BALTIMORE
JEWISH TIMES
JT
May 27, 2016
19 Iyar 5776

CRITTER PROTECTOR \\ YOU SHOULD KNOW ... PAGE 13

Candle Lighting: 8:07 p.m.

MODERN-DAY *Moses*

Dr. Bessie Moses opened Baltimore's first birth control clinic and shaped a movement

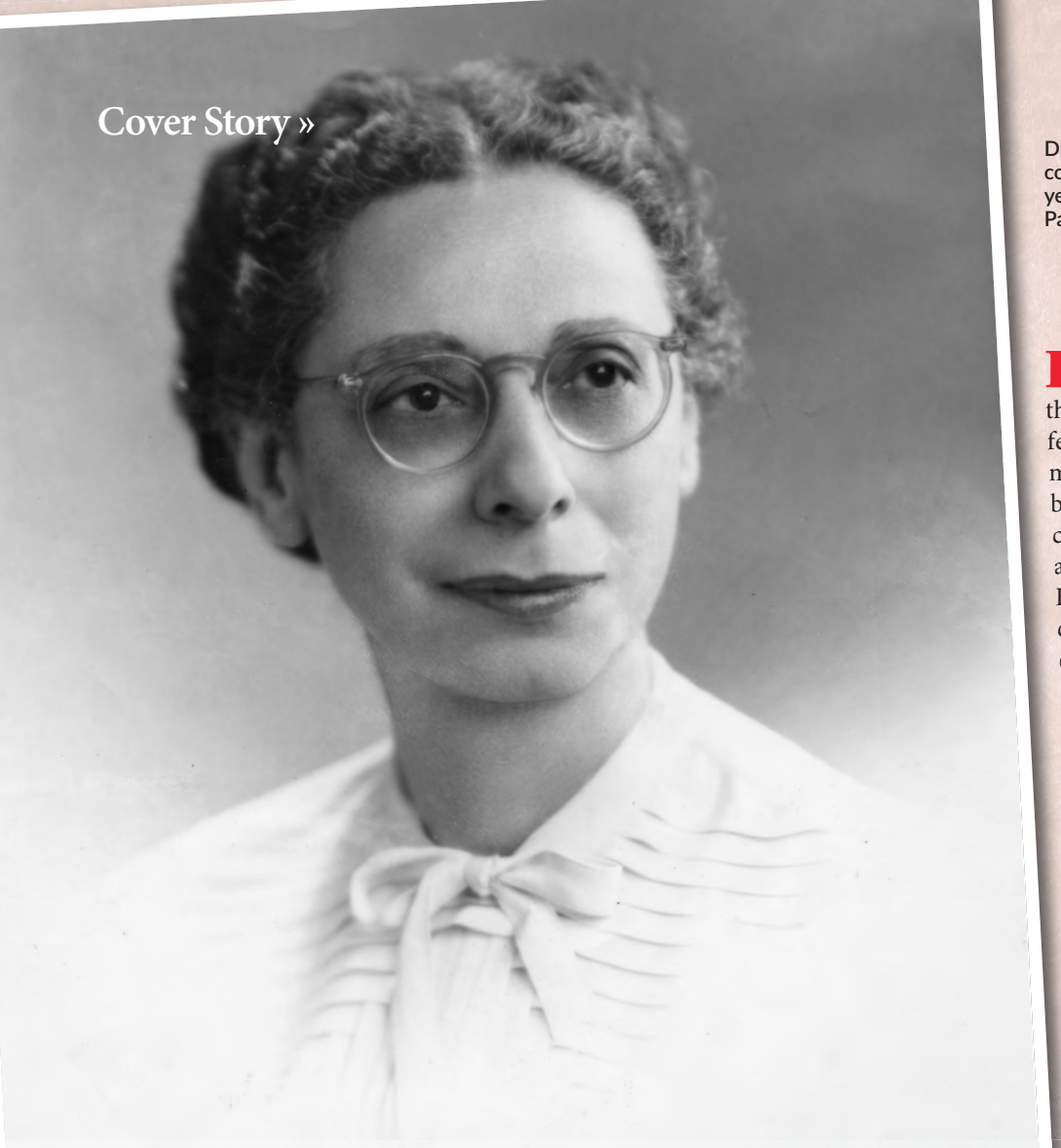
Story begins on page 18

$0.75
0 74470 19778 2

Fabulous Females

PAGES 25 -38

PLUS:



Dr. Bessie Moses opened the first birth control clinic in Baltimore almost 90 years ago, which later became Planned Parenthood of Maryland.

