



Daniel Hale Williams

(1858 - 1931)

Surgeon, Innovator, Educator, Pioneer

Daniel was born in 1856 in Hollidaysburg, PA to Daniel Hale Williams Jr. and Sarah Price. At the age of 12, his father died and he was apprenticed to a shoemaker in Baltimore, MD. Young Daniel soon left Baltimore and in 1863 he settled in Edgerton, WI with his sister. He attended high school and opened his own barber shop to support himself. After moving to Janesville, WI, Daniel began working as an apprentice to Dr. Henry Palmer, studying with him for two years and preparing for college.

In 1880, Williams entered Chicago Medical College, now Northwestern University. After graduation in 1883, he opened his own medical office in Chicago. Dr. Williams' first patients were both white and black. He was an exceptional doctor helping all who needed his help and he soon earned the fond nickname "Dr. Dan". Black doctors, however, were not allowed to work in America's private hospitals.

Aware of the lack of medical facilities for Black people, Dr. Dan opened Provident Hospital in Chicago in 1891- the first interracial hospital in the US. Dr. Dan also established a training residency for doctors and a training school for nurses in Provident. In 1893, he became the first African American to successfully perform pericardium surgery, repairing a stab wound that pierced the wall of his patient's heart. He did so without the benefit of penicillin or blood transfusions. His ability and fame earned him a presidential appointment as Surgeon General of Washington, DC's Freedmen's Hospital in 1893, where he initiated many medical innovations.

Dr. Dan married Alice Johnson and was appointed to the Illinois Department of Public Health, raising medical and hospital standards. He was also an attending surgeon at Cook County Hospital. In 1895, Williams co-founded the National Medical Association for African American Doctors, and in 1913 he became a charter member and only African American doctor in the American College of Surgeons. Daniel died in 1931. His skill launched cardiac surgery and his legacy created a path forward for African American doctors and nurses.