



JEFFERSON HEALTH AND THE UNIQUE LEGACY OF DR. FRANK BOSTON, AFRICAN AMERICAN WORLD WAR I VETERAN

When Dr. Frank Erdman Boston founded Elm Terrace Hospital in Lansdale in 1934, he did so not only as a physician, but as a World War I veteran whose military service shaped his lifelong commitment to service and community care. At a time when African American physicians were routinely denied hospital privileges and leadership roles, Dr. Boston built a hospital from the ground up. Elm Terrace Hospital grew over time and ultimately became what is now Jefferson Lansdale Hospital, part of the Jefferson Health system. Nearly a century later, the hospital he founded continues to serve patients and families across the region.

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Taken together, these accomplishments place Dr. Boston in a rare historical position. Based on available historical records, Dr. Boston may be the only African American World War I veteran in Pennsylvania known to have founded a hospital that remains in continuous operation today, even as it expanded and became part of a larger health system. Other hospitals founded or led by Black physicians in the Commonwealth, including Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital,

Mercy Hospital, Mercy Douglass Hospital in Philadelphia, and Clement Atkinson Memorial Hospital in Coatesville, played essential roles in their communities but ultimately closed due to long standing systemic barriers. Dr. Boston's legacy stands at the rare intersection of military service and race, and the hospital he created remains a living testament to what one veteran physician was able to build against extraordinary odds.

When viewed in a national context, Dr. Boston's achievement becomes even more rare. Across the United States, many hospitals founded by African American physicians closed during the mid twentieth century due to segregation, lack of access to capital, and exclusion from major health systems. This was true even for hospitals led by highly respected Black doctors and community leaders. When military service is added to that history, the field narrows further still. Based on available records, there are very few documented cases nationwide of African American veterans who founded hospitals that remain in operation today. Dr. Boston stands among that small and exceptional group, and may be unique in Pennsylvania and rare nationally for creating an institution that not only survived these barriers but continues to serve patients nearly a century later as part of a major health system.

Beyond its historical significance, this story matters because it shows what is possible. For students and young people, especially those who may not see themselves reflected in traditional histories of medicine, Dr. Boston's life offers a powerful example of purpose, resilience, and service. He did not wait for permission to lead or for conditions to be perfect. He built something lasting and meaningful that continues to serve people nearly a century later. This story encourages the next generation to consider careers in medicine, emergency services, public service, and community leadership, and to understand that service, whether through military duty or civilian life, can create institutions and impact that endure well beyond one lifetime.



FRANK ERDMAN BOSTON, M.D.
1890 - 1960

For his bravery and service to the United States of America during WWI.
For his lifelong commitment to improving the health of communities and to caring for veterans.

For his leadership and focus on expanding medical education.

For his extraordinary, longstanding contributions to the health and wellbeing of the North Penn region, by

Establishing the Lansdale First Aid Corps, known today as the Volunteer Medical Service Corps of Lansdale and

Most importantly, for his vision and extraordinary efforts to found the Elm Terrace Hospital, the community's first hospital, paving the way for Lansdale Hospital.

DR. FRANK E. BOSTON LOBBY
DEDICATED
2021

