

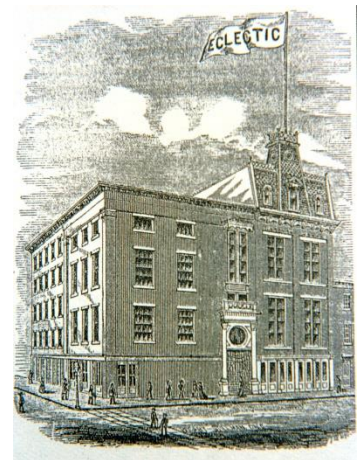
## R.H. Tate: Medical Heroism in Two Cities



*Dr. R.H. Tate's Headstone in Memphis, Tennessee*

In 1926, African American author, publisher, and civil rights activist Wendell Dabney identified R.H. Tate as Cincinnati's first African American doctor in his seminal work, *Cincinnati's Colored Citizens*. Delving further, the Lloyd Library discovered that Dr. R.H. Tate (1845-1878) worked as a physician in Cincinnati from 1874 to 1878 after studying at Cincinnati's Eclectic Medical Institute. At a time when medical instruction was difficult for African Americans to obtain, Dr. Tate overcame obstacles and demonstrated a commitment to the people of Cincinnati and displayed heroism while fighting yellow fever in Memphis.

Prior to the Civil War, African Americans seeking medical careers as physicians most often received their education in Canada, Europe or from a few medical schools in the northern United States. Unlike "regular" medical schools, Eclectic and homeopathic colleges were among the first medical schools to admit African American students. By 1860, the Eclectic Medical School of Philadelphia and the Homeopathic College of Cleveland were two of at least nine medical schools to enroll African Americans. In 1873, there were still few options for African Americans to train in the field of medicine. Howard University, a historically Black college and university, had opened its School of Medicine five years earlier and became the first school dedicated to training African American physicians. But for many, relocating hundreds of miles away was not an option. In the early 1870s, Tate would attend Cincinnati's Eclectic Medical Institute (EMI). It would be another 48 years until the nearby University of Cincinnati admitted the first African American student to its medical college.



*Cincinnati's Eclectic Medical Institute*

Demonstrating Dr. Tate's commitment to providing medical care for his fellow Black citizens, he located his offices in close proximity to Cincinnati's African American residents. After completing his studies in 1874 at the EMI, Dr. Tate opened a practice at 103 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Street near what was then called Bucktown, a neighborhood primarily inhabited by African Americans and poor whites. In 1875, he moved his practice to Mound Street in the West End neighborhood between Court and Richmond Streets--just a few blocks from the Eclectic Medical Institute and the future home of the Lloyd Library and Museum. Between 1860 and 1870, Cincinnati's Black population had more than doubled, half of whom resided in the two neighborhoods where Tate practiced. The West End was the largest, becoming the core of Cincinnati's African American community. Sadly, an epidemic in the southern United States ended Dr. Tate's life early in his career, when he answered the call to provide medical care to those suffering from the yellow fever epidemic.

In 1878, Memphis suffered its fifth yellow fever epidemic since 1828. Yellow fever is transmitted by mosquitoes. Due to wet and hot summers combined with nineteenth-century sanitation issues, Memphis became the ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, resulting in the rapid spread of yellow fever. The 1878 outbreak was especially severe with more cases than the earlier epidemics combined and over 5,000 recorded deaths in just a few months.

The Howard Association, a benevolent organization formed in Norfolk, Virginia during the 1855 yellow fever epidemic to care for those affected by the disease, sprang into action and organized volunteer medical providers from across the United States to travel to Memphis to treat the sick. Eight doctors from Cincinnati, including Dr. Tate, the only African American in the group, traveled to Memphis in early September of 1878.



*Howard Physician on his Rounds in Memphis*

One of his fellow doctors, Augustus Kuehne of Dayton, Ohio, spoke of Tate's tireless work in Memphis, combatting the low level of care typically afforded African Americans during the epidemic. During his time attending to those in Memphis, Dr. Tate became ill himself. Believing he had sufficiently recovered after four days, Tate returned to his medical duties, only to die of yellow fever three days later in the Beale Street home of Dr. Morgan, his friend and an African American dentist.

Dr. Tate was buried in the Howard Association plot of Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis. In 2005, the Bluff City Medical Society, an organization dedicated to providing health care to all Memphians, especially African Americans, erected a headstone in Dr. Tate's honor. It recognizes Dr. R.H. Tate as the first African American professional to practice medicine in Memphis. We join them as we recognize and honor Dr. Tate as the first professionally trained African American physician to practice medicine in Cincinnati.

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