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## Lydia Ruth Betts ; Public Health Nurse Durham, NC

From "Voices" by Evelyn Wicker

Lydia Ruth Flintal Betts, RN '35

Mrs. Betts was born August 31, 1913, in Durham, North Carolina, the third of ten children. Her father worked at North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company and her mother was a housewife. At about the age of twelve, she experienced the death of her mother and a sibling. Being the eldest girl she was given the responsibility of caring for the other children. This resulted in her inability to attend school for a while. She and her siblings were assisted by family members during this period. Later, she returned to school and was a 1935 graduate of Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing. She received a bachelor of science degree in nursing from North Carolina College (now North Carolina Central University) in 1966. She also held a certificate in public health nursing from St. Phillips Medical College of Richmond, Virginia, and attended the Certified Public Health Nursing Supervisor Training Program at the Public Health Nursing Section of the North Carolina State Board of Health. She died November 1996.

Mrs. Betts has been recognized as an early pioneer in public health in Durham County. She was the first African American to be appointed supervisor of the Public Health Department in Durham County in 1971.

During her interview, she said that her grandmother had been midwife and that she had accompanied her at some birthing events. These events influenced her decision to become a nurse. She held supervisory positions at Lincoln Hospital and worked in several hospitals outside of North Carolina. Before joining the Durham County Public Health Department in 1944, she was a public health nurse at Wayne County Health Department, Goldsboro, North Carolina, and at the Pearson County Health Department, in Roxboro, North Carolina.

Mrs. Betts was very active in both community and professional organizations. Her professional involvements include: President, Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing Alumni Association; member, American Nurses Association and District 11; board member and chairperson of the Bylaws Committee of the District 11, North Carolina Nurses Association; chairperson, Nominating Committee, North Carolina Conference of Public Health Supervisors, Directors and Consultants; member, Legislative Committee, North Carolina Conference of Public Health Supervisors, Directors and Consultants; and member, Governing Council of the North Carolina Public Health Association, where she earned a life membership.

Mrs. Betts loved the Chi Eta Phi Sorority, Inc., of which she was a life member. She was the chapter's first Anti-Basileus, and she served as Tamias for more than twelve years, as Tamiochus, as chair of the Nominating and Finance Committee, as a treasurer of the southeast region.

She was also a life member of the NAACP, a member of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc., a member of the Coordinating Council for Senior Citizens and AARP, a member of the YWCA and Women-in-Action for the prevention of Violence and its causes, and a board member and Secretary of the American Cancer Society, Durham Unit. Mrs. Betts provided voluntary transportation for cancer patients and was appointed to the Patient Advocacy Committee of the Durham County Nursing Homes, for which she served as secretary.

A deeply religious person, she was a life-long member of White Rock Baptist Church, in Durham North Carolina; a member of the Senior and Sanctuary Choirs, for which she served as Financial Secretary and Chair of the Bylaws and Policy Committee; a leader, and for several years the secretary, of the church's College View District; a member of the Susie V. Norfleet Sunday School Class; and a member of the Rosewood Street Community club.

Mrs. Betts listed her grandmother; Mrs. Helen Miller, the chairman of the Department of Nursing at NCCU; Dr. Warren; and Mrs. Shirley Callahan, the director of nursing at Durham County Department of Health, as persons who were influential in her life choices and who supported her throughout her career.