

# HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

## STUDIES IN INDIANA WOMEN'S HISTORY

Session 2

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### Fort Wayne's Women Medical Pioneers

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My purpose today is to look at Fort Wayne women medical pioneers who have been largely hidden from public memory. Much of this information is drawn from my article published in the *Old Fort News* in 2013. Further research during the past months has provided new insights and raised new questions.<sup>1</sup>

In the years immediately before and after the Civil War when she began her medical practice, Dr. Mary Thomas was shunned by medical colleagues in Fort Wayne. By the late 1870s, however, founders of the Fort Wayne College of Medicine encouraged women to study at their school. Over the college's thirty year existence, catalogues stressed their policy as follows: "The Faculty desires to call special attention to the fact that female students are admitted to study in this school upon the same basis and with the same privileges in every respect as male students; and each class hitherto has included ladies whose standing has been equal to that of any of the gentlemen."<sup>2</sup>

Advantages of medical training in Fort Wayne included the city's growing importance as a railroad hub "with the consequent accidents necessarily resulting from such an aggregation of railroads and their employees." Clinical instruction was offered at St. Joseph Hospital, at Hope Hospital, and at the Free

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\* Peggy Seigel's work has been published in the *Indiana Magazine of History* and *Old Fort News*.

<sup>1</sup> Peggy Seigel, "Fort Wayne's Women Medical Pioneers," *Old Fort News* 76:1 (2013).

<sup>2</sup> Clifton J. Phillips, "Mary Frame Myers Thomas" in Edward T. James, ed., *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971); Mary F. Thomas, M.D., "The Influence of the Medical Colleges of the Regular School of Indianapolis on the Medical Education of the Women of the State" with introductory remarks, *Indiana Medical History Quarterly*, (September 1979); *Fort Wayne College of Medicine Ninth Annual Announcement Session 1887-88*, p. 4, Internet Archive Search. See "Dr. W.H. Myers Dead," *The Fort Wayne News*, January 7, 1907, p.10, for detailed biography of one of the college's founders.

Dispensary at the Fort Wayne College of Medicine. During the college's first years, The Home for the Friendless, a shelter for single mothers and their infants, provided opportunities for assisting with childbirth. Reflecting national trends, emphasis was increasingly placed on scientific study and lab work. By 1892 three years of study were required. At the turn of the century four separate sessions, each eight months long, were mandatory for graduation.<sup>3</sup> Enrollment at the Medical College was never large. In 1894 Dr. Christian Steman, dean of faculty, reported that during its first fifteen years, 455 students had enrolled. Of these, 135 students had received degrees, including 19 women. Dr. Steman was proud of their high standards and of their support for women. "[O]nly the old foggy, behind-the-times colleges bar out women," he said. At the 1905 ceremony marking the college's merger with Purdue University, Dean Steman estimated that there were then between 200 and 300 graduates practicing medicine in Fort Wayne.<sup>4</sup>

Undoubtedly Alice Hamilton was the most illustrious student to attend the Fort Wayne College of Medicine. Prior to her admission to the University of Michigan medical school in 1892, the future leader in industrial medicine spent three and a half years in Fort Wayne studying science and medicine (1888-1892). Following graduation from Michigan and in between internships, she worked at the college's free dispensary. This exposure to health problems of the working poor deeply influenced her future work.<sup>5</sup>

The careers of four female graduates of the Fort Wayne College of Medicine who practiced in the city suggest a range of professionalism and limitations of sources.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Home of the Friendless was established in 1872 by women from local evangelical churches. See *Fort Wayne Daily Gazette*, October 27, November 2, 1882. The original Medical College of Fort Wayne was located at the southwest corner of Washington and Broadway streets. After two sessions the college was reorganized and continued as Fort Wayne College of Medicine located at Calhoun and Baker Streets. For a four year period, there was a rival Fort Wayne Medical College. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Fort Wayne College of Medicine moved into the Hugh McCulloch mansion on Superior Street. Edmund L. Van Buskirk, M.D., "The Fort Wayne Medical Schools 1876-1905" in *Indiana Medical History Quarterly* (March 1977). See catalogues of the Fort Wayne College of Medicine available on Digital Archives.

