

References

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Kennedy, John F. "Remarks Upon Signing the Health Profession Educational Assistance Act." Sept. 24, 1963. Online by Gehard Peters and John T. Wooley, *The American Presidency Project*.

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Kentucky League for Nursing professional collection (to be archived).



Earliest photo of Kentucky League for Nursing Board of Directors — September 1973. From Left to Right: Dr. Ruth E. Cole, Gladys Cooper, Tom Connelly, Jr. (President), Jean Davis (Secretary), Helen Sligar, Polly Johnson (Vice President), Martha Kneudson. Absent from photo: Marian Meyer, Treasurer.

Ongoing efforts are being made by the current board of directors to archive historical documents for the KLN. If you have any documents or photos that you are willing to share, please mail them to the attention of Carrie Reeder, c/o Jeanie Carman to P.O. Box 1083, Richmond, KY 40476.



Nursing Week Commission from Governor John Y. Brown, Jr. (1981)



**Kentucky League
for Nursing**

HISTORY OF THE KENTUCKY LEAGUE FOR NURSING

By: Carrie M. Reeder

The Kentucky League for Nursing (KLN) was incorporated on June 1, 1955, to “foster the development and improvement” of public and private health services across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. As a subsidiary to the National League for Nursing (NLN), which was the first nursing organization in the United States, the KLN’s mission was to educate current and future nurses to ensure that the “needs of the people” were met in local communities. The League was formed to assist with the federal changes in the medical profession which followed the Nursing Practice Act (1950). Kentucky was riddled with diseases which led to many unregulated medicinal practices in the early twentieth century. By 1945, it was reported that Kentucky was one of the sickest states in the country, due in part to the World Wars, the Great Depression, lack of medical advancements, and inadequacy of regulation for health care professionals. While practicing without a certificate was not legal, by 1937 many nurses still practiced without proper training or registering with the Board of Nursing. The Kentucky League for Nursing was instrumental in offering assistance for the establishment of nursing education and standardization in the Commonwealth. (see *Kentucky Board of Nursing History*, 9-14).

The early years of the KLN are somewhat unclear due to a lack of readily available information; however, the founding members had a clear vision of assimilating current and future nurses into the organization for education and training. They distributed League information to practicing nurses, encouraged the enlistment of nursing students, and assisted with the formation of the Kentucky Health Council. The KLN and the Council for Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing offered the first noted annual convention and training for health care professionals called "Through the Eyes of the Nurse, Doctor, and Social Worker," as early as, September, 1960. Following President John F. Kennedy's 1963 Health Professions Educational Assistance Act, the Kentucky Board of Nursing requested the League to assume a leadership role in state planning for nursing education in the Commonwealth. The League agreed and immediately nominated a committee to assist in the project which required a commission from Governor Edward T. Breathitt (1963-67) who took an interest in mental and public health issues. By 1964, the League boasted of 283 members and shifted their focus to encompass a "forward look, planning for the future in nursing."

The KLN Board of Directors believed that a Commission for Nursing Education would provide current and future nurses to gain "status and magnitude" in the profession. In cooperation with other state nursing organizations, their vision for the commission was to uncover needs and resources throughout the state, make recommendation for continuing education, conduct and publish research, and secure needed federal and state monies for the future medical advancement. This was partially enabled due to President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" which

took place in Martin County, Kentucky. Johnson's goal was to eradicate anything which might stand in the way of impoverished people's financial success. This included access to education, creation of employment, and modern health care practices. The success or failure of his domestic war is debatable; however, the Kentucky League for Nursing followed his call. In 1964, the KLN shifted their vision to focus toward Nursing Leadership and Nurse Educators. The League held annual conferences for nursing professionals to learn the most up-to-date medical practices. Gains were made in 1967 when a bill to "extend and expand" comprehensive health care was signed into effect by the Kentucky Congress. In response to the bill, convention speaker, Sister Cecilia Ann said, "Society is demanding and by law health planning must be done. Health services must be acceptable, accessible, and available."

As the 1970s brought waves of social change in the United States, the Kentucky League for Nursing maintained a forward vision of the future of nursing. In order to provide equal opportunities for those who chose the nursing profession, the KLN made two new adjustments to their focus: scholarship funding and continuing education. It is not entirely clear the exact date that the scholarships began, but as early as 1969, one Allstate Scholarship was awarded in the amount of \$750. The scholarship was payable over a two year period to assist a qualifying nursing student who needed additional financial support, and was accepted to a school accredited by the National League for Nursing. By 1977, the League annually supported students who were economically disadvantaged, but had potential as successful nursing candidates.

The Kentucky Board of Nursing mandated that by 1982, all professional nurses were required to have continuing education hours. The KLN agreed to sponsor education programs to meet the needs of health care workers as early as 1968 to accommodate the foreseeable standardization in nursing continuing education. Governor John Y. Brown, Jr. (1979-1983) proclaimed the week of Dec. 6 – 12, 1981, the "Kentucky League for Nursing Week." The proclamation commended the League for their "significant contributions" to health care, for their generous scholarships, aiding to meet the manpower needs in the health profession, and for their continuing education programs.

After a reorganization of the KLN in 2004, the League continues to follow NLN guidelines, support nursing educators, and those pursuing higher education degrees. Today, the Kentucky League for Nursing assists nurse educators to meet the challenges in an ever-changing medical industry. This year, three annual scholarships will be awarded to exceptional nurse educators pursuing leadership opportunities. Also an award for Teaching Excellence will be granted to an outstanding educator in the field. In accordance with the historical achievements of the League, they maintain a commitment to provide two continuing education workshops each year. The League maintains a mission to, "advance quality nursing education to meet the unique needs of diverse populations in an ever changing healthcare environment at the constituent level to advance the nation's health."