



BC History of Nursing Society

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2026
VOLUME 43
ISSUE 2

Gateway Health Building- the UBC School of Nursing is on the 4th and 5th floors along with Kinesiology, and the UBC Health & Integrated Student Health Services



BCHNS Archives Finds a New Home

Submitted by Suzanne Nixon

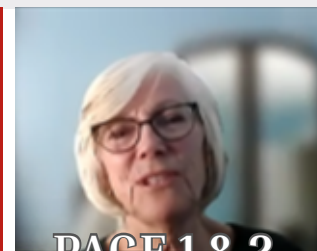
The recent BCHNS move to its new location in the Gateway Health Building on the UBC Campus has given Members of the Archives Committee an opportunity to pause and take stock. We have had a chance not only to undertake a review of the inventory of artifacts and treasures that BCHNS members have dedicated their energies to preserving but have confirmed once again the value of these efforts and the pride derived from being good stewards of these archival materials. The past Chair of the Archives Committee, Nan Martin, eloquently encapsulated the sentiment of past and present members who have been good keepers of our British Columbia nursing history:

"To me, the most significant reason for preserving nursing history is that it honours the nurses who came before us and ensures that their experiences, achievements, and challenges are not forgotten. Nursing history helps us understand the evolution of our profession, provides valuable lessons for future generations, and strengthens our sense of professional identity. Every photograph, letter, oral history, and artifact represents the dedication and service of nurses who made a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Preserving these stories is a way to recognize their contributions and ensure that future nurses can learn from and be inspired by their legacy. Through assisting with archival work, I came to appreciate how easily important records, photographs, documents, and personal stories can be lost if they are not carefully preserved. I found it deeply satisfying to help organize and safeguard materials that tell the story of nurses and their contributions to health care."

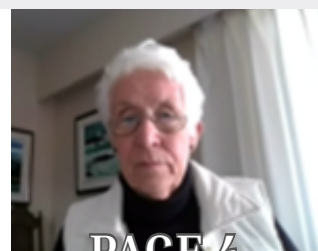
BCHNS members have dedicated over 35 years to safeguarding and preserving our nursing history. They have carefully preserved hundreds of artifacts and over 3,000 original-sourced documents and digitized oral histories. The documents and oral histories are now safely catalogued and environmentally protected within Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) at UBC. BCHNS members have dedicated over 35 years to safeguarding and preserving our nursing history. They have carefully preserved hundreds of artifacts and over 3,000 original-sourced documents and digitized oral histories. The documents and oral histories are now safely catalogued and environmentally protected within Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) at UBC. The noteworthy advantage of having these original documents preserved at RBSC ensures that they are accessible and available for research and educational purposes. The capacity to draw on past nursing experience and insights ensures that this knowledge can continue to influence nursing practice and policy development on health care delivery. Having the opportunity to organize an inventory of all artifacts before the move was a journey of discovery which highlighted the rich treasure-trove of antiquated and delicate equipment, nursing uniforms, badges, pins, pictures, books and memoirs. It reinforced the significance of preserving the rich heritage and legacy of the nursing profession in British Columbia. The new space allotted to BCHNS provides office space to continue archival work and will provide additional space to display some of the artifacts. Space has also been allocated for two display cases which will provide more permanent and visible displays of treasured collections, such as a display of Sheila Zerr's uniform doll collection which showcases the evolution of nursing uniforms.

Continued on page 2

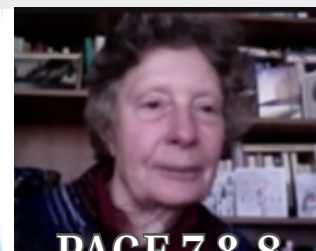
also in this issue:



PAGE 1 & 2



PAGE 4



PAGE 7 & 8

IN THIS ISSUE:

BCHNS Archive Finds a New Home	Cover, Page 2
Lynne Esson, BCHNS Honorary Member	Page 2
Nan Martin, BCHNS Honorary Member	Page 3
President's Message	Page 3
History of the VGH School of Nursing	Page 4
2026 CAHN-ACHN	Page 5
60 Years On - Perioperative Nurses Society Celebrates	Page 6
A Cultural History of the Nurse's Uniform	Page 6
"She Stayed at Her Post"	Page 7 & 8
History of Nursing Shortages	Page 9
Member News & Future Events	Page 10 & 11

newsletter committee

Frances Affleck and Lenore Radom. The BC History of Nursing Society Newsletter is published 2 times per year.

SUBMISSIONS ARE WELCOME.

Deadline for the Spring Issue is March 1, 2027.

Please send submissions to:

Francesaffleck123@gmail.com

Continued from Cover

Ever-increasing challenges to preserving our nursing history are borne out as more schools of nursing close, competition for space and funding, as well as an aging population of volunteers draw on the resources needed to assist and ensure ongoing stewardship of our nursing history. The profound and pivotal role nurses have had on providing health care to the people of British Columbia and beyond would be lost if it were not for the committed foresight of the BCHNS founding members. We are grateful to UBC School of Nursing for providing a new home that "honours the nurses that came before us."

