

# One Hundred Years **Yours**

MEMORIES AND MOMENTS FROM FRIENDS OF **ROCKVILLE GENERAL HOSPITAL**



## “A cottage hospital splendidly adapted to the needs of our community.”

Dear friends,

Rockville General Hospital (then, Rockville City Hospital) first opened to an eager and enthusiastic public on November 1, 1921. A local journalist lauded it as, “a cottage hospital splendidly adapted to the needs of our community.” His words would prove both pragmatic and prophetic.

The hospital began humbly, with few services, limited equipment and just four nurses. It found its first home in a former residence, with many of the staff actually living there. The boarding house on Prospect Hill was “splendidly adapted” to become the community’s beloved new hospital.

But what that young writer couldn’t know at the time was just how much the hospital would continue to adapt for the next 100 years. Perhaps unlike any other hospital, Rockville General Hospital has been shaped by you. Whatever the community has needed, Rockville General has become. Your history and the hospital’s history are one.

It’s interesting that 100 years later, Rockville General is still a cottage hospital in many ways. Still humble. Still intimate. Still operating, at least partially, out of a former residence. And still adapting to the needs of the community.

There is so much love for Rockville General Hospital. Just as it holds a special place in your hearts, it is beloved by all of us in the ECHN family.

Hospitals are not buildings, they are people. So, what better way to celebrate the 100th anniversary than to hear from a few nurses, physicians, patients, administrators and volunteers throughout the years? Please enjoy these special moments and memories. And we sincerely thank you for being a part of Rockville General Hospital’s history. And future.

**Deborah K. Weymouth**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Eastern Connecticut Health Network



“When I started, there were only 4 nurses in the hallways and we didn’t have an elevator or delivery room.

The hospital was not really completed. The plumbing wasn’t done. The sanitizers weren’t connected. But in order to get the recognition for that year, that was the last possible day they could open. We had an emergency patient the next day and no sterilizer set up, nothing. So we had to revert to the old procedure of boiling surgical equipment on the kitchen stove, and the drapes and sheets were sterilized in the oven. The patient was operated on very successfully.

Everybody seemed to appreciate what you did for them. I had so many people thank me. The town was very supportive of the hospital. Especially the people with means, and there were quite a few in Rockville. We had two to three millionaires. Of course, then a millionaire was something.”

● **Gladys Cratty** (recorded in 1980)

**Gladys Cratty** was at the hospital on day one, November 1, 1921, preparing for the grand opening and public tours.

Gladys likened the community event to a “housewarming,” noting that a maid and a butler served tea, and it was “a very nice affair.”

“I am on the newer side, but I already sense that we are deeply rooted in the community.

The Maternity Care and Family Planning Center has been a part of Rockville General Hospital's history for 50 years. There is sense of pride and dedication from those I work with, and it shines through every day. I work with a nurse for example, who has been here for 50 plus years! That speaks to how much people love working here.

I have also observed how dedicated our patients are to Rockville General. We have been taking care of generations of families. First a mom, or soon to be mom, then their child, then their child’s child. There is a definite loyalty from the provider and patient perspectives.”

● **Nicole Jackson, MD**



**Nicole Jackson, MD** joined the hospital in March 2021 as a family doctor in the Maternity Care and Family Planning Center. Her work with women who have been previously underserved aligns with her personal goals to promote equity in care.



**Maternity care and women's health** have been hallmarks of Rockville General Hospital from the beginning – from just three births in its first month of existence to decades of advances in family centered childbirth. Today, the legacy continues with the unique Maternity Care and Family Planning Center, the Women’s Center for Wellness and the Breast Care Collaborative.

“It was a very friendly hospital. You were not just a number. You were a patient.”

In 1925, I came to Rockville to visit my sister and decided to try to find work. I had a reference from Windham Hospital which said, ‘She is exceptionally good in operating technique.’ So, I went to see Dr. Metcalf, who was a surgeon, and he said, ‘Why don’t you work at the hospital?’ And I said, ‘Well I didn’t know you had a hospital!’

For all of us older nurses, I think closing the old hospital was very emotional. I suppose I have a lot of sadness. There was a lot of good work done at the old hospital, even though it was small. But, of course, we were so fortunate to be going into what we were going into.”

- **Emma B. Smith** (recorded in 1979)



**Emma B. Smith** began her nursing career at Rockville City Hospital in 1925 and became Superintendent of nurses a few years later. She served the hospital for more than 50 years.

She recalled how the hospital had no elevator. She “took one end of the stretcher and the doctor took the other” to transport patients between floors.



