Members of the BC History of Nursing Society, friends, and proud family members came together to celebrate the Society’s 25th Anniversary on Sunday September 20th in style. Turning out in their finery to the beautiful and appropriately historic Hycroft Manor, celebrants were treated to Afternoon Tea in honor of retired Helen Randal Librarian Joan Andrews and the induction of Sheila Rankin Zerr as an honorary lifetime member. Over 40 people were in attendance including members, student members, and guests. President Kathy Murphy served as Master of Ceremonies, ensuring that the full programme ran smoothly.

First greetings were given by Nora Whyte, who similarly opened the inaugural BCHNS meeting on May 3, 1990. Nora’s first address focused on “The History of Provincial Public Health Nursing in BC, 1939 – 1959,” and was based on her 1973 Master of Science in Nursing thesis (available online from the UBC Library). She commented then on the parallel challenges and innovations of past and present nurses. Her 2015 remarks reflected the ongoing development and innovations of the BCHNS as a strong and vibrant group committed to preserving and studying nursing history.
We hope you enjoy this very special edition of the BCHNS Newsletter, which celebrates the Society’s 25th Anniversary. We are most honored to edit this issue, and have had a wonderful time exploring the archives, hearing from long-time members, looking through photographs, and generally exploring the last 25 years to bring you some highlights of the BCHNS history. In addition to our anniversary material we bring you features on Genelle Leifso’s volunteer work in Nepal, a peek into the archival collection, and exciting news from our members. We extend a very big thank you to everyone who contributed photographs, stories, research, writing, and general counsel — creating this issue was truly a collective effort. We invite you now to pour a cup of tea, grab a slice of pumpkin pie, and enjoy the Fall Newsletter.

Did you know … You can find the signatures of 18 people who were interested in a “Proposed History of Nursing Interest Group” (ca. 1989) in the archives? Many of them remain BCHNS members to this day. The group grew quickly from those first 18: In June 1990, the group comprised 36 members, 1 student member, and 1 honorary member, which was enough to “satisfy the RNABC’s requirements for a professional practice group” (June 1990 Newsletter). By August the group had reached its goal of 50 members. Original dues were $5.00 (August 1990 Newsletter).
“Dear Members and Friends of the B.C. History of Nursing Society,

It is a great pleasure and an honor to be here this afternoon to join you in marking your 25th Anniversary. Today is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate your own rich history as an organization.

As highlighted on your website, “the mission of the founders was to discover, disseminate, and preserve BC’s nursing history.” Twenty-five years later, it’s clear that you have carried out this mission in an outstanding way characterized by professionalism, adaptability, and creativity.

From your visionary founding members and to all those who have served on the executive and committees over the years, the nurses of British Columbia owe you our deep gratitude for your dedicated leadership. We have witnessed the work of the organization to nurture historical scholarship, to collect and preserve artifacts, and to disseminate knowledge through your excellent website, displays, and resources. Members have contributed countless hours to keeping the Society going: preparing the newsletter and website updates, organizing meetings, maintaining your records, and looking after your finances.

Although I have not been an active member, I have observed your vibrant presence at numerous events, conferences, Nursing Week celebrations, and others occasions where you have displayed resources—you made us proud of our history! I have witnessed, also, your teamwork on projects and your generosity in hosting social and educational events.

During the 2012 convention and annual meeting of the Canadian Nurses Association in Vancouver, you loaned a mannequin in a 1918 student nurse’s uniform for the Association of Registered Nurses of BC (ARNBC) display and entrusted me to look after it at night because I was staying in the convention hotel. Riding with “my student” in the elevator each morning and evening--along with delegates and other hotel guests--was the source of the best elevator conversations I’ve ever had, creating a spark of interest in our nursing history. Thank you for that happy memory!

Following the transition from the RNABC to the College a decade ago, and the formation of ARNBC some years later, your members were strong supporters of the new Association and have offered guidance through consultations and networking events. I admired the way in which you made your own transition from a professional practice group affiliated with RNABC to become incorporated as a Society in British Columbia in 2008.

The BC History of Nursing Society assumed responsibility for the BC Memorial Book and also served to recognize outstanding nurses through nominations for the Canadian Nurses Association Memorial Book. It was a pleasure for me to receive your meticulously researched nominations when I worked with ARNBC and to submit the documents to CNA with great confidence of approval by the Board of Directors.

