

# Margaret Sanger Is Dead at 82; Led Campaign for Birth Control



The New York Times

Mrs. Margaret Sanger as she was honored at the Waldorf-Astoria in 1961 at conference on "world population crisis."

Special to The New York Times

TUCSON, Ariz., Sept. 6 — Margaret Sanger, the birth control pioneer, died this afternoon of arteriosclerosis in the Valley House Convalescent Center. She would have been 83 years old on Sept. 14.

Mrs. Sanger was the widow of J. Noah H. Slee, owner of the Three-in-One Oil manufacturing concern. She is survived by two sons by her previous marriage to William Sanger, Dr. Stuart Sanger and Dr. Grant Sanger, and eight grandchildren.

A funeral service will be held at 11 A.M. on Thursday at St. Philip's-in-the-Hills Episcopal Church here. A memorial service will be conducted at St. George's Church in Stuyvesant

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# Mrs. Margaret Sanger, Pioneer in Birth Control, Is Dead at 82

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Square, New York City, at 11 A.M. on Wednesday, Sept. 21. Burial will be in Fishkill, N.Y.

## Toward World Acceptance

As the originator of the phrase "birth control" and its best-known advocate, Margaret Sanger survived Federal indictments, a brief jail term, numerous lawsuits, hundreds of street-corner rallies and raids on her clinics to live to see much of the world accept her view that family planning is a basic human right.

The dynamic, titian-haired woman whose Irish ancestry also endowed her with unflinching charm and persuasive wit was first and foremost a feminist. She sought to create equality between the sexes by freeing women from what she saw as sexual servitude.

An active worker for the Socialist party, her friends included radicals of all shades—John Reed, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Bill Haywood, Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and Jessie Ashley.

The phrase "birth control" first appeared in 1914 in her magazine, *Woman Rebel*, which bore the slogan "No Gods; No Masters!" on its masthead.

In her days on the barricades of the birth control movement, Mrs. Sanger presented a figure not easy to forget. Many a policeman escorting her to the station had his ears wilted by Irish invective.

Trained in the methods of public demonstrations, she also could call attention to herself and her cause in more restrained environments.

Lawrence Lader, one of Mrs. Sanger's biographers, told of meetings called by a wealthy birth control advocate to discuss the movement. When her guests were deep in discussion of the problem, she would "telephone Margaret."

"Wearing a simple black dress (the more radical the ideas the more conservative you must be in your dress) Mrs. Sanger would arrive in the doorway.

"And now here is the woman who can answer all your questions. With it was a dramatic entrance that led easily into a short talk on birth control and often won new converts."

## Mother Died Young

Mrs. Sanger was the daughter of Michael Hennessy Higgins, a tombstone cutter in Corning, N. Y., who was described as "a philosopher, a rebel and an artist." Mr. Higgins specialized in chiseling angels and saints out of stone. His wife—Mrs. Sanger's tubercular mother—was Anne Purcell Higgins, who died at 48 after bearing 11 children.

Mrs. Sanger herself was afflicted with incipient tuberculosis in 1903, the year after her marriage to Mr. Sanger, an artist and architect. The Sangers moved to Saranac, N. Y., in the Adirondacks, from a New York City apartment that had been a gathering place for Socialists.

"Almost without knowing it you became a 'comrade,'" Mrs. Sanger later wrote her husband of this period of their lives.

The Sanger living room had become a place where liberals, anarchists, Socialists and Wob-



Associated Press

**Mrs. Margaret Sanger at a 1931 Senate hearing on bill to legalize dissemination of birth control data by physicians and clinics.**

blies (members of the Industrial Workers of the World) could meet.

"My own personal feelings drew me toward the individualist, anarchist philosophy . . . but it seemed necessary to approach the idea by way of Socialism," she later wrote.

Trained as a nurse, she was educated at Claverack College in New York. She also studied at White Plains Hospital and Manhattan Eye and Ear Hospital.

