

The beginning of professional association of nurses in Croatia

Početak profesionalnog udruživanja medicinskih sestara u Republici Hrvatskoj

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Abstract

Introduction: Since no significant efforts have been made in making a systematic study about history of nursing in Croatia, neither has the history of the Croatian Nurses Association (CNA/HUMS) been systematized or fully described. In this paper, an attempt was made to reconstruct the way its name changed from 1927 to 1939 with reference to the historical context in which it operated.

Methods: The reconstruction of the data was based on the archival holdings and collections of the Croatian National Archives (HDA) and the State Archives in Zagreb (DAZG), as well as documents stored in the CNA files. Also, the magazine published by the Association, collected oral testimonies of nurses, documentation kept in private possession and the literature published on the subject have been additionally researched.

Results: By looking at the archives and reviewing the available publications, it was not possible to determine exact year in which the *Graduate Nurses Organization of the School for Nurses in Zagreb* was founded. It can only be assumed that it was established between 1927 and 1929. The *Yugoslav Union of Nursing Associations* was established on 6 June 1929 and was admitted to ICN (International Council of Nurses) the same year. *The Union* was likely to change its organizational structure at the first congress that was held in Belgrade in 1930 and has since been called *the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses (JDDS)*. *The Croatian Nurses Section* was probably called *the Zagreb Section* until 1934 and changed its name at the 4th Annual JDDS Assembly in Belgrade on May 20, 1934. The name of *the Savska Banovina Section* remained unchanged until the formation of the Banovina of Croatia. Then, on August 18th 1940 the nurses, in the area of the newly established Banovina, launched the independent *Association of Graduate Nurses of the Banovina of Croatia*.

Conclusion: The establishment of the *Graduate Nursing Organization of the School of Nursing in Zagreb* was the beginning of a professional association of nurses in Croatia. During the observed period, the development of the association can be monitored, regardless of changes in its name.

Key words: Croatian Nurses Association • Graduate Nursing Organization of the School of Nursing in Zagreb • Zagreb Section of the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses • Section for the Savska Banovina of the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses • History of Nursing

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Introduction

Since no significant efforts have been made in research of nursing history in Croatia, the history of Croatian nurses association (CNA/HUMS) is neither systematized nor fully described.¹

For this reason it has not been possible to write about its role in professionalization of nursing in our country nor to perceive its contribution to the development of nursing in states of which Croatia was a part of throughout the 20th century.

Historical material, which should make the backbone of the effort, is largely unavailable, partially scattered in private possession or ruined by neglect. It has to be taken into consideration that throughout its history, Croatia was exposed to political tensions and wars, which certainly led

to the dispersal of documentation. Systematic gathering and storing of archive material of the CNA started in 2013, with the establishment of the CNAs Association for the History of Nursing, when it was concluded that without substantial effort it could not be possible to look back at the work of previous generations of nurses.¹

Additional aggravating circumstances were the two devastations of premises where parts of archive were stored, adding to the problem of finding permanent accommodation for the Association. During the 1970s the basement of School for Nurses Mlinarska, where the membership files and some archive material were stored, was flooded. And almost all of the material was irrevocably damaged.²

The destruction of the documentation also happened in 2004, when the lack of maintenance to installations in Mlinarska School from 1923 led to fire, which partially destroyed archive material.³ It is evident, from available archive material and articles published in "Nurse's word" (cro. „Sestrinska riječ“) and "Vjesnik" that the members of CNA gathered mostly in at the workplace of the current president of the CNA or in Mlinarska School.

CNA managed to obtain workspace in 2005, which is the current seat of the Association.⁴ Meanwhile CNA was a tenant at many locations, sometimes even finding themselves at the verge of „homelessness“. All these facts contributed to devastation of valuable documentation and undermining former work and the legacy of previous generations of nurses. Authors of this work tried to reconstruct the succession of name change of the Association and present its continuity from 1927 until 1939 along with historical context in which it operated.

