Our Story:
A Brief History of Berkshire Medical Center

Introduction and Background

Berkshire Medical Center (BMC) is a 365-bed, fully accredited, nonprofit, acute care community hospital that serves all of Berkshire County, Massachusetts, and communities in adjacent eastern New York, northwestern Connecticut, and southwestern Vermont. BMC is also a major teaching affiliate of the University of Massachusetts Medical School and a clinical training site for nursing, anesthesia, and allied health fields.

Berkshire Medical Center and its teaching heritage have a long and rich history. BMC was created in 1968 as a result of the merger of two Pittsfield hospitals, Pittsfield General and St. Luke’s, each with its own unique history.

However, somewhat surprisingly, BMC’s teaching heritage predates the founding of its predecessor hospitals by more than 50 years.

The Berkshie Medical Institution

In 1823, 52 years before the opening of the first hospital in Berkshire County, a medical college, known as the Berkshire Medical Institution, was established in Pittsfield. Housed in a renovated three-story hotel and adjacent stable on what is now East Street, the Medical Institution was the eighth medical college in New England and the first in western Massachusetts. The college consisted of a lecture room, anatomical theater, storage rooms, and apartments for the students.

Graduates of the Berkshire Medical Institution were conferred the same rights and privileges as medical graduates of Harvard University in Cambridge. Between 1823 and 1846, enrollment increased steadily from 25 students to 140. The institution was affiliated with Williams College until 1837; at which time the Massachusetts legislature dissolved the connection and established the Pittsfield school as an independent organization. Despite occasional incidents of grave robbery (to supply the Department of Anatomy), the Institution brought pride and prestige to the Pittsfield area.

On February 5, 1850, a fire destroyed much of the Institution. Quickly, funds were raised and the college was relocated in a new building on South Street.

In 1854, Henry H. Childs, M.D., president of the institution, established a weekly Saturday morning clinic: "for the free diagnosis and treatment, in the presence of the students, of such ailments as might be submitted." Since the medical students did not train in a hospital, these clinics provided direct patient care experience.

But despite these facts, high levels of indebtedness, strong competition from the large.
well-endowed medical schools in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, the proliferation of railroads in Berkshire County, and declining tuition receipts forced the Berkshire Medical Institution to close its doors in 1867. In its 44 years of operation, the Institution graduated 1,138 Doctors of Medicine.

The Rev. John Todd at the pulpit

The House of Mercy

During the 1850s, Dr. Childs, seeing much poverty and suffering in his clinic, spoke of the need for establishing a hospital in Pittsfield. But it was not until a moving Thanksgiving Day sermon in 1872 by the Rev. John Todd, pastor of the First Congregational Church, that the effort gained momentum. In his sermon, the Rev. Mr. Todd called for a refuge for the sick and the poor - a "House of Mercy." That evening, the first gift of $100 was given by Mrs. Mary Sullivan. Other donations followed.

On June 20, 1874, notices were published in the Pittsfield and Springfield newspapers announcing a meeting of all those interested in starting a hospital. Later that year, in September, $5,874.22 was raised at a community bazaar that ran for several days and was sponsored by churches, sewing societies.

Nurse and elderly patient, circa 1900

Two years later, the House of Mercy moved to a new, larger building that was constructed at a cost of $10,600 on the Gore, the triangle of land bounded by First, North, and Tyler Streets. That year, the hospital cared for 34 patients in its 13 beds.

The House of Mercy took pride in keeping pace with the new inventions of the day. For example, the hospital's first telephone was installed in 1879. A horse-drawn ambulance was donated to the hospital in 1891. And, in 1906, an X-ray apparatus was obtained. Records show that in 1908 the charge to a patient for one week of hospital care was $15.

Additional buildings would be built both on the Gore and also across North Street. In 1889, for example, the Henry W. Bishop III Memorial Building was erected on the triangular piece of property. This doubled the capacity of the hospital and also provided and other civic organizations. Other fund-raising activities, such as concerts and teas, were also held to further the cause.