**William H. Prescott**, a prominent Rockville business leader, left a bequest of \$50,000 to the hospital fund upon his death in 1908 – the equivalent of \$1.5 million today.

Dozens of other philanthropic neighbors followed suit with gifts aimed at building, equipping and then funding operations of the new hospital. That remarkable generosity and engagement has continued for generations, a testament to the collective vision of the community. Through monetary and volunteer support, the people of Rockville continue to show their desire to take care of one another, in part, through their very own community hospital.



**Nurses** lived on the third floor of the hospital and worked 12-hour shifts with one half-day off each week. They earned \$76.50 per month including room, board and laundry.



**Rockville City Hospital** was born of the will of the people. Residents had been raising money to build a hospital for decades. The Spanish flu pandemic intensified their efforts.

In 1920 they finally had enough money to purchase the Gaynor House, a former boarding house on Prospect Street. A year later, the hospital opened and the first patient arrived – not with the flu, but with a ruptured appendix.

“There’s a dear old  
wooden building  
up there on  
Prospect Hill,  
with twenty-four  
years of service  
to the wounded  
and the ill.

We are sort of sad at leaving,  
Although best of friends must part;  
And memories of the old place  
Will always linger in each heart.

It was there we went for comfort  
And tender nursing care;  
Where broken limbs were mended,  
And love reigned everywhere.

Mothers went there to have their babies,  
While fathers paced the floor;  
There was welcome for the stranger  
As he entered in the door.

And the doctors of our city  
Have been faithful to the end;  
To them the passing of the old place  
Will be like losing an old friend.

As we close the present building,  
With heartache and some tears;  
There’s our faithful superintendent,  
Standing by for eighteen years.

She’s been faithful to the old place,  
She’ll be faithful to the new;  
So let’s give three cheers for Emma  
And the entire nursing crew.

So as we carry on today,  
We’ll all be thinking still  
Of the splendid services rendered  
In the hospital on the hill.”

• **Dina A. Herzog**

**Excerpt from her poem** written in 1945 on the hospital’s move from Prospect Hill to the Maxwell Mansion on Union Street. Dina was the daughter of a nurse and would later go on to become a nurse herself.

**When the hospital moved to Union Street in 1945,** it opened for a public tour, and more than 2,200 people signed the guest register. The community took great pride in their "modern hospital, set in a most elegant facility." One historian recalls, "Lines were out the door and the hospital was simply wonderful."



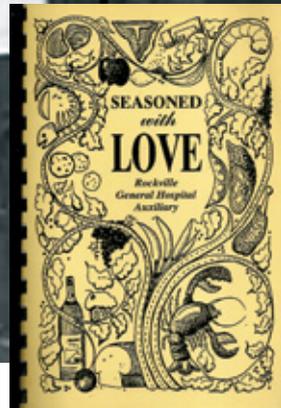
**The Maxwell Mansion** was a magnificent private residence before it was a hospital. The Maxwells were giants in the booming Victorian Era textile industry and instrumental supporters in the hospital's early years.

“The Auxiliary membership has the opportunity to do good deeds that are not measured monetarily.”

• Mrs. Luther (Edith) White (recorded in 1980)



**Edith** organized the Women's Auxiliary in 1943, to create interest in hospital work and to raise funds. In that effort, the Auxiliary introduced the first talent show in 1950, forerunner to the beloved Follies. The Auxiliary made countless donations to the hospital, from new toasters for the kitchen to hundreds of thousands of dollars for expansion projects.



“The community was so unbelievably supportive. They would come and see their friends making fun of themselves. They enjoyed it!

I was really involved in the Follies, a fantastic fundraiser. There would be a chorus line of administrators and doctors dancing around! We'd have auditions on Wednesday, and on Thursday, rehearsals would start. By the following Friday and Saturday night we would have a show. It was unbelievable! You couldn't believe the talent that would come out. Some of our nurses were so talented – one of our OBGYN nurses was an opera singer!

One thing we would do to raise money during the Follies was to have paid ads that people would perform! We would create a song or a poem. It was very creative. It wasn't just the hospital. The whole community was really involved.”

