

About Dr. Joseph F. Smith (1869-1952)

Dr. Joseph F. Smith was a surgeon who resided in Wausau from 1908 to 1952. In addition to his surgical practice, Dr. Smith possessed a strong commitment to community service and medical education.

Born in Huntington County, Indiana on July 24, 1869, he began his career as a professor of physics and chemistry at a normal school in northern Indiana and later at a high school in Roanoke, Indiana. After graduating from Rush Medical College, University of Chicago in 1900, he began a medical career that would span more than 50 years. After serving an internship and residency at Presbyterian Hospital in Chicago, he became an associate surgeon there in 1906.

He moved to Wausau in 1908 and practiced surgery at St. Mary's Hospital which had just opened. He served as president of the hospital's staff until the time of his death. Over the years, Dr. Smith and his wife, the former Mary Smith of Wausau, donated to St. Mary's Medical Library which by the time of Dr. Smith's death had grown to several thousand volumes including books written in German and French.

Dr. Smith was very active in medical education. He served as secretary of the Wisconsin Surgical Club and was a preceptor of the University of Wisconsin Medical School from 1926 to 1945. He was also on the editorial board of the Wisconsin State Medical Journal and was the author of numerous articles and publications.

He was one of the first six Wisconsin members of the American College of Surgeons and was a member of the American Medical Association for nearly 45 years. He was very active in the county and state medical societies. He was president of the Marathon County Medical Society for two terms and served on the council of the State Medical Society from 1922 to 1938. In 1934, he received the council's distinguished service award.

Dr. Smith was also a community leader. He served on the Board of Directors of the Wausau Chamber of Commerce and was its president from 1920 to 1922. He was active in the Wausau Community Chest, a precursor of today's United Way, and served as its president from 1932 to 1935. In 1938, he received a national award for his Community Chest service.

He was active in the Civilian Defense Council, chief organizer of the Marathon County Medical Emergency Service in World War II, director of the Marathon County unit of the Crippled Children's Aid Society and a Boy Scout leader.

He was a member of St. John's Episcopal Church, the Wausau Masonic Lodge, the Wausau Club, and the Wausau Rotary Club serving as its president from 1916 to 1917.

Dr. Smith died on March 22, 1952, at Wisconsin General Hospital, Madison at the age of 82.

The agreement which created the Dr. Joseph Smith Medical Library was signed in July of 1948. The agreement provided not only a permanent site for the library, but also an endowment to fund additions to the library.

Dr. Smith served in three distinct periods in the development of surgery: When surgery was done only in emergencies, when elective surgeries were performed and when physiological surgery was developed. Through his generous gift, information about future developments in surgical practice as well as other areas of medicine and healthcare is readily accessible to healthcare professionals in this region of Wisconsin.