



Penticton Hospital on Haven Hill Road, now the Haven Hill Retirement Home, circa 1922.

Photo: Penticton Museum and Archives PMA0933

Bake Sales, Operas, and Sewing Bees

The Ladies' Aid to the Penticton Hospital

Ethel Warbinek

While volunteering at the Penticton Museum and Archives, I became aware of the incredible contributions made by pioneer women who helped support the first two Penticton hospitals in the years 1912 to 1939. Their efforts have now faded from public awareness—and there are no street names or city monuments to commemorate them. Married women were identified in the records of the day by their husband's first name or initials, which made finding information on these women challenging.

Penticton, located in the southern Okanagan Valley, is nestled between two lakes: Skaha, on the south, and the much larger Okanagan to the north. For thousands of years, the area had been occupied by the Sylix people. Penticton is thought to be derived from an Interior Salish word—"pentkin"—commonly translated to mean "a place to stay forever."¹ In 1910 the population was estimated at 1,100.

First Hospital and Auxiliary

In 1908, Edith Hancock, a Penticton citizen, hired a nurse and opened a small, private four-bed cottage hospital at 948 Fairview Road. There were no operating or delivery rooms. The doctors and nurses supplied their own instruments, which they sterilized by boiling or baking in a wood-burning kitchen oven. Water was hand-pumped from a well at the back of the building

into a tank in the attic, providing gravity-fed water. A few years later, the residents of Penticton started to talk about the need for a new hospital.

However, 12 local women, the Girls' Hospital Auxiliary, began to raise funds for the existing hospital in 1912. They sponsored dances, held white-elephant sales and teas, and collected money from the sale of refreshments at sporting events. A performance of the opera *Floradora* raised \$150 (\$3,300 in 2020 dollars). This provided the hospital with much-needed supplies.

In 1913, ownership of the hospital was transferred to the city. A few months later, a serious outbreak of typhoid fever occurred among a group of construction workers, who were cared for in isolation tents. Medical care was primitive and supplies meagre.

This spurred community interest in the dire need for a new hospital. Twenty-five local women, led by Mrs. F.H. Latimer, established the Women's Aid. This was the beginning of an active society known as the Ladies' Aid to Penticton Hospital, later referred to as the Penticton Hospital Auxiliary (thought to be a name change from the Girl's Auxiliary). Vigorous fundraising had collected \$3,000 (\$65,000 in 2020 dollars), which supplied this early hospital with equipment, linen, and food.

Haven Hill Hospital

By 1916, the new 20-bed Haven Hill Hospital opened on Lower Bench Road. (The street name was later changed

to Haven Hill.) Hospital grounds included an orchard and garden. In 1923, records show that to help to feed patients, the hospital matron was able to can large quantities of fruits and vegetables that had been grown on the hospital grounds.

The hospital was financed by grants from the BC government, Penticton council, donations from the public (often in memory of family members), and patient fees—patients paid for their own medical care and hospitalization. In 1925, patients were billed \$2.50/day (\$37 in 2020 dollars) for general ward accommodation and \$4/day (\$59 in 2020 dollars) for a private room. Bills were presented upon discharge, and for some families these costs were insurmountable. Funds from the above-mentioned sources proved inadequate. The hospital could not have survived without the considerable and constant support of the extremely hard-working auxiliary.

In 1922, the hospital auxiliary raised funds for supplies: 12 cups and saucers, 1 tea kettle, 18 yards (16.5 m) of towelling, 62 yards (57 m) of flannelette, 19 yards (17 m) of pillow casing, 40 yards (37 m) of pillow ticking, blankets, bath mats, bedspreads, mattresses, floor scrub brushes, ladies and men's slippers, and a roasting pan. In 1926, they supplied a table, chair, dustpan, egg beater, bottle brush, and lemon squeezers. In 1929, the auxiliary spent \$840 (\$12,000 in 2020 dollars) on sheeting, flannelette, bedspreads, bath mats, pillows, blankets, china, and glassware. Why so much material? The auxiliary held weekly meetings to sew and mend patient, infant, and operating-room gowns, sheets, pillowcases, and pyjamas.

