

Mississippi Nurses' Association 1911 to present

When Jennie Quinn Cameron, Superintendent of Nurses at the Hattiesburg Hospital, moved to Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1910 she found that a “rather distressing situation existed.” There were no regulations for nursing and very little training was required.

For the Mississippi Nurses' Association, it all began in 1911 at Natchez Charity Hospital under the leadership of Jennie Quinn Cameron and Leola Steele as they began the undertaking of founding the Mississippi State Association of Graduate Nurses (MSAGN). After formalizing its constitution and creating its bylaws and code of ethics, MSAGN held its first convention in October 1911.

In the very first year of its establishment the MSAGN worked tirelessly to defeat a bill “to prohibit white nurses from caring for Negro patients in Mississippi hospitals.” Through their work in preventing the bill from reaching the Senate, the members of MSAGN understood the need for professional regulation, and formed a legislative committee to draft a proposal for a Practice Act to establish a board of nurse examiners which would be comparable to legislative efforts in other states. On March 14, 1914 Governor Earl L. Brewer signed the Nurse Practice Act into law and by late October of the same year licenses were being issued to registered nurses in Mississippi. All of this took place in an era when women were not able to vote.

Through these efforts, MSAGN realized the value of “networking.” Correspondence was regularly sent to legislators, officers of related organizations, and “people of influence” when addressing circumstances that affected the profession of nursing and healthcare of the people of Mississippi.

As the United States entered two World Wars and more hospitals were created, a need for more nurses and schools of nursing ensued. To remain in step with these changes, documents were amended as the MSAGN membership increased and legislation evolved as the profession of nursing expanded. In 1932, the MSAGN was officially changed to the Mississippi Nurses' Association (MNA). The governing body of the association is its House of Delegates which is comprised of the Board of Directors, eighteen District Nurses' Association Presidents (DNA), and the elected delegates from each district association.

To truly understand the impact the Mississippi Nurses' Association has had on nursing in Mississippi, you will need to read *A Way to Serve—The Mississippi Nurses' Association, 1911-2011* written by Seetha Srinivasan, Director Emerita University Press of Mississippi online.