Celebrating the Legacy of
KENNEY HOSPITAL
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

May 14, 2005
New Salem Baptist Church
130 W. Kinney Street, Newark, NJ

Presented by the
Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee
in partnership with
New Salem Baptist Church
Dr. John A. Kenney recalled that back in 1925 he looked out the dining-room window of his home at 134 West Kinney Street and decided that the vacant lot next-door would be an ideal site for a new hospital. Late the following year he wrote in his diary: "I shall build a hospital in Newark because I can't help it."

And that is exactly what he did.

Dr. Kenney had moved to Newark from Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1924. He soon discovered that African-American doctors and nurses were excluded from most hospitals in New Jersey, and their patients were confined to segregated wards. He also saw acute needs as the city's black population grew to 25,000, most crowded into cold-water tenements in the "Hill" section around his home.

Kenney couldn't persuade other doctors or civic groups to invest in his vision, so he took his own savings and borrowed to build a three-story structure for 30 patients. The building was dedicated to the memory of his ex-slave parents and admitted the first patient on September 1, 1927.

Kenney Hospital had an essential role not only in training and employing African-American medical professionals, but also in safeguarding the health of families living in unsanitary housing. Kenney Hospital operated privately until Christmas 1934, when Dr. Kenney announced that he would donate it to community groups. In 1935 they renamed it Booker T. Washington Community Hospital. Dr. Kenney remained as medical director until 1939, when he returned to Tuskegee.

The Community Hospital won full accreditation, diligently served thousands of families and trained scores of doctors. But it could not compete with larger institutions that had begun to desegregate. The patient rolls dwindled and Community finally closed in June 1953.

Six years later the building was sold to New Salem Baptist Church. The church enlarged the building and turned the first floor into a sanctuary, but preserved the original facade and some interior features.
"I shall build a hospital in Newark because I can't help it."

Top photo: Community Hospital (building at left) was connected by a ramp to Dr. Kenney's old home (center), which was used for the hospital's offices. An adjacent apartment house (right) was rented for a nurses' residence and clinics. Both of those buildings have been demolished some years ago. Bottom row (left to right): The hospital's operating room, laboratory and admitting office.

The Newark Preservation & Landmarks Committee, after conferring with leaders of New Salem, retained Ulana Zakalak, an architectural historian, to nominate the old hospital for official landmark recognition. Her report, based on extensive research, declared this was one of the first public buildings entirely planned, built, and managed by African-Americans in Newark. The building was entered on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places on January 1, 2004, and on the National Register on March 22, 2004.
CELEBRATION CEREMONY
Saturday, May 14, 2005 – 3 p.m.

Master of Ceremonies: William Mikessell
President, Newark Preservation & Landmarks Committee

Opening Prayer

Musical Selection: New Salem Mass Choir
under the direction of
Ahmed Wallace

Greetings
Rev. John K. White
Pastor, New Salem Baptist Church

City of Newark Officials
Dr. Winston Price, M.D.
President, National Medical Association

Remarks on the Occasion
Sandra W. Moss, M.D.
Retired Physician and Medical Historian
Robert M. White, M.D.
Internist and Medical Oncologist

Musical Selection: New Salem Mass Choir

Introductions of Visitors

Voices of the Past
Members of the Kenney Family
Former Hospital Staff Members

Musical Selection: New Salem Mass Choir

Principal Address
Dr. Clement Alexander Price, Ph.D.
Professor of History and Director of the Institute on Ethnicity, Culture,
and the Modern Experience, Rutgers University

Presentation of
Newark Preservation &
Historical Plaque
Landmarks Committee

Immediately after the program, visitors can tour all floors of the building, and see an historical exhibit downstairs.
Invited guests are welcome to a reception on the lower level.

NPLC Kenney Hospital Celebration Subcommittee
Rose M. Spears, Chairperson; Richard Grossklues, Catherine Leino-Hooker; Gloria Bryant, Charles Cummings, and Douglas Eldrige.

Our Deepest Thanks

The recognition of the Kenney Hospital as a State and National historic site and the celebration of this occasion have been made possible by the cooperation and support of many organizations and individuals. Special thanks to:

New Salem Baptist Church: Rev. John K. White, Pastor; the church’s celebration committee, chaired by Legretha Wingo; and all officers and members of the church.
City of Newark: Mayor Sharpe James and members of the Municipal Council.
State of New Jersey, Historic Preservation Office: Newark Public Library; especially Charles Cummings and New Jersey Reference staff.
Members of the Kenney family: Including Diane Kenney and Linda Kenney Miller, granddaughters of Dr. John A. Kenney Sr.
Former staff members of Kenney and Community Hospitals: Dr. Clement Alexander Price, Ph.D.

