Mobile County Health Department begins celebration of its 200th anniversary

Mobile, Ala. — The Mobile County Health Department began its year-long 200th anniversary celebration Monday, January 25, 2016, with a flag breaking ceremony. The event took place at 850 Saint Anthony Street, which was the original entrance to the historic U.S. Marine Hospital, to unveil a special flag that will fly over the clinics throughout the bicentennial year.

The special guest of honor was Dr. Thomas M. Miller, the acting State Health Officer for the Alabama Department of Public Health. Others taking part in the program were The Very Rev. Beverly F. Gibson, the rector and dean of Christ Church Cathedral; Dr. Nina Ford-Johnson, chair of the Mobile County Board of Health; Michael E. Pierce, executive director of the MLK Avenue Redevelopment Corp.; and Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II, the Health Officer of the Mobile County Health Department.

Three members of Boy Scouts of America Troop 113 from Saraland, Ala., formed a color guard. The Spartan Sound Marching Band from Saraland High School provided entertainment and performed The Star Spangled Banner as the U.S., Alabama and MCHD flags were hoisted.

Public health has been a component of Mobile’s illustrious history since the city's founding in 1702. Under the flag of the United States, the Board of Health was established for the Mississippi Territory in 1816. Services have been provided uninterrupted to the citizens of this community since that time.

Mobile's Board of Health predates any other health department in Alabama by almost 100 years. Construction of MCHD’s main building was completed in 1842 as a U.S. Marine (Public Health) Hospital, which provided care of sick and disabled seaman. The facility was located along several blocks of Saint Anthony Street that included the newly constructed Mobile City Hospital and eventually the Medical College of Alabama.

At the turn of the century, there were three boards of health functioning in the county (City of Mobile, County of Mobile and Citronelle). On January 1, 1919, one full-time health department was established for countywide services.

Under a consolidation plan, the first office of the Board of Health was housed at 119 Conti Street. It remained there until 1957 when, in July of that year, the facility moved into a new monolithic structure located at 248 Cox Street.
In 1955, the U.S. Marine Hospital was converted into a tuberculosis hospital. The Sixth District Tuberculosis Association elected Frank S. Keeler as its president. The facility was named in his honor in 1973.

On July 1, 1974, the Keeler Tuberculosis Hospital closed. The facility was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 9, 1974.

On December 1, 1974, the Mobile County Board of Health entered into a lease/purchase arrangement with the Sixth District Tuberculosis Association for the former U.S. Marine Hospital located. On October 23 of the following year, the title and deed were duly transferred to the Board of Health. Renovation of the hospital along with the construction of a new addition to the central structure was completed in 1983 and all of the services were moved to this new location during that year.

In 1984, the facility was rededicated as the Major General William C. Gorgas Clinic, a native of Toulminville, Ala., who served as the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army and is best known for his work in abating the transmission of yellow fever and malaria. The main entrance was relocated to 251 N. Bayou Street.

Plans are to have a special event each month through 2016 to mark the 200-year anniversary of the Mobile County Health Department. For more information, contact J. Mark Bryant, the Public Information Officer, at 251-690-8823 or via email at mbryant@mchd.org.

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