<sup>4</sup> "Students Graduate," *The Fort Wayne Sentinel*, March 14, 1894, p. 1; "Found It Most Difficult Task," *Sentinel*, October 11, 1905.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Sicherman, *Alice Hamilton: A Life in Letters* (Cambridge, 1984), 33, 55, 154; *Weekly Sentinel*, June 7, 1895, p. 2; See *Fort Wayne News*, April 3, 1896, November 5, 1897 for examples of many notices of her work at the free dispensary.

<sup>6</sup> Lists of female graduates are incomplete and sometimes contradictory. For graduates between 1879 and 1894, see "Fifteenth Annual Announcement of the Fort Wayne College of Medicine, Session 1893-4" on Internet Archive. Later students or graduates are also named in local newspapers: *News* February 11, March 11, 1897; *Sentinel*, March 20, 1899; March 22, 26, 1900. See also, "Nineteenth Annual Report of the State Board of Health of Indiana (Indianapolis, 1901)," 473-474 for Official Register of Physicians, Allen County.

Questions especially surround Dr. Luella Derbyshire, an 1887 graduate and one of the first physicians to be licensed by the Indiana State Board of Health in 1900. Following medical school in Fort Wayne, she studied and interned at the Philadelphia Women's Medical College and Polyclinic. Back in Fort Wayne she specialized in the treatment of women. In 1899 she established a maternity hospital for the care of "unfortunate" women in crisis. Six years later she started a mail order business to treat women's diseases. On at least one occasion she was investigated by a federal grand jury for improper use of the mail and found not guilty. Dr. Derbyshire's maternity hospital seems to have remained in existence at least until 1907. Furthermore, she remained in good standing in the Allen County Medical Society. Nevertheless, her mail order business was described in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1911 as a fake. Her twenty five year career in Fort Wayne thus is clouded by controversy.<sup>7</sup>

As family physicians, Dr. Harriet Stemen Macbeth and her niece, by marriage, Dr. Bertha Goba Macbeth called on patients in their homes, often assisting at childbirth. They referred patients to hospitals only when oxygen was needed. Office hours were for follow up care when patients were well enough to get out.<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Harriet Macbeth received her medical degree in 1894 at the age of 21 and practiced medicine for forty-four years. As many other early women physicians, she came from a family of doctors. Her father, Dr. Christian Stemen, was a founder of the Fort Wayne College of Medicine, college dean, and a well-known surgeon for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Four of her brothers were doctors. As a young physician, Harriet Stemen assisted her father during surgery as an anesthesiologist. In 1900 she married physician Dr. Albert H. Macbeth who was then serving as city health commissioner. Following their divorce, she shared a practice with Dr. Bertha Goba Macbeth. In 1915 she was tried for malpractice in Superior Court for emergency treatment of a woman patient following childbirth and was found not guilty.

Dr. Bertha Goba Macbeth graduated with an M.D. in 1905 following nurses training and practiced medicine in Fort Wayne and surrounding rural areas for the next thirty seven years. Reflecting common

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<sup>7</sup> "Fort Wayne's Maternity Hospital," *Journal-Gazette*, February 24, 1907; "Improper Use of the Mails Is Charged," *Sentinel*, August 11, 1908, p. 1; "A Woman's Physician," *Journal-Gazette*, March 24, 1912, p. 20A; "Death Claims Dr. Luella Derbyshire," *Sentinel*, August 18, 1915, p.2; "The Propaganda for Reform," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 1, 1911, 982-985.

<sup>8</sup> Harriet Stemen MacBeth obituary, *Journal Gazette*, March 19, 1939; "Mrs. Ulrey Was Not Damaged, Jury Says in Superior Court," *Journal-Gazette*, January 21, 1915; Bertha Goba MacBeth obituary *Journal Gazette*, December 16, 1942; Karen Aldred Van Buskirk, "The Lady in Lavender: Julia Emmanuel 1871-1962" in *Hidden Heroines: Biographical Sketches of Local Women* (Fort Wayne Public Library, 1976).

practices, her pay was often in the form of chickens and other farm products. Over the course of her long career, Dr. Bertha Macbeth became known for her competence, her kindness, and her dedication to serving the “unfortunate or needy.”

