



1889



STORY



AUDIO

ICN
TODAY

Ethel Gordon Fenwick

Formation of the International Council of Nurses

On 1 July 1899, the foundation of the International Council of Nurses was proposed by Ethel Gordon Fenwick ([read more](#)) at the Annual Conference of the Matron's Council of Britain and Ireland. This meeting was to have far reaching consequences for nurses, as ICN would bind them together in professional fellowship in the years ahead by enlarging their vision through congresses and education.

Gordon Fenwick believed that to raise the standard of nursing, it was necessary to raise the standard of education of nurses and provide them with registration as evidence of that training (Bridges, 1967). In 1887, she founded the British Nurses Association (later the Royal British Nurses Association) to campaign for the state registration of nurses. It was during her visit to Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore that she met Lavinia Dock, assistant director of the nursing department, who shared Gordon Fenwick's passion for the rights of women and nurses.

In June 1899, the Matrons Council of Great Britain and Ireland held its second annual conference at Gordon Fenwick's London home where she spoke of 'the international idea' (Bridges, 1967). Gordon Fenwick argued that nurses throughout the world would benefit from a similar body and proposed 'That step be taken to organise an International Council of Nurses' (Bridges, 1967, p.8).

"The nursing profession, above all things at present, requires organisation: nurses, above all other things at present, require to be united. The value of their work to the sick is acknowledged at the present day by the Government of this and all other civilised countries but it depends upon nurses individually and collectively to make their work of the utmost possible usefulness to the sick, and this can only be accomplished if their education is based on such broad lines that the term 'a trained nurse' shall be equivalent to that of a person who has received such an efficient training and has proved to be also so trustworthy that the responsible duties which she must undertake may be performed to the utmost benefit of those entrusted to her charge. To secure these results two things are essential: that there should be recognised systems of nursing education and of control over the nursing profession. The experience of the past has proved that these results can never be obtained by any profession unless it is united in its demands for the necessary reform, and by union alone can the necessary strength be obtained. (ICN archives)

In bringing her idea to fruition, Gordon Fenwick remarked that influential members of the nursing profession in other countries must be consulted as to the best constitution for governing an efficient International Council of Nurses.

The first meeting of the International Council of Nurses provisional committee was held at the Matron's House, St Bartholomew's Hospital. Between 1899 and 1900, a constitution for ICN was drafted and on 5 July 1900 duly accepted.

Gordon Fenwick E (1901). The International Council of Nurses: A Message from Its President. *The American Journal of Nursing*, 1(11), 785-790. <http://doi.org/10.2307/3402379>

Bridges D. M (1967) A History of the ICN 1899-1964 *Pitman Medical*, London, Ch. 21:pg 180.





1889



STORY



AUDIO



Annual Conference of the Matron's Council of Britain and Ireland, London

– Ethel Bedford Fenwick, ICN President, 1900-1904



ICN
TODAY



On 1 July 1899, at the Annual Conference of the Matron's Council of Britain and Ireland in London, I proposed the foundation of the International Council of Nurses.

“The nursing profession, above all things at present, requires organisation: nurses, above all other things at present, require to be united. The value of their work to the sick is acknowledged at the present day by the Government of this and all other civilised countries but it depends upon nurses individually and collectively to make their work of the utmost possible usefulness to the sick. To secure these results two things are essential: that there should be recognised systems of nursing education and of control over the nursing profession. The experience of the past has proved that these results can never be obtained by any profession unless it is united in its demands for the necessary reform, and by union alone can the necessary strength be obtained.

“My suggestion, briefly, is therefore that we should here and today inaugurate an International Council of Nurses, composed of representatives of the nursing councils of every country, a body which shall, in the first place, help to build up nurses councils in countries which do not now possess any nursing organisation at all, which shall afford to those countries the information acquired in England and America in the progress and development of our work, aiding them with our experience, helping them to avoid the difficulties which we have met.”





1889



STORY



AUDIO



ICN TODAY

Formation of the International Council of Nurses
(see story for background)

ICN still believes in strength in unity. Our mission is to represent nursing worldwide, advance the nursing profession, promote the wellbeing of nurses and advocate for health in all policies. Our President, Annette Kennedy, chose the Watchword “Together” saying that “...together we hold the power to influence, to drive change and to call for action.”

