

1st Historic teaser: the first 20 years of MWIA (1919-1938)

1919 was a historic year in several ways. The Treaty of Versailles was signed to end world war 1. Nancy Astor became the first woman to sit in the UK House of Commons. The first Distinguished Service Medal was awarded to a woman and senate passed the Women's Suffrage bill. 1919 was also a time when only America, Britain, India and Japan had female medical women associations and in many countries women were still not allowed to study medicine. During the first congress of women physicians in New York, on October 19, 1919, the 140 participants from 16 nations stressed their wish to form an International Association. Twelve participants were chosen by ballot to form a committee to make up a constitution for the **new association which was officially formed on October 25, 1919** at the Waldorf Astoria hotel. Esther P. Lovejoy was chosen to be the first President.



Esther P. Lovejoy, 1919



International MWIA Congress, Geneva, Switzerland, 1922

About 200 women from 15 Nations joined immediately after it was founded. In 1924, the number of members risen to nearly 2000 and by 1926, 14 national associations had been formed.

The first MWIA meeting was held on October 25, 1919 in New York, the second meeting in Geneva, Switzerland with 80 women from 14 nations attending and the third meeting was in London, July 1924. The first meeting under the new constitution was held in London, and is therefore referred to as *the first MWIA Congress*. Subsequent congresses were held in Paris 1929, in Stockholm 1934 and Edinburgh 1937. In 1934, the MWIA Northern European Regional Group was formed in Stockholm.

MWIA presidents following Dr. Lovejoy were Lady Florence Barret (1924-1929), Dr. Lasthénie Thuillier-Landry (1929-1934), Dr. Alma Sandquist (1934-1937) and Dr. Louisa Martindale being installed in 1937 .

World politics increasingly affected MWIA and the number of associations had fallen to 19 in 1936, communication was difficult and income fell.



Elizabeth
Lady Barrett²



Dr. Louisa Martindale¹

Sources:

- Ward, Dorothy. History of the Medical Women's International Association, Fledgling Press 2010
- Morani, Alma Dea, A short history of the Medical Women's International Association in Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Volume 42, Nr.4, 4.April 1975
- Bornholdt, Kerstin, Medical Women's International Association – a space for generating international knowledge and an international medical identity? Oslo, 16 October 2008
- <https://www.brainyhistory.com/years/1919.html>

¹ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Louisa_Martindale,_President_of_the_Medical_Women%27s_Federation.jpg; the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

² https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Florence_Barrett_Wellcome_L0004411.jpg; This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International