Following her graduation in 1887, Dr. Mary Wherry, like many women physicians of her generation, specialized in treating women. Her husband, Dr. William P Wherry, was an instructor at the Fort Wayne College of Medicine. Despite what seemed a successful career, however, Dr. Mary Wherry was found guilty of malpractice in 1906 and her state medical license was revoked.<sup>9</sup>

During this same early twentieth-century period, Dr. Carrie Banning and Dr. Jessie Calvin established lifelong careers as physicians and public health leaders. Following priorities of the Progressive Era, they served as municipal housekeepers aiming to improve the quality of life for women and children. They were physicians, inspectors, organizers, educators, suffragists, catalysts, and dynamic leaders of the Fort Wayne Women’s Club League.

Dr. Carrie Carpenter Banning (1857-1950) graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Wisconsin in 1877, taught school, and studied voice. In 1894 at age 37 she graduated from the Cleveland University of Medicine and Surgery. In her first years in Fort Wayne she was active in the Allen County Homeopathic Society with her husband Dr. Edmund P. Banning. Following a divorce, she operated a solo medical practice out of her home at 1148 Kinnaird Avenue.<sup>10</sup>

Always a strong champion of woman suffrage, Dr. Banning worked to change policy in Allen County courts so that women could serve on juries. Never shy, she appeared before the city council to protest the city ordinance that prohibited wrapping garbage. Claiming that she represented every thoughtful housewife in the city, she challenged the policy that was spreading disease. “It is simply a question of saving money or health. Which do you propose to do?”<sup>11</sup>

In 1916, thanks to petitions circulated by the Women’s Club League and parent-teacher club leaders, Dr. Banning was appointed one of the first three medical inspectors for Fort Wayne public schools. Following examinations of over 3000 children, she drew attention to serious health problems affecting almost half of the young students. In early 1921 when Congress was considering the Sheppard-Towner

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<sup>9</sup> “Is No Doctor Now,” *Daily News*, March 13, 1906, p.7.

<sup>10</sup> Obituary, Dr. Carrie Banning, *Journal Gazette*, March 19, 1939.

<sup>11</sup> *Evening Sentinel*, October 20, 1900; *Journal Gazette*, March 31, 1912; *Sentinel*, October 31, 1917; *Journal-Gazette*, January 24, 1922; *News*, November 12, 1919.

Maternity and Infancy bill, Dr. Banning and two other women secured 7000 signatures on petitions that they then sent off to Washington.<sup>12</sup>

Beginning in 1915 Dr. Banning served as health inspector for women employees at General Electric, the city's largest employer. Within a few years she took charge of a health clinic at the YWCA, offering free medical checkups to all women. In the summer of 1918 Dr. Banning registered young women to serve as a student nurse reserve to prepare for possible wartime needs.<sup>13</sup> Blocked from membership in the local medical society because of her homeopathic training, Dr. Banning nevertheless had a long successful career serving children and women.

Following graduation from the Northwestern University Medical School for Women and a two year internship at the Illinois State Hospital for the Insane, Dr. Jessie Carrithers Calvin (1868–1959) moved to Fort Wayne in 1897 with her husband Dr. Warren Calvin. For some twenty-five years the doctors shared a medical practice at 312 West Wayne Street. Similar to other female practitioners of the day, Dr. Jessie specialized in obstetrics and gynecology.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after settling in Fort Wayne, Dr. Jessie recognized the city's need for home health care of the poor. Putting ideas she had learned in Chicago into action, she recruited a corps of women volunteers from city churches, drew up a constitution, and enlisted the help of city physicians. The Visiting Nurse League, a program that would exist for more than twenty years, was thus given birth.<sup>15</sup>

Over the years, Dr. Jessie lectured on "Social Hygiene," a euphemism for sex education. She warned against the "white slave traffic," the practice of luring young women from small surrounding towns to Fort Wayne brothels. As World War I raged she helped establish Fort Wayne's chapter of the Red Cross. During World War II, Dr. Jessie started neighborhood classes to teach creative cooking with limited rations. Dr. Jessie Calvin served as vice president of the Fort Wayne Medical Society, the only woman at

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<sup>12</sup> *Journal-Gazette*, January 23, 1917; *News*, September 4, 1917; *Sentinel* May 1, 1919; *Journal-Gazette*, January 2, 1921.