ICN
TODAY





Ethel Gordon Fenwick

Ethel Gordon Fenwick was a woman of great strength and leadership. Credited with founding the International Council of Nurses (ICN), the British Journal of Nursing, and a large number of other nursing organisations (most with the goal of achieving state registration for nurses in Britain), she was a suffragette, a feminist, a mother and wife. Born Ethel Gordon Manson on 26 January 1857 in northern Scotland, she was determined to become a nurse and started her training as a paying probationer at the Children's Hospital in Nottingham at the age of 21 (Gordon Fenwick, 1901). After a year at Nottingham, she moved to the Manchester Royal Infirmary and, on completion of her training, was appointed Sister of Charlotte Ward at the London Hospital. By 24, Gordon Fenwick was Matron at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, a position she held for six years until her marriage to Dr Gordon Fenwick in 1887. She set out to improve the standard of nursing through the establishment of a three-year training programme for nurses, and expecting very high standards from her nursing staff. Gordon Fenwick also became very aware of the need to protect the public from untrained nurses. These concerns led directly to her life-long work in advocating for the professional independence of nurses through policy, legislation and practice.

Gordon Fenwick was elected as the first president of ICN, a position she held for five years. She was subsequently appointed honorary president with a seat for life. Gordon Fenwick did not end her involvement with ICN and continued her involvement for the rest of her life, attending congresses in 1909, 1912, 1931, and 1937. Meetings of the ICN executive continued to be held regularly at her home.

Gordon Fenwick established several other enduring legacies. At the 1912 congress in Köln, she announced plans for a Florence Nightingale Memorial Fund to help support the education of nurses subsequently formed in July 1934. The foundation continues to support the advancement of nursing education, research and other services to this day. Its signature project is the Girl Child Education Fund (GCEF). She coined the first ICN 'watchwords', which are chosen by each ICN President, and is a tradition that has continued since the first watchword 'work' in 1901. Gordon Fenwick was at pains to point out that ICN should avoid 'political entanglements and any suspicion of political 'bias' (Bridges, 1967, p.87).



Ethel Gordon Fenwick





1900



STORY

ICN
TODAY

Lavinia Lloyd Dock

Forming the First Constitution

On 5 July 1900, a meeting of the Provisional Committee took place. Representatives from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Great Britain and Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Union of South Africa and the United States of America (USA) were present. The business, transacted at the Matron's House, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, included the adoption of a Constitution and the election of the Honorary Officers.

Following consideration of the Draft Constitution and suggestions and criticisms from absent members of the Provisional Committee had been noted, the Constitution was proposed by Isla Stewart and seconded by M. Mollett. With only a few minor amendments the Council worked with this Constitution until its revision in Helsinki in 1925.

Article 1 of the Constitution defined the objectives of ICN as providing a means of communication between nurses of all nations, affording facilities for the interchange of international hospitality and providing opportunities for nurses to meet together from all parts of the world in order to confer upon questions relating to the welfare of their patients and their profession.

Article 1 also stated that the Honorary Officers shall be trained nurses, and the elected Honorary Officers shall be ex-officio members of all committees. A President of the International Council, having held the office for a full term, shall be made, upon retiring, Honorary President of the Council, with a vote on the Executive Committee and Grand Council for life. (ICN 1900)

The voting papers for the election of officers provided the following results: President: Ethel Gordon Fenwick (Great Britain); Hon. Secretary: Lavinia Dock (USA); Hon. Treasurer: M. Agnes Sniveley (Canada). (Breay & Gordon Fenwick 1931) Headquarters were established in one room at 431, Oxford Street, London. *The Preamble* focused on the sick and on nursing by stating:

"We, nurses of all nations, sincerely believing that the best good of our Profession will be advanced by greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose, do hereby hand ourselves in a confederation of workers to further the efficient care of the sick and to secure the honour and the interests of the nursing Profession." (ICN 1900)

It was agreed at this meeting that the First ICN Congress would take place in Buffalo, New York, USA in 1901, during the Pan-American Exposition, and that the organisation would be undertaken by Lavinia Dock ([read more](#)) and Agnes Sniveley ([read more](#)). These visionary nurses saw ICN as a federation of national nurses' bodies, each headed by a nurse, free of state control and representing only nurses.

Lynaugh, in discussing how international nursing came into being, wrote in 1999 of some of the thoughts of the ICN founders as they planned and worked at the turn of the 20th Century and on how they viewed themselves and nursing, based on a detailed written record of their first substantial discussions about broad nursing issues. (Lynaugh 1999).

ICN (1900) ICN Constitution (1899-1922). Document in the possession of the ICN Archives contained in the Office of the International Council of Nurses, Geneva, Switzerland and accessed by Marie Carney in August 2018.

Breay M. & Gordon Fenwick E (1931). History of the International Council of Nurses (1899-1925) Document in the possession of the ICN Archives in Geneva, Switzerland and accessed by Marie Carney in August 2018. Pg. 221

Kathryn Kish Sklar (1999). American National Biography <https://www.anb.org/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-1500182>

Barb Godin (2019). Women of Interest – Mary Agnes Sniveley. The Voice <https://www.voicemagazine.org/2019/03/22/women-of-interest-mary-agnes-snively/>

Lynaugh J E (1999) Inventing International Nursing: the first decade (1899-1910) International Nursing Review, Jan/Feb99; 46(1): 9-12.





