



Historical Marker Dedication
Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Ward, M.D.
Medical Corps, U.S. Army Reserves
August 17, 2019, 11:00 am
North West Corner of West 21st Street at North Boulevard Place



Figure 1, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Ward, M.D.¹

The First World War

The Great War as it was known began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo, Bosnia-and-Herzegovina on July 28, 1914. This global conflict is also known as the War to End All Wars; the First World War; or World War I., The United States, entered that war on April 6, 1917, when the United States declared war on Germany and its allies after the sinking of several merchant ships and Mexico's incursions into the border states of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The guns finally fell silent at 11:00 am, November 11, 1918, with the signing of "the Armistice" after more than four years of bloody conflict. The war officially ended with the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, and became effective January 10, 1920. The U.S. losses during the First World War totaled 116,516 dead, and 320,000 sick and wounded.

¹ Image courtesy of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Joseph Henry Ward

Joseph Henry Ward was born in Wilson, North Carolina, to Mittie Ward, a former slave on the D.G. Ward plantation, and Nathaniel Hagans, a freeman of color on August 26, 1872. He attended elementary school but left home and Wilson as a teenager. Ward eventually made his way to the Baltimore/Washington DC area where he waited tables and worked in kitchens. During this time, he met George Hasty. Dr. Hasty was one of the founders of the Indiana Physio-Medical College and the editor of the Physio-Medical Journal. For reasons long forgotten, Ward moved to Indianapolis where he lived with and worked for Hasty.

Sensing something special in the teenager, Hasty enrolled Ward in the Indianapolis Public Schools where he completed the 8th grade. At age 22, Ward graduated from Indianapolis High School (later Shortridge High School) in 1894. Ward proved to be a good student and such a talented orator that his classmates chose him to speak at their graduation. Ward then enrolled in the Indiana Physio-Medical College—at the time a college degree was not required to attend medical school—he completed the course of study in 3-years and then acquired his medical license in 1897.

In 1900, Dr. Ward took advanced training, probably in surgical techniques, at the Indiana Medical College—a facility in no way connected to the Indiana University School of Medicine. During 1902 and 1903, Dr. Ward trained at the Long Island College Hospital (LICH). The LICH pioneered in the practices of bedside teaching, the use of the stethoscope, and the application of anesthesia.

In 1904, Dr. Ward returned to Indianapolis and restarted his medical practice and married Zella Locklear that November. By 1907, he had established Ward's Sanitarium and Nurse's Training School at 722 Indiana Avenue. According to newspaper accounts, the hospital was located in a two-story building; it had a modern surgery room with steam sterilization equipment, white tile walls, linoleum floors, and electric lighting.

On April 6, 1917, the United States entered the Great War, which had been raging in Europe since June 14, 1914. Although President Woodrow Wilson had gone out of his way to alienate and marginalize African Americans from the day of his inauguration, the United States government drafted young African Americans and called for volunteers. Quoted in the Washington Bee, Dr. Ward said, “Something big is going on in the world, and I want to be a part of it.” A few weeks later, he enlisted in the U.S. Army as a medical doctor.

Like the other 118 – African American doctors and dentist who joined the Army in 1917, Dr. Ward reported to the U.S. Army’s first and only Medical Officers Training Camp – Colored (MOTC), held at Camp Des Moines Iowa for his basic military training. Of the 118 men who began training that July 104 completed the program and were commissioned officers in the United States Army Reserves. At 45-years of age, Dr. Ward was the oldest of the group. At his age, no prior military experience, with two young children at home, successful medical practice, and surgery center Dr. Ward would have been exempted from military service. Dr. Ward and the other 103 medical doctors who joined the U.S. Army in the Spring of 1917 knew that the African American soldiers were going to need medical treatment. The kind of medical care that would be preferable to the patients coming from a volunteer, as opposed to that from someone compelled to provide such care. Thus, the men of the all-black 92nd and 93rd divisions were cared for throughout the war by Dr. Ward and his colleagues.

During his time at the MOTC, the instructors notice Dr. Ward’s leadership ability, medical skills, and military bearing and recommended him for promotion before the 92nd Division embarked for France. In France, Dr. Ward was twice promoted, and he became the first African American ever to command a U.S. Army field hospital. He and the other 103 black doctors cared for a combined 4,574 wounded U.S. soldiers, an untold number of French soldiers, and soldiers from Frances African territories. Some of their better-known patients included William “Bill Bo Jangles” Robinson, the man who taught Shirley Temple to dance and appeared in several movies

with her. Also, Simon Haley, the father of ‘Roots’ author Alex Hailey. As well as Arron R. Fisher of Lyles, Indiana, and Elder W. Diggs the long-time principal of Indianapolis Public School #42 (the school bears his name).

Dr. Ward returned to the United States in February 1919; he was assigned to care for wounded soldiers at Camp Upton New York who were not well enough to return home. While at Camp Upton, Major Joseph Ward received word that his most famous patient, Madam C. J. Walker, had fallen gravely ill in St Louis, Missouri, while on a business trip. Walker was placed on a train and returned to her home in Irvington, New York (Irvington on the Hudson). Dr. Ward met the train in New York City then accompanied Walker and her attorney, Freeman B. Ransom, to her home. Dr. Ward was at her bedside when she passed away on May 25, 1919.

