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NCNA's 113th Convention . . . In 118 Years?

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Abstract

A brief history of the North Carolina Nursing Association's Annual Conventions (NCNA), first held in Asheville on June 9-12, 1903.

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NCNA's 113th Convention...in 118 Years?

By NCNA Member Dr. Phoebe Pollitt, RN; Nursing History Council Co-Chair

On October 28, 1902, Mary Lewis Wyche, the Superintendent of Nurses at Rex Hospital, presided over an ad hoc meeting of nurses who gathered in Raleigh to form a state-wide nurse association. Within a few months, the group was chartered by the Secretary of State and successfully secured the nation's first Nurse Practice Act (NPA) during the 1903 session of the NC General Assembly. Relying primarily on word-of-mouth and newspaper articles, the new NCSNA (NC State Nurse Association) publicized their new organization and its goals of improving the health of all through upgrading and standardizing nursing education and practice.

To build excitement and increase membership, Wyche and her colleagues held the first NCNA Convention in Asheville on June 9-12, 1903. The approximate dozen attendees interspersed business meetings with receptions, a church service, and a visit to the Biltmore Estate. They wrote by-laws, created committees, and established goals for the organization. The Convention was a success and delegates agreed to meet the following year in Raleigh.

In its first decade, NCNA flourished. Annual Conventions were held in cities across the state to encourage attendance and input from white Registered Nurses. Conventions were held in Raleigh in 1904, Winston-Salem in 1905, Charlotte in 1906, Richmond, VA in 1907 (in conjunction with the ANA Convention that year), Durham in 1908, and Wrightsville Beach in 1909. Membership increased while programs spanned topics from clinical break-throughs to professional ethics to learning how to affect the political system as members sought to enact more legislative, educational, and policy goals. Over the next decade NCNA Conventions were held annually despite WWI (1918-1919) and the world-wide flu pandemic (1918-1920).

NCNA, by law and custom, was restricted to white nurses. In 1921, Black nurses in North Carolina organized the NC Association of Colored Graduate Nurses to accomplish many of the same goals as the NCNA. These included affecting laws and policies about health and the profession of nursing and providing continuing education and opportunities for leadership.

In the 1930s, North Carolina, like the rest of the nation, was debilitated by the Great Depression, yet Conventions were held annually throughout the decade. Even the disruptions brought by WWII did not stop the annual meetings. At the height of the War, in 1943 and 1944, NCNA discontinued the social aspects of the Conventions but continued business and committee meetings.

In 1949, in a very progressive move for the times, the segregated nurse associations in North Carolina merged into one united voice for professional nursing in the state. Conventions continued annually throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

By the mid-1960s the nature of nursing was changing. Nurses and nursing practice were becoming more autonomous and assuming greater importance in clinical decision making and care. The beginnings of advanced nursing practice were evident across the country. NCNA had been holding springtime "Clinical Sessions" at multiple locations across the state for several years. The ANA and several other state nurse associations had restructured to having biennial conventions alternating with years focused on "clinical sessions" alone. Delegates to the 1966 NCNA Convention voted to institute the same format for NCNA.

State Nurse's Association.

A meeting will be held in the Olivia Raney Library Building, Raleigh, N. C., Tuesday, October twenty-eight at four o'clock p. m. also Wednesday, twenty-ninth at ten o'clock a. m.

The object of the meeting is to organize a North Carolina State Nurse's Association for the purpose of registration and legislation.

All Graduate Nurses and all Training Schools are urged to take an active part in the discussions.

Planning for the first ever meeting of the North Carolina State Nurse's Association. *The Robesonian*, 9/16/1902.

For a decade, 1967-1977, this format was followed before annual conventions with clinical break-out sessions were re-instituted. Not having conventions in 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974 and 1976 account for the "mismatch" between the age of NCNA and the number of conventions. Since 1977 NCNA has held a convention every year. Thanks to technology, even a worldwide pandemic couldn't stop the nurses of North Carolina from meeting, sharing, learning and advocating for themselves and the people of North Carolina at the 2020 NCNA Convention.

Are you interested in joining the Nursing History Council? We would love to have you! NCNA members are welcome to join any council they wish. To change your council status, simply update your Member Profile at www.ncnurses.org or email LaurenZahn@ncnurses.org.

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the view of the North Carolina Nurses Association or its board of directors. ■