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FORMATION AND THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS
OF THE
6TH DISTRICT ILLINOIS NURSES' ASSOCIATION

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A professional association is an organization of practitioners who judge one another to be professionally competent and have banded together to perform the social functions which cannot be performed by the individuals in their separate capacities. ¹ The professional association sets rigorous standards for the profession to follow. These standards include: the recruitment of qualified personnel into the profession, the training and education of such professionals, the practice of the profession, and the standards for research in order to broaden the professional knowledge base.

The association, also creates a consensus that is able to speak authoritatively on behalf of the entire profession. This allows for a strong clear voice, which is organized and louder than many individual voices. For example, "Were a profession such as nursing to be heard through some 400,000 separate voices, with each professional nurse proclaiming her own views and sentiments, only cacophony could result. The association seeks to create a concrete of purpose instead." ²

The formation of nursing associations was critical to the growth of the nursing profession in order to advance it from just a trade-skill. Prior to the founding of state

¹ Merton, Robert K. "The Functions of the Professional Association," The American Journal of Nursing 58 (January 1958): 1.

² Ibid., p.4.

nursing associations, no standards were set for schools of nursing relating to instruction and training to be given at the schools. Also, no selectivity for recruitment of students was evident. This lack of standardization virtually allowed anyone to practice nursing. Regardless of the level and amount of training, all nurses functioned on the same levels. Some of the so-called nurses were poorly trained, including some uncertified nurses who had been dishonorably discharged when students. The state nursing associations by beginning to set standards helped to overcome this dilemma.

"In the year 1901, nurse leaders, to correct the nursing evils existing in Illinois, began to urge a state association to bring about needed state legislation likely to raise nursing standards."³ A general meeting of graduate nurses and student nurses was held on July 6, 1901 in the "rooms" of Miss Harriet Fulmer, Superintendent of the Visiting Nurse Association of Chicago and the soon-to-be 1st President of the Illinois Graduate Nurse's Association. The assembly adopted a resolution "to form an association to be known as the Illinois Graduate Nurse's Association . . . the primary object of which shall be to bring about State Registration of Nurses."⁴ The constitution was ratified on August 2nd, 1901. The

³ Towne, Pamela. "Pages from a Proud History," Chart 88 (January/ February 1991) : 4.

⁴ Ibid., p.4.

preamble states the reason for a State Nurses Organization and the object of the Association to be:

We, the graduates of recognized training schools for nurses and residents of the state of Illinois realizing that in union there is strength, do pledge ourselves to support by one personal effort and interest this organization to be known as "The Graduate Nurses' Association of the State of Illinois." The object of this association shall be to secure state legislature with regards to nurses and to advocate all other interests of the nursing profession.⁵

Finally on August 22, 1901, the Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses was incorporated.

In 1911, the State Association reorganized on the basis of district subdivisions according to railroad facilities. The district associations had the responsibility for looking after the individual nurse members' needs while supporting the actions of the State Association. Thus, the State Association would be stronger due to the overall state support without having to spend critical time on the local problems within each individual district.

⁵ Towne, Pamela. "Pages from a Proud History," Chart 88 (January/ February 1991) : 4.

On September 28, 1914 the 6th District of the Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses was organized.⁶ It included McLean, Livingston (except Dwight), Ford, DeWitt, and Logan counties. In 1915, the 6th District was reorganized, adding district 10 to form the new 6th District as it stands today. This included Kankakee and Iroquis counties.

Membership in the 6th District consisted of members of the Brokaw Hospital Alumnae Association and individual nurses of other alumnae associations who worked within the district. Only through alumnae affiliation could a nurse be eligible for district membership. On May 10, 1928, members of the Mennonite Alumnae Association were accepted into the membership of the 6th District.⁷ St. Joseph's Hospital Alumnae Association was also welcomed into the district on May 29, 1929.⁸ The Iroquis Hospital Alumnae Association was voted into membership in 1936.⁹

Trends in the nursing structure can be traced to the early meetings of the 6th District led by the first president , Miss Justice. The 6th District has steadily progressed through the years incorporating into their meetings the nursing process, legislation, public

⁶ "Sixth District Making Nursing History: Pride in the Past; Leaders in the Future." From Archives of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library in the School of Nursing Files, N.D., N.P.

⁷ "Minutes, Sixth District Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses," Report of Executive Secretary (May 10,1928) :59. From Archive of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library in the School of Nursing Files.

⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹ Ibid., p. 150.

relations and image, and nursing education. Expanding upon the purpose of the 6th district, the district meetings were not only held to discuss nursing business and issues within the 6th District and the State of Illinois, but also for social interaction among the members.

The quarterly general meetings for the 6th District were held in February, May, September, and November. The annual meeting held in November was for election of officers and board members, committee appointments, revision of by-laws and constitution, annual reports from officers of the districts, and the reading of the Illinois Association Graduate Nurses Convention report. Board meetings were held whenever business needs of the district needed to be attended. These were held more often than the quarterly meetings but all members did not have to attend. General meetings were typically held at the YWCA or the Nurses' Home at Brokaw Hospital in Bloomington; however, board meetings were held where ever convenient. Recorded in the February 17, 1927 minutes, "A board meeting was held at the close of the business meeting of the 6th District Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses at the Al-Soc Sweet Shop, 623 North Main Street."¹⁰ Also, recorded in the minutes were meetings held at individual board member's home

¹⁰ "Minutes, Sixth District Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses," Report of Executive Secretary (February 17, 1927) : 46. From Archive of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library in the School of Nursing Files.

The organization's primary concern was nursing business. This was shown by the committees established to tackle aspects of this nursing business. These committees included: Credentials, Legislature, Program-Arrangements, Finance, Relief Fund, Nomination, special committees of Private Duty, Public Health, Red Cross, Membership, Publicity and Image, and Education. The 6th District meetings followed parliamentary procedure to discuss many aspects of legislation, recruitment, public image, and education in order to benefit the nursing profession.

The district thoroughly explored and supported the legislative topics of "The Central Registry," eight-hour duty, and wage requirements, benefits, etc. for nurses. The Women's Eight Hour Law was effective July 1, 1937. It states in section 1, "The hours of work may be so arranged as to permit the employment of females at any time so that they shall not work more than eight hours during the twenty-four hours of any day."¹¹ On November 15, 1939, the eight-hour duty went into effect for private duty nurses in three hospitals within the 6th District. The wages were adjusted proportionately for the eight-hour duty. "For home nursing, there will be 8 and 24 hour nursing, seven dollars for the 24 hour and five dollars for 8 hours."¹² Then in 1940, figures were given based on

¹¹ "Women's Eight Hour Law," State of Illinois Department of Labor (July 1, 1937)

¹² "District News," ISNA Bulletin 36 (December 1939) :26.

a state wide survey as to the status of staff nurses regarding salaries, hours, vacations, sick benefits and other opportunities.

The 6th District was active in the support of state proposed legislature. In May 1965, the nurses of the 6th District supported the removal of the 36-month time requirement for nursing education and the 20 year age requirement. "Members of District 6, a constituent of the Illinois Nurses Association, support this nursing legislation because it will upgrade and improve the quality and quantity of nurses."¹³

The 6th District always stressed the importance of recruitment and increasing membership into the district and state association. This was directly affected by public relations and image. The media was very generous in supporting and providing publicity to 6th District in order to promote recruitment of individual nurses and students. With membership quotas to meet, incentives were offered to the district with the highest increase in membership. Recruitment strategies ranged from individual prizes, to public nursing promotion booths and displays, to a student-nurse organization. A prize was offered to the Alumnae Association attaining the greatest percentage of membership increase over the previous year within the

¹³ "New Nursing Laws Advocated," Daily Pantagraph (May 1965) : editorial. From Archive of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library in the School of Nursing Scrapbook.

district. In 1938 it was announced, "We, of the Sixth District are proud of the fact that we have more than met our membership quota for 1938."¹⁴ One recruitment strategy follows:

In the interest of recruitment of nurses, the graduate nurses of the 6th District, in cooperation with the schools of nursing of the three local hospitals, maintained a booth during the four days of the McLean County 4H Fair. In the main tent, space was rented and contained of and made attractive with posters and a huge purple banner, bearing in gold the insignia of the Future Nurses of America. Many fair-goers were attracted to the booth by the continuous motion picture which depicted life in a hospital and nursing school. Both graduate and student nurses from the three local hospitals (Brokaw in Normal, St. Joseph's and Mennonite in Bloomington) were in attendance at the booth throughout the fair. A surprisingly large number of people visited the booth and the nurses in attendance answered innumerable questions about nursing. The committee in charge of this project felt that the venture had been a real success in that it aroused a great interest in nursing and the nursing profession in many people who possibly had before given little thought to either.¹⁵

In reports received by May 1 - July 1, 1954, 6th District led the state in recruitment of members into the state association.

