
❖ HISTORY OF NURSING NEWS ❖

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THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Spring is just around the corner and so is our 6th Annual History of Nursing meeting. I hope you will join us on April 11th at 9 am for a **CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**. Last year we had quite a lot of food left over at the end of the meeting, so bring your appetites and come to the **Lord Byron Room on the 4th floor of the Hyatt Regency Hotel** for breakfast. There will be a short business meeting from 9:30-10:30. We will bring you up to date on our activities, such as the **RNABC Memorial Book** and the **1997 International History of Nursing Conference**. There are positions to fill on the executive, so if you are interested in serving, please give Helen Shore a call at 731-9588.

The room is available until 11 am, which will give us ample time to visit, chat and view the displays. As a bonus, we have several valuable door prizes to give away to lucky attendees.

Looking forward to seeing you on April 11th!

Ethel Warbinek, President

THE EDITOR'S CORNER

The Annual General Meeting of the History of Nursing Professional Practice Group is held in conjunction with the RNABC's annual

meeting. History group members are welcome to attend the RNABC's annual meeting as an observer (no fee). Please note that the location is the **Hyatt Regency Hotel** in downtown Vancouver. (The hotel was incorrectly named in the last Newsletter!) Come and enjoy the interesting display of **Military Nursing** memorabilia being assembled by *Edith Lees*.

The Fall 1996 issue of the History of Nursing News will be devoted to publication of **historical articles**. Contributors should keep articles to 1,500 words. The deadline for submission is August 1, 1996. Look for more details in the next newsletter.

A reminder regarding 1996 **membership dues**: if you have not yet sent in your application and annual dues, please do so soon. This entitles you to continue to receive the Newsletter and support the preservation of nursing history in British Columbia.

Beth Fitzpatrick, Editor

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RECOLLECTIONS OF VON NURSING IN RICHMOND 1949-1964

By Marjorie G. Low, RN



Marjorie Gilland Low (nee Hoch) was one of two nurses who brought Victorian Order of Nurses services to Richmond, B.C., in 1949. Sometime during the late 1970s or early 1980s, she wrote down her recollections of those early years. In 1993, D.S. Low, her son, transcribed her notes into an 11-page transcript and provided a copy for the Registered Nurses Association of B.C.; this was passed along to the History Group. The following are excerpts from the transcript. A complete copy of the transcript is being held in the HoN Group Archives and can be borrowed from Glennis Zilm.

"We [Catherine Ross, the full-time VON charge nurse, and Marjorie Low, who began as relief nurse] started out in a modest way [in February 1949] but soon became quite busy, and as the service became better known our work increased greatly. From working four days a month as relief at the outset, I began working full time by the first of September 1949. We at first worked from one car, which meant much running back and forth to pick one another up, and in such a spread out community it was very time consuming. However, we finally graduated to a second car, which made us much more efficient, although not as much fun. ...

The actual nursing and day to day contact with our patients was never dull or uninteresting. I don't know of any profession that is more rewarding or interesting and one in which one makes so many friends and

is welcomed so warmly by clients. Many amusing situations arose as well as the sad and heart breaking ones, but this is good as one needs a balance to keep things in perspective.

One of my many experiences ... was a night call that I received from a local Doctor telling me he want me to visit a lady patient who was in distress and required considerable treatment such as catheterization, an enema and a bath etc. Then he went on to say, "I'm afraid she is rather large, in fact about 300 pounds." ... When I got to the door of her bedroom, my heart sank to my boots as there on the bed was what looked to me like a mountain. The patient was covered with one of those huge puffs and couldn't be seen until I got around to the head of the bed. There was barely space to move around as the room was piled with boxes and cartons as well as the usual furniture. Hanging from the ceiling, on the working side of the bed, was a huge cage containing a parrot. To say the least I was a bit overwhelmed. However, the patient herself was a jolly soul and we really had a ball, what with the lady making rude remarks while I worked and periodically banged my head on the cage each time I stood up suddenly. Both patient and nurse had a good laugh when it was over, which wasn't until about 11 PM. The Doctor, good soul that he was, came to see how I was getting along and took me to his house, where his wife had coffee and sandwiches waiting to revive me. ...



