

## **St. Agnes School of Nursing - 1896**

Source: <http://www.unctv.org/ncnursing/aanursing.html>

### **Organizing the Profession For African American Nurses**

At the same time that Mary Lewis Wyche was serving as a leader in the development of schools of nursing for young white women, a parallel development was happening in the African-American communities of Raleigh and Charlotte. On October 18, 1896, the St. Agnes Hospital in Raleigh opened its doors. By today's standards it would not even be recognized as a hospital. There was a single cold water faucet in the kitchen and water was heated over a wood stove to sterilize equipment. During its first six months of operation, the hospital cared for 17 inpatients and 35 outpatients. An additional 223 people received medical and nursing care in their homes.

The first Head Nurse was Marie Louise Burgess who was an African-American graduate of the New England Hospital for Women and Children. Students would clean, cook and make beds during the six month probationary period. If their work was acceptable and they wanted to pursue a career in nursing, they entered the hospital as student nurses. Most of their education was on-the-job training. They worked with the Matron, staff nurses and physicians on the wards, in the operating room and on home visits. In addition, they heard lectures which focused on the diseases and conditions of the current patient population. In 1898, St. Agnes graduated its first two nurses after a training program of 18 months.

Lincoln Hospital in Durham opened its doors in 1901 as the third hospital for African Americans in North Carolina. Construction costs were met by Washington Duke and the facility was open to all patients regardless of their ability to pay. The Lincoln School of Nursing opened in 1903. Miss Julia Latta, a graduate of the St. Agnes School of Nursing in Raleigh was the first director. Miss Patty Carter became the director of nursing in 1911. She was born in 1875 and was the daughter of Hawkins W. Carter who served Warren County as a representative and state senator during the reconstruction era. She obtained her education from Shaw University, St. Agnes Hospital and Lincoln Hospital in New York City. During her 37 years at Lincoln she served in nearly every leadership capacity. She was known to prepare meals in the kitchen, dispense medicines from the pharmacy, mop floors and help out where needed. In 1927, William K. Boyd in *The Scalpel* attributed the success of the institution to her dedication and countless hours of work.

Just as schools of nursing were segregated by race at the turn of the century, so was the North Carolina Nurses Association when it was founded in 1902. By the early 20th century, North Carolina had three strong schools of nursing for African Americans: St. Agnes in Raleigh, Lincoln in Durham and Good Samaritan in Charlotte and African-American women saw a need for their own professional association for registered nurses.

In August, 1920, Carrie Early Broadfoot and four other African-American nurses from North Carolina attended a meeting of the National Association of Negro Graduate Nurses in Washington, DC. They began discussing the formation of a state association. In January, 1923,

the North Carolina Association of Negro Registered Nurses was founded in Winston-Salem. Carrie Early Broadfoot was elected president and served in that capacity for the next eight years. Mrs. Broadfoot had been educated in the Frederick Douglas Memorial Hospital in Philadelphia and served for two years as the Superintendent of Nurses at St. Agnes Hospital.

The organization grew, despite lack of funds, no staff or permanent office space. The organization provided African-American nurses opportunities for professional growth. Educational and employment discrimination deeply concerned members of the association. By 1937, African-American nurses seeking employment in community health could only find jobs in Asheville, Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, Weldon, Wilmington and Winston-Salem.

By the 1940's, racial injustice was being questioned by more and more people. Organized nursing was in the forefront of breaking down racial barriers in North Carolina. During this decade leaders of the North Carolina Nurses Association and the North Carolina Colored Graduate Nurses Association created a plan to merge. In 1949, NCCGNA voted itself out of existence and NCNA voted to open its membership to all registered nurses in North Carolina. It took over a decade after the merger of the professional organizations for white schools of nursing to accept African-American women.