Methods

The reconstruction of the data was based on the archival holdings and collections of the Croatian National Archives (HDA) and the State Archives in Zagreb (DAZG), as well as documents stored in the CNAs files. The journal published by the Association was also used, which, with certain interruptions and name changes, was published from 1932 to the present. The collected oral testimonies of the nurses, documentation kept in private possession and the literature published on the subject has also been used.

Post World War I

By the end of The World War I it was obvious that the defeat and dissolution of the Austro – Hungarian Empire was inevitable. Hoping to prevent the dissolution, the Emperor and King Charles I tried to save the country through reforms, but in early October 1918, Slovenians, Croats and Serbs established the National Council as a representative body of the Slavic people in the Empire.⁵ The Croatian Parliament and its representatives met on 29th of October 1918, and agreed on the dissolution of Croatian state relations with the Empire and subsequently declared Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia, with Rijeka, an independent state that joins the State of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs (State of SHS). Shortly afterwards, the National Council was recognized as the supreme authority.⁶

Considering numerous instability factors within the newly created state (Green cadres, Italian pretensions on the Dalmatian coast), the State of SHS and the Kingdom of Serbia united. Meanwhile, Vojvodina and Montenegro were adjoined and on the 1st of December 1918 the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kraljevstvo SHS) was established. The state of informally centralist form of government was clearly defined on June 28th 1921, when the Vidovdan Constitution was adopted, which promoted the principles of unitarianism and centralism by legitimizing the monarchist form of government. With the same Constitution the State was renamed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which will last until 1929 (Kraljevina SHS).⁵

The power was mostly in the hands of the king, and the citizens had the right to choose, to associate and to have freedom of the press. The State committed to improve, among the other things, hygiene conditions, to protect people's health, care for people with disabilities and to proclaim free medicine. The Constitution abolished historic provinces and divided the country into 33 counties/regions (*oblasti*). Croatia was divided into Zagreb, Vukovar, Osijek, Karlovac, Split and Dubrovnik counties/regions, leaving Međimurje, Čabar and Baranja outside the Croatian territories. In the meantime, at the end of 1920, Croatia lost Zadar, Lošinj, Cres, Palagruža and Lastovo to Italy, due to the Treaty of Rapallo. In addition, to the discontent caused by centralization, the instability factors were the continuing economic crisis (which would escalate in the 1930s), poor service organization and material difficulties. In the new state, Croatia was the most industrialized region, while in most of the others remained a strong seal of Ottoman rule, which contributed to the backwardness of society, economy and health. Zagreb had become a trading and banking centre, and Croatia a country of development opportunities.⁶

Given the Austro – Hungarian legacy in Croatia, a high level of institutionalization was inherited, centred in Zagreb as centre of political and social life in Croatia. This made Zagreb stand out against other major centres of the newly founded state. Given its importance, the city continued to develop culturally, socially and politically until the beginning of World War II, which is confirmed by the emergence of new institutions such as universities, incredible growth of population, establishment of the Zagreb Philharmonic, the opening of the Hotel Esplanade, broadcast of the first radio station in this part of Europe and similar indicators of Zagreb's development as a modern city.

Organization of Graduate Nurses of the School of Nursing in Zagreb

The poor health in a large proportion of the population, especially rural, epidemic infectious diseases, poor nutrition and housing, primitive land treatment, economic consequences of war, lack of awareness of basic health issues, and poorly developed health infrastructure were fact that health professionals had to deal with after the First World War. On such occasions, work in the field of public health required a new approach that involved activating a wide variety of activities and engaging new professions and methods.⁷

From the emerging needs a new profession was born. Nurses between the two world wars retained devotion and a kind of discipline of the monastery ranks, but also incorporated everything that the times brought in which they lived into their everyday life, as well as the behaviour of a modern, educated and self-aware women who needed to understand the spirit of the times and modern understanding of life.⁸

The establishment of the **School for Nursing** in Zagreb marked the beginning of the professionalization of nursing in Croatia. The school was founded in 1921 by an order of the Health Department for Croatia, Slavonia and Međimurje, stating that the School was established *with the aim*

of educating professional staff for the dispensary service. As early in 1923, the school changed its name to **King's School for the Nurses in Zagreb**.⁹

With the design and development of the profession, there was a need for nurses to be organized into a professional association so that they could more easily and credibly represent and promote their status, ideas and needs.⁸

For now, no document is available to testify to the exact date of the founding of the *Graduate Organization of the Nurses of the School for Nurses in Zagreb*, as the first professional association, but it can be inferred from the two available texts that the nurses began the debate on the establishment of their professional organization between 1927 and 1928.

