

**WITNESS TO HISTORY: CHARLES R. MATHEWS,  
M.D., AND THE BIRTH OF MEDICARE IN 1966**

*(Dr. Mathews delivered these comments Dec. 15, 2010, when the Florida State University College of Medicine officially honored him for the donation of his June 15, 1966, conference notebook from the Presidential Meeting on Medicare Implementation.)*

It was a surprise to have been invited to President Lyndon Johnson's White House Conference on the Implementation of Medicare, in June 1966, since I had, for several years, been active in organized medicine's campaigns against "socialized medicine."

However, on that historic day, I found myself one of about 200 conferees, from all 50 states, seated in the East Room to get the word on the newly enacted Medicare legislation, direct from the president and from his staff. It was an all-day session, very well organized. We departed Washington crammed with much information, each carrying a binder replete with details about the new Medicare.

Whatever our prior medical/political persuasions, the clear responsibility of us conferees was to return to our communities (in my case, to Rochester, N.Y.) and to help our colleagues, hospitals and others to adjust to the new Medicare, in which, for the first time in history, the federal government provided health care benefits to an entire class of its citizens, to everyone 65 and older.

In my Florida years, I have become an advocate for universal health care, for a single-payer system, Medicare for all.

That historic Medicare binder stayed with me, after I departed upstate New York for Florida, at several locations in Sarasota, and finally in Tallahassee since 1989. My binder has remained remarkably intact, considering its multiple locations. When I recently donated my Medicare binder to the University Libraries, I had no idea that it was unique – surely there are other participants in that historic conference 45 years ago who have the binder and made it publicly available. But I am informed that these are the only known complete documents – that not even the Lyndon Johnson libraries in Texas have a complete set.

So – I am pleased to have placed these historic documents with the University Libraries, to be accessible to any and all via the web, available to scholars and to all interested parties.