## Served as Maternity Nurse

Mrs. Sanger's life work began shortly after she returned to New York in 1912. It resulted from her job as a nurse for maternity cases, principally on the Lower East Side. Many of her patients were wives of small shopkeepers, truck drivers and pushcart venders. Others were from a lower stratum of society.

"These submerged, untouched classes were beyond the scope of organized charity or religion," she wrote. "No labor union, no church, not even the Salvation Army reached them."

The young nurse saw them, weary and old at 35, resorting to self-induced abortions, which were frequently the cause of their deaths.

Mrs. Sanger nursed one mother, close to death after a self-inflicted abortion, back to health, and heard the woman plead with a doctor for protection against another pregnancy. "Tell Jake to sleep on the roof," the physician said.

The mother died six months later during a second abortion. Mrs. Sanger soon renounced nursing forever.

"I came to a sudden realization that my work as a nurse and my activities in social serv-

ice were entirely palliative and consequently futile and useless to relieve the misery I saw all about me."

## Magazine Was Spearhead

For nearly a year the ex-nurse read every scrap of material on contraception. In 1913, she went to France and Scotland to study birth control conditions, returning the following year.

Her magazine, *Woman Rebel*, was the spearhead of her movement. In an early issue she specified seven circumstances in which birth control should be practiced: when either spouse has a transmittable disease; when the wife suffers a temporary infection of lungs, heart or kidneys, the cure of which might be retarded in pregnancy; when a mother is physically unfit; when parents have subnormal children; if the parents are adolescents; if their income is inadequate, and during the first year of marriage.

The articles adhered to New York's Comstock law, which made it a crime to offer contraceptive information. Nevertheless, most of the issues of the *Woman Rebel* were banned by the New York Post Office.

## Fled to Europe

In August, 1914, Mrs. Sanger was indicted on nine counts of sending birth control information through the mails and was made liable to a prison term of 45 years.

She stood virtually alone. Even progressive women, Socialists and physicians offered her no assistance. Fighters for women's suffrage seemed more concerned with the vote than with Mrs. Sanger's immediate problem.

On the eve of her trial, Mrs. Sanger fled to Europe without the court's permission. There, she met H. G. Wells and became a friend of Havelock Ellis, the author of the pioneer study "Psychology of Sex."

During her absence, Anthony Comstock, secretary of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, went to Mrs. Sanger's home, represented himself to Mr. Sanger as an impoverished father in search of aid and bought a birth control pamphlet from Mr. Sanger. For this sale, Mr. Sanger served a month in jail.

## Opened Brooklyn Clinic

The indictment was quashed in 1916, shortly after she returned to this country. But Mrs. Sanger found that the indictment had aroused worldwide interest in the movement and she decided to take a step beyond the propagandizing then carried on by the National Birth Control League.

Mrs. Sanger and a sister, Mrs. Ethel Byrne, a trained nurse, opened a birth control clinic on Oct. 16, 1916, in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. The clinic, at 46 Amboy Street, was the first birth control clinic in the United States.

The legislative approach, Mrs. Sanger wrote, "seemed a slow and tortuous method of making clinics legal; we stood a better and quicker change by securing a favorable judicial interpretation through challenging the law directly."

Mrs. Sanger served 30 days in jail, but the case laid the groundwork for subsequent

court rulings enabling physicians to give contraceptive advice "for the prevention or cure of disease."

Her sister went on an eight-day hunger strike in Brooklyn's Raymond Street Jail after her arrest.

Despite continued legal harassment, Mrs. Sanger's work was increasingly accepted. In 1937, a year after the Comstock law was reinterpreted to provide for distribution of contraceptive information, the American Medical Association adopted a report that recognized birth control as part of legitimate medical practice.

In addition, she was the author of a number of books on birth control, including "What Every Girl Should Know."

Mrs. Sanger's often picturesque struggles with the police and her differences with the Roman Catholic hierarchy furnished the birth control movement with ample publicity: On Nov. 14, 1921, when Mrs. Sanger arrived at Town Hall on West 43d Street to take part in the discussion, "Birth Control: Is It Moral?" she found the police closing the meeting.

