

The history of Black Hospitals in Detroit

Disparities in healthcare for
African Americans

Detroit had 18 Black-owned and operated hospital



- Boulevard General (1852 West Grand Blvd) 1960-1974
- Burton Mercy (271 Eliot) 1949-1974*
- Delray General (7125 W. Jefferson) closed in 1974*
- Baily General Hospital (292 E. Ferry) 1970-1974*
- Bethesda Hospital (544 East Garfield) 1931-1965*
- Fairview Sanatorium (441 E. Ferry) 1931-c.1960*
- Good Samaritan Hospital (503 E. Palmer) 1929-1966*
- Haynes Memorial Hospital (73 E. Palmer) 1950-1967*
- Kirwood General Hospital (301 E. Kirby) 1943-1974*
- Mercy General Hospital (73 Russell St, 688 Winder, 2929 W. Boston Boulevard) 1917-1976*
- Mount Lebanon Hospital (2610 S. 14th Street) 1950-1958*
- Parkside Hospital (Brush and Illinois) 1928-1962*
- St. Aubin General Hospital (St. Aubin and Maple) 1931-c.1947*
- Edyth K. Thomas Memorial Hospital (556 East Garfield) 1937-1965*
- Trinity Hospital (E. Congress and DuBois, 681 E. Vernor) 1934-1962*
- Wayne Diagnostic Hospital (271 Eliot between John R. and Brush) 1939-1949*

Knocking but you can't get In!

In Detroit, the history of Black health care is largely a saga of Black physicians who established a parallel medical universe alongside the white hospitals that shunned them and their Black patients.

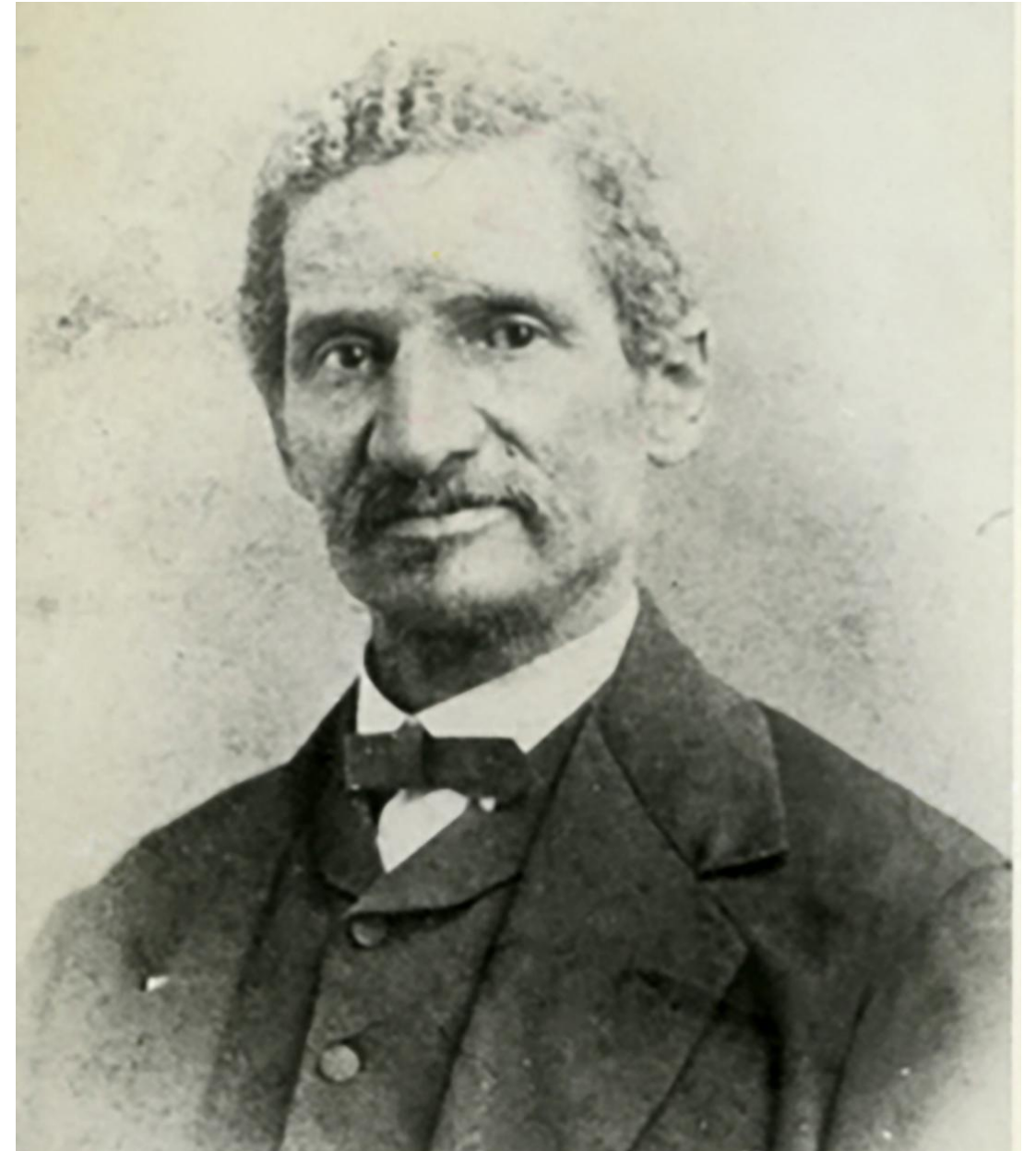
In 1844, four Catholic nuns — Loyola Ritchie, Rebecca Delone, Felicia Fenwick and Rosaline Brown — came to Detroit. On June 9, 1845, they established St. Vincent's Hospital, the first hospital in the entire Northwest Territory. It was located at Randolph and Larned in what is now downtown Detroit.