The eight-bed House of Mercy, located at 214 Francis Avenue, opened on January 1, 1875. It was the first cottage hospital in the United States. (A cottage hospital is an ordinary house or cottage adapted for hospital use.) Miss Martha Goodrich, who was an army nurse during the Civil War, served as the matron, housekeeper, and nurse at an annual salary of $260. In its first year of operation, the House of Mercy treated 22 patients (with only four deaths - from pneumonia, inflammation of the brain, heart disease, and consumption) and incurred expenses of $1,492.90.
a new home for the Bishop Memorial School of Nursing, which had been established four years earlier. Before its closing in 1968, the Bishop School graduated 1,449 nurses. In 1893, the LaFlin Surgical Building was completed. That year, 84 cases of "surgical interference" were performed for shotgun wounds, fractured bones, tumors, farm and railroad accidents, and other conditions. Recuperative lengths of stay were typically weeks to several months.

One of the historic relics from the House of Mercy that has survived to this day is a letter of acceptance, dated May 26, 1891, into the Bishop Memorial School. The letter, addressed to Miss Hildur F. Olson, reads:

"Your rank and certificates being approved, it gives me pleasure to inform you that you are accepted on probation in our Training School for Nurses for Nov. 1st, 1891. You will need to bring with you when you come two dresses of some wash material and such white aprons as you chance to have, as if you are accepted you must wear the uniform of the School. Every article of clothing must be distinctly marked with the whole name. Bring but one trunk. A watch with a second hand is a necessity. For the pocket, a pen ball, small needle-book, tape measure, scissors, small paper pad and lead pencil. At least ten dollars in money for any little incidentals for the probation month. Above all things bring a firm determination to obey all rules, a resolve not to get homesick, and to make a good nurse in every way. Hoping for your success, I am very truly yours, Mrs. Solomon N. Russell, North Street, Pittsfield, Mass."

In 1901, an anonymous donor gave $25,000, half the sum needed to build yet another new building. The identity of the donor was not known until 1911 when Miss Elea Maria R. Warriner died, leaving an additional $25,000 to the hospital and her name to the new building, which stands to this day. In 1919, the House of Mercy hired its first anesthetist.

Donations and bequests continued to support both the day-to-day operations of the hospital and its physical expansion. In 1924, the hospital received a gift in excess of $82,000 from Miss Annie B. Clapp, and with it built the Annie B. Clapp Memorial Dormitory for Nurses. The House of Mercy was expanded yet again in 1932, when the Edward A. Jones Memorial Wing was dedicated and opened to the public.

In 1931, the first electrocardiograph machine in Berkshire County was put into operation at the House of Mercy, and six years later, a dental extraction clinic and a venereal disease clinic were opened. And, in 1933, during the Great Depression, all salaries were reduced 10 percent as "an economy measure."

**Pittsfield General Hospital**

In 1949, the House of Mercy was renamed the Pittsfield General Hospital, a name considered more befitting a larger and modern hospital. Also, it was felt that the name Pittsfield General would "make a wider and more sustaining appeal for financial support." The annual operating budget...
surpassed $1 million for the first time in 1952, and by 1955, Pittsfield General was admitting more than 7,000 patients per year, with average lengths of stay of about eight days.

In 1956, a $1.5 million fund-raising campaign was launched for further expansion and modernization. A new, seven-level, 245-bed hospital was opened in 1962 at a cost of $4.25 million. Ten thousand tons of concrete and 240,000 bricks were used in the construction of the new Pittsfield General Hospital.

Also, in 1960, IBM machines were first installed for patient billing, payroll, and selective menus. And on November 25, 1962, Mrs. Elmer L. Litchfield of Hinsdale gave birth at BMC to her eighteenth child, Louis Paul.
By the end of 1917, the hospital needed to expand, so Bishop Beaven purchased the Allen Estate on East Street. The Allen mansion was renovated into the 28-bed St. Luke's Maternity Hospital, the barn was converted into a laundry facility, and the carriage house became nurses' living quarters. Maternity Hospital, as it was called, began operations in 1918, and Mother Mary of Providence was appointed administrator for both Boylan Memorial and Maternity hospitals.

