

Story #1: Dr. Annie Lawrence Brown

[Image Source Page](#)



Dr. Annie Lawrence Brown graduated from Freedman's Hospital Training School in Washington, D.C. in 1948. During her five-decade-long career Dr. Lawrence Brown served in many leadership positions, including as the Director of Nursing Education at the Provident Hospital School of Nursing from the 1950's until the early 1960's. She was also the first Black president for the Illinois Nurses Association.

Dr. Karen Flynn and Dr. Gwyneth Franck interviewed Dr. Lawrence Brown in 2022, when she was 89 years old.

Clip 1: [Why She Came to Provident and Her Relationship with Students](#) (5:43)

Clip 2: [Getting Provident Accredited and Why the School Closed](#) (3:34)

[Transcripts for Both Clips Here](#)

Story #2: [Berlean Burris oral history](#)

Dr. Berlean Burris graduated from Provident Hospital School of Nursing in 1959. Throughout her decades-long career, she has held many positions in education and healthcare, including serving as Dean for the College of Nursing at Chicago State University (1983-1990) and as a Vice President for Community Affairs and Campus Operation at National Louis University. Interviewer was Dr. Gwyneth Franck.



Clip 1: [Dr. Burris on Patients & Supervisors at Provident](#) (3:23)

[Also on YouTube with subtitles](#)

Clip 2: [Dr. Burris on the coursework & standards of excellence at Provident](#) (4:41)

Clip 3: [Dr. Burris describes her arrival at Provident & her family background](#) (3:33).

[Transcripts for all clips](#)

Source #3: Sandra Johnson (excerpt from *Provident: A Living Legacy*¹)

I was 17 when I started at the Provident nursing school. I had graduated from high school in Mobile, Alabama, when I was 15 and received a scholarship to attend Spelman College in Atlanta. I knew absolutely nothing about studying, so when I went to Spelman I promptly flunked out. I was devastated because I had been an honors student in high school. I worked for a year and then started at Provident.

I graduated from the nursing school in 1953 and took the state board exam. Five Provident nurses took the exam and we all passed it. I began work in the Hospital's pediatrics unit. The remainder of my Provident career was in the operating room as head nurse and then as acting supervisor. Then I moved to Christ Hospital and eventually became operating room supervisor at Forkash Memorial Hospital. I was the only black in management there for a two-year period.

\

While I was at Provident, it was sort of like a small business for a big family. Nursing life revolved around the nurses' residence.² We all worked in the Hospital. This provided a family atmosphere - everyone more or less looked out for the others. I look back today and know that Provident was special because it was all black. We had to try new things. The nursing school graduates would always say amongst ourselves that "once you've been trained at Provident, you can work anywhere." And that was true because being a black hospital and a small hospital, our resources were always very limited. So it meant that we as nurses had to provide quality nursing care with few of the resources that other hospitals took for granted...

As a student, I found most Provident patients to be very grateful. Relatives of patients who had been very ill would bring back homey goods like baked cakes or boxes of food. Many times after babies were born with problems, the parents would bring them back to show us the progress they had made...

I remember my first experience with a child dying from a tumor on the kidney. Those things are always traumatic and sometimes harder because we only saw the patient right there in the operating room - it was very isolated. We had to make do with fewer instruments than other hospitals and occasionally needed to borrow equipment...

I am truly grateful for the training, education, and the [motivation] that was instilled in me by the Provident faculty. We were always encouraged to go on, to further our education. I later received my bachelor's degree from Roosevelt University and went on to get a master's in counseling from Governors State University. I truly thank Provident for that because we all came from very humble, in my case, extremely humble, beginnings.

¹ Richard M. Krieg and Judith A. Cooksey. *Provident Hospital: A Living Legacy*. Chicago: The Provident Foundation, 1998.

² **Residence:** many Provident nurses lived together in houses specifically for the nurses.