1900



STORY



ICN
TODAY



ICN TODAY

Forming the First Constitution (see story for background)

Today, ICN's Objectives, as specified in the Constitution, are:

1. To influence nursing, health and social policy, professional and socio-economic standards world-wide.
2. To assist national nurses' associations* (NNAs) to improve the standards of nursing and the competence of nurses.
3. To promote the development of strong national nurses' associations*.
4. To represent nurses and nursing internationally.
5. To establish, receive and manage funds and trusts which contribute to the advancement of nursing and of ICN.





Lavinia Lloyd Dock

Lavinia Lloyd Dock (26 February 1858–17 April 1956) was a nurse, suffragist, and social reformer. Born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, she graduated from the Training School for Nurses at Bellevue Hospital in New York in 1886. She established herself as a leader in the nursing field with the publication of *Textbook for Materia Medica for Nurses* (1890); the first manual of drugs for nurses, it served as the standard nursing textbook for a generation. In 1890 she was appointed assistant superintendent of nurses at the new Johns Hopkins Hospital, became secretary of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools in 1893 and also formed the Nurses Associated Alumnae (later the American Nurses Association), which was modeled after the American Medical Association.

For 20 years, Dock worked with other public health nurses to provide preventive care and health education to poor immigrants. Their activities made these nurses the chief authorities on immigrant health and public health reform in New York City. From 1900-1922, Dock served as Honorary Secretary of ICN. She was the editor of the “Foreign Department” of the *American Journal of Nursing*, a column through which she dispensed information on the practice and status of nursing and of public health worldwide. With Adelaide Nutting, her former student at Hopkins, Dock wrote the two-volume *History of Nursing* (1907; revised and two volumes added, 1912). She also helped to organize the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses in 1908.

Dock was a great supporter of women’s rights, opposing state regulation of prostitution and publicly to advocating for the treatment of venereal disease. In 1907, she joined the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women (later the Women’s Political Union). In 1917 Dock became a member of the advisory council for the National Woman’s Party. She picketed the White House and was jailed (briefly) three times that year for militant suffrage activities. Dock advocated the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1921.

In 1947 she was honored for her achievements at the International Council of Nurses convention.



