



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Health Crusaders on Mount Vernon Avenue

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Image: Jefferson District Welfare Center, 1929. Photo, Arlington County Virginia Room.

In the 1920s, Arlington County opened the Jefferson District Welfare Center on Mount Vernon Avenue, which was then part of the Town of Potomac. This center offered regular clinic hours as well as specialized services like baby, dental and chest clinics. The staff included physicians and nurses, and public education was an important part of their mission.

One public health initiative that the center took part in was the Modern Health Crusade, a program developed in the 1910s by the National Tuberculosis Association, the predecessor of the American Lung Association. The Modern Health Crusade targeted children and used language and imagery of the medieval Crusades to promote health by introducing a “play element into the practice of hygiene,” according to a 1922 instruction manual for teachers and health care workers.

Sue Brown, a registered nurse seen in the middle of this 1929 photograph, organized the Modern Crusaders at the Mount Vernon School. These children pursued the “chivalry of health” by documenting healthy behaviors and practices, such as hand washing and good posture, on a checklist. Crusaders – and Nurse Brown – donned costumes of white capes and white helmets, inspired by those worn by knights, and bearing the red, double-barred cross insignia of the national association. Crusaders were active in public health campaigns and the annual sale of Christmas Seals, which helped raise money for the organization.





**Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia**

After the annexation of Potomac, the City of Alexandria continued to provide health services at the center, and during World War II, it served as a nursery. Today the former public health facility, now known as the Colasanto Center, is home to the Del Ray Artisans Gallery.

“Out of the Attic” is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as “Marking Time” and explored Alexandria’s history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into “Out of the Attic” and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by Amy Bertsch, former Public Information Officer, and Lance Mallamo, Director, on behalf of the Office of Historic Alexandria.