

UCC ROOTS

Remembering our History

October 2017

She Named the Village “Uplands”

The American Missionary Association (AMA) is primarily remembered for its educational work among African Americans. However, in 1884 the AMA sent a missionary into the Cumberland Plateau in eastern Tennessee to found a school to provide liberal arts education, and offer vocational training in agriculture and regional crafts, for Appalachian rural youth. They called it Pleasant Hill Academy.

Thirty-three years later, a woman named May Cravath Wharton M.D. (1873-1959) came to Pleasant Hill. Raised in Minnesota, she was well educated and eventually earned a medical degree at University of Michigan in 1905. She and her husband worked in a Cleveland settlement house for a time; and in 1917, when Edwin Wharton became the principal of Pleasant Hill Academy, “Doctor May” (as she was called) became the academy physician.



“Doctor May” was an amazing woman. Soon she was ministering to the needs of the wider community, often traveling on horseback in the middle of the night to respond to health emergencies. She created regional health clinics, built a small hospital in Pleasant Hill, and a larger Medical Center in nearby Crossville.

Over time her dream expanded. She saw the need for a retirement community where foreign-service ministers, educators and medical professionals—those who had spent their lives in service to others—could settle in retirement. It would be a place where people could live simply and affordably in a beautiful rural setting, knowing health care would be available when needed. She named the village “Uplands.”

People came, bringing a generous spirit and passion about issues of social justice. Today Uplands Retirement Village has a 500-acre campus with over 100 independent-living homes nestled in nine different neighborhoods. Assisted living, skilled nursing and various health services are available. “Doctor May” might not recognize “Uplands” now, but she would be delighted to know that her dream and her vision live on.

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