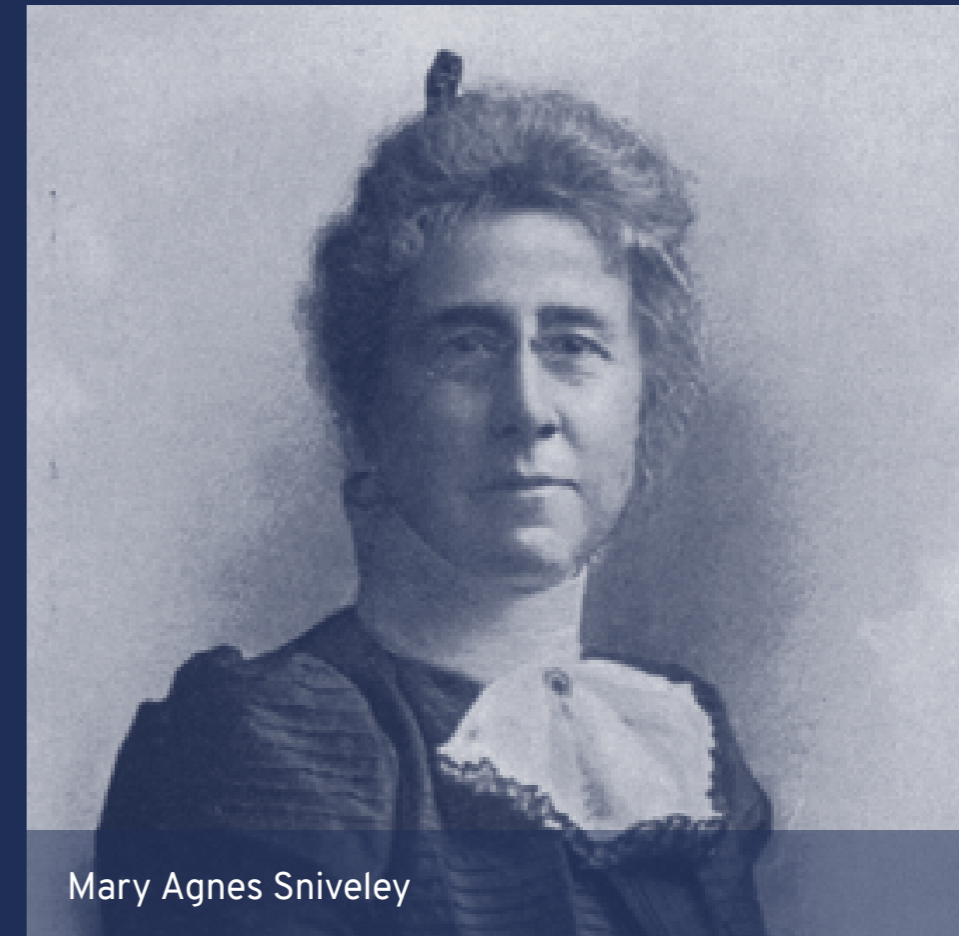
Lavinia Lloyd Dock





Mary Agnes Sniveley

Mary Agnes Sniveley (1847-1933) was ICN Honorary Secretary from 1900 to 1904. Born in Ontario, Canada, Sniveley attended New York's Bellevue Training School for Nurses and then served as Lady Superintendent of the Toronto General Hospital's School of Nursing from 1884 to 1910 where she established the first nursing student residence and a proper curriculum. She was named as the first president of the Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses in the United States and Canada, holding that position from 1908 to 1912. She was also the founder and first president of the Canadian Nurses Association.



Mary Agnes Sniveley





1901



STORY



AUDIO

ICN
TODAY

First ICN Congress, Buffalo, USA

In keeping with ICN's ideals to inform and educate, the first international Congress was held in Buffalo, New York, USA on 16 September 1901. Four nursing societies all recognised as leaders in their fields of nursing attended: The Nurses Associated Alumnae of the United States; The American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses; the International Council of Nurses; and the Spanish-American Order of War Nurses; along with 100 nurses from Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the USA. The focus of the Congress was on the administration of hospitals in Great Britain, United States and Australia and on the education of student nurses.

On 17 September 1901, a public meeting of ICN was held in a large hall of the Women's Educational Union and chaired by Gordon Fenwick, President. Representatives were present from Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the USA. Gordon Fenwick reminded those present:

"The work which lies before us in the organisation of an International Council of Nurses may well impress us with its magnitude. We have written down its Constitution – a Constitution pregnant with, and powerful for good – but we have to make that Constitution live. Constitutions live, and to do this we must inspire it with the vital force of a fine powerful spirit. Hence 'Work' must be our Watchword."

The President then described how ICN must develop:

"The graduate nurses will combine to form alumnae associations; the national society alumnae will federate to form a national council; and the national councils are then eligible for affiliation with ICN. We have, in sort, secured for our members' professional suffrage."

During the opening, the President of the Congress, Isabel McIsaac, Superintendent of Nursing, Illinois Training School for Nurses, Chicago and Honorary Member of the Matron's Council of Great Britain and Ireland voiced her opinion:

"If the phenomenal growth of nursing is any indication of its righteousness, then who can doubt our future. Small wonder that our pioneers, some of whom are still with us, express themselves as sometimes awed by the mighty impetus of the ball they started rolling, scarcely more than a generation ago."

Interesting papers, followed by discussions were presented on the first day: *Relation to Training Schools (Isla Stewart)*; *The attitude of nurses towards women on hospital boards (Isabel Hampton Robb)*; *Nurses' Co-operative Societies (Diana C. Kimber and S. E. Cartwright)*; *The League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital (E. M. Waind)* and *Nursing Organisation in Australia (Susan B. McGahey)*. On the last afternoon of the Congress, Gordon Fenwick spoke on *The Organisation and Registration of Trained Nurses*, suggesting, in broad outline, a measure for the state registration of nurses, which she thought would be easy to adapt and applicable to every country.

There was uncertainty over how ICN membership should be managed. A recurring refrain throughout the discussions taking place during the Congress was whether to involve physicians in their new organisations. Others present were unsure about how nurses in leadership positions could relate to the upper-class women on hospital boards, who were often perceived as not understanding nursing issues. The Congress gave particular attention to the problems surrounding the organisation of nurses and how to support their political agenda. Also of concern was what to do about the many graduate nurses whose "standards are not what we (the leaders) would wish". It was agreed that the education of nurses should lie in the hands of nursing organisations who would work for suitable legislation on regulation of nursing, few realising how long this goal would take to be realised.

For the first time, official delegates from national nursing associations (NNAs) attended the Congress, not as individuals but representatives of NNAs. These nurses came together because of the lack of nursing education standards, exploitation of nursing students as cheap labour, deplorable work conditions and the need for statutory registration and in the belief that their strength would come with unity. (Breay M. & Gordon Fenwick E (1931). The first NNAs all had similar goals: to improve registration, education and regulation of nurses in order to better serve their populations.

