



Centenary of the Parsons Mission in Brazil (1921-2021)

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There is a range of scientific texts that mention the Technical Cooperation Mission for the Development of Nursing in Brazil, or Parsons Mission, as the fundamental milestone for the recognition of the nursing profession in the country. On September 2, 1921 nurse Ethel Parsons arrived in Rio de Janeiro. Her arrival was a result of a partnership between the National Department of Public Health (DNSP) and the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) of the United States, at the time allied with the US government in the implementation of programs aimed at training and research in health^{1,2}.

The Brazilian government's concern, headed by the sanitary physician Carlos Chagas, then director of the DNSP, appointed in 1920 by President Epitácio Pessoa, was to carry out a sanitary reform and face the problems of precariousness in the life and health of the Brazilian population. It was for this purpose that the DNSP recognized the ownership of the arrival of the Parsons Mission and its purpose in implementing the Public Health Nurses Service and the DNSP School of Nurses, both created in 1922.

In this editorial, we highlighted the significance of the centenary of the coming of Ethel Parsons, a public health nurse and special member of the RF's International Health Board, leading the Mission, while we Brazilians ratified the importance of this event as one of the definers of the course of the history of Brazilian nursing. The profile of Ethel Parsons, who, in her home country, had held positions such as Superintendent of Nurses at San Antonio/Texas Department of Health and Director of Public Health Nursing at the American Red Cross³, inspired the confidence of Brazilians, in such a way that she was appointed superintendent of the first public and nationwide Nursing Service, where she accumulated political powers for management, teaching and nursing care.

Ethel Parsons attests, in her first report, to the real situation of nursing in the country, highlighting the lack of a nurse training school to respond to the nursing care needs diagnosed at that time. Faced with the scenario he found in the Brazilian capital, Ethel Parsons took a stand in favor of training women as nurses within the pattern already thought by North American and Canadian nurses in the Standard Curriculum for Nursing Schools, aiming at training competent professionals for the challenge to be faced in our country.

The main characteristic in the Mission's leadership, perceived in the evidences of history, was, without a doubt, the organizational capacity, which made the Mission itself surpass the expectation of some Brazilian physicians in relation to the profile of a nurse that would be possible to be trained in Brazil. When starting her work in front of the DNSP Mission and Nursing Service, Ethel Parsons foresaw the need to invest in formal education for nurses and in their immediate inclusion in public health and hospital services, carrying out the creation and organization of a very special public school for the training of nurses in the country^{2,4}.

In these circumstances, Parsons Mission's first work included the participatory action in health reform by acting in Sanitary Surveillance and supervising home visits that were already carried out by visitors. This intervention of North American nurses as the Parsons Mission in Sanitary Surveillance came to ensure a hierarchical reconfiguration in the entire field of public health, composing, throughout Brazil, the explanation of one of the first touches of quality, especially when an alert was given that visitors would only work under the supervision of a registered nurse, which he was already replacing in this work, under the coordination of Ethel Parsons, Sanitary Surveillance's chief physician^{4,5}.

The presence of Ethel Parsons and the other nurses selected by her to be part of the Mission represented the insertion of professionals, exclusively women, in a male environment, where there was still no female leadership related to health activities. Although nurses were trained by other courses and schools in Brazil, the Parsons Mission was mainly concerned

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with implementing and expanding in the country the teaching and training bases established by Nightingalean ideas, as in the United States, giving rise to the Anglo-American model of nursing, as recorded by Brazilian researchers^{2,4,5}.

Even facing large social differences between Brazil and the United States, particularly with regard to the role of women in society, Ethel Parsons continued with the development of modern nursing in Brazil, confident in the transformation by structuring academic-professional education into solid, higher-level curriculum bases, even though the School was not immediately created in the university.

For all Parsons Mission's achievements and, moreover, for the paths it took nursing as a profession, this Centenary makes us applaud the coming of the Parsons Mission to Brazil in the 1920s and especially for having elucidated as a futurity in its final report in 1931, the conviction that the education offered by Brazil corresponded to university education, which, for political and social reasons, only came to be effectively in 1937.

The assertion of many scholars on the subject that the Parsons Mission was responsible for the implementation of modern nursing in Brazil with the creation of the DNSP School of Nurses, today the Anna Nery School of Nursing (*Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery*) of Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (*Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*), is sustainable to this day, due to the recognition of a pattern of teaching nurses that

determined a strong professional identity in the first half of the 20th century. Even before this recognition, the first association of Brazilian nurses, created in 1926, rose to a place on the International Council of Nurses (ICN), bringing international recognition to this standard in 1929.

Considering that the Anna Nery Standard Law (*Lei do Padrão Anna Nery*) was in force from 1931 to 1949, this Centenary of the Parsons Mission is a fair tribute to the existence of nurse Ethel Parsons, her coming to Brazil and all the work she led.

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