

In *JNMA* 100 Years Ago: The 1908 Annual Meeting

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With memories of the 2009 annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, still fresh in the minds of those who attended, we thought present-day *JNMA* readers would enjoy learning about the National Medical Association (NMA) meeting (and the NMA) of 1908—100 (and 1) years ago. Reprinted in this issue of the *JNMA* are the minutes of the opening session on August 25, 1908, as well as a review and assessment of the overall meeting written by Associate Editor Walter G. Alexander of Orange, New Jersey, and John A. Kenney's NMA secretary's report.

Though the NMA came to life as the result of a meeting of African American physicians at the First Congregational Church on "Doctor's Day" (November 18, 1895) at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta,¹ it did not really flourish for several years. A second national meeting did not occur until 1897 (Nashville, Tennessee) and then not again until 1900 (Louisville, Kentucky). It skipped another year following the 1901 St. Louis meeting and, according to John A. Kenney, founder of the journal, only "took on real life" at the 1903 Nashville gathering, engendering there "professional achievements and enthusiasm" that lasted from that year onward.² Subsequent NMA meetings occurred annually.

In 1908, the NMA was still a fledgling organization, just 13 years old and holding its 10th annual meeting—in New York City! Though most of the sessions were plenary, several times during the 3 days (August 25-27) members attended disciplinary meetings to conduct business and hear specialized papers. The 4 sections of the NMA at that time were medicine, surgery, dentistry, and pharmacy.

The first pages of the minutes of the 1908 annual meeting are taken up with reports from representatives of each state. The messages from these representatives are short (at least as recorded in the minutes) and focused

on 1 major issue: growth of the black medical profession, measured by numbers of physicians, of hospitals, of patients, and of medical associations. See Dr Boyd's report on Tennessee, for example.

Local medical societies were important to these physicians for several general reasons: It was there that relationships were forged with other physicians who might be of help in formal consultations or in informal advice giving on a case, or in book or instrument lending. Papers presented imparted new or reviewed other important information. Conversations about tough cases took place. State societies broadened physicians' perspectives outside their local areas. For African American physicians (mostly in the south, but to some extent in other parts of the country as well) excluded from these associations because of race, banding together also provided cross-coverage when a particular patient's physician was not available. Finally, in the racist society of early 20th-century America, meetings provided a haven where black doctors could talk openly with each other in a safe environment.

For these reasons, reports at the national meeting from representatives of each of the states offering information about professional "progress" filled in a national picture of growing strength among black health professionals. The NMA membership was also interested in surveying the state of black hospitals.

Other important activities at the 1908 annual meeting included surgical clinics at local hospitals where black physicians could observe and learn the latest surgical techniques, formal medical presentations followed by commentaries and then by discussion from the audience, and social events, as mentioned in Dr Alexander's piece.

Readers of Dr Kenney's secretary's report will be struck by the small staff size keeping the organization running and therefore the dedication of those who served in administrative positions. Finances were—to say the least—thin.

As evidenced by the 3 excerpts from the *JNMA*'s first issue reprinted here, it is clear that the NMA was, by 1908, a going concern.

REFERENCES

1. Byrd WM. The NMA Founding Date Laid to Rest. *J Natl Med Assoc.* 1993;85:899.
2. Kenney JA. Some Notes on the History of the National Medical Association. *J Natl Med Assoc.* 1933;25:99. ■

MINUTES

The National Medical Association met in its tenth annual session in the Plaza Assembly Hall, 110 E. 59th St., New York City at 10:50 a.m., August 25, 1908. The President of the Association, Dr. W. H. Wright, was introduced by Dr. P. A. Johnson, Chairman of the Local Committee. Prayer by Rev. J. E. R. Franklin of Demarara, British Guiana, S. A. Next was the annual address by the President. On motion by Dr. Charles H. Shepard of Durham, N. C., the President's address was referred to the Executive Board....

Roll call and payment of annual dues. By vote of the Executive Board in session on Monday evening, August 24th, the annual fee was raised to \$2.50 and the Treasurer was instructed by the Chairman of the Board to proceed to collect that amount as membership fee. This caused some confusion and debate and on motion of Dr. J. R. Francis of Washington, D. C., the matter was referred to the Executive Board for further consideration. The roll call [of the states] was thus postponed until the Board could report on this matter....

South Carolina reported in the person of Dr. J. O. Robinson of Darlington. He reported much progress being made in medicine and surgery. North Carolina was represented by Dr. A. A. Wyche of Charlotte who reported progress in all sections of the state and a rapidly growing interest in the National Medical Association. Virginia was represented by Dr. C. R. Alexander of Petersburg who stated that his State Association was making great progress and that they had three Local Societies. Dr. J. A. Lewis of Richmond represented the Richmond Medical Society which has three hospitals in connection with it. Dr. W. P. Dickerson of Newport News represented the Tide Water Society which is purely medical and meets the first Tuesday in every month. He stated that they had a membership of 32. Maryland was represented by Dr. W. T. Carr who reported that their Local Society is composed of physicians, dentists, and pharmacists. He also stated that the wives of the doctors were members. Dr. J. E. Hunter of Lexington, KY., was present and reported much progress in medicine and surgery in his state.

Dr. C. V. Roman of Nashville, Tenn., reported that they had a State Association which was doing well and progressing nicely. Dr. Boyd also made the following report from Tennessee: "To the National Medical Association: Gentlemen, I am glad to report to you that Tennessee has made great progress during the past year both in Local and State organizations. In all of the towns and cities where there is a sufficient number of colored physicians societies and meetings are held regularly. The dentist, pharmacist and physicians are working together. There is more respect for the profession today than there ever was. The physicians are more ethical and the general public is beginning to understand the relationship of the laity and profession better...."

Louisiana, no report. West Virginia had two or three representatives present who spoke of much progress in the state. Indiana, no report. Dr. A. W. Williams of Chicago reported flourishing conditions for Illinois. Dr. W. H. Johnson, State Vice-President of New York, introduced Dr. Frazer who represented New York and said that the Medico-Chirurgical Society had made great progress in many respects and that it had steadily increased in membership. Pennsylvania was represented by Dr. T. G. Coates of Philadelphia who spoke of the Philadelphia Academy of Medicine and reported two hospitals in the city of Philadelphia. Rhode Island was represented by Dr. A. Van Horne who made the following report: "Mr. Chairman and members of the National Medical Association: As State Vice-president for Rhode Island I regret to say that we have no State Society which affiliates with this National Body for the very simple reason that we have only four colored doctors and three dentists in the state, but I take pride in stating that all four of us are members of the Providence Medical and Rhode Island Medical Associations.... The rapid increase in population among colored people in my state makes me feel sanguine for a proportional increase in Negro doctors and we predict that in the very near future we too can boast of a State Society which will be in sympathy and a part and parcel of this the greatest organization of Negroes in America."

Delaware, no report. New Jersey was represented by Dr. Burnett who reported much progress in medicine and interest in the National Medical Association. Massachusetts, by Dr. J. B. Hall of Boston who was the accredited delegate of the Bay State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association. The Society is nearly two years old and is making great progress and holds informal meetings.... Arkansas was represented by Dr. C. L. Wade of Hot Springs. He reported much interest in his State Organization which was composed of about thirty members and had also three District Societies. Ohio was represented by Dr. W. C. Gordon who reported as follows: "... A vigorous, growing State Association with present membership of 19, organized in 1905 at Springfield, Ohio.... For some reason there seems to be a lack of interest in the National Organization, which I attribute to the fact that the Association always meets too far from the state. I think if the meeting could be brought west, say to Chicago or St. Louis, we could get men in line and their future interest would be assured."

Dr. Gamble introduced Dr. Pitt of South Africa, also Dr. Chas. F. Meserve [President] of Shaw University, Raleigh, N.C. and Dean of the Leonard Medical School. Dr. Meserve made an address which was very encouraging and helpful.... Dr. Boyd of Nashville, Tenn., then made a motion that a committee be appointed to report on the number and condition of colored hospitals in the United States. Dr. A. V. Gray of Washington, D. C., objected to the motion on the ground that this was part

of the duty of the Committee on Medical Legislation. On motion by Dr. Childs, of Washington, D. C., Dr. Boyd's motion was laid on the table.... Dr. Robert Reburn, Dean of the Medical Department, Howard University, Washington, D. C., was introduced and gave a short but encouraging address.

[The remainder of the minutes was devoted to a listing of the papers to be presented along with the election of officers, appointment of committees and some clerical issues.]

W[alter] G. A[lexander]
From *JNMA*, vol. 1, pp 24-26

OUR NEW YORK MEETING

It in no wise detracts from the excellence of the conventions held in previous years to make the statement that the last session of the National Medical Association, held in New York City August 25, 26 and 27, 1908, was the most notable in the history of the organization. Nor was its excellence confined to any one particular feature but in every respect it was a Great Convention. The attendance, the papers, the discussions, the exhibits, the clinics, the social features and over and above all the enthusiasm and harmony all blended in one grand whole to make every one remember this session and feel glad that he had attended.