In closing I would like to thank my dedicated team of helpers, Wendy Trigg, Francis Mansbridge, Linda Quiney, Cathy Ebbehoj and Geertje Boschma. At various times and over several months they carefully inventoried our artifacts and in advance up to the big move, packed and later unpacked the office contents and all the stored artifacts. Thank you also to other members of the Archives Committee and Board members who, living outside of the region and unable to assist, provided ongoing encouragement and support of our work.



Display and shelf space

Lynne Esson — BCHNS Honorary Member

Nominated by Cathy Ebbehoj and Margaret Scaia



Lynne Esson has been an integral part of building the strong foundation of what is now the BCHNS. She joined the BC History of Nursing Professional Practice Group in 1995. She was never one to crave the spotlight but stepped up quietly when needed to take on a number of long-term roles, including Vice President, Secretary, Chair of the Memorial Book Committee, Co-Editor and then Editor of the Newsletter, and Member-at-Large. In helping to disseminate and preserve the history of nursing and nursing in BC, Lynne supported the Lady with the Lamp exhibit at St. Paul's Hospital in the late 1990's, and regularly supported the organization of nursing history conferences, including the one held at UBC as part of the Congress in 2019. She was also part of the Abstract Review committee for the CAHN conference in 2006. The feature story in the BCHNS Newsletter Summer 2018 shows Lynne and others dressed in a parade of past and present nursing uniforms to celebrate Nursing Week in collaboration with Vancouver Island University.

Lynne was born in Torphins, Royal Deeside, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, at the local cottage hospital. The same village that is famous for Walkers Shortbread. The family immigrated to Toronto, Canada, in October 1966 and by December had driven across Canada to settle in Surrey, BC. Lynne completed her RN at Vancouver Community College, Langara in 1983. She worked at St. Paul's Hospital in adult acute medical-surgical nursing. In 1988 she received her degree from the University of Victoria.

Lynne started at the UBC School of Nursing in 1988, travelled, and returned to UBC as a research assistant. She began teaching full-time in April 1991, showcasing her expertise in medical-surgical theory, labs, and clinical practice consolidation. Some of her leadership roles included BSN admissions, current student advising, mentoring new faculty, and coordinating exchanges between Guru Nanak and UBC nursing students. In 1999, she co-authored Nursing Foundations: A Canadian Perspective (2nd ed.) with Dr. Beverly DuGas and Sharon Ronaldson. Lynne received the RNABC Award of Excellence in Nursing Education and, in 2019, the UBC School of Nursing Centenary Medal of Distinction during the School's centennial celebration.

Lynne's contributions to the BCHNS have been many and significant, and they truly embody the mission of the BCHNS of discovering, disseminating and preserving the history of nursing in BC.

Nan Martin, BCHNS Honourary Member

Nominated by Cathy Ebbehoj and Margaret Scaia

Nan Martin has been a valued member of the British Columbia History of Nursing Society (BCHNS) since 2006. She has made significant contributions to preserving and sharing the history of nursing in British Columbia as a member of the Archives Committee beginning in 2009 and as Chair from 2016 to 2024. Through her thoughtful leadership, she strengthened the Society's archival work and helped ensure that the stories and records of nurses in this province are preserved for future generations. She regularly shared selected stories in the "Archival Corner" of the BCHNS Newsletter. She has also been the BCHNS representative to the BC Historical Federation since 2008.

Nan was born and raised in Scotland, where she began her nursing career at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary School of Nursing. She later completed midwifery training at Hammersmith Hospital in London. These early experiences fostered a strong commitment to compassionate care and professional responsibility that would guide her throughout her career.

After immigrating to Canada, Nan first became a registered nurse in Ontario and later in British Columbia. She spent much of her career as a leader in geriatric and extended care settings, where she became widely respected for her advocacy on behalf of older adults. Her leadership roles included Head Nurse positions at Brock Fahrni Pavilion at Shaughnessy Hospital and later at Lions Gate Hospital, where she spent the final decade of her nursing career. Nan's professional contributions extended beyond leadership in clinical practice. She was an involved member of the RNABC Gerontological Nurses Professional Practice Group and the Canadian Gerontological Nurses Association. In recognition of her contributions to gerontological nursing practice, she received the RNABC Award of Excellence in Nursing Practice.

We highly value Nan's leadership in the BCHNS. Her dedication to preserving nursing history and supporting the Society's work continues to enrich BCHNS and honour the profession's past.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Geertje Boschma

Welcome to our Fall season of BCHNS meetings and activities. At our first meeting, in September, we started off with a presentation by Kathy Murphy and Naomi Constant on the Alumnae Association of the VGH School of Nursing and their historical collection of artifacts and archives. We are planning on another presentation in November open to all members.

The BCHNS is continuing their work through our various committees and the active engagement of many members. At our last meeting of the 2025-2026 season in June, we met to get to know all committee members in a hybrid on-line and in-person meeting. Thank you all for generously volunteering your time. We are excited about the expansion of our Archives committee with two new members, Barb Lawrie and Jane Banks. They are joining continuing committee members Nan Martin, Linda Quiney, Wendy Trigg and Chris Lemphers, and Suzanne Nixon as the committee chair. Suzanne will closely work with Barb, who will gradually transition into this role moving forward. The Archives committee looks after the historical collection housed in the Archival Room at the new Gateway Health Building at UBC – Vancouver campus, about which you will read more in this newsletter. Stay tuned for an opportunity to visit, likely some time in the Spring.