Also in 1918, Berkshire County was faced with a terrible outbreak of influenza. At the time of the epidemic, the Allen Estate carriage house was still being renovated into Maternity Hospital's nurses' living quarters—the plumbing had yet to be installed, the doors were not mounted, and the staircases were unfinished. Additional beds for influenza victims were desperately needed. In a display of leadership and heroism, Mother Mary of Providence organized a group of local tradesmen and, in three days—excluding one Sunday—completed the construction of the rooms and opened it as an Influenza Emergency Ward.

The history of St. Luke's Hospital, which merged with Pittsfield General Hospital in 1968 to form Berkshire Medical Center, dates back to 1916, when Bishop Thomas D. Beaven of the Roman Catholic Springfield diocese purchased two frame houses on Springside Avenue in Pittsfield. The two houses were remodeled and converted into the 22-bed Boylan Memorial Hospital, in memory of the Rev. Charles Boylan of the St. Charles Church. The larger of the two houses was used for patient care and the smaller one served as a convent for the Sisters of Providence. The hospital began to admit patients on February 2, 1917, and the Boylan Memorial School of Nursing was opened on the same day. The Boylan School graduated 1,194 nurses in its 57 years of operation.
Both Boylan Memorial and Maternity hospitals quickly outgrew their capacities, so they jointly constructed the new, five-story St. Luke’s Hospital at 379 East Street. Prior to construction, a $150,000 fund-raising effort was carried out in such a way that every household in Pittsfield was solicited during a 10-day campaign push. The new St. Luke’s facility was opened on May 1, 1926, and the Boylan School of Nursing was renamed to the St. Luke’s School of Nursing.

Then, in 1951, St. Luke’s constructed a new building adjacent to the hospital to house the school of nursing. Called Madonna Hall, the structure was designed to provide dormitory facilities for up to 165 student nurses and 26 faculty members.

Four years later, St. Luke’s installed pay television sets in patient rooms. Reportedly, St. Luke’s was just the second hospital in the nation to offer this perk.

And, in 1959, St. Luke’s Hospital established an affiliation with the Albany Medical College. Under the arrangement, third-year medical students received one month of training at the hospital.

Chapel at St. Luke’s, circa 1966

Berkshire Medical Center Merger

In the 1960s, before the subsequent merger, Pittsfield General and St. Luke’s Hospitals had been involved in several cooperative efforts. In 1960, for example, the two hospitals formed the Pittsfield Affiliated Hospitals for the purpose of jointly sponsoring a medical education program with the Albany Medical College. And, in 1962, there was a joint staff dinner for the medical staffs of the two hospitals.

In 1965, both St. Luke’s and Hillcrest Hospital (the third hospital in Pittsfield, founded in 1908) were contemplating major new construction projects. Recognizing that independent, uncoordinated new construction would lead to costly duplication of facilities and services, the St. Luke’s Board of Trustees, led by Bishop Christopher J. Weldon of Springfield, proposed that representatives from Pittsfield’s three hospitals meet to discuss the city’s future health care needs and to consider the unification of the individual hospitals. The Bishop believed that a merger of all three hospitals would best serve the community’s health care needs.

Although Hillcrest did not favor unification, Pittsfield General and St. Luke’s signed a

memorandum of intent to merge. The vote for “complete corporate unification and integration” by Pittsfield General’s Board was a unanimous show of hands. Similarly, the vote to merge at St. Luke’s was by voice without a single dissent. It would be the first union of a Catholic and non-sectarian hospital in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

On January 12, 1968, the merger became official and the Berkshire Medical Center was created. Over the course of the next 10 years, the merger plans would be carried out.


Benjamin M. England, president of England Brothers, was elected BMC’s first president of the board of governors; Harold L. Hutchins, Jr., who had served as executive director of Pittsfield General Hospital since 1953, became the first executive director of BMC; and Sister Mary Cartus, who was the administrator at St. Luke’s and described as a “ball of fire,” was named associate director.

BMC’s first Annual Report (1968) further summarized the reasoning behind the merger: “...small and independent hospitals can no longer adequately serve a community of this size...only through a pooling of interests and efforts can community interest be properly served.”