(Continued from page 2)

During 1949 ... we moved from our first office to one on Granville Avenue. It was a duplex type building with a barber shop and living quarters on one side and our office on the other. Our side consisted of a front office and living quarters behind. The living area had a Winnipeg couch for a bed and a few pieces of furniture, a two burner electric hot plate, a sink, and a separate tiny cupboard sized area, the necessary private facility, but no bath or shower. To say the least it was not very convenient, but the charge nurse managed by either going to friends' homes or next door where they had both bath and shower.

Another patient we had ... was an elderly man who was paralyzed all down his left side. He also had diabetes and required daily injections of Insulin, which we did on our way to work. He lived alone in an old shack with all his goods and chattels piled around him. This was no ordinary patient, for his determination and sheer guts were amazing. I remember one morning finding him sitting in a chair with a box in front of him; a large carrot was upright against a solid object and he was determinedly peeling it by taking swipes at it with a large knife. Time and again it would topple over and he set it up again and repeated the process until it was done. He also did this with potatoes, and woe betide any of us trying to help. In the summer he canned fruit and made jam and in between times he would get a load of wood for his stove which he split himself in much the same manner as the vegetables. He was a cantankerous old chap, but no doubt we would have been too, if in his situation. He made the neighbors so mad they wouldn't

have anything to do with him except for one old chap, and even he gave up at times. If he was very obnoxious to us, we would just go in and do our work, say good morning and goodbye and not stop to chat. Then in a matter of a few days we would hear a sniffing noise as if he were about to cry and then he would say he was sorry, but imply that it was really not his fault. We had many laughs over some of our experiences, but many times we felt like crying ourselves, just watching him and feeling so sorry for him with his many frustrations. ...

From 1949 to the end of 1955 we had 16 home confinements, most of which were emergencies. We had one regular customer who had a baby every year, but we never knew until we got the call to go. On one occasion a neighbor informed us that they were sure she was expecting. I was delegated by the "Staff" (Irene Stafford, the charge nurse) to go and find out and get her set up for her confinement. I knocked on the door and Mrs. S. answered, looking much as usual. After chatting a few minutes, I managed to get up enough courage to say, hesitatingly, that someone in the neighborhood had told us she was expecting and, if so, perhaps we could help her get ready for it. Well, she looked me right in the eye and said, "Oh no! not as far as I know." Feeling more foolish than ever, I apologized and left after enquiring of all the other children. Three months later we got the call and Mrs. S. was in labour and another little one was brought into the world. ... All told, she had fifteen children all born at home except the last one. The Doctor had finally talked her into going into the hospital. When we visited to check on the baby after her return home, I

"He lived alone in an old shack with all his goods and chattels piled around him. This was no ordinary patient, for his determination and sheer guts were amazing."

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asked her how she liked having it in the hospital. She laughed and said it was just fine and didn't know why she hadn't done it before.

With all its trials and tribulations, the fifteen years I spent in the Richmond VON were among the best and happiest in my life. I am still reaping rewards when I meet people on the street and am greeted warmly and reminded of visits made to them years ago."

Submitted by Glennis Zilm

IN MEMORIAM



We are sad to report on the death of one of our History of Nursing Group's members, *Frances Pullman Stearns* of Chase, B.C., died January 30, 1996, at age 96.

She was born in Liverpool, England, in 1899; the family emigrated to Canada in 1905, living in Ontario and Saskatchewan and later, Vancouver. She graduated in nursing from St. Paul's Hospital, Saskatoon, in 1926. She married Charles Stearns in 1930 and retired from nursing. In 1941, she was widowed and so took a "refresher course" and returned to nursing. She retired in 1969, after a nursing career she described as "a very exciting and challenging one and I loved it."