On a final note, we welcome applications for the BCHNS Bursary: Application due dates: November 1 and March 1. See also our website: <https://bcnursinghistory.ca/bursaries/> – spread the word! Contributions for future newsletters are also welcome. Member input is always appreciated. Take note of upcoming news and meetings on our website (<https://bcnursinghistory.ca>), and enjoy the many interesting articles and updates on nursing history happenings and contributions in this newsletter.

Best wishes,

Geertje



History of the VGH School of Nursing Alumnae Association Archival Collection

Written By Naomi Constant, Archivist and Museum Manager and Kathy Murphy, President



The School of Nursing commenced in 1899 as the Vancouver City Hospital Training School for Nurses and in 1902, when the hospital was incorporated, the school became the Vancouver General Hospital Training School for Nurses. In 99 years, the VGH School of Nursing graduated 8,768 students.

The VGH School of Nursing Alumnae Association was formed in 1908 and has carried out many functions for the school graduates as well as preserving historical records and artifacts of the VGH School of Nursing, The VGH School of Nursing Alumnae Association, and the VGH School of Nursing Alumnae Association Building Society.

Naomi Constant has been the Archivist and Museum Manager for the alumnae association since 1998. She has a Diploma in Cultural Resource Management from the University of Victoria and an M.A. in Museum Studies from San Francisco State University.

The Archive collection commenced in 1995 and covers the period from 1899 to 1998. Initially the items were from the Vancouver General Hospital and donations from graduates and their families. The collection of items is guided by the established mission statement and all are checked for authenticity.

The Mission Statement guides the archival collection. It is to collect, preserve and display artifacts and archival material relating to the history of nursing in Vancouver for the period 1899-1998 with special reference to the history of the Vancouver General Hospital School of Nursing. This collection will be used to educate both the Vancouver General Hospital Community and the wider community about the history of



Military Uniform

nursing and nursing education in Vancouver, through exhibitions, loans, special educational programmes and research.

For acceptance of artifacts and archival material items, items must be free of any restrictive conditions as to use or future disposition, have clear title, and be accompanied by appropriate documentation. The Archives Committee retains the right to accept or refuse a gift or loan. All items are reviewed for acceptance, put through an accession process, stored appropriately, and made available for use by others.



Miniature dolls in historic VGH Nursing School uniforms created by Sheila Rankin Zerr



*Equipment: Baby Crib, Bird Respirator, Wicker Wheelchair, Paediatric Iron Lung
Interesting Fact: Dr. Forrest Bird a former pilot in World War II, invented the Bird Mark 7 ventilator. It was released in 1957 and was the first portable, low-cost ventilator in the world*



Tray of enamel instruments.

Tours of the Artifacts have been provided to class reunion groups, nursing student programmes, staff at the hospital, and members of the public.

A Loan programme allows for artifacts to be used in displays in the hospital and in other museums or events. The Archives have been used by those completing research projects and by families working on family history projects. In the past, other historical museums have been contacted if a donation does not fit the collection policy.

Despite the Alumnae Association having many members and functions over the years, a very difficult decision had to be made in 2025. The VGH School of Nursing Alumnae Association will be dissolved by the end of 2028 after 120 years of operation. This action has meant appropriate homes must be found for the archives and artifacts. The UBC Library Rare Books Division will probably be able to receive the archives and photos. However, there is a real need to locate appropriate sites for some special items. These include the collection of graduation pins, two iron lungs, a wicker wheelchair, a Bird respirator, and a baby crib. Several museums are being contacted regarding these various artifacts.

The Vancouver General Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae Association

www.vghnursingschoolalumnae.com



Feeding Cups



"Care to Back" Basket



The blue student uniform was introduced in the 1970's. The white bib and apron uniform was the graduation uniform in the 1950's and 1960's.

The 2026 Conference of the Canadian Association for the History of Nursing (CAHN-ACHN), May 29–31 at York University, in Toronto.



In May, CAHN-ACHN held its annual conference at York University in Toronto, organized by Lydia Wytenbroek and Kathryn McPherson. The main theme of the conference was “Nursing Humanities and Historical Imaginations: Exploring the Context and Politics of Nursing Across Time, Place and Medium.” It brought together an impressive group of presenters on nursing and health history topics. Presentations also included interesting humanities related topics, for example on nursing history in the curriculum, and doing history using mind maps or life history as an approach. The conference was a wonderful opportunity to meet nurses, nurse historians and history scholars, and catch up with colleagues, students and members from the nursing history community.

The participants joined from across Canada and internationally, including from the US, Germany and Brazil. Special to this year’s conference was the Hannah Panel, at the opening of the conference, on “History, Nursing and Indigenous Health.” One of the panel members, Crystal Point, who has just graduated from the MSN program, spoke about her learning journey in the MSN program and her thesis research on educators’ experiences with teaching Indigenous Cultural Safety and Humility content within nursing curricula. Other speakers on the panel included Christine Fiddler from the University of Saskatchewan and Ruth Green, Director of Social Work at York University. UBC graduate student Sara Daigle-Stevens also presented on Cultural Safety and what it means, in one of the sessions.

