

A Brief History



1899 - 1999

March, 1999



*First Graduating Class, 1901
Mercy School of Nursing*

THE HISTORY OF MERCY'S SCHOOL OF NURSING

This summary of the history of Mercy Hospital Medical Center School of Nursing is dedicated to all graduates of our school. The Centennial year for the School will be celebrated from July, 1998 to June, 1999. This history encompasses almost one hundred years.

Beginning in 1897, Mercy's medical staff conducted a series of lectures for nurses to assist in improving patient care. This was the forerunner in the development of Mercy Hospital Training School (1899) as it was called at that time. The first class of students consisted of seven women. Since then more than 3000 women and men have graduated from Mercy's Diploma program and 95 have graduated from the new Mercy College..

In 1899 a young lady with upright character and good health could enter the two-year nursing program at Mercy by completing an application and providing a letter of recommendation from her pastor and one other person (not a relative). The applicant was asked if she knew what nursing entailed, the regulations of the School and if she had the health necessary for the rigorous demands of the student nurse. A high school diploma was not necessary and the student could enter any time of the year. There were no entrance exams!

Arrangements were made for staff doctors to give lectures to the student nurses on various subjects needed for proper medical and surgical nursing. These lectures were given three times per week, usually in the evenings after the students had worked all day. Students on night duty were relieved of their duties by Sisters to enable them to attend the lectures.

The first year's lectures included Anatomy, Bacteriology, Urine Therapeutics, Materia Medica, Eye, Ear, Throat, Physiology, Dietetics, Histology and Pediatrics. The second year courses included Neurology, Massage, Surgery, Obstetrics, Gynecology and Medical Nursing.

Some rules concerning the nurses of the Mercy Hospital Training School were: day nurses would be on duty from 07:15 A.M. to 10:00 P.M., while on duty, only professional books could be read, no needlework for their own use could be done and lights must be out as soon as the nurse made it back to sleeping quarters.

One afternoon each week was allowed for open air exercise or rest or study.

Student nurses could not leave the Hospital or home while on duty, or during their free time, without permission from the superintendent so that their whereabouts would be known in case they should be needed. Mercy Hospital nurses were not allowed to smoke, leave the building stockingless or allowed to wear coloring on face or lips. Any infractions of the rules resulted in a time extension for the student.

Timely hints were supplied to the student which may still apply today!

- If you eat, sleep and exercise properly, your health and your complexion will be at it's best. No need for rouge.
- When a nurse dresses her hair too startling, wears waists that are too low or too thin, uses rouge, she reminds men of the wrong kind of woman.
- The way you walk or sit or stand shows culture or lack of it.
- The chewing of gum in any place outside of your own private room stamps you as "common."

The nurse's work at that time consisted of serving meals, carrying trays, feeding patients, making beds, rubbing and bathing patients, taking and recording temperature, pulse and respirations, recording all B.M.'s and urinations, cleaning and dusting wards, rooms and bathrooms, combing hair, cleaning fingernails, wiping off stands, giving medicine, cleaning water closets, etc., etc.!

Tuition in the early 1900's was \$75. Fifty dollars was paid upon entrance and \$25 on completion of preliminary courses.

The first graduating class was in 1901. There was no graduation ceremony. At the end of the two-year training, the graduate received a Diploma and a pin.

In 1906 the program increased in length from two to three years. The enrollment was 20 at that time. The State Senate passed a law requiring trained nurses to complete a state board examination in 1907. To take the examination, the nurse had to be at least 23 years of age, a graduate of a training school and have 2 years of general hospital experience. If these criteria were met and the nurse passed the examination, she was given a certificate. She could then be called a graduate or registered nurse.

Through the 1920's students continued to follow a similar schedule. In 1933 courses were offered at Dowling Junior College to ensure that Mercy students received a balanced curriculum of academic and practical experiences. The training focus shifted and Mercy Hospital School of Nursing became the new name for the program.

In 1943 the demand for nurses made by World War II brought about the Cadet Nursing Corps, a program arranged by the United States Army, by which a student completed school in 30 months, the last six months being spent in special assignment as Senior cadets. Mercy participated in this program whole-heartedly. Funding for this program continued until 1948.

The curriculum at Mercy continued to evolve and affiliation transferred from Dowling Junior College to Drake University in 1948. College credit was given for courses taken at Drake. Affiliation transferred to Grand View College in 1981 and to DMACC in 1991.

In 1952 Mercy Hospital School of Nursing began the accreditation process through the National League for Nursing (NLN). Full accreditation was received in 1958 which we have enjoyed ever since.

In 1959 we welcomed our first of many male students. Ron Caulk is the graduate's name. He has continued to be supportive of the school. The number of male students has steadily increased since 1959.

In 1961 the School shifted to a 9-month academic year. This made it a 27-month program. At this time, the student had an eight-hour day and a forty-hour week. Quite a change from 1900!

In 1995, in response to national changes in nursing education, our administration and faculty began to investigate the possibility of offering academic degrees. Our present College of Health Sciences has evolved from that vision. Our first class of A.S.N. students graduated in 1998.

