The year was 1895, the place was the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, a trade show where thousands of people from across the country had gathered.

Several doctors were present at the exposition, and before the affair was over, these men would band together to form what has survived to become one of the oldest professional organizations in the country - the National Medical Association.

Two of the doctors who helped found the NMA, for example, Miles Lynk and Robert Boyd, had both just survived a bruising battle with the American Medical Association, which had rejected the application of black physicians for admission to that body.

Realizing that there would be no acceptance within organization for them, the men decided to start their own medical association to replace or coordinate the number of smaller, regional, black medical fraternities already in existence throughout the country.

But many blacks frowned upon their initial effort. For example, a try by charter member Dr. F. Daniel Hale Williams to institute a black southern hospital was discouraged by Washington, who felt that there was no need for a separate facility.

This was at a time when many blacks were forced to either die of their afflictions or remain maimed for life due to the refusal of the better hospitals to accept them as patients.

This month, many of this nation's black doctors will make a return journey to Atlanta, for the 87th annual convention of that body, in the city which witnessed

At the conference, which lasts from July 19 - 23, the doctors will be able to discuss and view some of the latest advances in medicine. Various subcommittees of the NMA, devoted to specialized fields of medicine, will convene in smaller sessions at which those specialists can share with their colleagues various methods of care and surgery.

On tap at the meeting will be lectures on topics as arcane to the layman as "The Effect Cisplatinum Alone and in Combination with Thiotepa in Fanft Induced Bladder Tumor."

Other workshops are scheduled in fields such as plastic surgery, basic medicine, family practice, internal medicine, and a host of other topics relevant to the 5,000 members of the NMA.

But all work and no play makes for dull doctors, and NMA

## Forum For Black Physicians

## The National Medical Association

By Mick James

members will also have the opportunity to sample the night life and scenic vistas of Atlanta.

The House of Delegates, a body of the doctors drawn from across the nation, will meet to review present legislation which may affect the professions, and to help frame new policy for the group.

In the past, the NMA has taken aleading role in democratizing the health care field.

During the Sixties, they were among the leading advocates for Medicaid and Medicare, which they felt would lead to higher standards of health care for those who previously could not afford the most competent physicians.

According to the NMA's president, Dr. Oakland, obstetrician - gynecologist, Dr.

Vertis Thompson, Medicaid and Medicare are both in jeopardy as a result of Reagan administration policy decisions.

"There's only so much money available for all things," he said. "If our defense or military budget is going to be expanded, all other programs will suffer. We will return to a two-tiered health care system, with disadvantaged people being managed in county facilities without mainstream medical care."

The NMA during the fifties was actively involved in the civil rights struggle of that day, and lobbied incessantly for changes in the separate - but - equal system of health care which prevailed on a

Throughout the late fifties and

early sixties, the group fought to have the languages of a hospital building bill, the Hill-Burton Act, changed to ensure equal treatment for patients and staff.

Until the NMA zeroed in on the bill, hospital built with the federal monies the Act made available did not admit black patients or hire black doctors.

It took a major suit in Federal Court and the help of former New York Senator Jacob Javits, to finally have the language of the Hill - Burton Act changed in 1963.

But, according to Dr. Thompson, the problem is not over. Some hospitals and teaching facilities still discriminate against black

Some schools which offer specialized training discourage blacks, he said, and as a result, there is an imbalance of black physicians in certain fileds, and a dearth of doctors in another.

"Traditionally," he said, "there have been only certain areas in the country that have accepted blacks in certain fields. There are certain places where you don't have blacks training in specialized fields."

He pointed out that only Meharry and Howard medical schools, both historically - black institutions, accept blacks on a regular basis for training in such specialized fields as cardio vascular work, neuro '- and chest

But, he admitted that despite the efforts of these schools and his organization, "we don't even have enough primary care physicians."

Currently, one out of every 3,800 blacks in this country become doctors. There are 9,300 black physicians, compared to 380,000 of their white coun-

Dr. Thompson, an Oklahoma native, will step down from his post at the convention, to be replaced by the current president elect, Dr. Frank Royal of Virginia.

The NMA has grown and changed since its inception 86 years ago. Originally the decision - making power rested in the hands of a small executive board, but in 1941 the board was expanded, and in 1964 it was opened up even more to executive eleven voting and one non - voting member. Currently there are twenty board members and 10 offices. But as the internal structure of the organization become more democratized, admission to the NMA became more restrictive.

In 1954, the group voted to grant membership only to physicians. Previously dentists and pharmacists had been allowed

## wider scale.

When the 5,000 members of the NMA converge on Atlanta, accompanied by their wives and children, they will find many activities to occupy them outside of the meeting halls, thanks to the efforts of the Auxiliary to the NMA.

NMA Auxiliary

Organized in 1936 by Mrs. Alma Wells -Givens, a doctor's wife, in Philadelphia, the ANMA soon spread to other states, as an adjunct to regional chapters of the NMA.

Currently, the ANMA operates in six regions throughout the nation. The president of the ANMA is Robin "Robbie" Chissell, wife of Baltimore physician H. Garland Chissell.

Mrs. Chissell has been active in the NMA for more than thirty years, and can recall taking her children along to the NMA conventions each year. During those years, she said, she realized just how much the convention meant to her family and many others she met.

Mrs. Robbie

But the role of the ANMA extends far beyond that of providing social relaxation. Currently, under Mrs. Chissell's administration, the ANMA has taken as their theme this year "Health Care in the Bighties - Making a Difference."

In keeping with the slogan, the ANMA has embarked on a massive health community health education program. At the convention, the various local chapters of the ANMA will give their reports on their progress in health education.

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