We had a strong representation from BC, with students and several members of the BCHNS. Our board member, Michelle Danda together with Sheryl Zentner, lecturer at the UBC-V School of Nursing, gave several presentations, including one on “Nurse Activism in Canada: Historical Perspectives and Leadership Imaginations for the Future,” and one on Migrant Histories, Colonial Legacies: Filipino Nurses, Canadian Healthcare and Imagining Anti-Racist Futures.” They provided a vivid discussion of migration experiences of Filipino nurses, drawing on nursing history as well as family stories. The photograph included is of their presentation.

Several other UBC students, BCHNS and CAHN members presented a series of other topics. Lydia Wytenbroek and Kyra Philbert presented on the history of pageantry in nursing’s past, illuminated in photographs among others in the Canadian Nurse. Two graduate students, Mohadeseh Saki and Sarina Heidari presented on their respective projects, history of nursing in Iran, and the emergence of cardiac nursing as a specialty in BC, whereas Alistair White, who has already graduated, presented on his research project on the history of nursing in the Yukon. Jessica Casey, who recently graduated as an MA student under Lydia Wytenbroek’s supervision, presented her thesis research on the controversial history of the diagnosis of Arctic Hysteria. Another very interesting presentation. She won best student paper! Congrats to both her and Lydia! On Saturday evening we went out for dinner as a group, a real adventure traveling to the restaurant by subway as a group. Many laughs as you can imagine, and a delicious dinner! All in all, another terrific conference and a most valuable event.

Submitted by Geertje Boschma

60 YEARS ON – THE ENTERPRISE CONTINUES

Perioperative Nurses Association of BC Celebrates its 60th Anniversary

Submitted By Susan Knolls



L – R: Julie Cinel, Loraine Best, Rupinda Khotar, Marlene Weeks, Bonnie McLeod, Marcy McKay, Sandra Grimwood, Lorna Murphy, Susan Knoll, Valerie Johnson & Sheen Thursby.

On April 25th 2026, the Perioperative Nurses Association of BC (PNABC) [formerly the BC Operating Room Nurses Group (BCORNG)] celebrated the 60th anniversary of the group's formation. Following a celebratory dinner on the first evening, a one-day mini conference - Shining the Light on Excellence in Perioperative Nursing, was held at the Harrison Hot Springs Hotel. Eleven of the past presidents of the organization were present and recognized for their contributions since 1966. Each past president was presented with a commemorative coffee mug as a memento of the auspicious occasion.

Speakers covered a variety of stimulating presentation topics including: Documenting Legal Encounters in the OR by Shu-Tai from the Canadian Nurses Protective Society, Anaesthesia - Difficult Intubation and Medication Management by Dr. Cat Mattheus, Light Up Your Excellence by Lynn Walters – an interactive session that saw the delegates get out of their

chairs to get involved in stretch and yoga poses, Tips and Tricks for Mitigating Incivility in the OR by Dr. Alexander Villafrance and Jayna Wiebe and to round out the day the History of PNABC by Bonnie McLeod. Bonnie, a past BCORNG and Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada President, spoke about the history of BCORNG/PNABC and how the development of these organizations is closely connected. Susan Knoll, past Historian of PNABC, also set up a mini display of archival documents and artifacts for the delegates to peruse.

While many of the BCORNG records were transferred to the BC History of Nursing Group archives in 2007, some documents were retained for display purposes as shown here. The organization has evolved and changed over time. Although PNABC finds itself with a membership that numbers in the seventies, down from a high of over 600 in 2008, its mandate to shape perioperative nursing throughout the province and across Canada continues. At this conference the torch was passed on to the new board of directors for 2026 – 2028 who are committed to continuing the legacy that was built during the first sixty years.



A Cultural History of the Nurse's Uniform

By Christina Bates

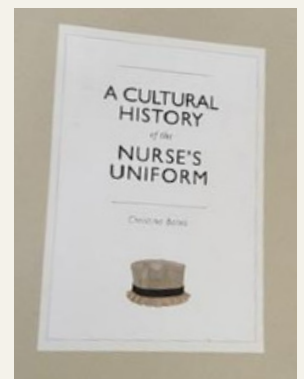


Reviewed By Christopher Lemphers

A Cultural History of the Nurses' Uniform by Christina Bates is a historical introduction to the formal uniform of a growing profession from the late 19th century in Canada. This book was sponsored by the Canadian Museum of Civilization located in Gatineau, Quebec [renamed the Canadian Museum of History] in 2012.

Through the ten chapters, we see the professional development of nursing from the 19th century, with working class individuals employed by charity hospitals to becoming the largest professional workforce in the health care system. Nursing practice in many areas such as hospital nursing, public health nursing and home care are identified through their various employers in the Federal, Provincial and Victorian Order of Nurses jurisdictions. In British Columbia, the reader will find many recognizable references to Vancouver General Hospital, St. Paul's Hospital and Victoria General Hospital.