Thus, the description of the first organized gathering of the nurses is recorded in a file signed by Lujza Wagner: "... During 1927 and 1928, the nurses of the Zagreb School met at the initiative of nurse Ani Papailiopulos and arranged to establish an association of nurses who graduated from the Zagreb School. ... Nurse Janić wrote to Ljubljana and Zagreb and requested a meeting of nurses in Zagreb with the purpose of establishing a nurses association across the country. The meeting was held in June in Zagreb. The nurses of the Zagreb School founded the "Organization of Graduates of the Nurses of the School for Nurses in Zagreb" and sent the rulebook to the Police Directorate."¹⁰

The following source is found in the article by Smiljka Nell, which states: "...In 1927, 5 years after the completion of the 1st generation of nurses, graduated nurses founded the Association of Nurses of Croatia for the purpose of implementing a good organization of nursing services in social and medical institutions, protection of the moral and social interests of members, improvement of work and material opportunities, protection of the rights guaranteed by law, and care for the professional training of nurses."¹¹

The assumption is that the Organization was not founded before 1927 as stated in some later texts.^{12,4} In the record of the founding of the Association of Nurses from Ljubljana on November 27th 1927, we find that it was the first organization of nurses in the state.¹³

By looking at the archives and reviewing the available publications, it was not possible to determine exactly the year of founding of the Graduate Nurses Organization of the School for Nurses in Zagreb. One can only assume that it was founded between 1927 and 1929. At present, documents dating from 1927 to 1929 that constitute the Organization's documentation during this period still are unknown.

Zagreb Section and Savska Banovina Section of the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses

The dissatisfaction caused by the centralist order of the state escalated on June 20, 1928, when Puniša Račić, MP of the

Nikola Pašić's Radical Party, assassinated Stjepan Radić, and some of deputies of the Peasant-Democratic Coalition in the National Assembly. Following this event, on January 6, 1929, King Alexander abolished the Vidovdan Constitution and instituted the Six-January Dictatorship, dissolving the National Assembly and political parties as well as all national, religious and regional characteristics.⁵ The king passed a law changing the name of the state to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and divided it into 9 counties (*banovina*). The Savska and Primorska *banovina* included Croatia, while the rest of the country was divided into the Drava, Danube, Drina, Moravian, Zeta and Vardar *banovinas* and the city of Belgrade as a separate administrative unit. On September 3th 1931, the King, by an constitution "octroi" (a constitution passed by a decision of the king without consultation of state authorities or citizens' representatives), only theoretically restored constitutionality, while in practice, dictatorship and absolutism remained, which will spawn numerous conflicts, including the assassination of the King in 1934. After the assassination of the king, the minor prince Pavle Karađorđević took over the government.⁶

Changing the name of the state, the *Graduate Nursing Organization of the School of Nursing in Zagreb* is likely to change its name and partner with existing associations in Ljubljana and Belgrade to qualify for membership of the International Council of Nursing (ICN).

The ICN Congress in Montreal in 1929 was attended by 6,200 nurses. At that time, 23 national associations with a total of 200,000 members were part of the ICN¹⁴

It appears that the first name of the newly established association for the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was the *Yugoslav Union of Nursing Associations*, of which we find two reports, one in „Vjesnik“¹⁵ and the other on a telegram sent by the Association to Lujza Wagner on the occasion of her wedding on October 17, 1929.¹⁶

