

Etched in Stone

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Ninety years ago, Martha Minerva Franklin (1870-19687) founded the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN), an organization dedicated to promoting the standards and welfare of black nurses and breaking down racial discrimination in the profession. This organization served an important need as black nurses at that time were not welcome in the American Nurses Association (ANA).

Franklin was a remarkable woman in many ways. She was the only black graduate of her class (1897) at the Women's Hospital Training School for Nurses in Philadelphia as well as one of the earliest nurses (1908) in Connecticut, her home state, to pass the state registration examinations. In 1906 and 1907, she surveyed nurses, directors of nursing schools, and nursing organizations to learn the numbers of black nurses in America and the extent of employment discrimination. The survey's results provided impetus to create the NACGN in order to organize and serve black nurses. In August of 1908, Franklin chaired a meeting of black nurses in New York City and the NACGN was formally founded, with Franklin being elected that body's president. The NACGN merged with the ANA in 1951 and Franklin was inducted in the ANA's Hall of Fame in 1976.

Culling through the Center's biographical documents this spring, Center volunteer Rita T. Beatty was intrigued by information she came across about Martha Minerva Franklin by author Althea T. Davis, RN, MA: "Franklin outlived her family and siblings. She was buried in the family plot along with her brother William, who died in 1905, and mother, who died in 1934. There appear the have been no surviving relatives, and her name was not added to the family gravestone." Upon reading this, Miss Beatty was saddened and concerned that a nurse leader of this caliber was not identified on the Franklin family tomb stone. As a result, an anonymous donor provided the money to have this accomplished and the Chi Eta Phi Sorority, Inc., Chi Chapter's, Hartford, CT, Black History Committee agreed to place a placque at the gravesite to commemorate Franklin's nursing leadership.

On June 13, 1998, Chi Eta Phi Sorority, Inc., Northeast Region held commemorative services for Martha M. Franklin at her grave in the Walnut Grove Cemetery, and later, at Parker Memorial AME Zion Church, Meriden, CT. Presiding at the grave-site ceremony was Soror Sandra Fisher, RN, Northeastern Regional Director, who welcomed the City's dignitaries, sorority members and friends. Soror Dannie Kennedy, RN, Chi Chapter, read the "Litany of Commemoration" in memembrance of Franklin written by Verdelle B. Bellamy, RN, MSN, CNA, FAAN. Joseph J. Marinar, Jr., Mayor of the City of Meriden, presented a proclamation citing June 13, 1998 as "Martha Minerva Franklin Day" in the City of Meriden in recognition of her outstanding service to her fellow nurses. Mayor Marinar urged all Meriden citizens to take notice of this special occasion in thanks and appreciation of Franklin's many years of dedicated service in professional nursing. It was also announced that the city of Meriden recently named a scholarship in Franklin's honor and will be awarded annually to a high school graduate who matriculates to a nursing school. The grave side service was concluded with the

group singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and was followed by benediction and wreath laying.

A special Commemoration Service was later conducted at Parker Memorial AME Zion Church, Meriden. Soror Jewel Gaither, RN, National Historian for the Tau Chi Chapter and Mistress of Ceremony, introduced Chapter representatives, members of other nursing organizations, friends and city officials present. Councilman Michael Rohder, City of Meriden, told the group he was honored and pleased to be participating in these services honoring a nursing leader who pioneered Civil Rights and who was a guiding light in the movement towards a national organization. A brief historical sketch of Franklin's life and the NACGN was presented by Rita T. Beatty, RN, volunteer at the Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, and Soror Mable Morris, RN, Theta Chapter, Philadelphia, PA. A reception followed these services.