

## 8. Kofoworola Abeni Pratt: From the First Black Nurse in the NHS to Minister of Health for Lagos State

by Lynn McDonald, for the Nightingale Society

**Family:** Born in Lagos, where she lived many years, Kofoworola Abeni Scott (1915-1992) married Olu Pratt, a pharmacist, who later qualified in medicine in Edinburgh. The wedding took place on 3 June 1941, at the Cathedral Church of Christ, Lagos. Of the couple's three sons, the first, born in eastern Nigeria, died in infancy. The second, Babatunde, was born in Lagos in 1943 (he qualified in medicine at St. Bart's in 1978), the third, Olufemi, born at Guy's Hospital, London, was baptized at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church (he qualified in aeronautical engineering, in 1974). Mrs Pratt and her husband went back and forth between England and Nigeria, and he also to a post in Cameroon.

**Education:** Church Missionary School Girls School, Lagos, with senior Cambridge certificate, 1933; Teacher's diploma, 1935; Teacher Training College, Ibadan; 1946 started nurse training at the Nightingale School at St Thomas', SRN 1949, with distinction; Midwifery certificate 1950; Tropical medicine certificate, 1951; Ward sister's course, RCN, with distinction in Psychology, on a scholarship from the Nightingale Fund; Nursing administration certificate, WACN, Hospital Nursing Administration, diploma, RCN 1957.

**Racial discrimination:** Mrs Pratt experienced racial discrimination at St Thomas' Hospital by a patient who objected to having a black nurse. She and another nurse reported this to the ward sister who reprimanded the patient; the patient changed his mind and her subsequent relations with him were friendly. In Nigeria, she also faced discrimination, when she was (initially) denied a post as ward sister, for which she had British qualifications (the Colonial Nursing Service only allowed British expatriates in these posts); the (expatriate) matron supported her and she got the post.



Kofoworola Abeni Pratt during her time at the Nightingale School, St Thomas', London

**Positions held:** teacher, CMS Girls School, Lagos (secondary) 1936-40; staff nurse Evelina Children's Hospital (Guy's) 1952; charge nurse, St Thomas' 1953; medical ward sister, UCH at Adeoyo Hospital 1954, administrative sister, UCH Ibadan 1955-57, asst. deputy matron 1955-63, matron UCH 1964-65; chief nursing officer (federal) 1965-72; commissioner for Health, Lagos State, 1973-75.

**Nursing leadership:** co-founder, Professional Association of Trained Nurses of Nigeria, 1956, president 1957-73; leader, 1st Nigerian delegation to the International Council of Nurses (ICN) Congress Rome, 1957, and 2nd, 1961; member, Administrative Committee and Board of Directors, 3rd vice-president, ICN, 1965-69; foundation fellow, West African College of Nursing; (occasional) co-editor, *The Nigerian Nurse*. Pratt was instrumental in getting university training in nursing started in Nigeria, initially at the University of Ibadan, beginning in 1965, next at the University of Ife.

**Honours received:** officer of St John's Council, UK, 1972; Florence Nightingale Medal and certificate, by Red Cross, 1973; Chieftaincy, Nation Iya Ile Agbo of Isheri, 1975; leader, Nigerian delegation to International Women's Year, Mexico, 1975; fellow, RCN, 1979; Order of the Federal Government, 1981; LLD (hon), University of Ife (Obafemi Awolowo University), 1981.

**Grants received:** Carnegie Foundation, for travel to Jamaica, the United States and Europe, 1969-70, to visit nurse training institutions, and a Rockefeller foundation grant, 1975.

### Publications on Pratt:

Akinsanya, Justus A. *An African "Florence Nightingale": A Biography of Chief (Dr) Mrs Kofoworola Abeni Pratt*. Ibadan: Vantage 1987.

"A Tribute to Mrs K.A. Pratt." *Nigerian Nurse* 5,4 (Oct.-Dec. 1973):24-25-26.

[Obituary] "Kofoworola Abeni Pratt." *Nightingale Fellowship Journal* 27 January 1993.

McDonald, Lynn. Appendix: *Mary Seacole: The Making of the Myth*. Toronto: Iguana Books 2014, 230-31.

### Publications by Pratt:

"The Nursing Council and You." *Nigerian Nurse* 4,2 (April-June 1972):19-22.