

Edith Corrine McNeill Holmes (1905- 1981)



Mrs. Edith McNeill Holmes (left) is retiring this year as public health nurse in Halifax County after 40 years of service. She was honored recently by District Seventeen at a dinner meeting. Mrs. Davis Dickens Clark, (center), supervisor of public health nursing in the county, presented a gift from the District to Mrs. Holmes. Miriam Doughtry (right), state director of practical nurse education, was guest speaker. Known affectionately by her co-workers and friends as "Nurse Mac", Mrs. McNeill in the early years of her nursing career crusaded for improvement and control of the practice of midwifery. For many years she was "chief stork" in Halifax County. Dr. Robert F. Young, county health director, writes of her: "No one on this green earth will ever be able to evaluate or accurately assess the contribution Nurse Mac has made to the public health and welfare of Halifax County. Her accomplishments have ever been directed to the prevention of disease, misery, and ignorance. . . . Nobody really believes that Nurse Mac is going to retire; she's just going to be her own boss and help others on her own terms."

Edith Corrine MacNeill Holmes was born on June 5, 1905, to Dr. A.S. and Georgianna McNeill and grew up in Clarkton, North Carolina. She graduated from the St. Agnes Hospital School of Nursing in Raleigh, NC in 1923 and passed the NC State Board of Nursing Examination in 1924. She worked at a doctor's office before joining the Halifax County Health Department in 1924. She was a public health nurse in Tarboro for 40 years. She began working in midwife supervision the following year and trained all 75 midwives in her county. She married briefly, (to William Holmes on December 23, 1934) divorced, and served as a role model and mother figure to several young people in her community. She retired in 1964.

Holmes was active in the NC Association of Colored Graduate nurses and served as President of District 9 (which included Goldsboro, Wilson, Sanitorium, Fayetteville, Tarboro and Rocky Mount) from 1936-1941. In 1942 she was elected Treasurer of the state-wide association.

Holmes was black, and in the oral history interview cited below, she speaks of connecting African American, Native American, and mixed-race patients. She faced discrimination and segregation. Holmes gave vaccinations, sometimes traveling to farms during the lunch hour to administer them to workers who lacked the time to visit her clinic. She dealt with tuberculosis and tuberculin testing as well as venereal disease treatments and midwife supervision. Her tasks included educating the midwives and mothers about maternity health. Holmes talks about the role of poverty in public health issues and describes her efforts to secure resources for her patients. She discusses folk medicine

and lay medical practitioners. Holmes covers the process of school visits and school screening. She discusses the way of life of black tenant farmers in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as that of the African American community in general.

She died July 5, 1981, in Weldon, NC. Here is her obituary:

[Rocky Mount Telegram](#)

[Rocky Mount, North Carolina](#)

08 Jul 1981, Wed • Page 9

She is mentioned briefly in these articles:

[Roanoke Rapids Herald](#)

[Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina](#)

31 Mar 1938, Thu • Page 10

[Roanoke Rapids Herald](#)

[Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina](#)

11 May 1944, Thu • Page 4