Source #4: Betty Gross (excerpt from *Provident: A Living Legacy*³)

“My sister Catherine and I married brothers and I came to Provident because Catherine was a nurse there. I was going to be a school teacher. But Catherine wrote such glowing letters home about her experience at Provident that I said, “I’m going to be a nurse there too.” My parents said, “First sign of blood and she’s going to be gone.” But I stayed. I realized that I enjoyed helping people.

I started working at Provident, and then took a break of several years while I received additional training at Howard University in Washington, D.C. When I returned, Dr. Hall arranged for me to receive allergy training at the University of Chicago, and then we organized Provident’s first allergy clinic. Later Dr. Hall went to Howard to develop an allergy clinic at Freedmen’s Hospital, and he asked me to help him so I traveled east to set up another allergy program.

I returned to Chicago as head nurse of the Provident’s pediatrics program. I was promoted to assistant director of nursing under Ms. Austin and served in that capacity from 1940 to 1948. In the mid-1950’s, I became director of nursing. My goal was to achieve accreditation by the National League of Nursing. This required us to meet many criteria. Every department needed to develop a nursing care plan, and the nursing school had to upgrade its teaching plan. In 1958, we obtained our goal of accreditation.

We had another accreditation visit, by the hospital association. The Joint Commission on Hospital Accreditation was to send a team out, including a woman out who would review every aspect of our nursing program. Some people in hospital administration said “You’d better watch out. This is a white woman with a Ph.D. who is going to be coming to evaluate the nurses. You’d better be careful.” Their team came on site and reviewed all the departments; and then they called us to give their summation. They had a long series of recommendations. But when it came time for the nursing review; she said that she had no recommendations for nursing, and complimented us for our problem-oriented method of training. Well, that knocked us out!

Back then, we felt we could do anything. We took pride in ourselves. Working at Provident was a privilege. It was our hospital. It was a facility that saved lives - the only place where blacks knew that they would receive care, no matter what. It was also a family-oriented organization where we knew each other. In some ways, Provident was the social epitome of the black community. By that I mean that the hospital attracted people of stature who took pride in their work. It was a landmark within the community. While the hospital flourished, there were good hotels nearby, and drugstores, and doctors offices. If Provident went down, so would the community.

³ Richard M. Krieg and Judith A. Cooksey. *Provident Hospital: A Living Legacy*. Chicago: The Provident Foundation, 1998.

For a long time, the Hospital was a place where the community came together and celebrated its accomplishments. We had traditions and there were a number of organizations that pulled in the community. The women's board and young professional women worked to provide benefits for the Hospital such as the Cotton Ball held every year. To be admitted, you had to bring a sheet, a pillow and a blanket. This would be used for bedding in the hospital.

But, in spite of that spirit, times changed. Ironically it was integration that hurt Provident. Integration was good, but what we experienced was a form of reverse discrimination. We were always open to treating whites in the hospital, although very few came... But it was at the professional level that the problem came -in the departure of black medical staff. If, at the point of integration, white staff came to us as much as we had gone to them, then I would call that integration. But the situation was that blacks left our professional staff without the possibility of high-quality replacement, something that hurt us greatly.

Personally, I never lost my faith in Provident, never lost the feeling that I was involved with a historic institution. When I got my masters degree, I was offered jobs at other hospitals, But I stayed as long as Provident could use me and needed me. Provident was the institution that gave me a chance to become a nurse. Now others did not feel that way. Some doctors and nurses would tell me that they were proud to be working at a white hospital. I could never feel pride, for that reason alone. I passed the same state board exam that a white nurse did. I knew just as much if not more than she did. And so I couldn't feel honored just to be working in a white hospital.

Source #5 : Nurses' Strike

The Chicago Defender is a Chicago-based African-American newspaper. It was founded in 1905 and was once considered the most important Black newspaper in the country.

R. Goldsberry, "30 Nurses on Strike at Provident Hospital," *Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1945, p. 2. Accessed via Proquest Historical Newspapers.

