



**Metropolitan Water
Reclamation District
of Greater Chicago**



2022 MWRD AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH

Daniel Hale Williams, MD

Daniel Hale Williams III, was born on January 18, 1856, in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. When his father died, 10-year-old Daniel was sent to live in Baltimore, Maryland with family friends. He became a shoemaker's apprentice but disliked the work and decided to return to his family, who had moved to Illinois. Like his father, he took up barbering, but ultimately decided to pursue a pioneering career in medicine. He worked as an apprentice with Dr. Henry Palmer, a highly accomplished surgeon, and then completed further training at Chicago Medical College. After his internship, he went into private practice on Chicago's south side. He soon began teaching anatomy at Chicago Medical College and served as surgeon to the City Railway Company.



Due to the discrimination of the day, African American citizens were still barred from being admitted to hospitals and Black doctors were refused staff positions. Firmly believing this needed to change, Williams opened Provident Hospital and Training School for Nurses in 1891, the nation's first interracial hospital and nursing school. The facility, where Williams worked as a surgeon, was publicly championed by famed abolitionist and writer Frederick Douglass. Furthermore, the first successful open-heart surgery on a human was performed in 1893 by Dr. Daniel Hale Williams.

Williams later became chief surgeon of the Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, DC. There, he made improvements that reduced the hospital's mortality rate. In 1895, he helped to organize the National Medical Association for black professionals, who were barred from the American Medical Association. Williams later returned to Chicago and continued as a surgeon. In 1913, he became the first African American to be inducted into the American College of Surgeons.