Early in 1992, *Mrs. Stearns* sent an 11-page typescript called *Reminiscences of a Pioneer Nurse* to RNABC President, Inge Schamborzki, who passed it to the History Group. Excerpts from the manuscript were published in the *Newsletter* in November 1992 (her training school days) and June 1993 (private duty nursing during the 1920s). The *Reminiscences*

are fascinating accounts of day-to-day bed-side nursing from the 1920s.

Mrs. Stearns joined the Group in 1993 and kept up her membership and an active correspondence with the *Newsletter* editor. She remained interested in and excited about nursing. *Arlene Bridge*, her home care nurse in Chase, wrote us of her death, describing her as "a very special lady."

Submitted by Glennis Zilm

Sister Diana Lillian Harsch, member of the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception, (SCIC), and director of archives for the Vancouver Archdiocese, died suddenly on November 20, 1995 after a brief illness. Born in Provost Alberta, *Sr. Harsch* trained as a nurse and worked in hospitals in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba before entering the religious order in 1933. She served in a variety of roles: nursing supervisor, registered nurse, and public health nurse. She was granted a certificate in radiological technology in 1961 and came to *St. Vincent's Hospital* in Vancouver as an X-ray supervisor. *Sr. Harsch* introduced diagnostic ultrasound to *St. Vincent's Hospital*—a first for Western Canada. When she retired from hospital work for health reasons, *Sr. Harsch* studied Western History at Simon Fraser University in preparation for her work in Vancouver's Catholic archives. She became archdiocesan archivist in 1980. Donations in *Sister Diana's* name may be made to *St. Vincent's Hospital Foundation*.

From The B.C. Catholic Vol. lxx, no. 44, 1995.

MEMORIAL NURSING PORTRAITS

The Memorial Nursing Portrait Collection has grown to 11 with the addition of two portraits in 1995. The portraits honor two special women whose lives are remarkably similar.

NURSING PORTRAIT # 10

Countess Ishbel Aberdeen

Countess Ishbel Aberdeen, wife of the Governor General of Canada 1894-1898, conceived the idea of a visiting nurse service when she was helping to organize the Vancouver Local Council of Women in 1869. They told her of the hardships suffered by sick women and children in isolated settlements on the prairies and in western Canada and urged her to use her influence in bringing them help. The idea of the cottage hospital had been suggested to her on an earlier visit to Kaslo on Kootenay Lake in 1895.

The Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) had its motherhouse in Rideau Hall. Services began in 1898. Four nurses were sent to the Klondyke Trail. The VON services and cottage hospitals grew to a nation-wide service.



The portrait of *Countess Aberdeen* honors **Josephine Dyer Rankin**, pictured on the left, who was born September 15, 1913 in Gurebridge Scotland. She lost her parents in the 1918 flu epidemic, was adopted by the Whitson family and brought to Canada in 1926. Her family settled in the Fraser Valley where *Josephine* continued her schooling and helped on the family farm in Matsqui.

In 1930 she set out by boat for employment in Powell River. Eventually most of her family would join her in this mill town where employment was available during the depression years. She met and married James Rankin in 1933. She lived in Powell River from 1930 to 1992.

Josephine devoted her life to her husband and five daughters. She lost a son at birth in 1938, and daughter Joy in 1984. Her life revolved around her family, her church and her husband's job at the company paper mill. Her 11 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren shared her love and devotion.

MEMORIAL NURSING PORTRAITS

Funds donated for sponsorship of a Memorial Nursing Portrait are used to support the History of Nursing Scholarship Fund and are tax-deductible. For more information please contact Sheila Zerr at 943-3012.

NURSING PORTRAIT # 11

The Sisters of Providence

The Sisters of Providence had their roots in Montreal and the work of Emilie Tavernier-Camelin. She founded the Sisters of Charity, later called the *Sisters of Providence*. They opened **St. Paul's Hospital** in Vancouver in 1894, naming it in honor of Paul Durieu, the bishop who invited them to Vancouver. They built a 25 bed 4 storey wood structure designed by one of the Sisters. The hospital was financed by "begging tours". *The Sisters* would solicit \$10.00 a year from workers for the guarantee of care at **St. Paul's**. In 1907 the School of Nursing opened. A century later the hospital continues to offer expert care and multiple services to the citizens of Vancouver.