No , you can't come In!

In 1850, the sisters moved to a larger site on Clinton Street near Gratiot and reopened their hospital with a new name — St. Mary's. In 1879, a larger facility was built. (The original St. Vincent's site is now a parking lot for city council members and their staff.)

Although these Catholic sisters were dedicated to assisting the poor and downtrodden, including unwed mothers, the homeless, orphans and prostitutes, their pioneering hospital did not provide care for African Americans.

Dr Joseph Ferguson



The First ! (Recognized)

- Dr. Joseph Ferguson, the first Black doctor to practice in Detroit, was born in Virginia in 1821. After attending Cleveland Medical School, he moved to Detroit in 1857 and became a conductor and stationmaster on the Underground Railroad. He was present at the Detroit meeting where Frederick Douglass and John Brown met on March 12, 1859, a few months before Brown was hanged for leading an abortive raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia.
- After the Civil War broke out, Ferguson became a leader in the movement to provide public education for Black children, who were then denied admission to Detroit public schools. In 1863, he provided medical care to the dozens of African American Detroiters attacked by white mobs in a race riot that year.
- When the war ended, Ferguson returned to his medical education, becoming the first Black student at what is now the Wayne State University School of Medicine. In 1869, the same year he received his medical degree, Ferguson became one of the plaintiffs in *Workman v. Detroit Board of Education*, a lawsuit that challenged segregated and inferior schooling for African American students. As a result of that lawsuit, his son, William Ferguson would attend the first racially integrated kindergarten class, and grow up to become the first African American in the Michigan Legislature.

The Struggle continued!



Ferguson dedicated his life to serving Detroit's black residents, and he embodied the idea that the struggles for civil rights and equitable health care were inextricably intertwined. But although he lived just five blocks from St. Mary's, neither he nor any other Black doctor could practice there, or at any of the other Detroit hospitals that existed in his lifetime.



Even a century later, when doctors bought St. Mary's hospital and renamed it Detroit Memorial Hospital, African Americans could only be seen if they were admitted by a white physician, and most were segregated in a Colored Ward on the hospital's 4th floor.

The door opened !

- In the early 1900s, David and Daisy Northcross, Black husband and wife physicians who had found work at Booker T. Washington's Alabama-based Tuskegee Institute, moved south and opened their own hospital in Montgomery. But the hospital was soon threatened by a resurgent Ku Klux Klan, and in 1916 the Northcrosses fled Montgomery and moved to Detroit, where they established the city's first Black-owned and operated hospital Mercy General, the following year.
- Originally located on Russell Street in Black Bottom, Mercy would move twice before settling at 668 Winder St., near the intersection Winder and Hastings. Along with the hospital, which included a nurses' training school, the Northcrosses established a drugstore and a hotel.
- Dr. David Northcross was killed by a tenant of the hotel in 1933. His nephew, Dr. Remus Robinson, became director of the hospital in 1946. In 1960, when Hastings Street was demolished to make way for the Interstate 375 and I-75 freeways, Mercy moved to the mansion-filled neighborhood of Boston-Edison, where Dr. Daisy Northcross lived. Daisy died in 1956, but the hospital continued under the management of her son, Dr. David Northcross Jr., until 1976.

Dunbar Hospital

- The Dunbar Hospital was the first hospital for the black community in Detroit, Michigan. It is located at 580 Frederick Street, and is currently the administrative headquarters of the Detroit Medical Society. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.



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- Denied care at the city's white hospitals, this growing population was too large for the city's 30 Black physicians to adequately serve. These doctors formed the Allied Medical Society, which acquired the Warren House and converted it into Dunbar Memorial Hospital in 1917.



Dr Alexander Turner General Surgeon

- The hospital had 27-beds and an operating room managed by Dr. Alexander Turner, the first African American surgeon in Detroit, who would join Mercy's Remus Robinson in leading the integration of Grace Hospital, which later merged with the Jewish-founded Sinai Hospital and became Sinai-Grace.
- Turner, the first Black surgeon in Detroit was one founding physicians at Dunbar Memorial Hospital. But his accomplishments did not insulate him from the virulent racism that prevailed in his time; a white mob forced him out of his home on Spokane Street in 1925.