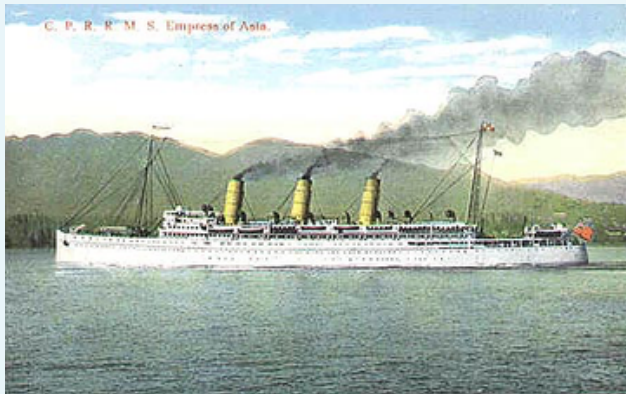
Acknowledgements are made by Bates to BC nurses Sheila Zerr, Adjunct Professor at UBC and Glennis Zilm, Honorary Professor at the UBC School of Nursing for their support and contributions to this project. It's a good read for those of us who enjoy Nursing Social History in Canada and an evolving profession.



“She Stayed at Her Post”:

Noreen Lum, Matron of the Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital, 1933–1949

Written By Irene Goldstone



CPR's RMS Empress of Asia leaving Vancouver Harbour

In April 1933, Noreen Lum, age 23, and her younger sister Lily sailed to the British Crown colony of Hong Kong on RMS Empress of Asia. Hong Kong (pop. ~840,000) was then a thriving international port serving as a gateway for trade and for missionaries travelling to China. With aspirations to be a missionary nurse, Noreen had accepted the position of matron of the Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital (HKS&H). She succeeded Agnes Chan (1923 graduate of Women's College Hospital, Toronto).

Noreen's commitment to missionary nursing was grounded in her Methodist upbringing and her ambition to provide Western standards of nursing practice in a culturally affirming environment. Her decision to go to Hong Kong was reinforced by limited opportunities for nurses of Asian ancestry in Canada, a situation made worse by the Depression.

Noreen (1909–1975) and Lily (b. 1911) had been raised by their widowed mother, Emma Lum (1883–1927), a charter member of the Chinese Woman's Missionary Society, and extended family in Victoria and Vancouver. With sponsorship from the Woman's Missionary Society, Noreen graduated in 1932 from the Lamont Public Hospital, Alberta, where she received the Elizabeth Young Memorial Prize for highest average marks. Known in British Columbia as the “only place an Oriental girl could apply,” the hospital gave preference to “young women of higher education and those in sympathy with missionary work.”

In preparation for her role as matron, Noreen completed a post-graduate course in obstetrics at Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) in the spring of 1933. She was the first nurse of Asian ancestry to do post-graduate or undergraduate training at VGH.

This was an outcome of the board's recent decision to allow the annual enrolment of one student each of Chinese and Japanese ancestry for the three-year program beginning in the fall of 1933. Missionary nursing was supported by the board and was consistent with their view that “Oriental nurses were intended to nurse Oriental patients.” The board's refusal to admit students of Asian ancestry was aligned with British Columbia's goal to maintain “a white man's province” and the Exclusion Act of 1923 barring the immigration of Chinese to Canada.

The Hong Kong Hospital

The Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital, originally named the Yeung Wo Nursing Home, had been founded in 1922 by a group of Western-trained Chinese Christian physicians who wanted to bring Western medicine to a population suspicious of foreign

medicine. In 1926, Dr. Li Shu-fan (1887–1966) was appointed chairman of the board and superintendent of the hospital; he led the institution until his death.

A training school was established, with the first class of three nurses graduating in 1930. The Nurses Registration Ordinance of 1931 required three years of training and passing of the Hong Kong Nursing Board's examination. Noreen was an examiner and member of the board during her time in Hong Kong. By 1932, the hospital had expanded to 94 beds, including 27 private suites, and had a staff of 10 graduate nurses and 17 students. While the facility was a private, for-profit hospital, charity patients were treated in outpatient and inpatient settings.

“I Enjoy My Work Very Much”

As matron, Noreen managed the day-to-day functioning of the hospital and the education of student nurses in the three-year program. Upon arrival, her first task was to establish a midwifery program of one year to prepare graduate nurses to perform normal deliveries in the hospital and community. The women of Hong Kong preferred midwives, but the introduction of midwifery training was also in response to high rates of neonatal and maternal mortality. The midwifery program was accredited in 1934, and Dr. Li Shu-fan credited Noreen with its success. The colonial government outlawed traditional midwives, *wan po*, in 1936.

In a letter published in *Canadian Nurse* in 1935, Noreen wrote: “I enjoy my work very much, especially ... training the Chinese girls.... I hope the day will come when nursing in the East will reach the standard of that in the West, and will be regarded as the highest profession for Chinese women.” Under Noreen's leadership, the training school grew; 16 nurses and midwives graduated in 1937.

Aside from her professional duties, Noreen served on the executive of the Chinese Canadian Club (est. 1934). From 200 to 250 Chinese Canadians had chosen to live in Hong Kong to escape the racism in British Columbia and for better professional and economic opportunities. Yet for those working in the colonial administration or British businesses, Hong Kong was just as discriminatory.