In the angry pulling, shoving and shouting that followed, Mrs. Sanger left the platform with two policemen. A disorderly conduct charge against her was dismissed the next day. The New York Times account of the interrupted meeting stated that the police intervention was "brought about at the instance of Archbishop Patrick J. Hayes of this Roman Catholic Archdiocese."

## Honors Came Later

Fifteen years later Town Hall was the scene of a ceremony in which the Town Hall Club gave Mrs. Sanger its annual Award of Honor for the most conspicuous contribution of the year to the enlargement and enrichment of life.

Three months ago her years of birth control advocacy appeared to be making an inroad in Rome. Reports from the Vatican indicated that a more liberal Roman Catholic position was possible as a result of a three-year Vatican study of the problem.

A majority of the 60 clerical and lay members of a commission originally appointed in 1963 by Pope Paul VI was reported to have accepted a position of leaving the matter of specific birth control techniques to the individual Catholic conscience.

Last month, a group of mothers, children and college students demonstrated in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York to protest the Roman Catholic Church's ban on artificial methods of birth control. In contrast to police action at many rallies when Mrs. Sanger and her supporters were chased, there were no hecklers outside the cathedral. Among the mutterers and headshakers were many who accepted leaflets with smiles.

She and her adherents won a notable victory when, on Jan. 6, 1936 in the famous case of "The United States v. One Package," United States District Court Judge Grover Moscowitz decided that Dr. Hannah Stone, a physician, could legally receive a contraceptive device sent to her by a physician

in Japan. Subsequent interpretations of his decision greatly broadened the scope of the circulation of birth control devices and artificial birth control information.

During one of Mrs. Sanger's visits to Europe the National Birth Control League was reorganized under the leadership of Mary Ware Dennett and Clara Stillman. Mrs. Sanger retained control of the New York State Birth Control League and later became the president of Planned Parenthood.

Mrs. Sanger's American Birth Control League, established in 1921, became the Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1946 and led to the establishment of more than 250 Planned Parenthood Centers in 150 cities throughout the country. The movement is now worldwide, with 38 member organizations and projects in 88 countries.

## Welcomed Abroad

"It was she who convinced America, and the world that control of conception is a basic human right and like other human rights must be equally available to all," said Dr. Alan F. Guttmacher, president of the Planned Parenthood World-Wide Association.

On a visit to Japan, Mrs. Sanger was received with great cordiality by members of the Japanese Government. She was the first woman to address the Japanese Diet. She was also warmly received by the late Jawaharlal Nehru of India. Her views on birth control were widely circulated throughout the Far East and in Africa.

Mrs. Sanger was heard from in firm tones when, in September, 1958, a controversy arose in New York over the refusal of Dr. Morris A. Jacobs, the city's Commissioner of Hospitals, to sanction birth control therapy in the hospitals.

Interviewed by telephone in her home in Tucson, Mrs. Sanger called the policy upheld by Dr. Jacobs "disgraceful." Mrs. Sanger was then nearing her 75th year and was still active as president of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

## Opposed Kennedy in 1960

From her Arizona home Mrs. Sanger kept up her fire of statements and letters to newspapers in behalf of birth control. Her disagreement with the Roman Catholic Church led her to say in 1960 that if Senator John F. Kennedy was elected President she would leave the United States. She opposed Mr. Kennedy because of his religion.

In an interview some weeks later Mrs. Sanger said that she had been informed that Senator and Mrs. Kennedy were both "sympathetic and understanding toward the problem of world population. I will wait out the first year of Senator Kennedy's Administration and see what happens."

During her long career many institutions honored her for her work. The degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred upon her by Smith College in 1949.

Mr. and Mrs. Sanger were divorced in 1921 after having been separated for several years.

In 1922, Mrs. Sanger was married to Mr. Slee. The industrialist, who died in 1941, contributed large sums to the birth control movement. During her marriage to Mr. Slee, she continued to use the name of Margaret Sanger.

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