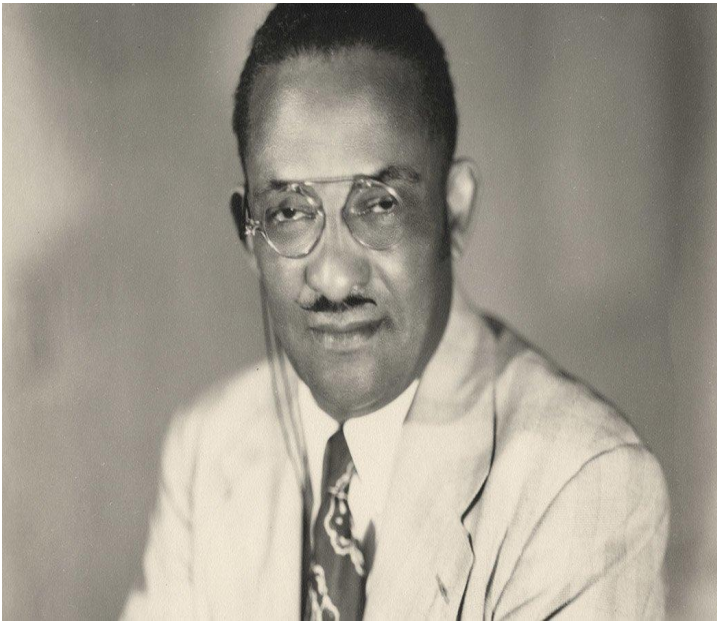
Dr Majorie Peebles-Meyers

- Dr. Marjorie Peebles-Meyers, in 1943, became the first Black woman to graduate from Wayne State University Medical School and would then become the first Black female resident at Detroit Receiving Hospital, and the first to be named chief resident.



Dr Ossian Sweet

- Dr. Ossian Sweet, Sweet was one of nine Black defendants charged with murder in 1926 after the deaths of two members of another white mob that had gathered to protest Sweet's move into a white Detroit neighborhood. Defended by Clarence Darrow and eventually exonerated, Sweet left his medical practice to run a small hospital in the Black community.



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Dr Natalia Tanner

- Dr. Natalia Tanner, was a medical and civil rights pioneer in Detroit. In 1951, she became the first African American fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics; and first African American board-certified pediatrician in Detroit. The following year, she became the first African American to join the staff of the Children's Hospital of Michigan.
- Before she passed away in 2018 at the age of 96, Tanner said that in her early years at Children's, African American patients were still being placed in segregated wards, and recalled that neither her credentials nor her concerns were taken seriously until she out-performed her white colleagues. In 1983, 32 years after her unprecedented election to the American Academy of Pediatrics, she became president of its Michigan chapter.



•Drs. W. Harold M. Johnson and Frank P. Raiford opened Trinity Hospital in October 1938 after 25 years since dreaming of it in medical school (Norfolk Journal and Guide). Costing more than \$100,000 (Norfolk Journal) and upwards of \$150,000 (The Chicago Defender), it was designed as a “race hospital” (Norfolk Journal) to cater to the needs of Black patients with the most modern medical equipment available.



Dr. Harold Johnson

- Co-founder of Detroit's Trinity Hospital



Group of doctors, wearing suits, pose on front steps of vine-covered stone building; sign on entrance: "Dunbar Hospital, visitors hours, 2 to 3, 7 to 8 p.m." Printed on photograph: "Staff, Dunbar Hospital, 1922, Jackson photo." Handwritten on back is a numbered diagram identifying the men in photograph. Handwritten on back: "1. Dr. A. L. Turner, 2. Dr. Ames, 3., 4., 5., 6. Dr. Cleage, 7. Dr. Bailer, 8. Dr. E. A. Carter, 9. Dr. Greenidge, 10., 11. Dr. Green, 12., 13. Dr. Frank Raiford, 14., Dr. Morton, 15. Dr." Stamped on back: "Harvey C. Jackson, photographer, Cherry 6054-M, 2514 Beaubien St., Detroit, Mich."



Built and they Came!



Trinity was founded in 1934 by doctors **W. Harold Johnson, Chester C. Ames, and Frank Perryn Raiford, Jr.** The hospital had a dual purpose of housing and treating ill Black patients while also giving opportunities to Black doctors looking to complete their residency training. Trinity also assisted postgraduate surgical training to students as well. Because many white hospitals shunned Black patients and doctors, Trinity thrived.



Trinity was the first Black hospital in Detroit to operate a cancer treatment center, and pioneered a number of deep X-Ray procedures used in treating patients and other methods. The hospital closed its doors in 1962, but merged its operations with one of its founders' son's non-profit hospitals. Dr. Perryn Raiford III opened Boulevard General in 1960 to serve the city's growing Black and poor citizens, and continued the operation into the 1970s.