

**August 9, 2022**

## **Report of the Ossining Village Historian**

**RE: Honorary Street naming application for Dr. George W. Hill submitted by Althema Goodson of the Dr. George W. Hill Legacy Center.**

My research into the contributions made to the Village by Dr. George W. Hill, Jr. was conducted by consulting the following sources: telephone interview with Devorah Hill (Daughter of Dr. Hill); Dr. Mary Lane Cobb; Donna Chambers-former patient; Diane Sharrock, former patient; Tanya Holt, former patient; Shandi & Shay Speller-former patients; Denise McIver, a former patient. I referenced several articles written about Dr. Hill as well as Facebook posts about his impact on Ossining residents' lives over the decades. The following is a summary of my findings:

**RESIDENCY IN OSSINING:** George W. Hill was born in New York City, the son of the late Joshua and Elisa Hill. At the age of three, he moved to Mount Vernon, where he attended public school. He graduated from Mount Vernon High School and attended Cornell University, Indiana University, and Indiana University School of Medicine (where he was the only black student) to receive his medical degree.

Dr. Hill moved to Ossining in September 1934 to start his medical practice just one year after graduating from medical school. When interviewed by the Citizen Register on Dec. 10, 1968, about why he chose Ossining Dr. Hill said, "I like the town" he further elaborated, "I was told that the community [Ossining] was not one that would support a Negro physician. It was a challenge." He responded, "In that case, I'll come." Dr. Hill's first office was located at 10 Croton Street and his first patient was Mr. Henry Bateman. He was not able to secure enough patients to maintain that office, so he moved. From 1936 to 1939, Dr. Hill lived and saw patients at his home at 13 Hunter Street. Later, he moved his practice to 30 State Street. Dr. Hill moved to Croton for many years, but his practice remained in Ossining. In his latter days, he moved back to Ossining where he lived until his death. Dr. Hill served the Ossining community for 40 years in many capacities.

Dr. Hill died on Friday, May 31, 1974. The Ossining Village Board declared Monday, June 3, 1974, an official day of mourning for Dr. Hill. "Dr. George W. Hill was truly one of Ossining's leading citizens," said former Mayor Rudolph J. Joenk, Jr., speaking for the board. "The Village Board deeply regrets his death and is sincerely appreciative of his far-reaching influence and Ossining He affected the lives of a great many people here, not only in his role as a physician but in a much wider role as a compassionate friend and advisor. He will be remembered for his selfless response to human needs in our community."

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE VILLAGE:** Dr. Hill opened his medical practice in Ossining in 1934. In an interview, Hill explained his desire to go into medicine came from being inspired by his family doctor. One of his missions was to provide quality, affordable medical care to the black community. When he opened his offices there were not enough black patients in the Village to keep the practice going, he made house calls to surrounding towns to keep the practice afloat. Dr. Hill was more than a doctor to those who entrusted him with their care. He was a friend to the Ossining community which many confided in. It is almost impossible to talk to 10 people from "old Ossining" that was not a patient or were brought into the world by Dr. Hill. By 1968, he had 1,600 patients, half of

whom were white, according to the Citizen Register. Dr. Hill was generous with his practice by offering to barter services for medical care. In fact, a landscaper from the Village with a large family would tend to his properties in exchange for family medical care. This was not a comparable exchange, but Dr. Hill was more concerned with the health of his patients than he was with profit.

Dr. Hill is lauded for being a gentle soul, compassionate, trusted doctor with a great bedside manner. Less concerned with money but a deep concern for the health of those he served.

He spearheaded many projects that addressed the social, economic, and advancement of the entire community with a practical focus on the black community.

He founded 1938 the Ossining Negro Civic Organization which was instrumental in working with the Village to dedicate a memorial in honor of the late Rev. Henry Edward Duers. The organization was also instrumental in the appointment of the first black police officer in the Village and the opening of, after World War II, a number of employment opportunities previously closed to black people.

He worked with the Ossining Public Library to establish a special collection of books relating to African and African American life. He was concerned with the education of black children and their pursuit of higher education and thus founded the Cooperative Scholarship fund which provides scholarships to black graduating seniors at OHS. He mentored them, called college admissions offices on their behalf, and provided scholarships through the Cooperative Scholarship Fund.