Nursing in a City Under Attack

With the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese war in 1937, refugees poured into the city, doubling the population. Stresses on public health, sanitation, food, and shelter were extreme. By 1938, the Japanese Army occupied the nearby city of Canton (now Guangzhou) and Kwangtung Province, and the colonial administration prepared to defend the island. The HKS&H was designated a casualty clearing hospital, with Dr. Li Shu-fan as the medical officer in charge. Noreen Lum, “our matron, a fine Chinese lady born and trained in Canada,” reorganized the nursing units on a “war footing.”

Early on the morning of December 8, 1941, Dr. Li Shu-fan heard a series of explosions across the harbour. From a hospital verandah, he could see black smoke over Kai Tak airport. The invasion had begun. While newspaper reports focused on Pearl Harbor, the 18-day attack on Hong Kong far exceeded the ferocity of fighting and the loss of life in Hawaii. The defending army and volunteers numbered less than 15,000, including nearly 2,000 Canadian troops that had arrived in November. On Christmas Eve, the Canadians made a valiant counterattack. Overwhelmed by 35,000 seasoned Japanese troops, Hong Kong surrendered on Christmas Day. At least 4,500 Allied troops and volunteers were killed; 550

Canadians succumbed to their wounds or illness or were reported missing. The Japanese sustained heavy losses. When the city came under attack, the patients at HKS&H were evacuated to temporary hospitals. As planned, the capacity of the hospital was increased from 120 beds to 300; patients overflowed onto mats under beds and into the hospital's garden. Three surgical teams operated. No blood was available for transfusions. Despite two large red crosses painted on the roofs of the hospital, the hospital was bombed.

Dr. Li Shu-fan noted that "our fifty nurses had carried on with admirable calm and efficiency"; one nurse suffered "war neurosis" and one suffered multiple bullet wounds. The operating rooms were moved to the ground floor, where they were protected by six floors of reinforced concrete; nonetheless, the surgical team wore helmets. Nurses were trained to provide the anaesthetic. When the elevator failed, stretcher bearers transported the patients. Once the city's gas and electricity were cut, surgery was performed by the light of kerosene lamps. Wood and coal fires were used to boil water to sterilize instruments and operating room linens. When the supply of rubber gloves was exhausted, the surgical team dipped their hands and arms into a solution of biniodide of mercury in crude alcohol. Wounds were cleansed with a solution of carbolic acid; sulpha drugs were scarce; penicillin was not available.

The mortality rate was high. A mass grave, built on the grounds of the hospital, was dug in total darkness to avoid the attention of the Japanese. Towards the end of the fighting, public health services collapsed and a new patient population presented with malignant (potentially fatal) malaria, cholera, and later, dengue fever.

Harsh Years of Japanese Occupation

After the surrender, the residents of Hong Kong endured a three-day victory spree of rape, pillage and looting. Boxing Day night, Japanese soldiers forced their way into the hospital with guns and bayonets, prowling for night nurses; the nurses managed to escape. Dr. Li Shu-fan placed Indian "old amahs" (nursemaids) on night duty and Indian watchmen on night patrols. He believed that, since Japan had signed an accord aligning India with Japan in 1940, Japanese soldiers would hesitate to kill an Indian.

Knowing that the nurses at a neighbouring hospital had been brutally raped and murdered, Dr. Li Shu-fan and his colleague, Dr. R. K. Valentine, negotiated with Colonel Eguchi, the chief medical officer of the Japanese Army in Hong Kong, regarding the fate of the hospital and the need to protect the nurses. Over tea served by "Noreen Lum, our charming matron," and then over Johnny Walker Black Label, it was agreed that a poster warning soldiers that "the hospital was doing the work of mercy and was under the protection of the Imperial Army seal" would be placed on the hospital gates and on the hospital itself. The poster and night watchmen were effective.

But violence and deprivation, especially of food that was reduced to half the daily required calories, continued until liberation. The Japanese forced the mass deportation of hundreds of thousands of civilians. Nine months after the surrender, a "crop of enemy babies" conceived during the mass rape after the fall of Hong Kong arrived. Uncomplicated cases were delivered by the nurse in charge of the maternity ward.

Dr. Li Shu-fan and the hospital were under constant surveillance. When faced with an ultimatum that he assume the role as head of the Sino-Japanese Medical Association, rather than collaborate, he escaped to Free China in August 1943 and on to Washington, where he served as an advisor to the American government. Emperor Hirohito surrendered August 15, 1945; Hong Kong was liberated August 30. The Vancouver Sun reported that Noreen had served as matron during the occupation and that Lily had escaped

On to unoccupied China. Dr. Li Shu-fan's return to Hong Kong in November 1945, he found the hospital in "a pathetically dilapidated state," in need of major repairs and the replacement of surgical instruments and equipment. Most of the patient blankets and linens had been sold to buy food. Noreen explained that "the hospital's patients and staff had to subsist on the compulsory sale of these articles..." As matron, Noreen had seen her nursing staff and patients through three years and eight months of the occupation: she had "stayed at her post."

Post-war Return to Canada

Within a month of Japan's surrender, the British military government restored limited public services, buried corpses, sanitized filthy hospitals, and imported rice, vegetables, and fuel. The population was malnourished and immuno-compromised. In 1946, epidemics of enteric fever, dysentery, cholera, smallpox, and malaria swept the colony; tuberculosis claimed hundreds of lives. Despite post-war inflation and the lack of building supplies, the HKS&H was restored and, by 1947, had a capacity of 200 beds. On mainland China, the war between the Nationalists and Communists raged, bringing a new wave of refugees. There were fears the Communists would invade Hong Kong.

