

Archived version from NCDOCKS Institutional Repository <http://libres.uncg.edu/ir/asu/>



UNC-Chapel Hill School Of Nursing Celebrates 70 Years Of Nursing Education

By: **Dr. Phoebe Pollitt, RN**

Abstract

On the crisp fall morning of September 14, 1951, a group of 27 young, White, women arrived on the segregated campus of UNC-Chapel Hill to begin their historic journey as the first class of Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree students in North Carolina. Recruited from across the state (and 2 from out of state), they became the first freshmen women to live on campus. Of the original class members, 17 graduated four years later. All passed the state board examinations and became leaders in our profession.

Pollitt P. (2021). UNC-Chapel Hill School of Nursing Celebrates 70 Years of Nursing Education. *Tar Heel Nurse*. Fall 2021:13. Publisher version of record available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rzh&AN=151992975&site=eds-live&scope=site>

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Nursing Celebrates 70 Years of Nursing Education

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

On the crisp fall morning of September 14, 1951, a group of 27 young, White, women arrived on the segregated campus of UNC-Chapel Hill to begin their historic journey as the first class of Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree students in North Carolina. Recruited from across the state (and 2 from out of state), they became the first freshmen women to live on campus. Of the original class members, 17 graduated four years later. All passed the state board examinations and became leaders in our profession.

Three main factors led up to the founding of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Nursing (SON). The first was the alarming statistic that North Carolina had the highest number of men rejected from military service in WWII due to poor health. Their status generally reflected the poor health suffered by many North Carolinians brought on by the poverty and hunger of the Great Depression of the 1930s and lack of funding for hospitals and health care due to the urgent needs of WWII in the first half of the 1940s. A second factor was a study completed in 1950 by the NC Medical Commission titled “Nursing and Nursing Education.” The

study’s primary finding was an acute shortage of nurses in the state, and particularly those educated to become administrators, educators, and public health nurses – those with a bachelor’s degree. Finally, a national survey of nursing education programs, titled “Nursing Schools at the Mid-Century,” revealed that over half of the nursing schools in NC were ranked in the bottom 25% of nursing schools in the country. NCNA used these statistics to garner support in the NC General Assembly to establish the first state funded collegiate school of nursing at UNC-Chapel Hill to address these problems.

Founding Dean Elizabeth Kemble, the first doctorally prepared nurse in North Carolina, quickly hired three faculty members: Alice Gifford, Ruth Dalrymple, and Ruth Boyles. Together they oversaw the construction of a nursing dormitory and classrooms, developed a budget, wrote curriculum, and recruited the first class of students. They relied heavily on Elizabeth Scott Carrington, RN, wife of an influential physician and sister to Governor W. Kerr Scott, to successfully navigate the state’s political and cultural climate to gain approval of the SON from the legislature.

Over the last 70 years, the UNC SON has graduated tens of thousands of nurses from its BSN, ABSN, MSN, NP, MSN, DNP, and PhD programs. These graduates are improving the health and well-being of people around the globe. They can be found at the bedside, in faculty and executive offices, in the state legislature, and research labs. The rich history of our state’s first BSN school of nursing deserves to be remembered.

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. ■

The UNC SON has proven a great success over its 70-year history. Some highlights from its early years include:

