of the movement came in 1936 when the decision of the United States circuit court of appeals was that the Comstock law's design was "not to prevent the importation, sale and carriage by mail of things that might intelligently be employed by competent physicians for the purpose of saving life or promoting the well-being of their patients."

In 1937 the house of delegates of the American Medical association, representing 165,000 physicians of the United States, unanimously adopted a report to study contraceptive practices. This was the first official recognition of birth control as a legitimate part of medical practice.

#### 350 Control Clinics

Today there are 350 medically-directed birth control clinics in 42 states and the District of Columbia. The number has doubled in the past two years. More than 70 centers are located in hospitals, 40 in city halls or city and county health departments, and nine are on church property. State organizations are functioning in 25 states, all with medical advisory committees of prominent physicians, well known laymen, club women, business men, educators and religious leaders.

"Birth control means just what the term implies—control of births," Mrs. Nelms said. "Child spacing is the correct word. Our patients do not want to avoid motherhood, nor does the clinic advocate such a thing. We merely want to help overtired mothers to space their children far enough apart to give both mothers and children their chance at health and happiness. Our work is solely for the mothers who can not afford to pay private physicians for such advice. The improved health of our patients and the happier homes that result from our work are rich rewards for our efforts."