The portrait of a *Sister of Providence* honors **Katherine Yarko Rumen**, pictured on the right, who was born December 7, 1904 in Dawid Gorojok, Russia. Her mother died of typhoid fever in 1922 and her father died of cancer in 1936. *Katherine's* father was a lumber merchant, and well off, which meant *Katherine* had the privilege of attending school.

At age 21 *Katherine* married Sam Rumen, a Russian living in Poland. Using *Katherine's* dowry, Sam immigrated to Canada. By the year 1930, after working 2 years, Sam was able to send for *Katherine* and daughter Nina. The family settled on a farm in Jaffray.

Katherine and Sam had 5 daughters. They lost Lydia in 1926 at 5 months of age. Life in Canada was difficult during the 1930 depression years. The family moved to Fernie in 1941 when Nina began high school and when Sam got a job with Canadian Pacific Rail.

Katherine never worked outside the home. She devoted her life to her family and friends. She lived 53 years in her home on Third Avenue in Fernie. She enjoyed her 8 grandchildren.

Sam died in 1981 and *Katherine* passed away in 1994.



THE BRITISH COLUMBIA MEMORIAL BOOK

At the Registered Nurses Association Annual Meeting in 1994, a resolution put forth by the History of Nursing Group was passed, which asked that the directors of RNABC develop an in memoriam book. In this book, the names of RNABC members who have made major contributions to nursing and the community could be recorded, documented, and displayed. The **Memorial Book** would serve as an historical document that honors deceased RNABC members who deserve recognition for their contributions to nursing in British Columbia.

For the past two years members of the History of Nursing Group, in particular *Helen Niskala* and *Helen Shore*, have been working with RNABC to develop the criteria for nominations and determine the selection process, briefly described below.

Nominees must have been registered in B.C. and practiced nursing in the province. The nominee will have made a significant contribution and exceptional contribution to nursing in B.C. Specific indicators have been developed which are diverse in nature and will assist in the selection process.

Nominations should include full name, dates, a 250 word account of the nominee's contributions, other supporting information and a photograph.

Each year the call for nominations will specify particular years, but all nominations are

welcome. Approximately 5 names will be put forward each year but all names will be retained and submitted in subsequent years. Nominations for 1996 will include nurses who died in 1995 or prior to 1940.

The History of Nursing Group is responsible for obtaining nominations each year for the **Memorial Book**. Deadline for submission for 1996 is Monday April 1. Nomination materials should be sent to *Helen Shore*, History of Nursing Professional Practice Group, c/o RNABC, 2855 Arbutus St., Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3Y8. For further information please call *Helen* at (731-9588).



History Group Authors Present at Research Forum

Ethel Warbinek and *Glennis Zilm* presented a paper on "Emergence of Tuberculosis Nursing in British Columbia 1895-1920" at the First Annual **Ethel Johns Nursing Research Forum** sponsored by the Xi Eta Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau in Vancouver in early February. Both were pleased to have nursing history research recognized by and included in a peer reviewed, mainly clinical, nursing research conference. The History of Nursing Group also arranged a small display of information on *Ethel Johns* for the conference.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE NEWS

During the past several months the following interesting news items about Florence Nightingale have been submitted by History group members.

Florence Nightingale's Fever

The British Medical Journal (23 Dec. 1995, Vol. 311, pp. 1711-1714) has an interesting article on "Florence Nightingale's Fever." Author D.A.B. Young, formerly principal scientist, Wellcome Foundation, London, England, premises that Ms. Nightingale's debilitating and confining ill health from 1857 to 1880 stemmed from the Crimean Fever she contracted in Balaclava. He postulates this was actually chronic brucellosis and dismisses medical theories that it was neurosis or malingering.