Highly respected for her contributions to the nursing profession, Noreen left Hong Kong in January 1949. She travelled first class on SS President Wilson, which docked en route at San Francisco; Noreen continued by train and arrived in Vancouver February 6, 1949, a few months after all Asian Canadians had been granted the vote. She married Cecil Bow Wand (C. B. Wand) (1900–1957), a well-known local photographer, and became manager of her husband's business. As a widow, she taught at the Chinese United Church School. In 1975, Noreen died prematurely, age 65, of cardiac disease, perhaps due to the privations of the occupation. Lily probably graduated as a nurse and a midwife in 1937; I cannot confirm that she returned to Canada.

Noreen's and Lily's life stories speak of tenacity and resilience—all while providing nursing care in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

About the Author: Irene Goldstone is a graduate of the Training School for Nurses, Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal (RN 1966), McGill University (BN 1972), and the University of British Columbia (MSc 1981). She is a founding member of BCHNS and CAHN.

Sources: The author consulted sources at the City of Vancouver Archives, Chinese Canadian Museum and Archives, and Library and Archives Canada, plus various journal, and newspaper articles. Specific citations are available on request from the author Irene.goldstone@gmail.com

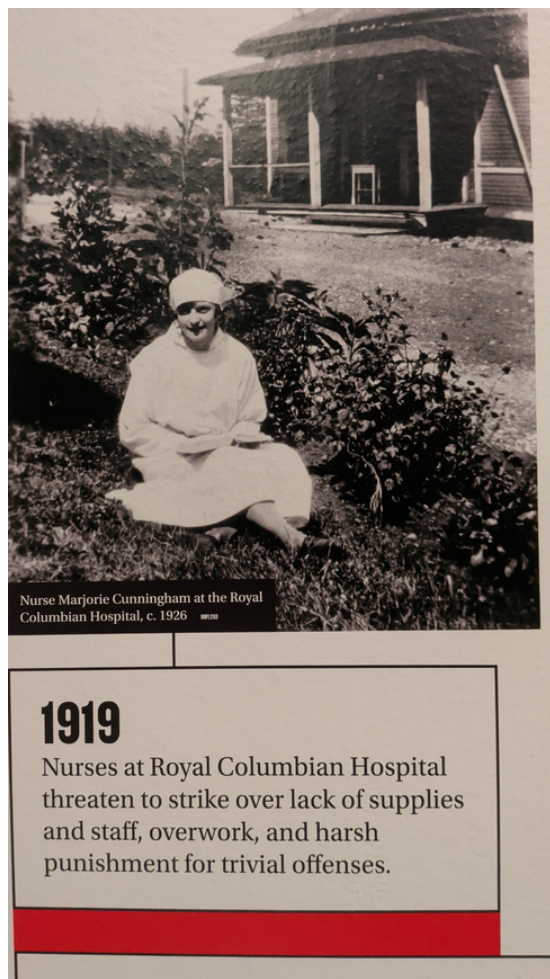
Acknowledgments: With thanks to Linda Yip, genealogist, for assistance identifying Emma Lum; to Naomi Louie of the Chinese Canadian Museum, for assistance searching for Lily Lum; and to Manrico Scremin for assistance with the image of Noreen Lum.



Noreen Lum's certificate of Canadian return, 1949
Department of
Immigration and
Colonization
Library and Archives
Canada

Shaughnessy Hospital & The History of Nursing Shortages

Submitted by Margaret Scaia



Solidarity Labor Movement Exhibition, New Westminster Museum

We received an inquiry from Melody Pan, a new BCHNS member, asking about the history of labour strikes of nurses in BC and whether firsthand or other accounts of nurses' job action exist from that period to the present. As we prepare for labour negotiations again, and perhaps a strike, it might be useful to put one member's experience into context.

In developing this article, I learned from a friend that they were actually on the picket line at Shaughnessy hospital in the mid-80s. Their biggest memory was that 'we were better staffed while on strike, and in the end, nothing really changed at the bedside; we were still chronically short-staffed!'

Their memory of the Shaughnessy Hospital picket line in the mid-1980s captures an important theme in BC nursing history: "We were better staffed while on strike." The comment is brief, yet it points to longstanding concerns about staffing, workload, and the gap between policy decisions and bedside realities.

During the 1980s, nurses in British Columbia worked within a health-care system shaped by budgetary restraint, restructuring, and rising patient needs. Shaughnessy Hospital, then a major veterans' hospital in Vancouver, relied heavily on experienced nursing staff to provide both acute and long-term care. Nurses managed heavier workloads while striving to maintain standards of patient care.

Many nurses who participated in labour actions during this period recalled that essential-service staffing arrangements during strikes often created safer, more manageable working conditions than during regular operations. Staffing levels were more carefully planned, assignments were clearer, and workloads could temporarily feel more balanced. For some nurses, this highlighted how deeply chronic understaffing had become accepted as normal hospital practice.