<sup>13</sup> *Sentinel*, May 5, 1915; November 2, 1917; *Journal-Gazette*, July 30, 1918.

<sup>14</sup> "Outspoken Dr. Calvin Lived to Find New Medical Era," *Journal Gazette*, May 10, 1958; Obituary, *Journal Gazette*, November 23, 1959; Nancy Venderly, "Far-seeing female doctor urged better public sanitation, hygiene," *Journal-Gazette*, March 30, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> "Work Is a Success," *Daily News*, September 29, 1900.

the time to be an officer of the society. Near the end of her long life, the Indiana State Medical Association recognized her for fifty years of service.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, three other women physicians deserve special recognition for their successful medical practices during years that offered women little support.

Dr. Kathryn Whitten came to Fort Wayne in 1918 following graduation from Chicago's Rush Medical College. Her qualifications were undoubtedly exceptional because by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century women in medical schools were rare. For over twenty years, Dr. Whitten served as a general practitioner and surgeon in what was more than ever an exclusive male profession.<sup>17</sup>

Remarkably, Kathryn Whitten recorded her personal journey in a book published in 1942 entitled *Horses of the Sun*. In disguises transparent for Fort Wayne readers, she described her work as a general practitioner and surgeon. "Her entire forenoon was taken up making house calls and operating," she wrote of the early World War II years. "The afternoon and evening up to ten at night were full every minute. Everyone was working, factories were going the limit; and workers were receiving good wages. She often stayed all night at the hospital, encouraging and reassuring some woman in labor, and then, without going to bed, worked all the next day." Dr. Whitten's character Ellen confides to a friend the great meaning she found in her work, "[T]he only test, so far as I can see, of whether one lives right is whether one is rendering a service to humanity."<sup>18</sup>

In an essay in *The Medical Woman's Journal* in November 1943, Dr. Whitten reasoned that the hostility directed towards her was linked to the community's German traditions. "[B]eing a woman doctor in an independent practice wasn't exactly according to German philosophy or plans. *Kinder, kuche, and kirche* [children, kitchen and church] or its equivalent was for a woman, and that's all there was to it." She nevertheless felt that women physicians were becoming recognized for "their research and their scientific contributions as well as for their physical endurance."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "The Home Culture Circle," *Daily News*, November 26, 1909, p.2; "Dr. Calvin," *News*, February 9, 1910, p.2; "Red Cross Chapter Finishes Big Order," *Sentinel*, December 12, 1917, p. 9; Isabelle H. Taylor, "War Work of the Fort Wayne Chapter of the American Red Cross" (Fort Wayne, 1919), p. 4; obituary – above.

<sup>17</sup> Obituary, *Journal-Gazette*, May 15, 1951; date for moving to Fort Wayne taken from Allen County Genealogical Society, "Physicians and Dentist Applications 1897-1951" (1985). Twenty nine women physicians are named on this list.

<sup>18</sup> Kathryn Whitten, *Horses of the Sun* (Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1942), 312-13.

<sup>19</sup> Whitten, "Women and the Practice of Medicine," *The Medical Woman's Journal* (November 1943):275-276.