Gordon Fenwick E (1899) ICN Papers ICN Headquarters pgs. 3-4. Document in the possession of the ICN Archives in Geneva, Switzerland and accessed by Marie Carney in July 2018.

Breay M. & Gordon Fenwick E (1931). History of the International Council of Nurses (1899-1925) Document in the possession of the ICN Archives in Geneva, Switzerland and accessed by Marie Carney in August 2018. Pg. 249

The Stewart Society (n.d.), Famous Stewarts, Isla Stewart – matron, nurse, author & educator. <https://www.stewartsociety.org/history-of-the-stewarts.cfm?section=famous-stewarts&subcatid=20&histid=184>





1901



STORY



AUDIO



ICN
TODAY



ICN TODAY

First ICN Congress, Buffalo, USA
(see story for background)

Today, ICN has counts over 130 national nursing associations as its members.

ICN continues to recognise that setting and enforcing standards for nursing education and practice is a major responsibility of organised nursing. It is a key aspect of nursing's progress as a profession and essential for the protection of the public. With globalisation, free trade and telecommunications, regulation of nursing practice is attracting ever greater attention. ICN produces competencies required of nursing care providers across the continuum of care from the support worker to the advanced practice nurse, organises biennial regulatory forms; and provides continuing education credits to help nurses continue their professional development.





1901



STORY



AUDIO



First ICN Congress, Buffalo, USA

– Isabel Mclsaac, President of the 1st ICN Congress



ICN
TODAY



We're here at the first Congress of the International Council of Nurses in Buffalo. We have leaders of nursing from four nursing societies: The Nurses Associated Alumnae of the United States, The American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses; the International Council of Nurses and the Spanish-American Order of War Nurses, as well as 100 nurses from Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the USA. We can't wait to get started to discuss n the administration of hospitals in Great Britain, United States and Australia and on the education of student nurses.

“If the phenomenal growth of nursing is any indication of its righteousness, then who can doubt our future. Small wonder that our pioneers, some of whom are still with us, express themselves as sometimes awed by the mighty impetus of the ball they started rolling, scarcely more than a generation ago.”





Isla Stewart

Isla Stewart (1856-1910) was a hospital matron of St Bartholomew's Hospital in London and a founding member of the Royal British Nurses Association. Born in Scotland, Stewart began working at St Thomas' Hospital in London, England at the age of 23, as a special probationer in the Nightingale Training School for Nurses. The Nightingale training emphasized the ideas of practical nursing experience over theoretical instructions, and possibly most importantly to Stewart, the moral values that all nurses have to possess to be successful and effective. Stewart left St Thomas' in 1885 to become matron at a smallpox hospital in Kent, England. In 1887, Stewart became the matron of St Bartholomew's Hospital in London. She brought order and education to the nursing programme, including a four-year training system for student nurses. In 1899, she published *Practical Nursing* with Dr H. E. Cuff, in an attempt to describe how nurses should work, emphasizing the idea that training should be required and that hospitals could create their own training programmes and employ the nurses immediately after completion. During her time as Matron at St Bartholomew's, she founded the League of St Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses, the first organisation of nurses in England. She also helped to found the Matrons' Council for Great Britain and Ireland and was a member of the provisional committee of the International Council of Nurses. She was a member of the Nursing Board of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service and an honorary member of the Irish Nurses' Association and the German Nurses' Association.