This scholarship remains today. He was adamant about finding jobs for black youth in their fields of interest. Such as Donna Chambers (former patient) who he sent to work for Vera Neumann at Printex. She went on to be a renowned quilter, shop owner, and jeweler. He would call colleges to ensure students had a better chance of admittance. In 1949, he ran for a seat on the Ossining School Board. He not only employed students but many adults in the community.

He championed fair housing for the black community and challenged the local government on issues affecting his community.

Dr. Hill held sickle cell testing clinics in the Ossining schools and the former St. Mathews Church (No. Malcolm St) in the early 70s. He provided testing, results, and counseling to over 500 participants. A community-led event supervised by Dr. Hill.

Dr. Hill was a trailblazer, the first black physician on the regular attending staff of any hospital in the county, joining the Ossining Hospital staff in 1935. He was one of the original members of the medical staff of Phelps Memorial Hospital in North Tarrytown, serving both as president of the staff and member of the medical board. He was plant physician for the Printex Corporation on State Street, and in 1973 was appointed senior staff physician, and chief of medical services for the Ossining Correctional Facility (Sing Sing Correctional Facility, today).

Dr. Hill was known for his selfless acts, such as annually offering free physicals to children who were going to summer camp, according to an article in the River Journal. It was Dr. Hill's dream to turn his medical office at 30 State Street into a health center for the black community staffed by black doctors. Dr. Mary Lane was a part of this vision and mission. Although he was not able to bring this to fruition exactly the way he planned our community did receive the center at his death. Dr. Hill took care of the medical needs of minorities in Ossining and surrounding towns/villages. His

colleague at Phelps Memorial Hospital understood the void in the care his death would cause to the community. Dr. Bardley Gorden, of Phelps Memorial Hospital, spearhead the establishment of the Ossining Open Door Health Center. The center provided free medical care on Tuesday and Thursday evenings in the basement of the First Baptist Church, Ossining. Dr. Hill's far-reaching impact has created one of the largest Health Care Centers in our County.

Dr. George W. Hill has been recognized for excellence by numerous organizations, celebrated by the community, and an exhibition of his work was shown at the Ossining Public Library in the 1970s.

An excerpt in the program for the testimonial dinner in his honor reads:

In his many years of service to the community of Northern Westchester, black and white, Doctor Hill has endeared himself to literally thousands of people. His professional devotion and personal warmth, understanding, and generosity have made him one of the most outstanding and beloved of friends.

Dr. Hill not only meant the world to this community, he was a great and inspiring family man to his wife Mrytle and children, Devorah and Neal.

Dr. Hills has left an indelible mark on this community. His legacy lives on through his former patients, the Ossining Open Door, The Cooperative Scholarship Fund, and the Dr. George W. Hill Legacy Center whose purpose is to carry on his legacy of community service to the underserved community.

#### **ORGANIZATIONS/MEMBERSHIPS/AFFILIATIONS**

United States Army – Veteran of WWII

Lifetime Member of the NAACP – Active in the Ossining branch

Former Member of the County, State, and American Medical Associations, of the American Academy of General Practitioners

Former member and president of the Senior Attending Staff of the Ossining Hospital

Former President of the Visiting Attending Staff of Phelps Memorial Hospital

Former Member of the Westchester Heart Association

Former member of the Board of Directors of the Westchester Mental Hygiene Association

