



Dr. Matilda Evans

(Sunrise: May 13 1872 – Sunset: ? 1935)

Matilda Arabelle Evans was a pioneer in the true sense of the word. The first African-American woman to be licensed as a physician in South Carolina, Dr. Evans was ahead of her time in spreading the importance of good health and adequate sanitation in the state.

She opened the first hospital for African-Americans in Columbia and introduced the idea of providing free medical examinations for children in the public schools of the city. The oldest of three children born to Harriet and Andy Evans, Matilda was born in Aiken County, South Carolina, in 1870. As a student at the Scholfield Normal and Industrial School, she became a protégé of the school's founder, Martha Scholfield, an outstanding educator about whom Evans later wrote a book. As a result of Scholfied's encouragement, Evans attended the prestigious Oberlin College in Ohio before enrolling at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania to earn a medical degree. She then returned to South Carolina to practice medicine in the fields of surgery, gynaecology, and obstetrics. Dr. Evans opened her medical practice in Columbia, which, at that time, offered no hospital facilities for African-American people.

With a generosity that was typical of her, Evans took patients into her own home until she could establish a hospital for them. In 1901, she established the Taylor Lane Hospital, which was both a hospital and a training school for nurses. The hospital building was later destroyed by fire. Undaunted, she started another hospital before moving to a larger facility which was named the St. Luke's Hospital and Training School for Nurses. In 1918, she became a registered volunteer in the Medical Service Corps of the United States Army.

She also founded the Good Health Association of South Carolina to help convince people that they could improve their own health by following sound health practices and safe sanitary habits. Charity, compassion and a love of children were the hallmarks of Dr. Evans' career. Aware that many of her patients were extremely poor, she charged only nominal fees. She rode bicycles, horses and buggies to visit the sick that were unable to go to her surgery. Her efforts to provide for school physical examinations and immunizations saved the lives of countless young children. In 1930, she operated a clinic which was free for black children who needed medical treatment and vaccinations.

Incredibly, Dr. Evans found the time to raise 11 children who needed a home. In addition to becoming a "mother" to some of the children who were left at her practice, she brought up five children from relatives who had died. She taught the children respect, cleanliness and manners and provided them all with the opportunity for a college education. People, both young and old, enjoyed the facilities that she willingly shared at a recreational centre which she developed on her twenty-acre farm. Evans lived life to the fullest. She was an active member of St. Luke's Episcopal Church and, in her spare time, she loved to swim, dance, knit and play the piano. For Matilda Evans, a woman of remarkable dedication and integrity, her profession as a doctor was truly a labour of love. Appropriately, Richland Memorial Hospital in Columbia has named an award in her honour. She died in 1935.

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