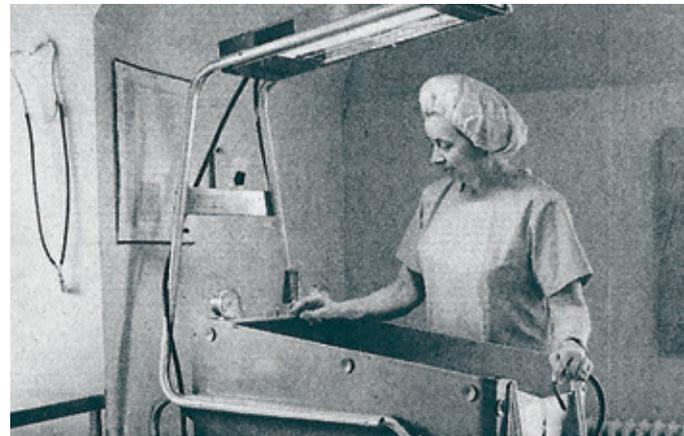
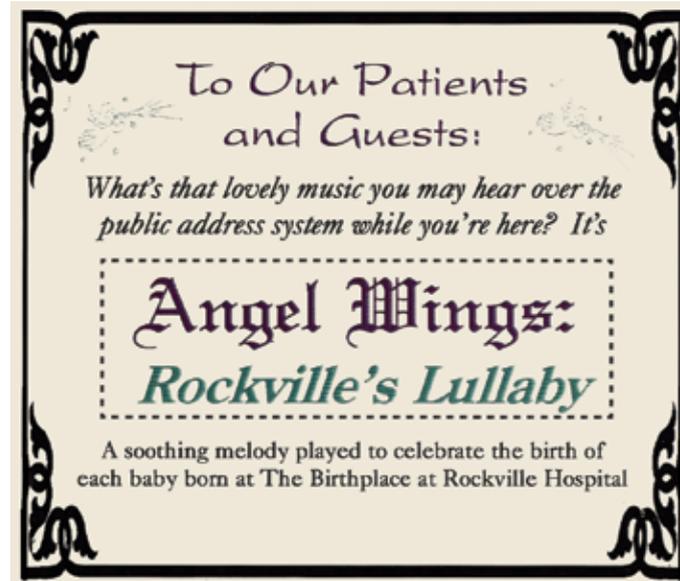
• Susan Mason, hospital volunteer and Auxiliary member



“My chief job is the tender loving care of each and every baby born in the hospital.

I've loved and spoiled every one of them. I used to teach them how to suck their thumbs, now I teach them how to use a pacifier. I become very attached to my little ones and hate to see them go.”

● **Faith Schortman, RN** (recorded in 1973), served as nursery nurse for more than three decades



**The Maternity Department** was beloved throughout the community, and quite innovative. Advances like the Isolette and Kreiselman Crib were impressive for a hospital of its size. In 1993, the maternity department was expanded to offer homelike birthing suites and was named “The Birthplace at Rockville Hospital.”

**The lullaby program** began in 1995, a gift from the Auxiliary. A family member would press a special button to send a sweet lullaby echoing throughout the entire hospital, announcing the arrival of a newborn.

“Being a small community hospital, you had to learn everything. And I learned a lot.

I was a candy striper at Rockville Hospital while I was in high school. Then I started working there right out of nursing school. My very first day was on the floor at maternity. They sent me down to check on a woman at the end of the hall and told me they didn't think she was really in labor. She rolls over to face me and says, ‘Oh Donna, thank God it's you!’ Turns out, it was an old friend from high school!

I knew enough to know that she was in very active labor. She said she was so happy I was there, but I kept thinking, ‘Oh no, you're not going to be happy I'm here. You're my first patient ever!’ I remember the baby came fast. I ended up having two more deliveries that night. I went home exhausted thinking, ‘What the heck am I doing?!’ But I went back that next day and 41 years later, here I am, still enjoying the relationships we have with our patients and each other.”

● **Donna Cameron, RN**

“It was a beautiful type of medicine where you could see how much each physician cared about the hospital and community.”

The medical doctors saw themselves as more than doctors. They saw themselves as true advocates for the hospital and the community. The main practitioners lived right in town. They were well-known in the community, and they were active in community affairs. Everything revolved around the hospital and community. It was very personal, very individualized, a mutual trust between doctor and patient, and hospital and community.”

- **Dr. Robert Rodner**, joined the urology practice at Rockville in 1975 and worked there until his retirement in 2013

“The hospital is like another home for the staff, like a family. That has been the culture here for a really long time.”

- **April Gothberg**, Staff Physical Therapist at Rockville General Hospital

“We had a very congenial medical staff. Virtually the entire staff met for lunch every day. We had great relationships between the medical staff and the nurses, too.”

