CMA History, Dr. Chester Pryor and Dr. George Hale
Speech given on January 16, 2000

- Dr. Chester Pryor -

Welcome Colleagues, Guests and especially our Spouses,

We are going to attempt to give you a capsule form of the history of Negroes, African Americans or blacks in Cincinnati.

The first Negro to practice medicine in Cincinnati was around 1870. His name was L. F. Buckner who practiced from 1870 to 1907, at the time of his death. “He was extremely respected among the majority of physicians because of several of the cures that he was able to accomplish. His hobby was music and he was the first Negro to play the great pipe organ at Music Hall. He did not attend medical school but he had worked for white physicians, taking care of their patients in the hospital and they taught him medicine, prior to him beginning to practice. In 1880 came a Dr. Tate, who was a very dedicated physician and he volunteered to treat yellow fever, which was rising in Tennessee and died in that process. Around 1890, a Dr. Frank Johnson was the first physician who graduated from a medical school, Columbus Medical School in Columbus, Ohio. He practiced for a short time and entered politics here in Cincinnati. He was elected the Assistant City Paymaster and served there for five years. He opened a small hospital which failed because of business ability, but he was also instrumented in assisting others informing hospitals. For those who are not aware, Negroes were not allowed in a hospital at that time. He also was a trustee of the Crawford Old Men's Home, which I believe is part of now, the Lincoln Crawford Home and he was a trustee at Wilberforce University.

The first Black woman to practice in Ohio was around the same time Cansarella Clark. She did not stay very long because her husband relocated in the Northern Part of her state. There was a Dr. Callory and several others who came to Cincinnati around the same time and he was noted because he too opened a hospital but failed because of lack of administrative ability, as well.

Between 1900 and 1930 there were several physicians who came to Cincinnati to practice, but there was nothing particularly lasting in terms of their civic contribution. Around 1930 and it would be good for you who are not familiar with Cincinnati to find the book on "Cincinnati Colored Citizens" to get some concept of the environment that was common place in Cincinnati at that time. -1 he -Ohio Book Store, you know, specializes in reproductions of interesting historical documents and I apologize that I could not find my copy to give you the real flavor at this time. But needless to say, they were totally ignored within the professional community.

Between 1930 and 35 entered Dr. Ray E. Clarke; Dr. B. F. Cann; Dr. Breedlove; Dr. Walker; Dr. Gladden; Dr. Miller Berry and his wife were also physicians; Dr. John Leeland, Sr.; and Dr. McClain. Dr. Clarke and Dr. Cann, Sr. were really the great pioneers of the time in terms of their diligence and perseverance in the face of totally being unwelcomed. They had to practice in the hospital downtown and also at the Evangelist and Booth Hospitals, down on 6th street, but they, persisted on going over to The University Hospital to the Clinic and they had to look over this not being recognized for their professional skills. Around that same time, Dr. Ken Jones was first to pass the City Examination to be a City Physician and Dr. Robert Brown, a very kind gentleman, followed that at that time, as well.

The 1940s were actually the time that the Evangelist Hospital closed and Catherine Booth opened its doors and at that time it was on Beecher Street. Some more physicians came to Cincinnati, Dr. Richardson and Dr. Lemmon, Dr. Fletcher came at that time. They were superb physicians in terms of their clinical skill and knowledge for their time. Dr. Clarke had his residency in General Surgery and only operated at St. Mary's Hospital and the Catherine Booth hospital in the 30s. Dr. Cann was the family physician and also those two were the first Negroes to be admitted to a private hospital staff, which was The Jewish Hospital. Dr. Clarke had privileges in General Surgery and Dr. Cann had privileges in Family Medicine and OB. Dr. Clarke was also certified in OB. Dr. Clarke said at one time and I assume that this still stands, of being successful in delivering a 35 pound abdominal fibroid or tumor. None of the physicians had been able to accomplish that feat. Neither one
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were Board Certified, but had full privileges without censor, that is, they did not have to assign their patients to another physician if they had to be admitted.

The 1950s brought forth physicians who were well trained, that is they not only had finished Medical School but also had finished Residency. In the 1940s, Dr. Luther Lemon and in the 50s came Dr. Ed Casey, Dr. Paul Hough, Dr. Samples, Dr. Darden, Dr. Clinton Buford, and Dr. Cecil Fascett, to name most of them. They became important for several reasons. Dr. Buford was the first African American to limit his practice to General Surgery. In spite of Dr. Clarke's skill and respect, he actually mostly was doing Family Practice. Dr. Ed Casey, along about the same time arrived and his sub-specialty was Chest Medicine. Shortly after that, Dr. A. H. Clint also General Surgeon and he were in the practice with Dr. Clinton Buford. The first Negro to be allowed to be trained in Cincinnati that is an Internship in Cincinnati was Dr. Chester Pearless. It was about 1950. Chester Pearless was the first black to be an intern at The University Hospital and he was the first African American to have Residency training and he was trained in Psychiatry. In 1952, A. H. Clement, M.D. came and was the second black to be allowed to have Internship in Cincinnati at The University of Cincinnati but they refused to give him a Residency and he did his General Surgery Residency at Miami Valley Hospital, which was nearby.

Needless to say, these two superb surgeons certainly on the platform that Dr. Clarke had marked were successful, very skillful surgeons. The third African American to be allowed to have an Internship in Cincinnati was myself in 1955 at The Jewish Hospital, the first time an African American had been allowed to intern at a private hospital in this city. Because of that, Dr. Hale was the second and Dr. Cantos was the third. We will get into Dr. Hale a little bit later. Dr. Clarice Reed, I believe is the first African American to be allowed to have a Residency in Pediatrics at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and the second was Marilyn Gaston. As you know both of those are in Washington, DC high in the administrative office of public health and have been there for almost two decades. The outstanding contribution in terms was whether the patient was black or white, that was 1956, and he said that he would not ask them again for any blood from anybody.

The fall came also shortly there in the early 60s, with Dr. Hale in front of Dr. C. O. Dillard and me and we met various difficulties. The outstanding thing that we had about 9 or 10 active physicians in The Cincinnati Medical Association and we hosted the National Medical Convention, I believe in 1965. It was after that convention that our wives were allowed to join the Auxiliary of the Cincinnati Academy of Medicine. My personal experience with the Academy was when I applied, I should back up and say, to get on staff at the hospital, and you had to be a member of the Academy of Medicine. I applied and the executive secretary at that time proceeded to chat with me at length, but I was a little slow to catch on and he was concerned when I said that I was Board Certified. So, he asked me that there was more than one part to the board and I said, "Yes." I told him, "I'll tell you what, if you look in the directory of the American Board of Ophthalmology in North Carolina, you will find my name." It was 1961 that this type of overtness occurred.

I was not allowed to attend the Cincinnati Ophthalmological Society Dinner. I think that I was allowed to come after the dinner to hear the guest speaker starting around 1964. These are all overt acts, which were just yesterday, so to speak.

Dr. Clarke, I single him out because he and Dr. Cann took the insult to look over the medical student's shoulders because they loved their patients and because they I think in some degree were hoping to help also those patient's at The University Hospital as well.

Dr. Clarke belonged to several civic organizations, totaling about 15 and he was on the board of 4, one of which was the Boy Scouts. He was on the board of the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority for some 30 years of which he was the chairman of 27 of those 30 years. He was also on the board of the Red Cross. He was a charter member of the Cincinnati Medical Association and he was also the charter member of the Green County Gun Club, his hobby was shooting clay pigeons. It is those two and finally both of them were admitted as instructors at The University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and on the voluntary staff of the hospital due to their perseverance.