The comment also reflects the broader history of nursing as a predominantly female profession. Nursing work was often treated as a caring service that relied on personal commitment and sacrifice. In practice, nurses frequently compensated for shortages by working overtime, skipping breaks, and taking on additional emotional and physical labour. Hospitals continued to function because nurses absorbed many of the pressures created by limited staffing.

What makes the recollection notable today is its continuity with current discussions about nursing shortages in BC. Concerns about workload, burnout, retention, and patient safety remain central to the profession. The statement from the Shaughnessy picket line suggests that these problems were already well recognized by bedside nurses forty years ago.

For nursing historians, memories like this are valuable because they link labour history to everyday clinical experience. They show how major policy decisions were felt at the bedside and how nurses understood the relationship between staffing levels and patient care long before these concerns entered the broader public discussion.

As the Talking Heads said in their 1981 album *Once in a Lifetime*, "Same as it ever was."

Member News

Passings

Sheila Oxholm (Ann)



Born in 1937 in Highley, Shropshire, U.K., Sheila died peacefully on April 19, 2026. She was pre-deceased by her husband, Ben, her brother, Denis, and her sister, Mary. A nurse and midwife, Sheila held many roles throughout her career, working in England, New York, Montreal, Newfoundland, Victoria, and Vancouver. She loved being a nurse and often shared stories from her experiences. After retirement, she remained active in volunteer work and in caring for friends who needed support.

Fiercely independent, practical, generous, and kind, Sheila said she had a good and happy life. She offered special thanks to James Kwan for his ongoing care and support. Sheila will be lovingly remembered and deeply missed by her nephews, nieces, and many friends. No service, by request.



Below: Ralph & Lenore with their sons Colin & Ryan, Daughter-in-law's Brittany & Tracy, and their grandchildren Jake, Dax, Bree, Liam, Roman, and Matteo.



We send our condolences to Lenore Radom in the loss of her husband of 56 years. A loving tribute to Ralph can be viewed at <https://virtualmemorialgatherings.com/ralph-radom/>

Members Out & About



Anne, Nan, Kathy, Frances, Wendy & Francis attended the BC Federation of History Annual Conference in May - "Layered Histories: Hard Conversations," they also announced the 2026 book award winners. There was wide variety of historical books to peruse. Catherine Clement discussed her book *The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act*. Which included a fascinating story of Chinese immigrant cards. And explored one photographer's work documenting the Chinese community in Vancouver, and the hidden detail that can be interpreted from these images. More details and interesting articles can be found on the website:

<https://bchistory.ca/about/news/>



BCHNS Meetings with Guest Speakers are open to all members. The meetings are via Zoom and followed by a Board meeting. To register send us an email via <https://bcnursinghistory.ca/contact/>

Tuesday November 10, 2026

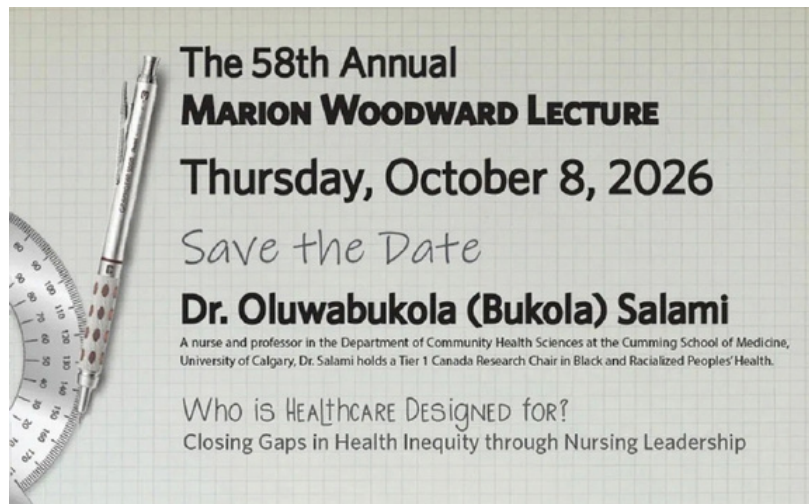
Lisa Smith will be presenting the story of Emily Patterson: The Heroic Life of a Milltown Nurse.

<https://lisaannesmithbooks.wixsite.com/lisa-anne-smith-bo-1>

Tuesday February 9, 2027 4-6pm Open meeting with speaker TBA

Tuesday April 13, 2027 4-6pm AGM

Future Events



UK Association for the History of Nursing (UKAHN) Colloquium 2027

24 June 2027 in Glasgow
<https://ukahn.org/>



Please share our invitation to students to apply for the BCHNS bursaries. The application deadline is November 1, 2026. <https://bcnursinghistory.ca/student-nurse-bursaries/>

The BCHNS Newsletter is published regularly two times a year. The Editorial team welcomes book reviews, research projects, and relevant historical articles. We also invite presentations of one's own professional experiences and careers at one of our open meetings.

PUBLISHED IN THE SPRING AND FALL

BC History of Nursing Society

PO Box72082 RPO Sasamat,
Vancouver, BC, V6R 4P2

Check out the BLOG on our website:
www.bcnursinghistory.ca

Special thanks to all who contributed to this issue of the BCHNS newsletter