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Mary Cash

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Black History Research Project of Tampa

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[Detailed Summary Note: The USF Oral History Program was not provided with the audio for this interview. The following Detailed Summary was compiled from a transcript provided by the USF Department of Anthropology African Americans in Florida Collection, which is currently housed in USF Libraries' Special Collections.]

Clara Frye Hospital

Mary Cash was a nurse who worked at Clara Frye Hospital, Tampa's segregated hospital for African Americans. She worked at Clara Frye until 1962. There were no white patients there at all. After she left, there were "charity people out of the county, but they didn't have any paid patients."

The nurses at Clara Frye

Ms. Cash saw to it that each of the nurses she supervised was qualified. "They were willing to take a reprimand, and I was very nice with them, every one of them." The nurses worked well with Ms. Cash. If something went wrong in the hospital's north wing, they would come get her to see if she could do anything.

Medical technology

"I guess I'm the first black woman to give oxygen." She learned how to do that in Fort Lauderdale. Ms. Cash is also the first one at Clara Frye who drew blood. They made all of the tubes and other supplies. "We made our tubes and everything. All this stuff you pay for now, we made it." She learned how to do that in Fort Lauderdale, too. They also made a blood pressure apparatus: "those tubes you see hanging up there, running down," which Ms. Cash helped make.

"Then they got this plastic stuff; it's even different to what it was when it first came out." After World War II they used plasma, and the doctors came over and showed her how to mix it and get it going.

Politics

The Clara Frye nurses had nothing to do with politics. “If we voted, we didn’t say we voted. We didn’t have nobody’s sticker on the back or our cars or anything. We didn’t root for this man and taboo the other one.” They just worked.

Whatever went on at Tampa General Hospital went on at Clara Frye, because the two hospitals had the same superintendant, Mr. McKay. Ms. Cash does not remember his first name.

The nurses’ strike

Some of the nurses decided to go on strike. “I had too much sense to go on a strike and ask for money, because I knew if Tampa General got a raise, we’d get a raise because we were under the city.” When Mr. McKay came in, he would fire everybody. He asked the nurses if they were on strike; they told him they were just sitting down to rest until he came to talk with them. He still wanted to fire them, and he had the power to do it.

Ms. Cash told the nurses that, “What affects a poor white man affects a Negro.” She told them not to worry about the government cutting things off, because there were so many poor people and the Senate and Congress would see to it that people wouldn’t suffer.

Relationships with white doctors

“We had very good relations with the white doctors that had patients over there. We never had any complaint. Everybody tried their very best to do what was on the chart, and that was all we was responsible for.”

Other Clara Frye superintendants

There was someone named D.W.P. Johnson. After he left, there was a superintendant named Mr. Callahan. “He died while I was on my vacation, and the last word they remember him saying clearly was, ‘I wish Cash was here.’” He was “a little short fellow.” “They claim he and [Curtis] Hixon must have been some kind of relation, because people bucked about this man being superintendant of our hospital when he knew nothing about medicine.” Hixon, who was mayor of Tampa from 1943 to 1956, was a pharmacist by trade.

[Detailed Summary Note: The interview ends at this point in the transcript. The transcriber notes that the recording was paused. After recording is resumed, an unidentified male voice begins reading an article about Clara Frye Hospital called “Here’s Legend of How First Negro Hospital Started.” The newspaper is unidentified, but the date is given as Sunday, April 5, 1959. Mary Cash is mentioned prominently in this article. Although the article is included in the printed transcript, it has been omitted from this digitized version due to copyright restrictions. Consult USF Tampa Library Special Collections for the printed transcript.]