
Mary Wyche's Nomination to the ANA Hall of Fame written by Dr. Eugene Tranbarger

Mary Lewis Wyche, RN NCNA founder Mary Lewis Wyche is one of five inductees to the ANA Hall of Fame. Martha Barham, NCNA President, and Russell (Gene) Tranbarger, former NCNA President and member of the Centennial Project Committee will accept the award on behalf of Miss Wyche on July 1 at the ANA Convention. Nomination of Mary Lewis Wyche for ANA Hall of Fame By Russell Tranbarger, EdD, RN THE NORTH CAROLINA NURSES ASSOCIATION IS PROUD to nominate Mary Lewis Wyche, RN for the ANA Hall of Fame Award. The nominee's contribution to professional nursing in the state was to implement her vision about the need to establish key building blocks to parallel such structures at the national level. Her ability to invigorate and organize others enabled nursing in the state to move forward rapidly to establish training schools, set standards for education and practice, charter a state nurses' association, and persuade a legislature to enact a licensing act, the first one in the US. The organizational structures she foresaw as essential to advancement of professional nursing have served the state well and stand as the basis for changes and new directions in this century. Mary Lewis Wyche was born in 1858. She graduated from college and moved to Chapel Hill at her father's direction, to keep house for her two younger brothers while they attended the University of North Carolina. In 1891 she was "free" to resume her life and went to nursing school at Philadelphia General Hospital, graduating in 1894, at the age of 36. She returned to North Carolina and practiced nursing in Raleigh. In 1901 she attended an International nursing meeting in Buffalo, New York. She returned with a three-pronged vision of nursing needs for her state if it was to play a vital role in the development and advancement of the profession of nursing, in North Carolina and nationally. She began to 1), organize nurses to establish a state association to bring unity and support for nursing, 2), organize support to enact a registration law for nursing, and 3), establish training schools that incorporated standards in curriculum, practice, and conduct. Organization of State Nursing Organization. Miss Wyche first established the Raleigh Nurses Association in 1901. It remains alive today as NCNA District #13. She then organized the North Carolina State Nurses Association in 1902. The archives show that she was the first signer of the articles of incorporation and served as president from 1902-1907. Establishment of a Licensing Board for Professional Nurses. Miss Wyche organized support that led to the enactment of legislation establishing the North Carolina Board of Nurse Examiners, the first in the nation, in 1903. She was appointed to the Board and served as Secretary-Treasurer from 1903-1908. The North Carolina Archives identify that of the thirty-five individuals licensed as registered nurses in 1903. One, Annie Lowe Rutherford, a graduate of Freedman's Hospital, Washington, D.C., was African-American. The notation after Ms. Rutherford's name was "col" in parenthesis. Establishing Nursing Training Programs. She organized the first training program at Rex Hospital, Raleigh, in the fall of 1894. The school admitted five students and those who graduated were the first registered nurses in the US as well as in North Carolina. Subsequently, she served as Superintendent of Nursing and established nursing programs at Watts Hospital, Durham, 1903. and at Sarah Elizabeth Hospital, Henderson, in 1915. Summary: The nominee presented here focused her energies and professional life on improving professional nursing. With uncanny insight she identified three areas of importance: nursing education, licensure and nursing organizations as the major enduring building blocks needed within the state and for linkage with national organizations. She truly led the way! The enduring achievements of Mary Lewis Wyche, are as relevant to professional nursing today as they were nearly a century ago. The three-pronged visionary approach to promote and advance professional nursing in its infancy provided guidance and a model continued on page 7 Tar Heel Nurse May - June 2002 ANA Awards Mary Lewis Wyche Named to ANA Hall Of Fame continued from page 6 for individuals in other states seeking the same goals. This early success surely provided encouragement and support to others seeking the same goals. In education, she foresaw with others, the need to standardize nursing schools and their curricula. She established three different schools and actively implemented her ideas of appropriate education and practice. She did this in time not too far distant from the Victorian era when women's roles were constrained. It is truly remarkable how she effectively lobbied members of the legislature to do her will when women lacked the vote. Over a span of 23 years she established and provided leadership in three schools of nursing, one of which still operates today and is well known for the quality of its educational programs. These schools served as exemplars for the development of other schools of nursing. In state licensure. Miss Wyche proposed early in the 20th century that state mandated licensing boards were needed to examine and register nurses qualified by education and practice. She began mobilizing support for such a law among nurses and members of the legislature. Further, she identified how and what such a law should regulate. In 1903, the legislature enacted the first practice act in the US. She succeeded even against the strong opposition of the Medical Society. The law was changed from her original bill and she lobbied effectively over the next ten years until all elements of the original bill were adopted. Miss Wyche saw a strong and effective nursing organization as essential for her goals to succeed. In 1901 she mailed cards to nurses she knew, inviting them to discuss the formation of a nursing organization. No one came to the meeting. She then mailed a second card, informed them of the excitement of those in attendance and the date for a second meeting. Every one came to that meeting to see what they missed at the first meeting! This core of nurses established the North Carolina State Nurses Association in 1902. Miss Wyche was the first to sign the articles of incorporation and served as its president for five years. In 1932 she was named honorary president for life of NCNA. Today this organization unifies and leads nurses to address critical issues and takes positions on issues of concern at the state, national, and international levels. The nominee is a nurse, who despite the cultural constraints and barriers of her time, was able to accomplish extraordinary achievements, which have earned her a place in the history of nursing. Her contributions reach far beyond any one state as she focused on standardizing and elevating the practice of nursing, and nursing as a profession.