Isla Stewart



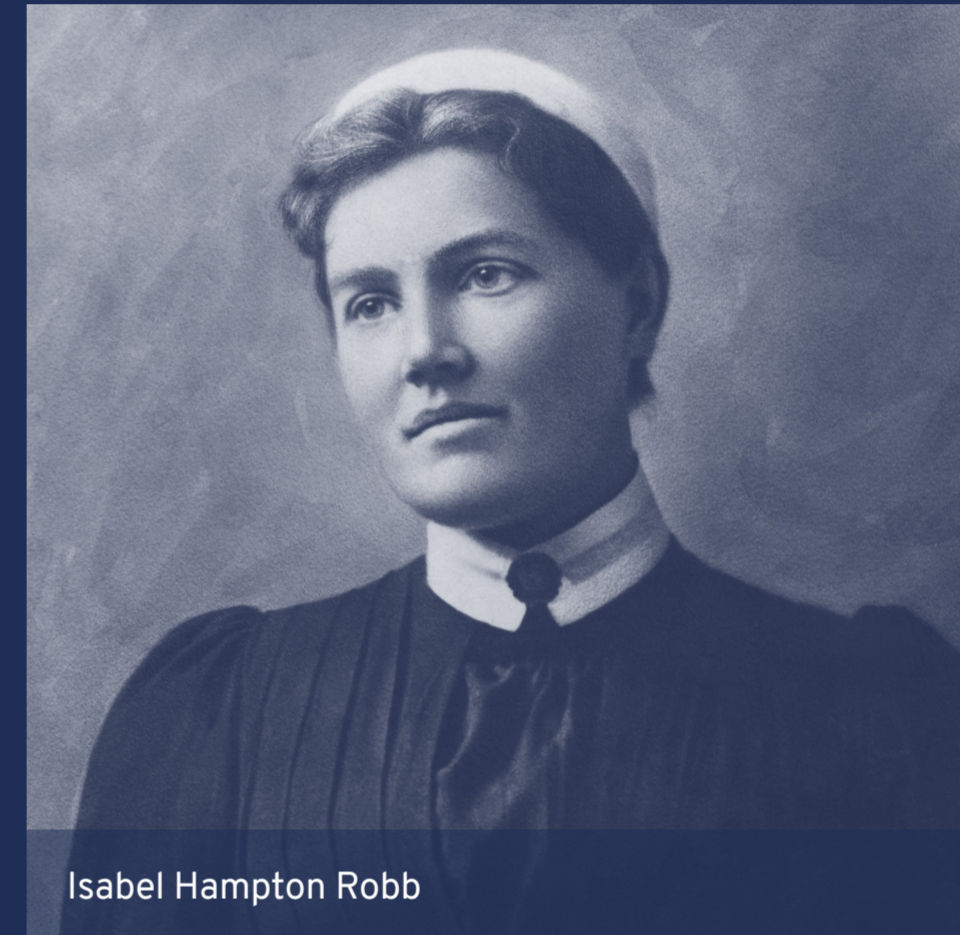


Isabel Hampton Robb

Isabel Hampton Robb (1859-1910) was born in Ontario, Canada. She entered Bellevue Training School for Nurses in New York in 1881 and received her diploma in 1883. Upon graduation, for a few weeks she served as substitute for the superintendent of nurses in the Woman's Hospital, New York. She then spent two years in Rome as a nurse at St. Paul's House. In 1886 she went to Chicago where she was the superintendent of Illinois Training School for Nurses at Cook County Hospital.

In 1889, she came to the newly opened Johns Hopkins Hospital, where she was the first Superintendent of Nurses and Principal of the Training School. Hampton was present in 1890 for the formation of the Women's Fund Committee, which called for the admission of women into the school of medicine. While Superintendent at Hopkins, she wrote the nursing text book, *Nursing: Its Principles and Practices*, published in 1893. In 1893 at the World's Fair in Chicago, she organized the Nurses section of the International Congress of Charities, Correction and Philanthropy, for which she arranged to have Florence Nightingale send an address. Out of these activities, the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses was organized, which would later become the National League for Nurses. She later served as its president.

Isabel Hampton Robb was active in the International Council of Nurses and the Committee to Secure by Act of Congress the Employment of Graduate Women Nurses in the Hospital Service of the US Army, which worked toward the establishment of the Army Nurse Corps. In 1896, Isabel Hampton Robb became the first President of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States and Canada, which would later become the American Nurses Association. Robb helped to found the American Journal of Nurses. She was instrumental in establishing the course in Hospital Economics at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1899. She worked to secure a place for professional nurses within the Red Cross Nursing Service. Locally, she served as an advisor to the Lakeside Training School for Nurses in Cleveland and helped found the Cleveland Visiting Nurse Association. She continued to write and give speeches on various nursing topics. She wrote the books *Nursing Ethics* in 1900 and *Educational Standards for Nurses* in 1907. She was killed April 15, 1910 in a streetcar accident in Cleveland, Ohio.



Isabel Hampton Robb





1904



STORY



Susan McGahey, ICN President 1904-1909

Second ICN Congress, Berlin, Germany 1904

The second Quadrennial Congress was held in 1904 in Berlin. Nine NNAs were represented from Great Britain and Ireland, USA, Germany, Sweden, France, Canada, Denmark, Holland and Australia. The second ICN President (1904-09), Susan Bell McGahey ([read more](#)) from Australia, was given the Watchword, 'Courage', which outgoing President, Gordon Fenwick, identified with the statement:

"Maybe we shall not be called upon to endure in the future as we have been in the past. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that nurses have won their battle. The right to think and judge for themselves, to help and govern themselves ... let us try to leave the world in some slight degree better than we found it."