Planned Parenthood Collection, University of Baltimore Langsdale Library Special Collections

MODERN-DAY *Moses*

Dr. Bessie Moses opened Baltimore's first birth control clinic and shaped a movement

By Hannah Monicken

In 1926, 46 years before the right to contraception would be federally recognized for all (both married and unmarried) and 90 years before Maryland would pass the most comprehensive contraception coverage expansion in the country, Dr. Bessie Moses — the Baltimore Jewish doctor who would become a birth control pioneer — was quietly incorporating Baltimore's first birth control clinic, which would open its doors the following year.

Margaret Sanger, who in New York started the first birth control clinic in 1916, may have been the face of the birth control movement, but she was also known for being brash and more than a bit of a media hog, according to Rowan University history professor (and Goucher College grad) Melissa Klapper, who wrote a book about American Jewish women and activism called "Ballots, Babies, and Banners of Peace." So, perhaps it is no surprise that the contributions of Moses, both in Baltimore and to the birth control movement at large, are not more well-known.

With the 100th anniversary of Planned Parenthood's national organization taking place this year, the 90th for Planned Parenthood of Maryland right around the corner and this month's sweeping contraception legislation that passed in the state, Moses' story and legacy run parallel to the conversations still current today about reproductive rights.

"That's why Dr. Moses' work was so incredible — and forward thinking," said Joanna Diamond, vice president of external relations for Planned Parenthood of Maryland. "We're still having those conversations and still having that fight. There is still a need to expand access to birth control."

A Baltimore native born in 1893,

Above: Planned Parenthood moved to its current location on Howard Street in 2004. Right: The row house at 1028 N. Broadway housed Baltimore's first birth control clinic, the Bureau for Contraceptive Advice.

Moses attended Western High School and Goucher College and did graduate work at Johns Hopkins University in biology. Despite an interest in medicine, she was convinced by her parents to become a teacher instead. She lasted two years teaching at women's colleges before finally convincing her parents of the value of a medical career and enrolling in the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

Though she was dedicated to her chosen field of study, the early 1900s was not a time known for its liberal views of women and their abilities. The percentage of women doctors was in the mere single digits, Klapper said. In fact, a *Baltimore Home News* article in 1939 placed the number of Baltimore women doctors at just 25.

"Jewish women doctors were discriminated against on two fronts," she said. "It's one of the reasons so many of them went into the birth control movement."

And yet, Moses persevered.

According to the Maryland State Archives, she was the first woman obstetrical intern at Johns Hopkins and later studied at the Women's Hospital in Philadelphia. She opened her own private practice in 1924, and she continued to practice until just before her death in 1965, more than 40 years.

"Few physicians were as loved by patients as much as Bess; she gave of herself unstintingly," said Dr. Alan Guttmacher, a friend, former Planned Parenthood president and namesake of the Guttmacher Institute, in a memorial written in a Planned Parenthood newsletter after Moses' death.

But it was her journey into contraception where she became celebrated as a pioneer. Opening the Bureau for Contraceptive Advice in 1927 wasn't just radical by the social mores of the time, it was essentially illegal — the federal Comstock Law

Building photos by David Stuck

prohibited moving contraceptives (and other "articles of immoral use") across state lines.

Moses skirted around this obstacle by setting up the Bureau as a research facility. Even still, none of the local hospitals would house the program, and she instead set up shop in a row house north of Johns Hopkins Hospital at 1028 North Broadway. She would later publish her research as an influential book called "Contraception as a Therapeutic Measure."

In 1932, the Bureau would become the Baltimore Birth Control Clinic and then, 10 years later, Planned Parenthood of Maryland. Moses would stay on as its first medical director until 1956. Her work was so important to the birth control movement that she was honored in 1950 alongside Sanger with the Lasker Foundation Award from Planned Parenthood — the first women to win this award.

It is easy to account for her various accomplishments — they are impressive and always outlined in local biographies, articles from that time and Planned Parenthood of Maryland's official history. It is harder, now more than 50 years after her death, to know much about the woman herself.

Articles about her at the time will often mention — breathlessly and, considering the era, rather patronizingly — her attractiveness and femininity. But it is her unpretentious nature and sense of humor that friends and family remember.

"She was a very humble woman," said Jonathan Hollander, 64, her grandnephew who works as a choreographer in New York. "She was very down-to-earth and had a great sense of humor, liked playing with the children of the family. We were a very close-knit family."