Radonić describes this in her article: "...nurse Nikica Bovolini, a native of Dalmatia, president of the Belgrade Association of Nursing telegrams from America, where she was training, informing the Zagreb nurses to contact the nurses in Belgrade and establish their own association so that they can work together with existing nursing associations in Belgrade and Ljubljana to become ICN members at a congress that was held in Montreal the same year. In Zagreb on June 6, 1929, the Janić nurses from Belgrade, Šifer, Boškin and Kostomaj from Ljubljana, Lujza Wagner, Margetić, Holjevac, Čulinović, Gruber, Fabijančić, Rogina, Lascarini, Geršić, and Janc¹ from Zagreb meet. The Zagreb nurses drafted the rules of the Association, which were accepted at that meeting and the Yugoslav Union of Nurses was established in Belgrade as the seat of it..." The article below describes the organization of the newly formed alliance: "Yugoslav Union of Nurses was a central organization compound of regional associations in which members were graduated nurses. Regional associations had complete independence. Nikica Bovolini was elected first president, Lujza

¹Holjevac Štefanija, Čulinović Štefica, Gruber Marija, Rogina Dorotea, Lascarini Marija. It is probably referring to Fabijanić Katica, who graduated in Zagreb in 1926. It is probably referring to Geršić Marija, who graduated in Zagreb in 1927, nurse of the same surname Garšić Silva is not od the Zagreb school list. No data was found for Margetić.

Wagner vice-president, Antonija Šifer secretary and Ida Bečan treasurer. Subsequently, a telegram is sent to Nurse Bovolini in which she is authorized to represent the Yugoslav Federation at the Congress as president. A board of directors was elected at the foundation Zagreb, which consisted of Katarina Ježić, Blaženka Holobar, Marija Gruber, Danica Zelenjak whose task was to work on the organization of the Association until the first Annual General Meeting...¹⁵

The Yugoslav Union of Nurses was likely to change its name and organizational structure at the first congress held in Belgrade in 1930. The assumption is that a general meeting was also held at that time. Records from that assembly are not available, and the reorganization and change of name to the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses can only be assumed on the basis of the record of the „Formation of the Association“ signed by Lujza Wagner in 1939: „...A congress was held in Montreal in August and nurse Bovolini, assisted by Miss Jean Gunn, succeeded in receiving our Association as a member of I.C.N. In the fall of that year, Nurse Bovolini from America returned and visited Zagreb. She gave a lecture to nurses and there were also invited representatives of women's associations in Zagreb. After that, the nurse suggested that an association with sections in counties should be established in the place of the union/alliance. Mostly new rulebook Yugoslav Union of Graduated Nurses, who kept roughly the same frame as the original association, Associations ceased, and the Sections began to work. In 1930, the first congress of our state's nurses was held in Belgrade. Congress has succeeded. Nurses from all over the country came...“¹⁰

The first record of the meetings held by the Croatian Nurses Section is found in „Vjesnik“, where it is stated that the first committee session of the Section for the current year after the regular General Assembly was held on June 3rd, 1932.¹⁷ After that, it is possible to track the activities of the nurses through the minutes of the section from 1934 to 1939.¹⁸

The original name of the section was probably the Zagreb Section, and at the Annual General Meeting of the JDDS (the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses) in 1934 it was agreed to change the name to the Savska banovina Section. The name change is evidenced by the decision of the Zagreb Police Directorate of March 24th, 1937. The decision forwarded to the Section president Kalanj Katica - Zlata clearly shows that the Savska Banovina Section, based in Zagreb, of the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses, reported the name change in the same year. The name change of the section occurred at the 4th annual JDDS assembly in Belgrade on May 20th, 1934. Then came the JDDS ordinance approved by the Ministry of the Interior on April 20th, 1936.¹⁹

The name change is also witnessed by the trademark/seal change found in the records of the Section. Committee meeting was held on June 12, 1934, for which we have found a stamp with the inscription Section Zagreb Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses. The stamp/seal is changed in the minutes of the ninth committee meeting held on November 20th 1937 at the School of Nursing, and there is a trademark with the inscription Section for the Savska Banovina in Zagreb Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses.¹⁸

In spite of these formal decisions, the section apparently used the name Savska Banovina Section earlier, which is evident in the first magazine/newsletter to be published in 1932.

