

Our heritage: Medical education in Milwaukee

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Solomon Juneau was the first permanent white settler in Milwaukee, arriving in 1818 as an agent for the American Fur Company. A few years after his arrival, his wife Josette became ill, and the couple had to travel to Chicago for health care because there were no physicians in Milwaukee. Within 15 years after Juneau's arrival, Milwaukee began to grow rapidly, thanks to land speculation and the extensive influx of immigrants. By 1841, there were 2000 people in the city, including eight physicians.

In 1835, the first medical school-trained physician to arrive in Milwaukee described it as "so full of fever and ague...that it could not hold any more." But two years later, the same physician wrote to a New York relative that the village was "so full of comely young lasses" that easterners ought to be "quick to move here."

Who was that first physician? Thayer and King believe it was Enoch Chase, a Dartmouth Medical College graduate. Chase practiced medicine for only a few years and then became highly successful in business. Dr Alfred Castleman arrived later the same year. He was president of the State Medical Society for several stints beginning

in 1850 and later was made surgeon of the Fifth Wisconsin Infantry.

One of the luminaries of that era was Dr Erastus B. Wolcott, the first great surgeon in the area. A graduate of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, Wolcott performed the first nephrectomy in 1861. Over the next few decades, the number of physicians grew in proportion with population growth.

The quality of the physicians who came to Milwaukee in the 1840s and 1850s was spotty at best. Many had no formal medical training and were charlatans whose expertise was solely chicanery and trickery. Since medical licensure did not exist at the time, anyone could proclaim himself a "doctor." King described "a host of herb doctors, bone setters, soothsayers and quacks of all descriptions, preying on a gullible public. Anyone who could put on a bold front, grow a Van Dyke beard, wear a frock coat and silk hat, sport a gold-headed cane, and have the necessary crooked mind, could call himself a physician, hang out his shingle, and be in business."

Other physicians had worked as apprentices with established physicians, who frequently served as preceptors for many trainees. The host of German physicians who joined the community had attended well-established medical schools in their homeland. US-trained physicians were invariably graduates of



Enoch Chase, MD

eastern schools. This prompted the question—should Wisconsin have a medical school?

Even before Wisconsin had been granted statehood in 1848, territorial Governor Henry Dodge sent a bill to the Legislative Assembly incorporating "The Wisconsin Medical College," which was to be "located in or near the city of Milwaukee." Governor Dodge was quoted as saying that the object of this incorporation shall be to promote the general interests of medical education and to qualify young men to engage usefully and honorably in the practice of medicine and surgery.

While nothing came of this original effort to create a medical school in Milwaukee, Dodge's actions did eventually lead to the development of the University of Wisconsin

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School of Medicine in Madison. Efforts to establish a medical school in the Milwaukee area were attempted again in 1850, 1868, and 1881, but lack of financial support and poor organization kept these attempts from succeeding.

In 1885, a number of physicians formed an association to found a School of Medicine and Surgery in which only the disciplines of Medicine and Surgery would be taught. Their institute was to be known as the Milwaukee School for Surgery and Anatomy. The school would issue licenses to practice, rather than diplomas. The president of this association was the renowned physician Nicholas Senn. This Chicago Medical School graduate, who arrived in Milwaukee in 1870, was an eminent medical teacher whose fame as a surgeon spread throughout the world. He eventually joined the faculty at Rush Medical College and served as a medical officer in the Spanish-American war. But even with his fame and clout, he was unsuccessful in creating a medical school in Milwaukee.

Another attempt to start a school occurred in 1891 at the instigation of a number of physicians practicing in the area. Milwaukee's St. Mary's Hospital declared its willingness to provide clinical experience for students in the school. Louis Frank, the historian of Milwaukee medicine in the 19th century, was one of the hopeful organizers, but financial support to endow the contemplated institution never materialized.

Diploma "mills" appeared in Milwaukee in the 1890s. The Wisconsin Eclectic Medical College, which opened in 1894, graduated its only class in 1896. The dean of that "school" was arrested for selling diplomas. In February of 1896, three "businessmen" incorporated the Milwaukee University. This purported "medical school" sold di-



Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons and Presbyterian Hospital, 1884

plomas for \$200. The state attorney general brought charges of fraudulence against the "university." No one appeared for the defense, and the Court dissolved the corporation in November 1896.

Dr William Washburn, an erudite and respected local physician, said that "until 1893, the members of the medical profession in Milwaukee had been slumbering on in a sort of peaceful and decent mediocrity, discharging their duties as family practitioners with a modicum of success, but creating and occupying no place in the world of science or education, and taking no active part in the course of events." Washburn and his colleagues pushed the issue and, finally, a Milwaukee medical school was born.

