



Ross County Contributor

Dr. Emma Ann Reynolds



Emma Ann Reynolds was born on August 3, 1862, in Frankfort, Ohio to Sarah and William Reynolds. Growing up, she was deeply influenced by her parents' commitment to education. After completing her studies at Wilberforce University, Emma moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where she worked as a schoolteacher for seven years. During this time, she became acutely aware of the health disparities within the African American community. Inspired to make a difference, she decided to pursue nursing, but found herself repeatedly rejected by nursing schools because of her race.

Determined to fulfill her ambitions, Emma enlisted the help of her brother, Reverend Louis H. Reynolds, a prominent pastor in Chicago. Together, they approached Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a well-known African American physician, for assistance.

Dr. Williams, who recognized the racial barriers in healthcare, was inspired by Reynolds' commitment. Instead of helping Emma gain entry into a white nursing school, he proposed creating a hospital and nursing school for African Americans. In 1891, with Dr. Williams' support, the Provident Hospital and Training School opened in Chicago, offering much-needed medical care for underserved communities and a platform for training nurses of any race and background.

Emma enrolled in the first nursing class at Provident Hospital and graduated in 1893, one of the first to complete the program. Eager to expand her education, Emma became the first African American woman to attend Northwestern University's Woman's Medical College, where she earned her M.D. in 1895. With her medical degree in hand, Emma became a trailblazer, not only as a nurse but also as a physician in a field that was largely closed to women, especially African Americans.

Her professional journey took her to Texas, Louisiana, and Washington, D.C., where she held various important medical and educational roles. In 1896, she became the resident physician at Paul Quinn College in Texas, and in 1900, she moved to New Orleans. There, she founded the Visiting Nurses Association to provide free healthcare to low-income people, demonstrating her lifelong commitment to supporting underserved communities.

In 1902, Emma returned to Ohio to care for her aging parents, where she settled in Sulphur Lick, practicing medicine until her death in 1917. Despite the many challenges she faced—racism, sexism, and limited opportunities—Emma's determination and vision helped lay the groundwork for better healthcare and nursing training for African Americans. In 1990, a tombstone was erected in her honor at Greenlawn Cemetery in Frankfort, Ohio, and she was inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame in 1994.