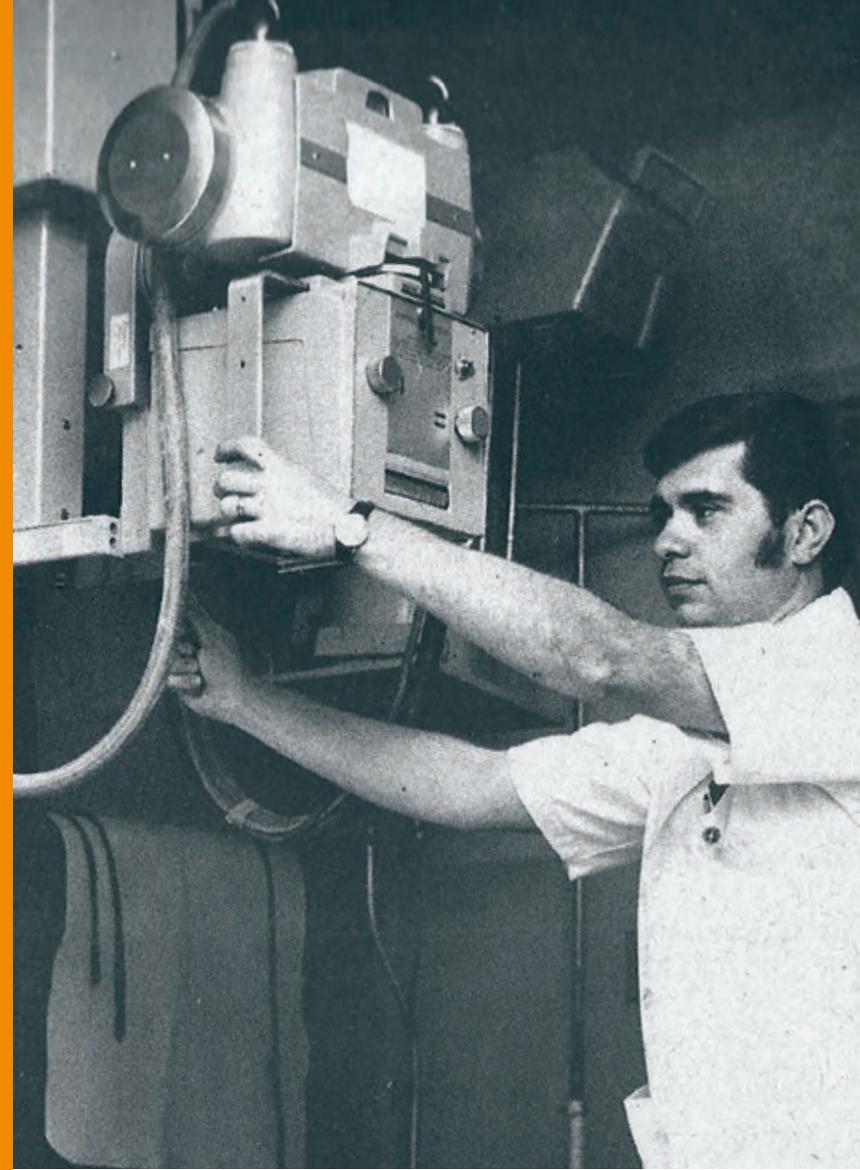
- **Dr. Neil Brooks**, retired primary care physician and former Chief of Staff at Rockville General Hospital, affiliated with hospital for 34 years



“The medical staff and employees have always been the heart and soul of the hospital. Their dedication, compassion and love for the community is palpable.”