The First "Successful" Medical School

The first "successful" medical school began when the Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons opened in October 1893 with 42 students. The initial faculty numbered 22, with A. Hamilton Levings, MD, as president. Faculty members were likely to be shareholders in the corporation, which was intended to operate at a profit and to pay dividends. In 1894, two

of its students received an MD degree, the first physicians to graduate from a Milwaukee medical school. Initially located at the corner of 25th and Walnut Streets, the school was immediately adjacent to the aging Presbyterian Hospital, which was utilized to some extent for clinical teaching.

In 1898, the school moved into a new building at the corner of Fourth Street and Reservoir Avenue, and a dental department was opened in the school in 1899.

The school provided clinical experience for the students at St. Joseph's Hospital, which was located across the street. But by the turn of the century, the major clinical affiliation was at Milwaukee County Hospital. The school's 1908 bulletin says about the County Hospital: "This great institution is situated in the town of Wauwatosa, easily reached by electric car, and annually treats a very large number of patients. Its rooms and wards rarely contain less than 200 patients, most of whom are available for clinical demonstration and instruction. Very recently, this hospital has nearly doubled in size and a large clinical amphitheater has been added, so it is now an essentially modern institution and furnished



County Hospital, 1910

greatly increased facilities, not only for teaching, but also for scientific research and observation.”

The institution had started with a small capital stock that gradually increased to \$100,000. In 1906, the stockholders surrendered all of their holdings to the College trustees.

In 1909, the Wisconsin College of Physicians affiliated with Carroll College of Waukesha, but retained its own management and Board of Trustees. By 1909, there were over 50 clinical faculty members affiliated with the school. Among them was W.H. Washburn, MD, who was the school's vice president, and professor of the Principles and Practice of Medicine, and Clinical Medicine. Washburn was a Rush College graduate who arrived in Milwaukee in 1885. He was a highly respected physician and teacher who became involved in local medical organizations. He also began a program of clinical case studies with colleagues in the community.

The Second School

In 1894, a second school, the Milwaukee Medical College (MMC) and School of Dentistry, was organized. This was also a proprietary institution, with profits for its shareholders a major impetus, if not the sole reason for its creation. This school opened with an enrollment of

96 students in a four-story building on Ninth and Wells Streets. It was adjacent to the old Trinity Hospital, which had been built years before. By 1896, the old hospital building was removed and a new building was erected, which functioned as a hospital and medical college.

In spring of 1902, the Milwaukee County Medical Society brought a suit against the MMC, accusing it of inefficiency and irregularities. It was contended that diplomas were granted to men not properly qualified, that some had been authorized to practice medicine before they received a diploma, and that courses advertised were not actually given. The Milwaukee County Medical Society concluded its accusation with the statement that the school was a “menace to the reputation and good standing of the medical profession of the city and state.” The school countered with a libel suit against the president of the county society. A bitter legal feud ensued and the charges were finally brought to the Association of American Medical Colleges, who determined that the irregularities were true and recommended that the MMC be indefinitely suspended from membership in the Association. After further deliberation, this decision was reconsidered and the MMC was “severely censured.”

Sometime early in its existence, the MMC established a relationship with County Hospital, allowing it to use the hospital to provide clinical experiences for its junior and senior medical students. A certificate noting completion of clinical rotations at County was given to the graduates.

In 1907, the Milwaukee Medical College became affiliated with Marquette University, which added a semblance of academic validity, although some thought the affiliation was more based on the merger of their football teams. Walter Camp began a national ranking of football teams and players in 1889. Lee J. Foley, a Milwaukee Medical College student, who later became physician-sons Tom and Dave, received a Camp award in 1893. The combined team defeated all Wisconsin-based elevens.

In 1908, the total enrollment of the medical and dental schools at the Milwaukee Medical College was nearly 350. A nursing school was added. At this point, there were over 100 clinical faculty affiliated with the school. The major clinical teaching affiliations were at the County Hospital, the County Insane Asylum, and Trinity Hospital. Maternity experiences were provided at Misericordia Hospital. By 1912, tuition at the Milwaukee Medical College was \$70 for each of the two semesters. About 180 students received their MD degrees from this school in the first decade of the 20th century.

