

# The Clerk's Black History Series



**Debra DeBerry**  
Clerk of Superior Court  
DeKalb County



## Dr. Barbara Ross-Lee

(June 1, 1942 – )

First African-American Dean of Medical School

**Barbara Ross** was born the eldest of six children, on June 1, 1942. Raised in the housing projects of Detroit, Michigan, Barbara became caretaker of her younger siblings at the age of ten, when her mother became ill with tuberculosis. Although several of the Ross children showed an early interest in show business, Barbara had a passion for education. And while her younger sister Diana pursued a career in music, Barbara left her mark on medicine. After high school, Barbara enrolled in Detroit's Wayne State University in 1960, during the boom of the Civil Rights movement, hoping to pursue a degree in pre-med. However, a pre-med counselor advised her that women should not be doctors and denied her request for admittance. Barbara married her first husband James Lee during her junior year and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Biology & Chemistry in 1965. She joined the National Teacher Corps to earn her Master's degree while working in Detroit Public Schools. After completing the program in 1969, she was given an opportunity to return to her first love of medicine. Barbara applied to and was accepted into the newly opened School of Osteopathic Medicine at Michigan State University in Pontiac.

Divorced and now with a small child, Barbara moved in with her mother to finish school. After graduating in 1973, Dr. Barbara Ross-Lee opened a family practice in Detroit, serving inner city, low income, people of color until 1984. Leaving her practice, she joined the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a Consultant on education in the health profession. From 1990 to 1993, Dr. Ross-Lee was a community representative on the Governor's Minority Health Advisory Committee for the state of Michigan. It was during this time she changed history by becoming the first osteopathic physician to participate in the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Health Policy Fellowship in 1991.

And in 1993, Dr. Barbara Ross-Lee became the first African-American Dean of a Medical School, The College of Osteopathic Medicine of Ohio University, where she remained until 2001. During her tenure there, Barbara seized the opportunity to right some wrongs from her past. She reformulated the entire course of study and drafted a women's curriculum, earning a reputation as a "Change Agent."

In 2001, Dr. Ross-Lee was appointed Vice President for Health Sciences and Medical Affairs at the New York Institute of Technology, and in 2002, she became dean of the New York Institute of Technology's New York College of Osteopathic Medicine. In 2012, she was appointed to chair the board of directors for the Institute for the Advancement of Multicultural & Minority Medicine.

Today, Dr. Barbara Ross-Lee remains one of only seven woman deans of medical schools.



Barbara and her younger sister, Diana



Barbara and her younger sister, Diana