Florence Nightingale's Chatelaine

The University Hospital in London, Ontario, has a rare bit of historical nursing ephemera of interest to nurse historians. On display in a glass case in the lobby is Florence Nightingale's Chatelaine.

A chatelaine is a small piece of jewellery that was worn clipped to the belt of the woman of the house in Victorian times. Originally designed to hold the household keys, it eventually became more like a charm bracelet and carried small items of significance to the woman herself. Florence Nightingale's Chatelaine is of gold and holds several small charms, including a swivel seal and a ring that she purchased while on a trip to Egypt just before she went to Kaiserworth. There

are other rings and a gold coin as well. The belt clip is worn, indicating that it was used many times.

The Chatelaine was presented to University Hospital by a staff physician during Nurses' Week in 1989 in recognition of the quality care given by nursing staff. It was purchased through **Sotheby's Auction House** in London, which noted that the item had been a gift to a *Mrs. Coleman* after Miss Nightingale's death. The Chatelaine is displayed along with several other items of Florence Nightingale memorabilia.

The information on the Chatelaine was obtained for the History of Nursing Group by *Nina Rumen*. She had heard of it through *Eileen Cummings*, Nursing Sister in the London, Ontario Unit. She also wrote *Nina* of another stained glass window in tribute to Florence Nightingale, this one is in St. Luke's Garden Chapel on the site of the old Hospital (the Beck), which is now a Children's Psychiatric Research Institute.

The University Hospital donated photographs of the Chatelaine and a background news item to our History of Nursing Group for display at the International Nursing Conference.

Submitted by Glennis Zilm

Florence Nightingale's Legendary Lamp

In a recent edition of the Boston University Nursing Archives News (Vol. X, No. 1, January 1996) mention is made of a Turkish lamp actually used in the Crimea by Miss Nightingale. This lamp is described

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as being a "brass lamp, with candleholder-type shade and a top hook-handle enabling vertical extension of the shade to full height". Dr. Shirley Stinson sent photographs of the lamp actually used in the Crimea by Miss Nightingale to the Boston University Nursing Archives News. The lamp was a gift of Dr. Winston Backus to the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses Archives and Museum. The granddaughter of Mary Stanley, who helped Miss Nightingale select nurses for the Crimean War, passed the lamp on during World War II to the first wife of Dr. Backus, then a head nurse at the London Hospital.

Submitted by Shirley Stinson

The Inaugural Florence Nightingale Tour: London and Istanbul

It's not too late to register for this historical tour sponsored by the Alberta Registered Nurses Educational Trust. The tour departs May 12, 1996 from Calgary and returns May 26. Costs, which includes air-travel, hotel, tours, some meals, entrance fees and other special events, is \$3,500 for Registered Nurses and \$3,650 for non-nurses. For more information call Carol at the Educational Trust office at 1-403-451-0043, extension #339.

Florence Nightingale's Cats

Florence Nightingale grew up in the country with large gardens to play in and many animals to take care of, including her mother's old

pony, Peggy and Cap, an injured shepherd's dog who is said to have been Florence's first patient. During her later years, Florence found solace in "the society of cats". Her cats were constant companions, lying on her pillow, curling themselves around her neck, and leaving paw print trails on her papers.

Submitted by Nina Rumen, taken from the Florence Nightingale Museum Newsletter, No. 4, 1996.

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*(Editor's Query?? Is love of cats inherited? Helen Shore, Past President and a relative of Florence Nightingale, also loves cats!)*

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NURSE'S WEEK 1996

Florence Nightingale's birthday, May 12, is celebrated around the world as part of **International Nurses Week**. This year the dates are May 6-12 and the theme is "Ask a Nurse". Posters and buttons are available from the RNABC.

THE RED CROSS

From the Vancouver Sun, January 2, 1996: Nurse *Sara Taylor* returned home and to work at Vancouver Hospital after eight months surrounded by war, devastation and hatred in Croatia. She was posted with **Red Cross International** and worked in Knin, a small city in the south of former Yugoslavia. The Serbian rebels had occupied the city for almost four years. She was there for Operation Storm when Croatian forces liberated the city. Taylor and others went into the area to find people after the Serbs left and assist them with meeting basic needs. "I have never seen such poverty. We brought them relief—some basic food items so they could make bread—and made sure they were okay."