In 1910, the famous Carnegie-sponsored Flexner report that started the revolution in medical education was issued. The report led to periodic inspections of medical colleges by the Council on Medical Education (CME) of the American Medical Association. That year, both the Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Milwaukee Medical College re-

ceived “B” ratings by the Council. However, both schools received a “C” rating at the 1912-1913 review. Since a number of states adjacent to Wisconsin refused to recognize colleges rated in class “C,” the Wisconsin State Board of Medical Examiners was alarmed at the new classification of their schools.

The CME was asked to advise how the schools could achieve a higher rating. Its major recommendation was to merge the two existing schools. When students learned about this recommendation, the entire MMC student body left their classes and marched to the Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons to enroll there with the understanding that action would be taken immediately to make the change required to obtain a higher rating. Since Marquette University had been burdened with nominal responsibility of the MMC without any significant control over it, the University welcomed this crisis. The Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons was financially insolvent at this time and could not offer prospects of academic improvement. Something had to be done.

Marquette University School of Medicine Evolves

Prominent members of the medical profession in Milwaukee, under the leadership of Louis F. Jermain, MD, approached Marquette University and promised to support efforts to form a university-oriented medical school. In 1913, Marquette University purchased outright the building and equipment of the Wisconsin College of Physicians and Surgeons and leased the building of the Milwaukee Medical College, thus organizing Marquette University Medical School. Dr Jermain became its first Dean.

Efforts were begun immediately to improve the school’s academic condition in accordance with the



The 1910 powerhouse team

CME recommendation. The first full-time faculty members were appointed, but most of the education was provided by volunteer faculty support from physicians in the community. One full year of pre-medical collegiate work was established as a minimum requirement for admission, but entrance requirements were soon raised to two years of collegiate work. By 1915, the school received a class “A” rating. Some clinical teaching programs were started at St. Joseph’s Hospital, located across the street from the medical building on Fourth and Reservoir streets. However, the major clinical experience for senior students, and to some extent junior students, continued to be at County Hospital. The Marquette Dispensary Clinic in the medical school building provided ambulatory training. Some clinical work was done at Trinity Hospital in the old building of the former MMC.

In 1917, the Carnegie Foundation offered Marquette University School of Medicine nearly \$340,000 toward an endowment of \$1 million. The school was reorganized and its entire administration was delegated to a Board of Trustees. This step was taken to assure donors that no funds would be diverted to university purposes outside the medical



Milwaukee Medical College and Trinity Hospital

school. The campaign to secure the remaining \$660,000 through public subscription was successful.

The annual tuition in 1917 was \$200 and according to the 1917 medical school bulletin, room and board for a full year was close to \$250. In the fall of 1918, there were 76 students distributed over the four years. In an attempt to meet the medical needs of the military services for World War I, a continuous session of the medical school was held during the summer of 1918.

Additional clinical training sites for students at that time were available at Johnston Emergency Hospital, located on Second and Sycamore (Michigan) Streets. Pediatric clinics were held at the Milwaukee Children’s Hospital, at that time located on Tenth and Wells Streets. Completing the newer clin-



Marquette University School of Medicine

ical training sites was South View Municipal Hospital, also known as the Isolation Hospital, on Mitchell Street.

In 1920, the satisfactory completion of one year of internship in an approved hospital was added as a requirement for the MD degree. In that same year, Mrs. Harriet Cramer, the widow of a local newspaper publisher, added \$1 million to the endowment. When the new medical school building on Fifteenth and Wisconsin was built in 1932, it was named the Cramer Building.

Dean Louis Jermain became Dean Emeritus in 1926. He was followed as Dean by Bernard McGrath, MD, Professor of Surgery, and Dr Eben Carey was appointed Dean in 1933. That same year, the class size was increased to 100 students. Armand J. Quick, MD, one of the schools most illustrious names, joined the faculty in the Department of Pharmacology in 1935. By 1939, the requirement for admission to the medical school was raised to a minimum of three years of premedical liberal arts collegiate work.

World War II led to many changes. In July 1942, all teaching activities in the school went on an accelerated program. Vacations

were few and short. Some courses were shortened, and electives were dropped. The Army Student Training Corps and the Navy 12 programs were organized and all of the students were enlisted and placed in uniform. Graduation was in May and November. Regular academic years were restored by September 1947.

In 1967, the Marquette University School of Medicine was experiencing some financial problems and appealed to the state of Wisconsin for financial aid. The medical school severed ties with Marquette University. The separation from the Jesuit University resolved the church-state issue and cleared the way for the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision that approved infusion of some funds to aid the school. The funds were raised by an increase in the tax on beer, leading to frothy comments by local comedians. In 1970, the Board of Directors of the Medical School adopted a more regional name and Marquette Medical School became the Medical College of Wisconsin.

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