[Full article in its original form accessible here.](#)

30 Nurses On Strike At Provident Hospital

By R. GOLDSBERRY Union officials proclaimed that the nurses are being pushed around by the management who are stubborn in their refusal to deal with union representation.
Thirty graduate nurses at Provident hospital went on strike this week. "The nurses will not report for

"Thirty graduate nurses at Provident hospital went on strike this week.

The nurses, some of whom have been on the staff at Provident for a number of years claimed that they were forced to strike because hospital management failed to recognize their union as a bargaining agent.

Among the lowest paid in Chicago hospitals, these women in white who perform the duties of orderlies and maids in addition to their regular routine, want a raise in pay and better working conditions.

State Demands

Hospital officials have been blamed for their refusal to hear the dissatisfied nurses state their grievances, a spokesman for the group said.

Their demands, asserted John Arnett, official of the Building Service and Municipal Employees Organization, are as follows:

1. A minimum wage rate of \$135 a month instead of the present \$100.
2. A 40 hour working week, and time and one half for each hour exceeding 40. Present hours are 45 to 48 without overtime compensation.
3. Progressive sick leave with pay, three weeks to one month depending on individual status.
4. A special infirmary for ill nurses.
5. Full maintenance for married nurses who do not live in the nurses' home.
6. One month vacation with pay, depending on length of service.

Officials of the hospital had been notified of the strike a month ago, the nurses claimed, but they have been reluctant in their effort to negotiate a satisfactory settlement of their complaints.

Miss Belva Overton, director of nurses, asserted that she did not know of any grievances existing among the nurses.

"If they have any," she informed the Defender, "I do not know about them. They have told me nothing."

Miss Overton branded the strikers as being "unfair to the patients by walking out like that." Salaries are set by the board of trustees headed by Whitner Fitzhugh, she concluded.

Nurses Dissatisfied

Several nurses declared that Charles Beckett, comptroller of the hospital, whacked the vacation period from one month to 18 days and also slashed salaries.

When the nurses first made it known that they had become dissatisfied with the setup at Provident, one of the officials was quoted as saying "that Negro nurses should be pleased under present working conditions. They should not expect more money because they could live cheaper than white nurses."

One of the nurses who used to work at Cook County hospital, said she received \$130 a month, the base pay while working at that institution.

Union officials proclaimed that the nurses are being pushed around by the management who are stubborn in their refusal to deal with union representation.

"The nurses will not report for work until their demands are met or [negotiated] to their satisfaction," declared Clarence Kigk, union representative.

Hospital Lacks Funds

Dr. H. V. Wilburn, medical director of Provident, claims that limited resources of the nonprofit and nonsustaining institution prevent management from meeting the demands made by the union.

"I am interested in the improvement and welfare of the nurses," said Dr. Wilburn. "I would like for Provident to be outstanding in its relationship with its nurses, and I stand ready and willing, to the extent of our financial capacity, to do all that I can for them."

Picturing Provident as a nonprofit voluntary general hospital with any endowment funds, Dr. Wilburn said that the institution must go to the public and beg for funds to meet an annual deficit which ranges from \$40,000 to \$60,000.

Staff physicians, he said, have contributed around \$20,000, in addition to giving a large amount of free service to needed patients, to help the financial situation.

Salaries paid to nurses at Provident, he said, meet the basic salary range recommended by the Illinois State Department of Nurses. But the nurses wonder why janitors, yardmen, handymen, watchmen, and kitchen helpers have a bi-weekly minimum salary range of \$52.50 and a maximum of \$62.50. while their basic pay is \$100 a month."

"Guardians of the Health of Chicago's Citizens: Alumnae Ass'n Remembers Provident Hospital's Needs." Chicago Defender, November 26, 1938, p. 17. Accessed through Proquest Historical Newspapers.

"Nurses to Give Spring Dance," Chicago Defender, June 5, 1937, p. 3. Accessed through Proquest Historical Newspapers.

Mitchell, "Provident Hospital: A Black Institution Survives," 38.