The hospital matron was not the only one making requests of the ladies auxiliary: the board also regularly needed money for hospital repairs, maintenance, and new equipment. The walls required frequent painting with calomine (white washing) and the auxiliary supplied the paint. In 1925, they provided calomine for five private rooms and later, paint for the women's ward, kitchen, and bathroom. The auxiliary also donated \$148 (\$2,800 in 2020 dollars) to paint



Penticton Hospital nurses, circa 1933. Front row L-R: Susie Livingstone Gaube, May Stocks Gray. Mid row L-R: Dolly Swanson Gregory, Miss Korindale, Miss Beatty. Back row L-R: Miss Fyarn, Edith King Bracewell, Miss Haines.

Photo: Penticton Museum and Archives PMA2628

the board room, medical wards, two bedrooms, and the lower corridor, and to buy a new Maytag washing machine.

Depression Years

During the Great Depression, funds were stretched to the limit, and as a cost-saving measure staff salaries were cut. The hospital relied heavily on donations from the auxiliary. Purchases in 1929 amounted to \$840 (\$12,500 in 2020 dollars). In 1932, the matron, Miss Harrison, approached the auxiliary and requested the following: teapots for the trays, drinking glasses, curtain material for the nurses' rooms, dust mops, corn brooms, slippers, blankets, a wastepaper basket, an egg beater, a cookie pan, a potato masher, a paring knife, a mixing bowl, a wringer for hot "fomentations" (hot towels applied to a patient's chest), an electric iron, and new cutlery for the private patient rooms. (The old cutlery was to be used in the nurses' dining room.) The auxiliary donated \$100 (\$1,800 in 2020 dollars) to the

Although this article focuses on the Penticton Hospital Auxiliary, recognition must be granted to other community organizations: Women's Institute, Knights of Pythias, Gyro Club, Eastern Star, and local church groups.



300 block Main Street, looking north at Nanaimo Street, circa 1920.

Photo: Penticton Museum and Archives PMA0620

hospital for X-Ray equipment and the installation of electric fans. The auxiliary also installed a telephone in a new hospital wing for the convenience of the nurses.

In 1933, the matron requested flannelette for infant gowns, bleached cotton, thread, a clothes basket, chairs for the nurses' bedrooms, 15 chairs for the wards, factory cotton, (another!) egg beater, an electric iron, and a new sewing machine. The women diligently continued to sew, and in 1939, three bolts (300 m) of material were purchased for making pyjamas at a cost of \$412 (\$7,000 in 2020 dollars). These efforts did not go unrecognized, as noted in 1934 board minutes: "Appreciation of the work of the Ladies, without whom running the hospital would be very up-hill work." They also continued to support the nursing staff by providing furniture, cutlery, and dishes, and painting their rooms: living at the hospital was usual for nurses at this time.

Hospital Day, Thursday, May 16.
The public is cordially invited to visit the local hospital. Donations of canned fruit and preserves will be gratefully received and empty jars will be given in exchange if desired. Tea will be served by the Ladies' Aid. Cars will be at Post Office at 3 p.m. 19-1-c

Hospital Day in 1935 was an opportunity to gather much-needed supplies.

Source: Penticton Museum and Archives.



Hancock Hospital, 1968. The first hospital in Penticton was established in 1909 at 948 Fairview Road.

Photo: Penticton Museum and Archives PMA4576

Finding the Funds

Financial records for these early years are sparse and amounts not always recorded. What is known is that funds were collected, as always, from a variety of community events such as bake sales, afternoon tea parties, dances, bazaars, concerts, and from refreshment sales at sporting events. In addition, donation boxes were placed strategically in stores and banks. In 1923, a performance of *Oh Susannah* at the Empress Theatre raised money for the hospital. In 1924, a successful

cabaret dance described in the *Penticton Herald* as a "most brilliant and successful affair" was attended by 300 people at the Incola Hotel. A successful Thanksgiving drive was held in 1932, and a cheque for \$500 (\$9,500 in 2020 dollars) was presented to the hospital. In 1933, the women organized an Easter candy sale, and they donated proceeds of \$509 (\$6,942 in 2020

dollars) from a Labour Day carnival. Also in 1933, the comedy *Muggins, M.P.* was performed in the Legion Hall in aid of the hospital auxiliary. School children managed to collect and donate 139 dozen eggs! In 1938, a hospital "tag day" was held, and in 1939, a garden party raised \$42 (\$700 in 2020 dollars). Annual hospital days, open to the public, showcased the hospital and encouraged donations.