The name of the Savska Banovina Section remains unchanged until political changes in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, when Banovina Croatia was formed. Then, on August 18th 1940, the nurses, in the area of the newly established Banovina, would launch the independent Association of Graduate Nursing of the Banovina of Croatia.⁸

„Bulletin of the Savska Banovina Section“ („Vjesnik“) and the „Nurse's word“ („Sestrinska riječ“)

The nurses probably discussed the necessity of launching a professional newsletter since the inception of the JDDS, but the venture required considerable resources and personal effort.

In December 1932, the Zagreb Nurses published the first magazine in the territory of the then-state called the „Bulletin of the Savska Banovina Section of the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses“.^{8,9}

In it we find an introductory text by Antonija Schiffrer, then president of the JDDS: „...Ever since we established our „Association“, we have all had the greatest desire to have our own journal. Unfortunately, despite all our efforts and efforts, we have not yet succeeded in fulfilling this desire of ours. All attempts to create a larger-scale printed sheet have been unsuccessful due to material difficulties. All the more, we must be pleased with your idea, that you publish your monthly reports in the form of this Bulletin and your perseverance and diligence, which have made this idea truly true ... But the most important success of this Bulletin will undoubtedly be that our nurses throughout Yugoslavia will see that it is still possible, that is, that already in these difficult conditions, we will begin to cooperate with one another through a single page.“²⁰

Probably only one issue of Bulletin was published, after which in January 1933 the magazine „Nurse's word“ began publishing. The fate of the Bulletin can only be traced from one report in the „Nurse's word“: „...The work of the Savska Banovina Section was in 1933 and 1934 very lively although the section committee has been meeting very rarely. Our best work is featured in Nurse's word. At last year's assembly of the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses in Ljubljana, the section managed to keep our first magazine as its property. It succeeded that all sections, including our headquarters, contributed financially to the maintenance of the newspaper...“²¹

At the annual assembly in Ljubljana, it was probably agreed to change the name of the magazine to become the official newsletter of the JDDS. The cited publisher of the „Nurse's word“ in the first issue of 1933 is the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses of Zagreb Section. The following issues state that this is the Yugoslav Society of Graduate Nurses in Zagreb. In the issues of 1937, the publisher is the JDDS Section for the Savska Banovina and from 1938 the cited publisher is JDDS till 1940 when the paper ceases to be published.

The "Nurse's word" was printed at the printing house of the School of Public Health in Zagreb. The editor was Lujza Janović Wagner. Her dedicated work and exceptional talent have shaped a professional sheet that contains the most significant issues of nursing work of the period and valuable reports on the work of the JDDS and its sections.²²

Conclusion

By looking at the archives and reviewing the available publications, it was not possible to determine exactly the year of founding of the *Graduate Nurses Organization of the School for Nurses in Zagreb*. One can only assume that it was founded between 1927 and 1929. At present, documents dating from 1927 to 1929 that constitute the Organization's documentation during this period are unknown. The *Yugoslav Union of Nursing Association* was established on June 6th 1929 and was admitted to ICN the same year. The *Croatian Nurses Section* was probably called the *Zagreb Section* until 1934, and the name changed at the 4th annual JDDS assembly in Belgrade, on May 20th 1934. The name of the *Savska Banovina Section* remains unchanged until political changes in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia when Banovina Croatia was formed. Then, on August 18, 1940, the nurses, in the area of the newly established Banovina, would launch the independent *Association of Graduate Nurses of the Banovina of Croatia*. In December 1932, the Zagreb nurses published the first magazine in the territory of the then-state called the "Bulletin of the Savska Banovina Section of the Yugoslav Association of Graduate Nurses". The "Nurse's word" magazine will be launched next year. The editing of the list was entrusted to the *Savska Banovina Section of JDDS*, whose headquarters were in Zagreb. The editor was Lujza Janović Wagner.

We can conclude that the founding of the *Graduate Nursing Organization of the School of Nursing in Zagreb* was the beginning of a professional association of nurses in Croatia. In the years to come the vocational organization will be the backbone of the development of the nursing profession. In addition, in the observed period, the sequence of the association can be monitored regardless of changes in its name.

Nema sukoba interesa

Authors declare no conflict of interest

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