To help with the recruitment of new members, a Bloomington-Normal Association of State Nurses was organized in 1951. Membership included students and

¹⁴ "District News," ISNA Bulletin 35 (September 1938): 15.

¹⁵ "District News," ISNA 47 (October 1950): 14&19.

faculties representing St. Joseph's, Brokaw, and Mennonite Hospitals. This was the First Student association within the 6th District. Membership was given to all members of any Illinois State approved school within the district.

Along with recruitment, nursing education was always very strong in the 6th District. "Sixth District boast the existence of 6 Diploma Schools of Nursing at one time."¹⁶ In 1902, Brokaw Hospital School for Nurses was founded in Bloomington-Normal. The Mennonite Sanitarium Training School followed in 1919 and in 1923 the St. Joseph's School of Nursing was established in Bloomington. Brokaw Hospital School for Nurses in 1923 began to offer, in conjunction with Illinois Wesleyan University, a Bachelor of Science Degree and a Graduate Nurse Diploma. In 1959, Illinois Wesleyan University adopted its own baccalaureate school of nursing.

Nursing education was not always limited to students, but included present nurses and retired nurses. Red Cross classes were offered regularly on the topics of Hygiene and Care of the Sick. Special clinics and institutes were also held on topics of tuberculosis, private duty nursing, polio, etc. For example in 1936," a private duty Institute was held in Bloomington, March 2nd and 3rd, with Miss Ethel Swope of the American Nurses'

¹⁶ "Sixth District Making Nursing History: Pride in the Past; Leaders in the Future." From Archive of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library in the School of Nursing Files.

Association as the speaker."¹⁷ In 1942, St. Joseph's, Brokaw, and Mennonite Hospitals offered nursing refresher courses for previously trained nurses. In 1953, when polio was a threat, a Polio Workshop was held at St. Joseph's Hospital.

The meetings of the 6th District not only discussed issues related to nursing, but also provided social interactions to its members. The members had all sorts of entertainment provided at the meetings ranging from music and dancing, to interesting speakers on every type of topic. The Illinois Wesleyan University School of Music entertained the nurses of the 6th District frequently with orchestras, vocalists, and combination bands. They provided much of the entertainment along with a variety of guest speakers. The guest speakers spoke on various educational topics relating to nursing and the medical field. The close of every 6th District meeting, included a social hour for the members as is evident in the minutes of the September 20, 1934 meeting: "The meeting adjourned for the usual social hour," signed Wilma R. Sevour, RN, secretary, 6th District.¹⁸

Aside from the regular social hours, the 6th District held elegant teas and dinners. These teas and dinners were

¹⁷ "District News," ISNA Bulletin 33 (June 1936) : 19.

¹⁸ "Minutes, Sixth District Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses," Report of Executive Secretary (September 20, 1934) : 129. From Archive of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library in the School of Nursing files.

used to celebrate special occasions. For instance in 1939, "A tea was held on Sunday, June 25th , at Hotel Tilden Hall, honoring the new graduates of training schools within the district."¹⁹

The 6th District moved steadily forward through the good times and bad times in nursing history. Its members have tackled tough problems regarding legislature, recruitment and retention, and nursing education, while maintaining a strong social calendar for its members.

On January 14, 1965, the 6th District celebrated its 50th anniversary at Illinois State University. "Uniforms from various services and vintage were modeled and our district history was reviewed."²⁰ This accomplished history would press further the advancement of the nursing profession and the 6th District through the years to come, laying a strong foundation to build upon.

¹⁹ "District News," ISNA Bulletin 34 (September 1937) : 3.

²⁰ "Report to the House of Delegates for the 1964-66 Biennium," (October 1966) : 53. From the Illinois Nurses' Association Chicago, Illinois.

For More Information on the 6th District Illinois Nurses' Association:

1. Dunwiddie, Mary. A History of the Illinois State Nurses' Association 1901-1935, (Illinois State Nurses' Association 1937)
2. "Minutes, Sixth District Illinois State Association of Graduate Nurses," Reports of the Executive Secretary (September 1921- April 1940). From Archive of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library in the School of Nursing Files.
3. "School of Nursing Files," From Archive of the Illinois Wesleyan University Sheean Library.