Despite Dr. Whitten's optimism, few women entered medical practice during the dark years of the Great Depression and World War II. Feminist politics and progressive reform in maternal and child health care had faded. Women physicians were almost totally excluded from board-certified specialization. Against great odds, two Fort Wayne women nevertheless established long term medical practices.<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Geraldine Baumgartner was one of two women out of the 100 graduates of the Indiana University Medical School Class of 1939. Following a yearlong internship at the Cleveland Women's Hospital, she opened her Fort Wayne practice in 1940. For the next thirty-six years she served as a general practitioner in Fort Wayne and rural Allen County. During the World War II doctor shortage, Dr. Baumgartner made around the clock house calls, sleeping only when someone else was doing the driving. Often working alone, she administered her own anesthetic, set fractures and even cut a man out of a corn picker. She delivered about 3,500 babies, she recalled. Humble and professionally confident, Dr. Baumgartner was well respected within the medical community. Dr. Berniece Williams, a graduate of Purdue's School of Pharmacy and the Indiana University Medical School Class of 1934, served as a family practitioner in New Haven and as girls' physician at the Fort Wayne State School. She was the first woman physician appointed to the City Board of Health. Dr. Williams had the advantage of being part of a family of doctors—her father, grandfather, brothers, and husband were physicians. In addition to her professional career, she juggled the responsibilities of motherhood.<sup>21</sup>

A brief history of professional nurses in Fort Wayne includes stories of heroism, personal ambition and professional commitment that are rarely told. In addition, their stories reveal gender and age discrimination, sexual abuse, and racism.

The largely forgotten memorial to Eliza George in Lindenwood Cemetery hides the story of a dynamic Civil War heroine. She challenged military traditions that insisted that only male convalescent soldiers serve in military hospitals. She also proved that her advanced age—55 when she first volunteered—would not limit her usefulness. Her skills as a healer and her personal popularity are the only way to explain how she was allowed to accompany General William T. Sherman's forces in the 1864 advance to Atlanta. At the end of the war, she nursed Union soldiers freed from prison camps and sent

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<sup>20</sup> Ellen S. More, *Restoring the Balance: Women Physicians and the Profession of Medicine, 1850-1995* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 148-50, 158.

<sup>21</sup> *News-Sentinel*, April 29, 1976; December 31, 1954; June 28, 1985. Dr. Baumgartner remembered that male classmates discouraged her and "played tricks" upon her and her woman classmate. *News-Sentinel*, April 29, 1976.

to Wilmington, North Carolina. Eliza George was one of three Indiana women nurses known to have died in service, the single Indiana woman to be given a full military burial.<sup>22</sup>

In Allen County institutionalized nursing began in 1868 when eight Catholic sisters of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ from Dernbach, Germany established a twenty-bed St. Joseph's Hospital in the former Rockhill House hotel. Hospital-based training programs for nurses started when City Hospital, soon to be known as Hope Hospital, began a program in 1897. Graduates of Hope Hospital are credited with organizing the Indiana State Nurses' Association in 1903 and drafting the Indiana law regulating nursing practice. Lutheran Hospital began a small training program in 1904, followed in 1918 by St. Joseph Hospital.<sup>23</sup>

A conflict in late 1917 involving student nurses at Hope Hospital exposed the conditions that student nurses experienced. That year Hope Hospital moved to its third location, a building described by the nurses as poorly ventilated, heated and lighted, with windows nailed shut. Student nurses typically worked a minimum of 12 hours a day, often as long as 18 to 24 hours without rest, 7 days a week, 50 weeks a year for 3 years, all without pay. They had become accustomed to such conditions. What they found intolerable were "indignities and injustices not in keeping with good hospital management or fair and honorable dealing with the student nurses." In mid-December 1917 the student nurses gave notice that they would leave their positions the first of the year unless improvements were made. A couple of weeks went by. Then, with three hours notice, the Hope Hospital board of directors replaced all 25 student and registered nurses with nurses from Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis. In a detailed letter to the *Journal Gazette* the Hope Hospital Nurses Alumnae Association fully supported the student nurses and nursing staff. "[I]ndignities and injustices" were most likely forms of sexual harassment, as female subordinates were often considered fair game for male superiors.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Peggy Seigel, "She Went to War: Indiana Women Nurses in the Civil War," *Indiana Magazine of History* 86: 1 (March 1990); "Eliza George, Civil War Nurse," *Old Fort News* 50:2 (1987).

<sup>23</sup> *Journal-Gazette*, August 25, 1968; *Weekly Sentinel*, February 8, 1905. Hospitals that preceded Parkview were City Hospital, Hope Hospital, and Methodist Hospital. Linda Chapman, "Margaret Phillips Church 1893-1969" in *Hidden Heroines: Biographical Sketches of Local Women* is an excellent sketch of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Fort Wayne nurse.

