

## **Book Recalls History of Charity Hospitals**

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"Ask anyone around the world if they've heard of the Charity Hospital in New Orleans, and they'll probably know something about it," said Jonathan Roberts, former director of the Charity Hospital System, a Tulane public health alumnus and co-author of a new book on the history of Louisiana's 10 public hospitals.



Charity Hosptial in New Orleans, empty since Hurricane Katrina, is one of the institutions included in *A History of the Charity Hospitals of Louisiana*. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Roberts, along with Thomas Durant Jr., professor emeritus at Louisiana State University, wrote *A History of the Charity Hospitals of Louisiana: A Study of Poverty, Politics, Public Health and the Public Interest*.

During a recent [book signing](#) at the Tulane University School of Medicine, the

authors talked about the book, which includes interviews with political figures instrumental in opening the hospitals around Louisiana, discussion of the hospitals' unsatisfactory reputations and several little-known facts pertaining to the hospitals' relationships with African Americans and women.

"After Emancipation the charity hospitals were segregated, but it took time for African Americans to play more prominent roles in the hospitals," said Durant. "African American physicians could not practice in the charity hospital system. Black patients were allowed in the office, but black doctors could not practice medicine there."

It was not until the Hill-Burton Act of 1964 that African American doctors were able to work in the hospitals. As for the progression of women's roles, the book attributes much to the mission set forth by the Daughters of Charity ? an organization that has worked since the 1800s to make health care accessible to the poor.

In recent years, the hospital system renamed the institutions to avoid a negative connotation linked to the word "charity."

"So many people think the word charity means welfare, so now we have the Medical Center of Louisiana here in New Orleans, and the Baton Rouge charity hospital bears the name Earl K. Long," said Durant. "Unfortunately the changing of the names did not always change the image."