Harvard Press, Orange
Eley Catering, Irvington
Budget Print, Bloomingdale
Dr. John Andrew Kenney, M.D.

One of the most influential African-American physicians of the 20th century, Dr. Kenney was born as the son of former slaves in Albemarle County, Virginia, in 1874. He became valedictorian of the class of 1897 at Hampton Institute, and earned his M.D. degree four years later from Leonard Medical School at Shaw University.

After interning at Freedmen’s Hospital in Washington, he was summoned to Alabama by Booker T. Washington to become medical director and chief surgeon of Tuskegee Institute. There he helped found the John A. Andrew Memorial Hospital and the Nurse Training School. He was personal physician for Washington, the founder of Tuskegee, until his death in 1915, and filled the same role for Dr. George Washington Carver, the famed scientist.

After being threatened by the Ku Klux Klan, Dr. Kenney and his family moved to Newark in 1924. They lived on West Kinney Street, and later on Irving Street and in Montclair.

In 1927 he built the Kenney Memorial Hospital, dedicated to his parents, John and Caroline, and directed the institution until 1934, when he made a gift of it to a community association. He remained medical director until 1939, when he returned to Tuskegee Institute.

During his long career Dr. Kenney also served as an early president of the National Medical Association (NMA), and helped found its Journal in 1908. He later served 32 years as its editor-in-chief.

Dr. Kenney came back to Montclair and a private practice during World War II. He died there in 1950 at the age of 75, and was buried in Fairmount Cemetery. His wife, Frieda, had died a year earlier.

Two of their four children also became prominent physicians. Dr. Howard Kenney, who died in 1996, was the first black director of the East Orange Veterans Hospital. Dr. John A. “Jack” Kenny, who died in 2003, was a dermatologist and also a president of the NMA. A third son, Oscar, died during World War II as a Tuskegee Airman.
Dr. Kenney’s Parting Thoughts

In 1939 Dr. John Kenney left the Newark hospital he had founded and returned to Tuskegee, Alabama. Here are a few of his remarks at a testimonial dinner on October 27, 1939, at the Knaezer Auditorium on Belmont Avenue:

On September 1, 1927, the doors of the Kenney Memorial Hospital were opened and one patient admitted. From that beginning and that time, our progress has been steadily upward, through hardships and difficulties, it is true, but always upward...

The need is so apparent for a hospital by and for ourselves in this city, that to me it is quite strange that there should be any controversy about it...

...among the many emotions claiming expression, perhaps the foremost is gratitude; first for life, and next that I am privileged to have been born in this great country where, despite many inconveniences, one is permitted to develop and expand his own resources to the limit of his ability. I am grateful for my birth, that it was humble rather than aristocratic...I am thankful that it has been, and is, my privilege to, in some small measure, serve my people and by doing so serve my country...I’d say that there is nothing in this world greater than service. To be permitted to serve one’s day and generation is the greatest honor that can be paid to an individual.

I want to thank the ruling powers of this great city, who have in so many ways supported my aims. I thank God for sending me to Newark, when I was headed for Detroit. I am grateful to all the people of Newark and the surrounding municipalities. Alike I am indebted to the helpfully active, the passive, and the opponents. Anybody can go with the wind or drift with the current, but it takes friction to develop power...

There was no earthly power that could prevent my leaving Tuskegee, and there is none that can prevent my return. On my recent trip to Tuskegee, my good old friend, Dr. George Washington Carver...with his arms around me, said, “My dear Dr. Kenney, it’s God's will. He sent you away from here for a purpose and it’s He who sends you back.”

John D. Kenney, M.D.
Newark Preservation and Landmarks Committee

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Founded in 1973, this is the only private organization devoted entirely to saving, restoring, and promoting the city's rich heritage of history and architecture.

The Committee has helped save and restore priceless structures and sculptures; helped win official protection and public awareness of many landmarks; and sponsored publications, exhibits, tours, and other activities.

The Kenney Hospital is among more than 70 buildings and sites which have received state and federal designation as historic places, many through the Committee's efforts. NPLC has also nominated six major historic districts for the landmark registers.

Committee projects have included publication of “Tales Without Hate,” the memoirs of the late William M. Ashby, founder of the Urban League of Essex County.

Supported primarily by members' dues and private donations, the Committee is governed by a board of 18 elected trustees representing varied backgrounds and interests.

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