The mere fact that the convention could attract attention in such a busy and surfeited city as New York is evidence sufficient that the session was a success--for no ordinary thing is even noticed in that city.

There had been some apprehension that, in holding the convention in New York, it would be "lost." But the "doubters" had reckoned without considering the hosts of the occasion. The Medico-Chirurgical Association of Greater New York and The North Jersey Medical Association of New Jersey . . . spared neither energy nor money to make the session a memorable success--and the result was a fitting climax to their efforts. The place selected for the sessions, The Plaza Assembly Hall, was well adapted for the purpose . . .

The sessions were all well attended and the interest manifested in the reading of the papers and the discussions was notable. Every paper was of high order and gave abundant evidence that the members of the Association are well to the forefront of medical and surgical progress. An innovation of this session was the holding of a night meeting on Wednesday evening. This proved to be one of the most interesting features of the convention; it is estimated that fully 800 persons were present . . .

The opening public session, held at St. Mark's M.E. Church was a well planned index of the whole convention.... Particular mention must be made of the address of Hon. Patrick F. McGowan, President of the Borough of Manhattan, who made the address of welcome in behalf of the City of New York....

The address of Dr. Walter Brooks, pastor of the church, in behalf of the citizens of New York was cordial and sympathetic. At this session the church was filled to capacity, despite the fact that the weather was most inclement.

The clinics were numerous and interesting.... The most interesting clinic was that held at Lincoln Hospital; the operations performed by Drs. Hall, Curtis and Williams being of a high order and demonstrating a mastery of the details and technique of modern surgery.

The social features of the convention were "most enjoyable." On Wednesday afternoon the Ladies Auxiliary of the Local Committee gave a "Tea" at the home of Dr. Geo. E. Cannon in Jersey City, which was attended by more than 400 persons. . . .

The crowning event, of course, was the reception and banquet on Thursday evening. The banquet hall was a scene of beauty and brilliancy--New York did itself proud. Nearly 600 persons were seated at the banquet board, in the galleries were 500 more, a truly magnificent gathering.

W[alter] G. A[lexander]
From *JNMA*, vol. 1, pp 33-34

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY TO THE NATIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

August 25, 1908

Mr. President and Members of the National Medical Association in tenth annual session convened: it is with distinct satisfaction that I offer the following report: In the first place, I want to extend my grateful thanks to our esteemed President, to our loyal Chairman of the Executive Board, and his co-workers, to the worthy Chairman of the Local Committee and his associates; to my helpers on the Program and Censor Committee; to the State Vice-presidents and to the members of the Association in general for their encouragement, charitable tolerance, and helpful cooperation in the work during the past year. I believe that there is no other body of equal size and importance composed of men and women from Boston to the Gulf and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi whose members have so subordinated personal ambition and where selfish aggrandizement has been made so subservient to the common weal as in this our great National Medical Association. In this age of class against caste, of labor against capital, of combination and monopoly, it is a privilege to belong to such an organization.

Indulge me in a bit of personal reference while I say the work of my office has been no small task this year, but not one minute have I allowed myself to become discouraged, not even when the treasury was empty, and bills to be paid. If I had been discouraged, such letters as came frequently from our honored President and others, would have given encouragement. Our Association is forging steadily ahead from year to year: not only in

number, but in its personnel, in character, in education, in scientific ability. There is unquestionably a future for us, which we are approaching with mammoth strides. Our Association as a whole and members individually must be found on the firing line of every movement that has for its object the betterment of conditions regarding health, whether national or local. To that end I trust that a resolution will be introduced and passed at this meeting endorsing the work of the Committee of One Hundred of the American Health League that is striving among other things, for the creation of a National Health Bureau in the city of Washington.

My financial report has been handed to the Executive Board, but I desire to say that I have endeavored to man-

age the office of Secretary as economically as possible and at the same time keep the work of the Association as prominently before the members as possible. To that end I have had a stenographer employed on half time since last October 1st. She has been supplemented by my office girl and at times, an extra stenographer and others had to be pressed into service.... A total of more than 3,000 pieces of mail matter sent out from my office from September 1, 1907 to August 17, 1908. Since last meeting we have enrolled twenty-five new members. We now have 301 bona fide members and a mailing list of 1,590.

John A. Kenney
From *JNMA*, pp 34-35