<sup>24</sup> "Hope Hospital Nurses Defended," *Journal-Gazette*, January 3, 1918, p. 13; *Scrapbook of Fort Wayne History*, Vol. 19, "Historical Observations Regarding the Hospitals that Preceded Parkview Memorial Hospital as Given by Mr. Andrew C. Burry, Former President of the Hospital's Board of Directors, September 7, 1952; Alexandra Minna Stern, "Against the Odds: Becoming a Female Physician in Midcentury Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* 104:4 (December 2008).



Like their white sisters, African American women had always been healers and caregivers. Yet as nursing schools were organized, color lines were firmly drawn. Prior to World War I, the vast majority of the some 1,700 nurses' training programs nationwide were white only. Excluded by the American Nurses Association, African American nurses formed the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses. Little had changed before World War II. Young black women from Fort Wayne studied nursing in out-of-state hospital programs such as those at Provident Hospital in Chicago and at The Homer G. Phillips Hospital in St. Louis. If they returned to Fort Wayne, they would have not been hired by the local hospitals.<sup>25</sup>

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Black nurses had limited success in serving during World War II, despite public outcry. While likely incomplete, records show that two local African American women served in the Women's Army Corps. In January 1944 Ethel Hurst, a former employee of General Electric, was attached to the ambulance driver hospital division of the WACs at Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island. One year later in March 1945, Dorothea B. Jordan Patterson, a graduate of Provident Hospital and Training School, enlisted as a Second Lieutenant assigned to Camp McCoy, Sparta, Wisconsin, a reception and separation center.<sup>26</sup>

Slowly, hospital nursing staffs and nurse training programs in Fort Wayne became integrated. In 1947 Mrs. Frank King was hired at Methodist Hospital, becoming the first black nurse hired for a professional staff position. Two years later, in 1949, Lutheran Hospital School of Nursing became the first city nursing program to accept a black student nurse, despite "strenuous objections" raised by the hospital's medical staff. The student was nevertheless "well accepted" and "popular with patients, hospital nurses, and students." In 1955 three black nurses graduated from the Parkview Hospital School of Nursing but were unable to find jobs in Fort Wayne.<sup>27</sup>

In the early 1960s, a remarkable African American woman and a supportive nursing administrator wrote still another chapter in Fort Wayne's women's history. Lena R. Jones was married and had two small children. Having graduated from a small, all black high school in Alabama certainly didn't help,

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<sup>25</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Facts on File Encyclopedia of Black Women in American Science, Health, and Medicine* (New York: Facts on File, 1997), 7, 11; Margaret Walker and Dorothy Belle Walker, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Walker of Fort Wayne, worked at the Homer G. Phillips Hospital in 1940 and 1941. *Indianapolis Recorder*, November 9, 1940; June 21, 1941.

<sup>26</sup> *Journal-Gazette*, January 21, 1944; March 31, 1945.

<sup>27</sup> J. Harvey Kerns, "A Study of the Social and Economic Conditions of the Negro Population of Fort Wayne, Indiana" conducted for the Social Planning Council of Fort Wayne and Allen County, 1949. Maxine Blanks, one of three African American 1955 Parkview graduates, became a nursing instructor in the East. Interview with Miles Edwards, November 5, 2009. Mary Emma Chapman and Mary Louise Minor graduated from Parkview Class of 1962. *Lamp*, Allen County Public Library.

although she had been salutatorian. She was rejected by both Lutheran and Parkview Hospitals before being accepted at St. Joseph Hospital School of Nursing. During her senior year in nursing school, she gave birth to her third child. Upon graduation, Mrs. Jones was honored as the “ideal nurse” in her class. She went on to work at St. Joe for twelve years, serving as head of surgical nurses. She continued her career as a nurse at International Harvester and Magnavox.<sup>28</sup>

Stories of Fort Wayne’s early women physicians and nurses add missing chapters in the history of Indiana women in medicine. Hopefully, future research will deepen understanding of questions prompted by my research.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with husband Dan Jones November 19, 2009; obituary, *Journal-Gazette*, February 10, 1992.