The history of the AANA is undeniably linked to Agatha Hodgins (Figure 1), one of nurse anesthesia’s pioneers, but it also is linked to Cleveland, Ohio. For it was in Cleveland that Hodgins’ idea for a national organization of nurse anesthetists was brought to life and nurtured in its early years.

Agatha Hodgins was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1877. She traveled to Boston to receive her nursing training at Boston City Hospital Training School for Nurses. After graduating in 1900, she was employed as a head nurse at the private pavilion at Lakeside Hospital in Cleveland. It was there in 1908 that she caught the eye of prominent surgeon George W. Crile (Figure 2), who decided that she had the necessary qualities to become his anesthetist. By 1909, Hodgins had become highly skilled in the administration of nitrous oxide–oxygen anesthesia, and Crile reported she had sat at the head of the table in 575 major operations.\(^1\)(p41)

Hodgins’ skill as an anesthetist led her to train nurses in the administration of anesthesia starting in 1911. Her teaching continued in the Lakeside Hospital Unit of the American Ambulance in Neuilly, France, during World War I (Figure 3). Upon her return home in 1915, she formalized the Lakeside Hospital School of Anesthesia and served as its director until 1933. In the school’s first year, the 6-month course cost $50 and 11 nurses graduated.

The school was soon to be challenged—the Ohio State Medical Board repeatedly warned Crile that only physicians could administer anesthesia. In 1916 the board adopted a resolution that recognition of the Lakeside school and its nurses be denied until the charges that nurse anesthetists were working outside of their scope of practice were disproved. The ensuing debate before the board resulted in the reopening of Lakeside, and students were accepted again in November 1917.

Hodgins presents idea to begin national organization

After years of graduating skilled nurse anesthetists, the Alumnae Association of the Lakeside Hospital School of Anesthesia was formed in 1923. Although inactive for 3 years, the association reformed in 1926 with 133 names submitted for membership. At its first meeting that year, Hodgins presented the idea of forming a national organization for nurse anesthetists.\(^1\)(pp65-66) Although no formal action was taken, Hodgins continued to work on her idea.

**Key words:** AANA history, Agatha Hodgins, Alumnae Association of the Lakeside Hospital School of Anesthesia, Cleveland.

**Figure 1. AANA’s founder and first president, Agatha Hodgins, undated photo**

(Courtesy of AANA Archives.)

**Figure 2. George Crile, MD, undated photo**

(Courtesy of AANA Archives.)
and at the November 9, 1928 meeting of the Alumnae Association, “the general impression of the members was that this would be an excellent thing.”

By 1929, Hodgins was the chair of the Committee of the National Association of Nurse Anesthetists, where she and her committee worked to create a constitution and bylaws for the yet unformed national association. The minutes reflect a concern for choosing an appropriate name for the organization—if it should be known as the American, National, or International Association of Nurse Anesthetists—and a concern in the decision to affiliate with the American Nurses Association (ANA) or remain independent. The alumnae voted for independence at the March 3, 1930 meeting because an independent organization would be “midway between the Medical Field and the Nursing Field” and that if a section for nurse anesthetists was formed within the ANA, “the Nurse Anesthetist is apt to fall under the dominion of the Directress of Nurses rather than the Anesthetic Chief.” The decision for independence may have generated further discussion, as one purpose of the March 1931 meeting was to “definitely decide whether it would be better policy to group the Nurse Anesthetist with the American Nurse’s Assoc. or to remain independent.” The same reasons were discussed, and the members once again voted for independence.