A Voice on the Board

The women of the hospital auxiliary were also outspoken and at times expressed their dissatisfaction with board decisions and actions. Because the auxiliary had a seat on the hospital board, it was recognized as the

Girls' Hospital Auxiliary			
Statement of Accounts			
		Credit.	Debit.
1911			
Dec.	20	By Teas at King's Store	\$ 72.50
		" Hospital Dance	444.00
1912			
Jan.	17	Proceeds from Dreamland	40.80
Jan.	17	To Printing Posters	22.60
Jan.	19	By Burns Dinner Coll.	49.45
		" Donations	27.40
Feb.	24	" Coll. Football Match	10.00
"	24	" Ping Pong Tournament.....	25.00
Mar.	29	Bazaar	76.60
"	29	To Printing Posters	
April	15	By Concert	150.95
		To Exdenses	
May	7	By Hospital Dance	93.50
		To Expenses	
June	28	By Collection M.C.K.	150.00
June	30	" Monthly Subscriptions	4.90
		" Interest	10.83
		\$1178.63	\$73.70
Dec.	31	By Balance in Bank	\$1104.83

Statement of Accounts, 1913. Source: Penticton Museum and Archives

major volunteer group. The following, for example, was recorded in the auxiliary minutes of May 19, 1936: "They wish to express their entire confidence in the Matron, Miss Boggs, and feel that she has been put to uncalled for embarrassment by some members of the Board. As a result, the Women's Hospital Aid wish to withdraw their representation from the Board for the remainder of the year."

The Spirit of the Auxiliary

Gone with nostalgia are the fancy balls, fashion shows, and pie making sales of yesteryear along with the close camaraderie formed during countless hours of sewing and baking. The auxiliary is now known as the Auxiliary to the Penticton Regional Hospital Society and continues the legacy. Funds are no longer spent on everyday kitchen appliances (such as lemon squeezers!), but on new hospital equipment. The spirit of the original auxiliary remains in their mission statement: "Our purpose is to add to the comfort and welfare of the hospital patients by providing volunteer services, equipment and funding." 📖



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References

Penticton Regional Hospital Auxiliary Fonds, MS130, Penticton Museum and Archives.
Penticton Regional Hospital Fonds, MS132, Penticton Museum and Archives. *Penticton Herald*, 1912–1939.

Endnotes

1. A. David MacDonald, ed. *Penticton, Years to Remember 1908–1983*. (City of Penticton, 1983), 2–3.

Although it was difficult to obtain information on individual women, four especially stand out: Kathleen Dewdney, Tiney (Coffin) Morgan, Marion Pringle, and Edith "Toddy" (Tisdall) Hatfield.

Kathleen (Ferguson) Dewdney (1890–1985)

Kathleen was born in Calgary, married Walter Dewdney and moved to Penticton in 1922. She immediately became involved in community groups such as the hospital auxiliary, the Red Cross, and the Women's Institute. In later life, she was an active member of the Penticton branch of the Okanagan Historical Society.



Photo: Penticton Museum and Archives PMA 0294

Marion E. Pringle (1872–1965)

Marion was born in Whitby, Ontario, and moved to Naramata circa 1919. She is listed as an "orchardist" who donated fruit to the hospital. Marion was the auxiliary representative on the hospital board during the 1920s and 1930s. According to board minutes, she was an active and outspoken member.

Tiney (Coffin) Morgan (1876–1939)

Tiney was born in Toronto and lived in Penticton for 28 years, where she married Daniel Morgan, a family member of the Morgan Plumbing Company. She was vice-president of the auxiliary during the 1930s and an active community leader. She died suddenly on June 24, 1939 from a heart attack at age 64.

Edith (Tisdall) Hatfield (1905–1984)

Edith, fondly known as "Toddy," Tisdall was born in Vancouver in 1905 to a prominent BC family. She graduated as a nurse from the Vancouver General Hospital and received a baccalaureate degree from UBC in 1929. Following graduation, she moved to Kelowna where she worked as a public health nurse until her marriage to Harley Hatfield in 1932. She published four articles related to the health of school children. The couple had four children: John, Peter, Chris, and Allison. Edith was vice-president of the auxiliary, sitting on the board for several years in the 1930s.



Photo: Courtesy of Ethel Warbinek