The School of Nursing and the present College of Health Sciences reflects the philosophy of the Sisters of Mercy in it's commitment to a Christian environment conducive to the optimal development of each individual. The objectives of the School have changed but slightly through the years:

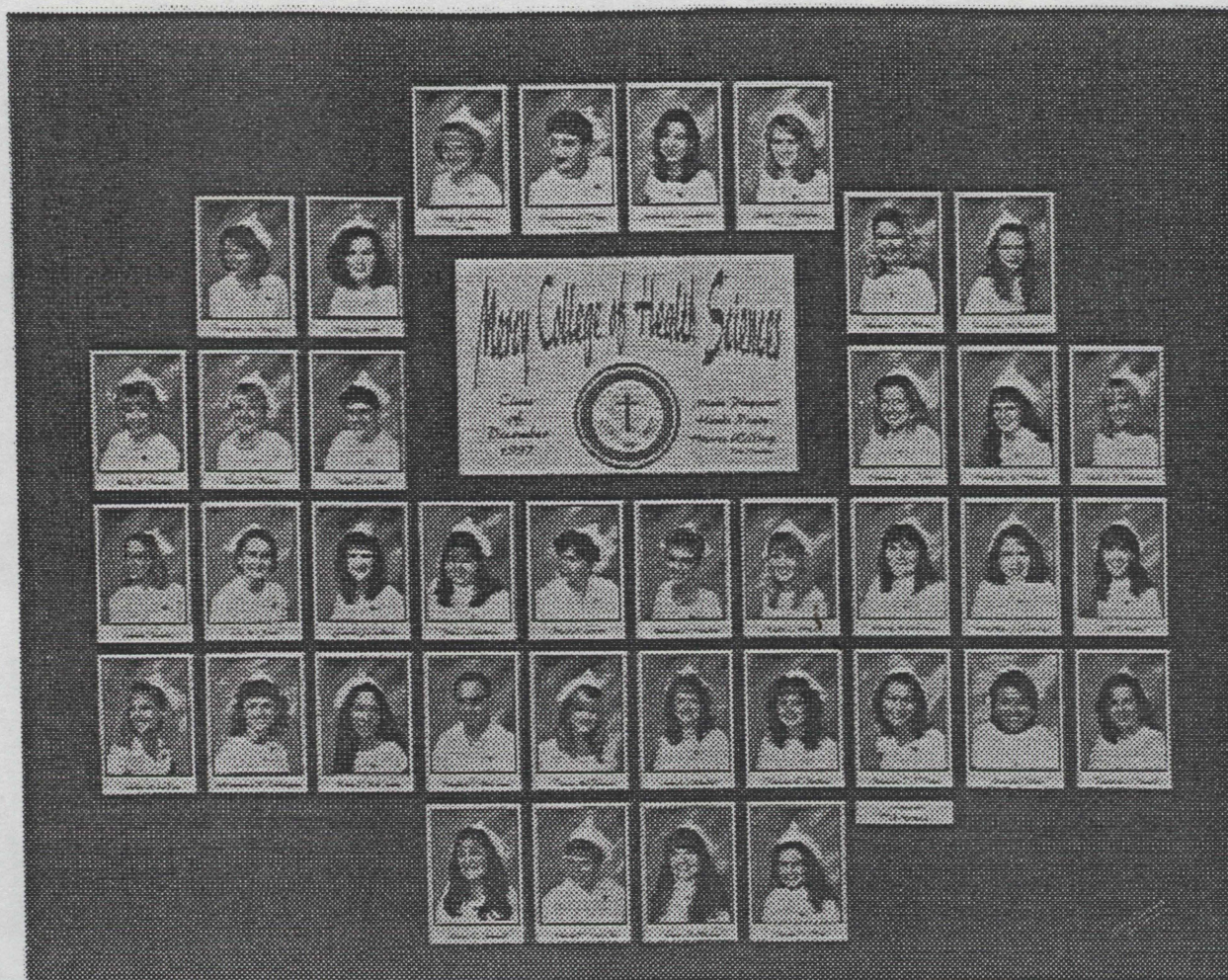
- To select well qualified applicants and to develop and guide them so that they will give their best service to society and thus enrich their own lives.
- To educate the student in the science and theory necessary to care for the total needs of the patient.
- To strengthen in the student “Christ-like” principles that may bring spiritual and ethical interpretation to nursing problems and to her/his own life.
- To prepare the student to cooperate with others in the promotion of health and prevention of disease.
- To stimulate an interest in and a desire for further professional study and advancement.

As a Mercy institution, the School furthers the spirit of Mother Catherine McAuley, and the ideals of the Sisters of Mercy, as expressed in Mother McAuley’s words: “Nursing is regarded not as professional service but as a gracious work of mercy in which the nurse administers to Christ in the service of the poor, sick and suffering.

Text compiled by: JoAnn Humphreys, R.N., M.S.N.
Post Alumni Association President



*Class of May, 1997
Mercy School of Nursing*



*Class of December, 1997
Mercy School of Nursing*

Mercy Memories