**ANA rejects establishment of a section for nurse anesthetists**

While Hodgins was working within the Lakeside Alumnae Association, Anne E. Beddow (Figure 4), a nurse anesthetist from Birmingham, Ala, was leading a movement within the ANA to form a section for office nurses and nurse anesthetists. In the South those 2 jobs were often combined. A resolution to form this group was to be presented at the 1930 biennial meeting of the ANA. Hodgins’ knowledge of the impending resolution led her to present a paper (Figure 5) to counteract the “possibility of this unfortunate development.” She spoke of improvement being in the hands of the nurse anesthetist and laid out the step an organization of nurse anesthetists should take upon formation:

> …self-organization as a special division of hospital service, in such an organization emphasis to be placed in the establishment of educational standards; postgraduate schools of anesthesia, established or to be established, required to conform to an accepted criterion of education; state registration, putting the right of the nurse anesthetist to practice her vocation beyond criticism; constant effort towards improving the quality of work by means of study and research, thus affording still greater protection to the patient; dissemination of information through proper channels.

Beddow’s resolution was referred to an ANA committee where it was quashed, and Hodgins geared up for a special meeting of Lakeside alumnae.

**Lakeside alumnae meet to form association**

On May 9, 1931, Hodgins sent a letter to all Lakeside alumnae ask-
ing them to attend a meeting of the Lakeside Alumnae Association “for the purpose of considering the organization of the nurse anesthetist group.”3(p184) On June 17, 40 nurse anesthetists from 12 states met in an anesthesia department classroom at Lakeside Hospital at 2:30 PM. The minutes simply stated that the motion to form a national association was carried, as was a motion to affiliate with the ANA. Gertrude Fife, Aida Allwein, and Verna Rice were elected to draft the constitution and bylaws; the meeting adjourned for a while as the 3 anesthetists revised the documents that Hodgins had previously drafted.

The approved constitution named the organization the International Association of Nurse Anesthetists. Although substituting “national” was discussed, “international” was retained as Hodgins felt it gave a “broader scope to the function of the Association.”5 The group elected officers according to the newly approved bylaws: Agatha Hodgins, president; Laura Davis, first vice president; Aida Allwein, second vice president; Helen Lamb, third vice president; Matilda Root Miller, secretary; and Verna Rice, treasurer. The charter members signed the roll at the end of the meeting; it was left open to allow those who were unable to attend to sign it at a later date (Figure 6). The meeting adjourned at 5:30 PM, and Hodgins’ hard work and planning was finally realized.

Hodgins felt that the best way to ensure success of the newly formed association was to put it on “an active functioning basis and this will be best accomplished by the formation of State Organizations.”6 In November 1931, Hodgins sent a letter to 13 nurse
anesthetists asking them to take on the responsibility of organizing the nurse anesthetists of their state. Ohio and Alabama affiliated with the national organization in late 1931, and other states were soon to follow.

The issue of affiliating with the ANA was put to rest after months of silence and delayed responses—the application for affiliation was denied in May 1932. Hodgins wrote to the ANA to express her regret for the decision but stated that “it is, however, our firm opinion that the interests of nurse anesthetists will be best served by having a distinct organization.” In her book, Virginia Thatcher reasoned that the ANA had little to gain from the affiliation since membership in the ANA was already open to nurse anesthetists. The issue of liability also was suggested as a reason for the denial; in some states the administration of anesthesia was considered the practice of medicine. Apparently, Hodgins had a change of heart about affiliation while waiting for an answer from the ANA. She wrote to her friend and fellow anesthetist Helen Lamb stating that “a small organization with high standards will accomplish our objectives more successfully than a large one half-heartedly concerned with anesthesia.”

Association is incorporated
On March 12, 1932, the association was incorporated in Ohio under the name National Association of Nurse Anesthetists (NANA). The name was changed from International to National as part of the unsuccessful effort to affiliate with the ANA. The headquarters remained at Lakeside Hospital, now part of University Hospitals of Cleveland, until 1937 when NANA moved to Chicago, Ill; however, the treasurer’s office stayed in Cleveland until 1946.

Dues were established at $5 with a $1 initiation fee, and the first convention was held in 1933 in Milwaukee, Wis. From little more that an idea in 1926 to an incorporated organization with dues and conventions in 1933, the NANA was well on its way to fulfill Agatha Hodgins’ dream of a national organization for nurse anesthetists.

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6. Hodgins AC. Letter dated November 1931. AANA Archives, Collection 08/13, box 35.