Shirley Stinson brings the following publication to our attention: **International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum (1995) Profession: Nurse**. Geneva: The Museum. This is an exhibition and catalogue, about 220 pages, well-illustrated, and a high quality paperback. It was produced under the auspices of the **International Red Cross** and the **Red Crescent (IRCRC)** Committee of the Red Cross, International Council of Nurses, and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Cross Societies. The ISBN number is 2-88336-006-7. It can be ordered from:

IRCRC Museum
17, avenue de la Paix
CH1202 Geneva

In the last issue of the Newsletter **Clara Barton**, initiator of the **American Red Cross**, was referred to as an "unpaid nurse" (p11). *Natalie Riegler* from The Margaret M. Alleman Centre for the History of Nursing writes saying that "Barton did not see herself as a nurse." She refers to a book written by Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Clara Barton: Professional Angel*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, (1988), which *Riegler* reviewed. Here are some illuminating excerpts from the review: "**Clara Barton** was educated and worked first as a teacher until she was refused the principalship of the school she had founded because she was a female. She was a successful clerk in the Patent office until she was demoted to the position of copyist: again because she was a woman. It was her experience in the Civil War which made **Barton** realize the need to supply the wounded with provisions. At the beginning it was the injured soldiers returning to Washington where there were no hospitals, barracks or supplies; at the end it was the needs of the released war prisoners and families looking for their missing relatives. She set to work to fill this gap in the health care system. **Barton** never saw her work as nursing: this she left to women like *Dorothea Dix* who headed the Department of Female Nurses, and *Mary A. Livermore*, who, in directing the Western Sanitary Commission, staffed the hospital ships. Similar to Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, **Barton** was adored by the common soldier."

SAVE THESE DATES!

April 4, 1996, **HoN Executive Meeting**, 4-6 pm, RNABC Building, All members welcome!

April 11, 1996, **HoN Annual Meeting**, 9-10:30 am, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Vancouver, B.C.

May 12-26, 1996, **Florence Nighingale Tour of London and Istanbul**, AARN Educ. Trust

June 14-16, 1996, **CAHN 9th Annual Nursing History Conference**, *We are Our Own History*, Halifax, Nova Scotia

**HISTORY OF NURSING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE GROUP OF
THE REGISTERED NURSES ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH
COLUMBIA**

The History of Nursing Professional Practice Group provides a forum for those interested in the history of nursing to exchange ideas and information. The Group, formed in 1990, strives to stimulate interest in history of nursing and promotes study of and research into history of nursing in British Columbia. The Group also encourages the teaching of nursing history in educational programs and can assist in the preservation of historical nursing materials.

**R.N.A.B.C.
NURSING HISTORY**

Membership categories are honorary, full, affiliate and student. If you would be interested in joining us, please get in touch with any member of the executive. Full (voting) Members must be paid-up practicing or non-practicing members of RNABC. Non-nurses may join as Affiliate Members. Student Members must be enrolled in a nursing education program or be Registered Nurses enrolled in a graduate program.

Dues for 1996 are: Full and Affiliate \$20; Students \$5. Membership year is January 1 to December 31. Send name, address, telephone number, and RNABC registration number or name of the educational program. Make cheques to "History of Nursing Group" and send to: Anne Karl, Membership Coordinator, #1-2880 West 33rd Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V2C 1N7.



THE HISTORY GROUP'S NEWSLETTER

The History of Nursing News is published irregularly four times a year by the History of Nursing Professional Practice Group of the Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia. Unsolicited material is welcome, but the Editor reserves the right to shorten, reject, or edit materials in consultation with the author(s). APA style preferred. Editor Beth Fitzpatrick, Box 444, Brackendale, B.C. V0N 1H0 1-604-898-3156

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