

Wisconsin Historical Society: The Saint Anthony Hospital in Milwaukee Listed in National Register of Historic Places

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Milwaukee, Wis. – The Wisconsin Historical Society has announced the listing of Saint Anthony Hospital in Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, in the National Register of Historic Places. National Register designation provides access to certain benefits, including qualification for grants and for rehabilitation income tax credits, while it does not restrict private property owners in the use of their property.

The Saint Anthony Hospital is significant as a pioneer in the racial integration of healthcare within the city of Milwaukee. Affiliated with St. Benedict the Moor Church and its African-American congregation, the hospital was built in 1931 to serve all creeds and races at a time when racial discrimination limited medical care options for many African-Americans. Administered by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Anthony Hospital drew most of its patients from a surrounding area that included the majority of the city’s African-American community, as well as a number of Jewish, Greek, and German residents. By 1936, the hospital was treating 1,697 patients annually and, within ten years, this number increased to 3,731, at which time a large addition was constructed increasing hospital capacity to 135 beds.

In 1954, Dr. John W. Maxwell, Sr. was elected Chief of Staff by his fellow physicians.

At the time, he was one of two black doctors on Saint Anthony's staff of forty physicians that served a patient population which was 30% black. Dr. Maxwell was the first African-American chief of staff in any Wisconsin hospital. A graduate of Meharry Medical College, Dr. Maxwell came to Milwaukee to practice medicine at Saint Anthony Hospital in 1946. In 1961, he was named General Practitioner of the Year by the National Medical Association.

By 1965, Saint Anthony Hospital's patient population was composed of 35% black and 65% white patients. In its staff of eighty doctors, six were African-American; the hospital also had four black registered nurses and five black practical nurses. Changes in the neighborhood such as freeway development and urban renewal were devastating, forcing many of its residents to relocate. Ultimately, these changes, coupled with an inability to raise money for expansion or relocation, led the hospital to close in 1988.

The register is the official national list of historic properties in America deemed worthy of preservation and is maintained by the National Park Service in the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Wisconsin Historical Society administers the program within Wisconsin. It includes sites, buildings, structures, objects and districts that are significant in national, state or local history, architecture, archaeology, engineering or culture.

To learn more about the State and National Register programs in Wisconsin, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.

About Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit www.wisconsinhistory.org.