Though she never married or had children of her own, she loved them. Her close friend, Dr. Lucy Liberles, wrote in a letter that Moses was so fond of "the younger set" of her family that she would have their photographs

Photos provided by Planned Parenthood

Left: After opening the first birth control clinic in 1916, Margaret Sanger (stepping into the wagon) was arrested for distributing contraceptives. Right: Women gather in support of birth control in New York.

up in her office. Liberles also noted that because several of the photos showed relatives "now grown to handsome young manhood," the young women coming to the clinic would be embarrassed in front of them and "with a chuckle, Dr. Moses will turn them face to the wall."

She was also a lover of the arts, attending the theater and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra concerts on a regular basis, as well as an amateur painter. One of her paintings, a nautical-themed still life, hangs prominently in Hollander and his siblings' Martha's Vineyard home.

Hollander said she was "fascinated with the world" and would often travel, both for professional and recreational reasons. Hollander remembered she took his father (Moses' nephew) with her to the then-Soviet Union and recalled seeing photos of her in India as well. Independent and self-assured, she struck an elegant and stately figure — definitely "not a shrinking violet," Hollander said.

"She was not the sequestered, hermetic pioneer," he said. "I mean, she was a pioneer, obviously, but she had a lot of chutzpah."

Chutzpah was, no doubt, a useful quality in her frequently controversial work. Though her work was certainly no barrier to her beloved reputation in the community, said Stephen Moses, 81, her cousin and a now-retired lawyer living in California.

"She was extremely respected in Baltimore," he said. "You just had to say 'Dr. Bess' — you didn't have to say 'Moses' — and everyone knew who you were talking about. … Everybody knew her and liked her. I don't know anybody who disliked her."

Stephen Moses had moved down to Baltimore after law school to clerk for Roszel C. Thomsen, a federal judge — a job he knows he got in part because of Moses' reputation.

"I know for a fact that when he learned I was related to Dr. Bess that that was a factor in him selecting me," Stephen Moses said. "He thought that was definitely a positive thing."

Though she was not particularly religious, her Jewish faith did inform how she lived her life, having grown up in a family that was active in the Baltimore Jewish community.

"I think a lot of Jewish women [of that time] grew up in an environment where their families and the people they saw around them really believed that it was their job to make the world a better place," Klapper said. "They saw that as a Jewish responsibility — that, as Jews, it was their role in the world to do that."

Diamond, who is Jewish and grew up in Owings Mills, echoed this sentiment, the feeling that she wanted to be of service as a part of the Jewish tradition.

"My grandmother was part of that movement. My grandmother was a pharmacist, one of the first female pharmacists of her day," Diamond said.

"Jewish women doctors were discriminated against on two fronts. It's one of the reasons so many of them went into the birth control movement."

— Melissa Klapper, author and Rowan University history professor

"Her three daughters, my mother being one of them, have carried that mantle, and I see myself as the next generation of Baltimore Jews."

A lot has changed in the 90 years since Moses opened that first birth control clinic in Baltimore — and some things haven't. Contraception has become more advanced and more varied, now enfolded in the umbrella term of reproductive rights.

The services of Planned Parenthood of Maryland have expanded as the culture — and court cases — have shifted, now providing many forms of contraception, breast exams, cancer screenings, pregnancy tests, sexually transmitted infections testing, HPV vaccinations and abortions, among other services. It has seven clinics across the state and provides more than 26,000 patients with birth control a year, conducts nearly 40,000 STI tests and even sees about 1,800 men for reproductive health visits.

The current national climate around reproductive rights is often ambivalent at best, sometimes openly hostile at worst. The past year for Planned Parenthood has had its share of challenges, said Diamond, with the shooting at a clinic in Colorado Springs and the "sting" videos that resulted in a lot of controversy and, ultimately, the man who released them being indicted. Security has been ramped up in all clinics across the country as a result.