Former Member of the Westchester War Manpower Board

Former Member of the Medical Board of Phelps Memorial Hospital

Recipient of the NYS Fellowship for Study of Social Diseases

Founder/President Ossining Negro Civic Organization

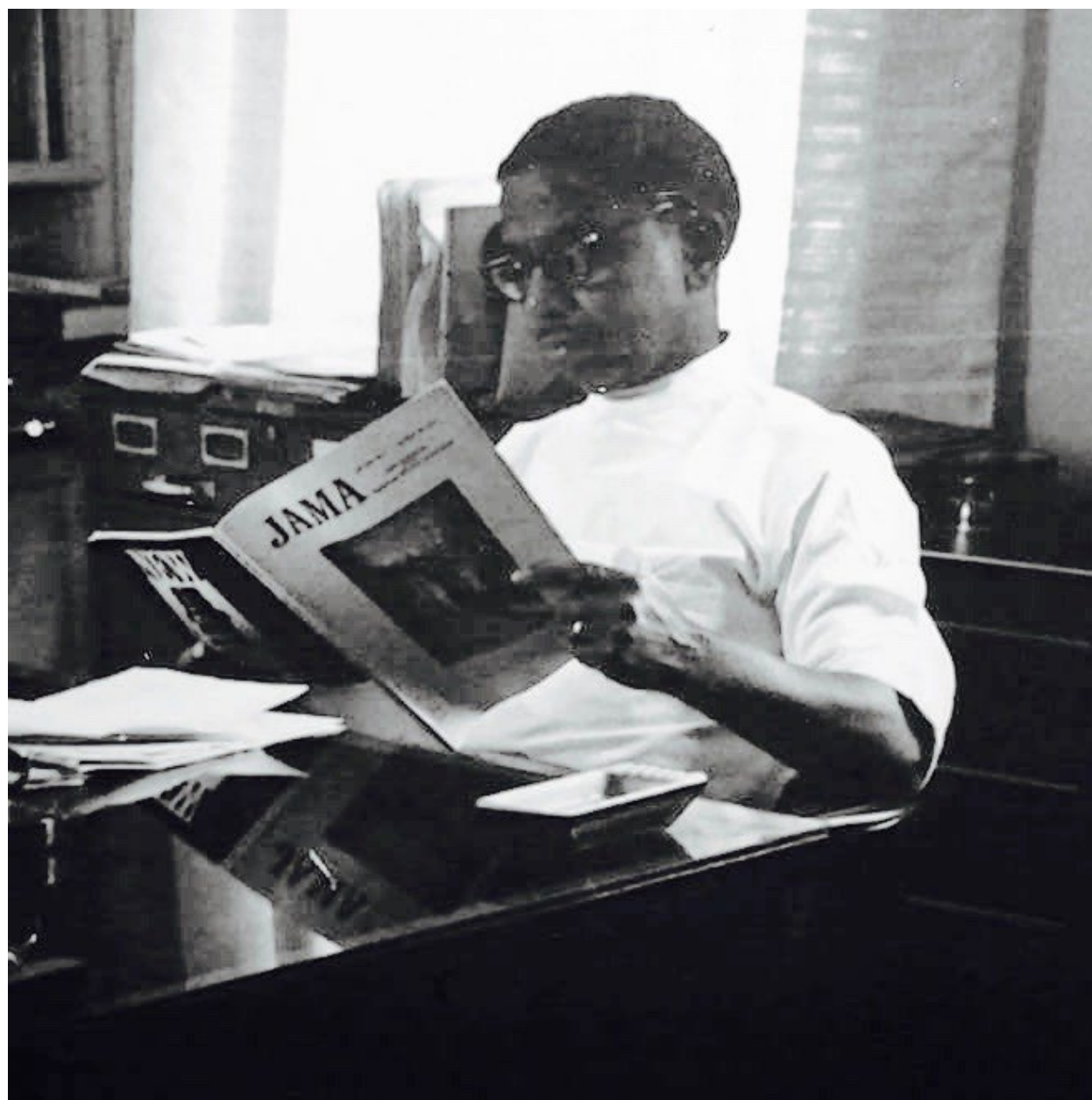
Founder/Trustee of the Cooperative Scholarship Fund – Ossining

Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity

Member of the Pride of Ossining Lodge, 250, I.B.P.O.E. (Negro Elks)

Ran for a seat on the Ossining School Board – 1949

**SIGNAGE HISTORY OF PROPOSED STREET:** Currently, there is no honorary street signage on the proposed street (Academy Place and State Street). The applicant requests the honorary street name, "Dr. George W. Hill Place"



**Dr. George W. Hill in his office at 30 State Street, Ossining**