By June 1919, Dr. Ward was back in Indianapolis and reestablishing his sanitarium. In 1922, he cared for the first African American police officer who died in the line of duty in Indianapolis and possibly Indiana history. In 1923, the United States government hired Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Ward as the chief medical officer and administrator of Veteran’s Hospital #91, the racially segregated black veteran’s hospital located in Tuskegee, Alabama. Ward reported for duty in January 1924 and took command in June 1924. Veteran’s Hospital #91 was a 600-bed facility with a one-million-dollar budget; it offered every medical service, including psychiatric unit, tuberculosis unit, and an orthopedics ward with a prosthetic shop. All the 350,000 African American veterans of the First World War were required to travel to Tuskegee for medical care. Despite open hostility from local whites, the Ku Klux Klan, and white politicians (both local and national) Dr. Ward led Veterans Hospital #91 from 1924 to 1936.

In 1936, Dr. Ward and his wife returned to Indianapolis, where he tried to pick up his surgery practice at the sanitarium. In the 12-years that Dr. Ward was at Tuskegee, his brother-in-law, Dr. Paul Batties, had operated the sanitarium. Moreover, in those 12-years, the city of Indianapolis had changed—some. From 1926 to 1929, the city had explored the construction of a

black hospital west of the old Wishard Hospital. However, construction costs and the lack of financial resources caused by the Great Depression ended all thoughts of a separate publicly supported hospital. By 1940, the Jim Crow rules at City Hospital began to soften, if not fall altogether, undermined by the United States governments need to differentiate itself from the racist policies of Nazi Germany.

Faced with a changing political landscape and his advancing age, Dr. Ward closed his sanitarium for good, but he continued to practice medicine for another decade. In December 1954, after 50-years of marriage, he tragically lost his wife when she drove home suffering the effects of a medical crisis in the car. Together they had grown his medical career from a two-room second-floor office, to a thriving ahead of its time private surgery center, to Army surgeon and the first African American to lead a U.S. Army field hospital, to the first African American to lead a Veteran's Hospital, to becoming the first African American to lead a major hospital in the United States. She parked in the driveway but was unable to get out of the car. Two years later in December 1956, Dr. Ward passed away at the West 10th Street V.A. Hospital. A hospital that just a few years earlier, he could not enter as a patient nor as a medical professional. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Ward, M.D.'s career is made all the more remarkable when we consider that it took place at the height of the Jim Crow era (1896-1954)—between *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and *Brown vs. Board of Education*—and that he was a first-generation-Freedmen. A man who was not supposed to succeed.²

² Researched and prepared by Leon E. Bates, M.A.



Figure 2, Dr. Joseph Ward and Zella Ward³

³ Image courtesy of Alice J. Palmer, Ph.D. (granddaughter)

Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony

Bugle call, *Sick Call*..... American Legion⁴
Leon E. Bates.....Wayne State University; American Legion; Joseph Taylor, Branch of ASALH
Honorable Alice J. Palmer (granddaughter of Dr. Ward).....former Illinois State Senator
Joseph L. Tucker Edmonds, Ph.D.....Joseph Taylor, Branch of ASALH⁵
Honorable Joseph Hogsett.....Mayor of the City of Indianapolis
Representative of the office of Congressman Carson.....Seventh Congressional District
Kimberly Denning, Chief of Nurse Primary Care... Department of Veterans Affairs, Indianapolis
Millicent Moye, M.D.....The Aesculapian Medical Society
Woodrow A. “Woody” Myers, Jr. M.D.....former Indiana State Health Commissioner
Carol A. Mutter, Lieutenant General, USMC.....World War Memorial Commission
Harold L. “Butch” Miller, past National Commander.....American Legion Department of Indiana
Roger W. Vandrey, Commander.....Broad Ripple American Legion Post #3
Nicole Poletika.....Indiana Historical Bureau
Chaplin Edward L. Harris, Jr.....American Legion Post, 11th District, Department of Indiana
Bugle call, *Taps*.....American Legion⁶

The following individuals and groups provided support to this effort:

Indiana Historical Bureau
Indiana Department of Transportation
Indiana State Archives
Indiana Historical Society
IUPUI Library
Indianapolis Marion County Public Library, Center for Black Literature and Culture
Indianapolis – Marion County Archives
Joseph Taylor branch of Association for the Study of African American Life and History
Broad Ripple American Legion Post #3
Tillman H. Harpole American Legion Post #249
Indianapolis Chapter of the NAACP
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Yvonne M. Jones, Ph.D.
Monroe H. Little, Jr., Ph.D.
Darlene Richardson
Wayne Sharp
Ronald L. King
Renzie Gordon
Mary Margaret Peck

⁴ *Sick Call*, U.S. Army Band, accessed August 8, 2019. <https://www.bands.army.mil/music/buglecalls/sickcall.asp>

⁵ Joseph Taylor Branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH-Indy.org)

⁶ *Taps*, U.S. Army Band, accessed August 8, 2019. <https://www.bands.army.mil/music/buglecalls/taps.asp>