Three NNAs from Great Britain and Ireland, Germany and the United States of America were affiliated to ICN membership. The focus remained on funding as the economic situation remained uncertain and ICN was in a precarious state financially as it had little funds apart from its members' contributions (Breay & Gordon Fenwick 1931). Hospital economics was keenly felt and the comparisons between hospital and private nurses were deplored (Lynaugh 1999). Of interest also was the Financial Report of 1901, presented by Margaret Breay ([read more](#)), Honorary Treasurer, which showed a balance in hand on 1 January 1901, of US\$14.18, and of donations received by her since that time of US\$14.78 (Breay & Gordon Fenwick 1931).

Forsyth, S (2005). McGahey, Susan Bell (1962-191), Australian Dictionary of Biography, national Centre of Biography, Australian National university. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mcgahey-susan-bell-13064>, published first in harcopy 2005, accessed online 9 September 2019.

Breay M. & Gordon Fenwick E (1931). History of the International Council of Nurses (1899-1925) Document in the possession of the ICN Archives in Geneva, Switzerland and accessed by Marie Carney in August 2018.

Lynaugh J. E. (1999) International Nursing Review 46(1) 1-121.

British Journal of Nursing (1940). Margaret Breay, S.R.N., S.C.M., January 1940. <http://rcnarchive.rcn.org.uk/data/VOLUME088-1940/page002-volume88-january1940.pdf>





Susan Bell McGahey

Susan Bell McGahey (1862-1919) was born in Ireland. After completing her general training at London Hospital, she moved to Sydney, Australia where she served as first matron of Carrington Convalescent Hospital, and matron at (Royal) Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney. Over the next 13 years, McGahey made nurse training more rigorous and systematic, employed wardmaids to take over the heavy cleaning previously done by probationers, appointed senior nurses to newly established administrative positions and founded the Prince Alfred Trained Nurses' Reunion. These reforms raised the status of nursing at the hospital and brought McGahey international acclaim. In 1899, she helped found the Australasian Trained Nurses' Association, the voluntary self-regulatory organisation that set uniform standards for training and registered trained nurses and training hospitals. In 1904, McGahey was elected president of ICN. McGahey was a member of the ATNA council until 1912 and founding editor of its journal, the *Australasian Nurses' Journal*. She died of cancer on 16 November 1919.



Susan McGahey, ICN President 1904-1909





Margaret Brey

Margaret Brey (1862-1939). Born in England, Margaret Breay received her nurses' training from St Bartholomew's Hospital School of Nursing in London, following which she received her certificate in obstetrics. She served as Matron of the Battersea Maternity Home and the Metropolitan Hospital. In 1893, she was appointed as Matron of the Zanzibar Hospital. She was sub-editor of the Nursing Record (later *British Journal of Nursing*) She took an active part on the organisation of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland and was present at the historic meeting in London on 1 July 1899 when the foundation of ICN was inaugurated. She was Honorary treasurer of the national Council of Nurses of Great Britain and Resident First Vice President of the British College of Nurses. Breay was known for her work to establish statutory education and state registration of nurses. She helped to draft the UK's first Bill for the Registration of Nurses in 1904, and served as ICN Honorary Secretary and Treasurer (1899-1900) and Honorary Treasurer (1904-1925).





1909



STORY



AUDIO



ICN TODAY



Sister Agnes Karll, ICN President, 1909-1912

Third ICN Congress, London, England

The third Congress (also titled the Second Quinquennial Meeting) held in London from 19-25 July 1909, at Westminster, demonstrated that ICN was spreading its message. In attendance were official delegates from associations already members of ICN: the Nurses Association of Great Britain and Ireland, the American Nurses Association, the German Nurses Association, the Nurses Association of the Netherlands, the Finnish Nurses Association, the Danish Nurses Organization and the Canadian Nurses Association, as well as *fraternal delegates and visitors* from other countries, including from the Australasian Trained Nurses' Association and its Tasmanian Branch, the Bordeaux Schools including a representative officially appointed by the Minister of War to represent Army Nurses, the Red Cross Society of Japan, the Spanish American Nurses of New York and distinguished medical men from France and Belgium. (Breay & Gordon Fenwick 1931).

Delegates were occupied with professionalism in nursing, borne out by the first paper, titled *An International Educational Standard for Nurses*, that acknowledged that whilst basic nursing principles remained, the scope of activities had broadened. Aims were more clearly defined, particularly in relation to education and practice and to the health of the community. Lavinia Dock and Ethel Gordon Fenwick, two of the nursing leaders of the world at this time, clarified the purpose and functions of ICN more clearly. Dock confirming that:

“The essential idea for which the ICN stands is self-government of nurses in their associations with the aim of raising ever higher the standards of education and professional ethics, public usefulness, and civic spirit of the members. The ICN does not stand for a narrow professionalism but for that full development of the human being and citizen in every nurse, which shall but enable her to bring her professional knowledge and skill to the many sided services that modern society demands of her.” (Arnold 1974)