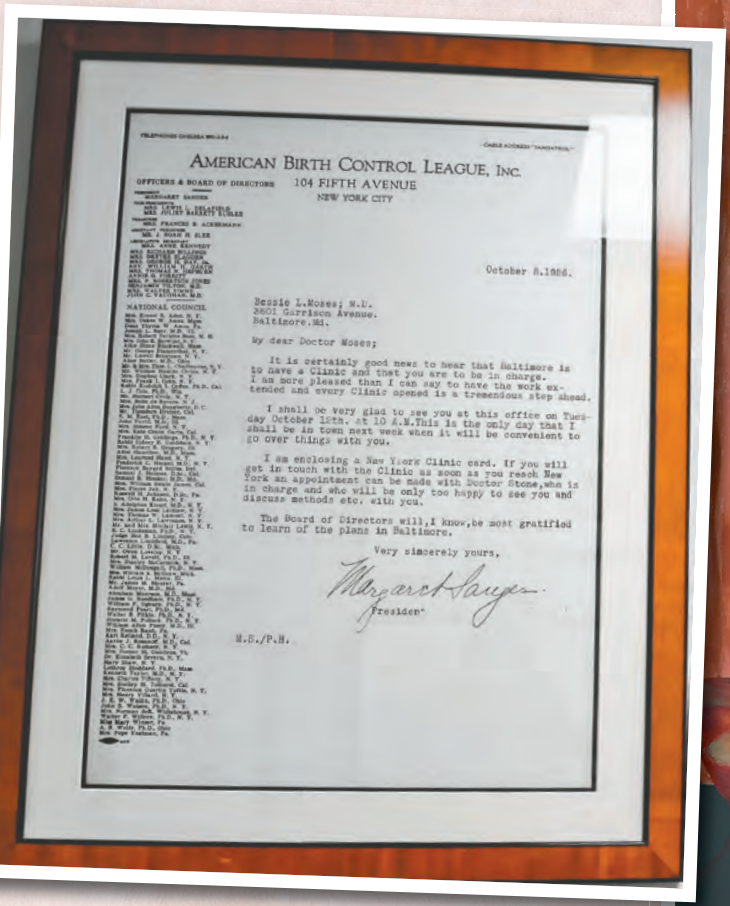
"It's been a difficult year for us," Diamond said. "It's been hard. But we're moving forward and passed this incredible legislation."

The legislation is the Contraceptive Equality Act, which was signed into law by Gov. Larry Hogan this month. It will require insurance companies' coverage of birth control to include over-the-counter emergency contraception and vasectomies, as well as providing birth control to women for six months at a time. This law puts Maryland at the forefront of proactive reproductive health, Diamond said.

It is just another notch in a long line of Maryland's progressive history when it comes to reproductive rights. In 1992, the state actually codified the right to choose in Maryland law by passing a referendum by an almost two-thirds majority. (Incidentally, Question 6, as the referendum was known then, would become another

From left: Joanna Diamond, vice president of external relations for Planned Parenthood of Maryland; Stephen Moses, cousin of Dr. Bessie Moses; and Jonathan Hollander, Moses' grandnephew

Sangler: Underwood & Underwood - Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division; Joanna Diamond: David Stuck; Stephen Moses and Jonathan Hollander: provided



AMERICAN BIRTH CONTROL LEAGUE, INC.
OFFICERS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS
104 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK CITY

October 8,1926.

Bessie L.Moses; M.D.
2601 Garrison Avenue.
Baltimore,Md.

My dear Doctor Moses;

It is certainly good news to hear that Baltimore is to have a Clinic and that you are to be in charge. I am more pleased than I can say to have the work extended and every Clinic opened is a tremendous step ahead.

I shall be very glad to see you at this office on Tuesday October 12th. at 10 A.M.This is the only day that I shall be in town next week when it will be convenient to go over things with you.

I am enclosing a New York Clinic card. If you will get in touch with the Clinic as soon as you reach New York an appointment can be made with Doctor Stone,who is in charge and who will be only too happy to see you and discuss methods etc. with you.

The Board of Directors will,I know,be most gratified to learn of the plans in Baltimore.

Very sincerely yours,

Margaret Sanger
President

M.S./P.H.

Opposite page: Margaret Sanger. Top: A letter from Sanger to Dr. Bessie Moses congratulating her on Baltimore's first birth control clinic. Middle: A painting by Moses that hangs in her descendents' home. Bottom: Contraceptive materials from Planned Parenthood of Maryland.

social issue referendum 10 years later when Maryland passed 2012's Question 6, legalizing same-sex marriage.)

"I think our challenge in Maryland is making sure we are really carrying the mantle of proactive, positive change," Diamond said. "And that's a burden, but it's a burden we are delighted to have."

There's no way to know for sure, of course, what Moses would have thought of the current reproductive health climate, considering how different many parts look from her time spent providing (only married) women with condoms and diaphragms.

It does not seem a stretch, however, to say her work stemmed from a desire to make the world a better place for women — a legacy everyone can believe in. JT

hmonicken@midatlanticmedia.com

Letter and contraceptives photos: David Stuck; Moses painting: provided