In other words, the merger would consolidate, the community’s medical resources, eliminate expensive duplications of services and equipment, and allow for more efficient care to be delivered at a lower cost. Merger advocates promised a

Bishop Weldon, 1967
combined entity greater than the sum of its parts. Other supporters likened the formation of the new organization to the birth of a child.

Even so, many employees from both hospitals were dubious of the merger from its inception and opposed the loss of their organization’s identity. Feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, anger, and a sense of rivalry surrounded the merger. A common feeling was that the leadership of each hospital had ‘sold out’ and actually betrayed the community. The feelings of uncertainty and rivalry gradually abated over the course of the post-merger integration.

Aiding the merger process were the established cooperative arrangements between the parent organizations. Among them were (1) the aforementioned joint medical education program, which was quite successful and drew high praise from other medical schools, and (2) the sharing of common medical staffs - the majority of St. Luke’s physicians had full privileges at Pittsfield General before the merger, and vice versa.

In 1967, maternity services were consolidated at the Pittsfield General unit and combined purchasing arrangements were initiated. These cooperative efforts saved a total of $84,000 that year.

In 1968, a common set of medical staff bylaws was adopted, a new intensive and coronary care unit was opened at the St. Luke’s site. The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals granted BMC three years of accreditation, and a host of departments and functions were merged. Also, in 1968, BMC’s first transvenous, battery-operated pacemakers were installed in selected cardiac patients.

Fiscal operations were combined, personnel offices were integrated, and a surgical day care program was introduced in 1969. The following year, nursing procedures were standardized. BMC’s first total hip joint replacement was performed, and a major new technology for cancer treatment, radioactive cobalt therapy, was introduced. Ten years later, another milestone in technology was reached when BMC unveiled its first computized tomography (CT) scanner. CT was a major advance in diagnostic imaging technology that enabled physicians to visualize cross-sectional slices of the body with greater resolution than ordinary X-ray pictures.

The year 1981 was marked by a 69-day registered nurses strike against Berkshire Medical Center over wage, benefits, and work schedule issues. On July 15, the BMC chapter of the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA) filed a 10-day notice of intention to strike. The nurses went on strike on July 25. During the strike, BMC maintained hospital services by relying on the efforts of nursing supervisors, managers, and non-striking registered nurses. Nevertheless, the hospital census dipped to less than half its normal level.

After many long negotiation sessions over the 69-day period, the strike ended on October 1. It took months for hospital operations and patient census to return to pre-strike levels.
Philanthropy

In 1972, a $2.4 million endowment, the largest in BMC’s history, was left by Paul C. Zuhlke of New York City. It was Mr. Zuhlke’s wish that the $2.4 million principal not be spent and that the interest income, which amounts to approximately $200,000 per year, be used “to offset in whole or in part the hospital expenses of individuals that were financially unable to pay.” Mr. Zuhlke owned the Huribut Paper Company in Lee.

In 1973, a $2.5 million fund-raising drive was launched in anticipation of a new $15 million, 153-bed St. Luke’s Pavilion to replace the obsolete St. Luke’s building. In a remarkable show of generosity, the Pittsfield community raised $2,500,197 in just seven months.

One result of this construction would be joining together of the merged hospitals on one campus. Ground was broken for the new Pavilion on June 7, 1975, and the facility was dedicated on June 25, 1977. In 1976, BMC established its affiliation with the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

The new Cancer Institute of the Berkshires was the beneficiary of a fund drive in 1986 that shattered its goal of $2.5 million and raised a whopping $3.8 million. The extra money raised was earmarked for future equipment updates and for additional free care to cancer patients.

Formation of Berkshire Health Systems

A major corporate reorganization took place in 1983. As a result, a nonprofit holding company, called Berkshire Health Systems Inc. (BHS), and two nonprofit subsidiary companies, Berkshire Medical Center Inc. and Berkshire Consolidated Realty Inc., were created. In announcing the reorganization, John C. Johnson, president of BHS, explained that, “a more flexible organizational structure is required to meet the health needs of Berkshire County residents ... The creation of a multiorporate system will provide greater flexibility to manage the hospital, to develop new activities, to compete effectively, and to respond to new opportunities efficiently and quickly.”