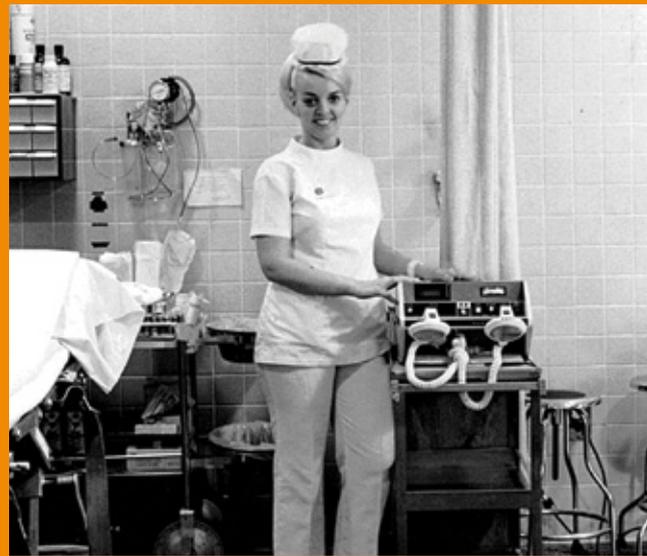
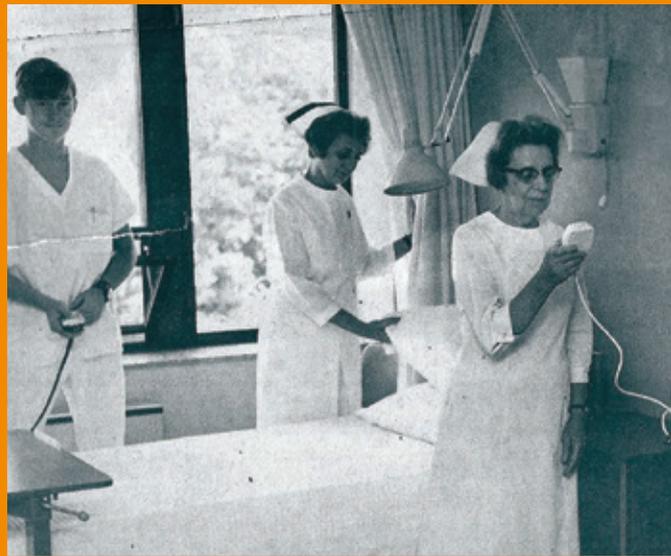
- **Deborah K. Weymouth**, Chief Executive Officer, ECHN





“The care that people need is here in the midst of us. Everything has been changed and upgraded so much. You name it, they’ve got it now.”

- **Dr. Howard Abbott** (recorded in 1973), former orthopedic surgeon at Rockville General Hospital for 19 years



**In 1964, Rockville City Hospital** was renamed Rockville General Hospital and it was on its way to being a full-service hospital. Throughout the 1970s, the hospital saw its largest expansion, marking the end of the “hand me down” era, with gleaming new purpose-built facilities adjoining the historic renovated residence.

Today, Rockville General Hospital continues to be an important access center for high quality care in a community setting. Key services include emergency care, imaging, laboratory services, specialty rehabilitation, behavioral health, inpatient care and more.



“For those in town, Rockville is their hospital. There is a sense of loyalty and pride.”

It is a really beautiful place to work. It's a small, quaint community hospital where everyone knows each other. I like to believe that that feeling extended outward. Although the hospital's services have shifted over the years, it has changed and adapted based on the community needs, which is a great thing that a community hospital has the ability to do.”

- **Pamela Dombek**, worked at Rockville General Hospital in the 1990s, currently the IRC and Transitional Year Residency Coordinator for ECHN

“We’ve sure gotten a lot of use out of the hospital. It’s always been there for us.”

We’ve used it so many times for broken arms, broken legs and motorcycle accidents, bumps and bruises and getting gored by cows. When I was 14, I spent two months at the hospital after falling three stories while hanging tobacco.”

- **Rudolph Luginbuhl** (recorded in 1995), one of 11 siblings who made frequent trips to the hospital in the 1930s, '40s and '50s and later serving as Chairman of the hospital's board



“The community needs the hospital and the hospital needs the community. It’s a symbiotic relationship.”

In addition to providing quality local health care, the hospital is the largest private employer in Rockville. Its contribution to Rockville’s economy is huge. It’s a special place filled with special people.”

- **Drew Crandall**, member of the Rockville Downtown Association and ECHN Advisory Board – Drew recently organized public tours of the Maxwell Mansion, noting that, “To this day, residents are still fascinated with the history of the hospital.”



“It is a beautiful hospital. It is uncomplicated. It is comfortable.”

A hospital visit can be so unnerving. And there is something very calming about Rockville Hospital. It really put people at ease, so they could handle what was going on. And that's because it's a small, intimate hospital, and the staff is quite special. They care a lot about their patients and they care a lot about their hospital.”

• Susan Mason



“The community feels like they are a stakeholder here. They are possessive and feel like owners of the hospital.”

• April Gothberg

“It's like the Phoenix that rises out of the ashes.”

The hospital keeps evolving and changing. In order to survive in healthcare, we must continue to adapt to changing needs and progress our services. I can't wait to see what's going to happen in the future. Exciting times are ahead.”

• Donna Cameron, RN





**Very special thanks** to all those who have contributed their memories to this publication, as well as physicians, staff, donors, volunteers and patients of Rockville General Hospital, past and present. Extra special thanks to Jean Luddy and the Vernon Historical Society for invaluable assistance.

**Rockville General Hospital**  
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