The newly elected president, Sister Agnes Karll (Germany) ([read more](#)), was presented with the Watchword Life, elaborated on by Gordon Fenwick by saying:

“...life in its depth, variety and majesty-a very sweet and precious gift” ... and “the nurse of the future, inspired by a fine militant spirit, will make determined war upon fundamental wrongs which conduce to low vitality and physical deterioration... and “the life –giving elements are the common right of the community.” (Gordon Fenwick 1926, p.4)

Karll commenced the role by sending a message to Florence Nightingale with these words:

“Before I try to thank you for the great honour you have done me in electing me your President, I should like my first act to be one of grateful acknowledgement to that revered woman who came to our great Kaiserswerth and went back to England to alter the nursing system of all countries. I ask that this body send its greetings and assurances of grateful devotion to Florence Nightingale.”

The entire meeting voted to send this message to Nightingale. (Gordon Fenwick 1926, p.255)

Karll had spoken of social conscience portrayed by the fact that:

“People were beginning to recognise that prevention was better than cure and that the increasing demands being made on nurses could only be met by those who possessed an adequate, thorough and versatile training.” (ICN 1912)

The first paper of the Congress, titled *An International Educational Standard for Nurses* was presented by Isabelle Hampton Robb ([read more](#)), former Superintendent, John Hopkins Hospital Training School for Nurses, Baltimore, USA and Honorary Member of the Matron's Council of Great Britain and Ireland. The cordial greetings of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance were conveyed by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who said that their aim was closely aligned with that of ICN as both desired: “the elevation of the status of nurses, the best training and professional status; and what was the Suffrage Alliance aiming at but at elevating the status of the whole of womanhood throughout the world...” (Gordon Fenwick 1926, p. 253).

Gordon Fenwick in speaking about the nurses' curriculum advised that:

“The practice of nursing in the future will not be restricted to a few years mechanical training in hospitals and, subsequently, to a more or less narrow sphere of influence, but under a more comprehensive curriculum defined by state authority, it will attain a definite value to the community. So much of the moral welfare of the people depends on sanitary conditions that a nurse who grasps her opportunities should find herself in intimate touch with her fellow creatures. It is not sufficient that she should be the instrument for the relief of suffering; she must also be the harbinger of its prevention.” (Arnold 1974)

Breay M. & Gordon Fenwick E (1931). History of the International Council of Nurses (1899-1925) Document in the possession of the ICN Archives in Geneva, Switzerland and accessed by Marie Carney in August 2018.

Arnold V. (1974) Way to the Future. *International Nursing Review* 21 (3-4): 68

Gordon Fenwick (1926) The International Idea-A Retrospect. *I. C. N. January Vol 1 (1): 253-and 255* Accessed ICN Archives by M.Carney.

ICN (1912) ICN President Germany spoke at 3rd ICN Congress Cologne, Germany speaking “of social conscience” ICN Notes, p. 5 Archives ICN Headquarters, Geneva





1909



STORY



AUDIO



Third ICN Congress, London, England

– Agnes Karll, ICN President, 1909-1912



ICN
TODAY



It is an honour to have been elected President of ICN at this third Congress.

“Before I try to thank you for the great honour you have done me in electing me your President, I should like my first act to be one of grateful acknowledgement to that revered woman who came to our great Kaiserswerth and went back to England to alter the nursing system of all countries. I ask that this body send its greetings and assurances of grateful devotion to Florence Nightingale.”

We know that one of the greatest causes for concerns among nurses is Fatigue, and many of our discussions here will focus on the health and welfare of nurses. Our members have called out to hospital authorities to give the same consideration to the problem of overwork among nurses that industrial leaders give to the overwork among workers in industry!





1909



STORY



AUDIO



ICN TODAY



ICN TODAY

Third ICN Congress, London, England (see story for background)

ICN has several leadership training programmes to prepare nurses with leadership skills that are required to implement organisational change for the purpose of improving nursing practice and achieving better health outcomes as well as provide them with the skills they need to operate effectively in tough policy arenas.

- [Global Nursing Leadership Institute](#)
- [Leadership for Change](#)
- [Nursing Policy Leadership Programme](#)





Sister Agnes Karll

Sister Agnes Karll (1868-1927) was a pioneer in nursing in Germany. She trained as a nurse in Hanover and then worked as a nurse at the University of Göttingen. From 1891-1901, Agnes Karll worked in private nursing, mostly around Berlin. In 1903, she founded the "professional organization of female nurses in Germany" (BOKD), the precursor of today's DBfK, and became its first president. From 1909-1912, she was elected ICN President.



Sister Agnes Karll, ICN President, 1909-1912