BHS and BMC Today and in the Future

BHS is one of the few truly regional, vertically integrated health care systems in the nation. At present, the entities that comprise BHS include two hospitals (BMC and Fairview in Great Barrington), 18 nursing homes, home health services, a continuing care retirement community.
an outpatient psychiatric facility, a proprietary laboratory, and a health maintenance organization.

BHS is establishing itself as a leader in the field of long-term care. On August 7, 1980, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts honored the management of Linda Manor, an extended care facility located in Northampton, Massachusetts, for operating the only facility in the Commonwealth that provides every resident with the dignity and compassion of a restraint-free lifestyle. In addition, Fairview Extended Care Services, Inc., an affiliate of BHS has acquired the assets of Hannover Healthcare, Inc. of Germantown, Maryland. Hannover's assets included eight long-term care facilities, four of which are located in Massachusetts and the others in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Missouri.

New service innovations and technological advances continue to mark BMC's development as well. In the last few years, for example, BMC has established a cytogenetic laboratory and clinic, implemented a state-of-the-art cardiac monitoring system, and introduced laser angioplasty in Berkshire County. And the tradition of growth and improvement continues with the construction of a six-story medical office building on campus.

Berkshire Medical Center is proud of its rich history and is committed to meeting the challenges and responsibilities that lie ahead.
Leadership History
of BMC and its Predecessor Organizations
Board and Administrator/President Levels

The House of Mercy / Pittsfield General Hospital

President of Corporation
Mrs. Mary S. B. Todd 1875
Mrs. Harriette M. Plunkett 1876-1906
Mrs. Mary L. Hinsdale 1907-1911
Mrs. Alice P. Hobbard 1912-1924
Mrs. Isabelle A. Jones 1925-1934
Mrs. Ara W. Grinnell 1935-1945
Mrs. Margaret J. Bentott 1946-1950
Mrs. Elizabeth C. McCracken 1951-1955
Miss Julia Ellen Knowl 1956-1962
Mrs. Grace L. Kane 1963
Mrs. Blanche M. Ris 1964-1965
Mr. Peter van S. Race 1966-1967

Superintendent
Miss Anna G. Clement 1887-1908
Miss Anna G. Hayes 1909
Miss Mary M. Marcy 1910-1917
Miss Fannie C. Smith 1918
Miss Ida J. Anstead 1919-1923
Miss Clara Bartlett Peck 1924-1938

Administrator
Miss Clara Bartlett Peck 1939-1943
Miss Edith Atkin 1943

Director
Dr. Reo J. Marcotte 1944-1952

Executive Director
Mr. Harold L. Hutchins, Jr. 1953-1967

Matron
Miss Martha Goodrich 1875-1879
Miss Lucy M. Cremer 1880-1881
Miss Mary A. Field 1882-1883
Miss Anna G. Clement 1884-1886

Boylan Memorial Hospital

President of Corporation
The Right Rev. Thomas M. O'Leary 1921-1926

Superintendent
Sister Mary Adelaide, SP 1918-1926

St. Luke's Maternity Hospital

President of Corporation
The Most Rev. Thomas D. Beaven 1918-1920
The Right Rev. Thomas M. O'Leary 1921-1926

Superintendent
Sister Mary Magdalen, SP 1918-1926

St. Luke's Hospital

President of Hospital
The Most Rev. Thomas M. O'Leary 1926-1949
The Most Rev. Christopher J. Weldon 1950-1966

Superintendent
Sister Mary de Pazzi, SP 1926-1932
Sister Mary Curran, SP 1933-1934
Sister Mary Phoebe, SP 1935-1942
Sister Mary Louise, SP 1943-1951
Sister Marie Reparatrice, SP 1952-1954

Administrator
Sister Marie Reparatrice, SP 1955-1966
Sister Mary Cartas, SP 1967

President, Board of Trustees
Mr. Luke S. Hayden 1967