Reflecting on the past 25 years, I see a legacy of leadership exemplified in your commitment to nursing heritage in BC. Congratulations on reaching this special anniversary with many more to come!”
25TH ANNIVERSARY GREETINGS
from the Canadian Association for the History of Nursing

President of the Canadian Association for the History of Nursing/Association Canadienne pour L’Histoire du Nursing Lydia Wytenbroek sent her greetings from the road.

“As President of CAHN/ACHN, it is my pleasure and privilege to congratulate the BCHNS on 25 years as a tremendously fruitful organization! As BCHNS members, you have tirelessly dedicated your time and energy to the promotion and preservation of BC’s nursing history, and your extensive efforts have not gone unrewarded! BCHNS’s impact on the field of nursing history in Canada is remarkable. By collecting oral histories and preserving key BC nursing history documents in its archive, BCHNS has ensured that these important sources are available for future researchers. BCHNS has done an incredible job of promoting awareness about the valuable contribution of BC nurses to Canadian health care through its various presentations to the public and to nursing students. And through its scholarships, BCHNS has supported students interested in nursing history and has cultivated the success of emerging scholars in the field of Canadian nursing history more broadly. This is an impressive legacy!

On behalf of CAHN/ACHN, I thank you for all you have done in preserving and promoting Canadian nursing history over the past 25 years. You have my personal thanks, as well, for investing in my career as an emerging nurse historian in Canada. It is such a pleasure to be involved with a group of nurses that are so passionate about nursing history. My warmest congratulations to BCHNS!”

HONORING

Helen Randal Librarian Joan Andrews

The 25th Anniversary celebration continued as the BCHNS honoured Joan Andrews, thanking the long-time librarian and manager of the RNABC/CRNBC Helen Randal Library for her contributions to the Society:

“Joan became the Manager of the Helen Randal Library at the RNABC in 1986 after years at Simon Fraser University, the Vancouver Law Courts, and managing her own library consulting business. She spearheaded computerization initiatives that were used throughout the association and, due to the increasing demand from RNABC members, managed collection development, technology planning, budgets and staff training. As a result of the 20,000 inquiries per year, Carol MacFarlane and Marjory Jardine were hired as reference librarians. They are with us today. In 2001, Joan was asked to be the Acting Director for Resource Development and Communications. Using a “systems approach” she introduced quality assurance measures to RNABC Resource Development using a variety of technical, communications and design talents. The library became Canada’s largest full service specialty nursing practice library, which served nurses throughout BC.

As long as I can remember, Joan was the resource person to contact regarding library holdings. Each request was met with her calm and helpful manner. As this group grew and acquired items that needed housing or sharing with others, she made it happen. The Oral Histories, Pages of History, Nursing Miniatures created by Sheila Rankin Zerr, and ever-changing displays were given appropriate space and utmost care.

Thank you, Joan, for your many hours of thoughtful service to the members of the History of Nursing Society. We could not have grown without your assistance.” - KATHY MURPHY
HONORING Sheila Rankin Zerr as Newest BCHNS Honorary Life Member

BCHNS Vice President Ethel Warbinek gave a beautiful address inducting dedicated BCHNS member Sheila Rankin Zerr as an honorary life member.

The BCHNS awards this distinguished honor to leaders and scholars who are committed to identifying and preserving important nursing history resources and to those who have advanced nursing history knowledge in their writing, research, and educational accomplishments. On behalf of the BCHNS, Ethel noted, “Sheila has made significant and outstanding contributions to nursing in B.C. and especially to history of nursing. She is an outstanding role model and we are pleased to nominate her for the BCHNS’s Honorary Life Membership.” You can read more about Sheila Rankin Zerr’s accomplishments and Ethel Warbinek’s full address in the BCHNS Newsletter Summer 2015 Edition (Volume 26, Issue 2).

Sheila joins an esteemed group of honorary life members including Helen Shore and Glennis Zilm, who attended the Anniversary Tea; Nina Rumen, Naomi Miller, and Beth Fitzpatrick, who were unable to attend; and past honorary members Margaret Street, Monica Green, Esther Paulson, Mary Richmond, Verna Huffman Splane, Beverly Du Gas, and Helen Mussallem. More information about these members is available on the BCHNS website and in the archives.

Did you know …

From the June 1990 Newsletter:
“Margaret E. Street, author of the best-selling biography of Ethel Johns, Watchfires on the Mountains, was nominated by the executive and elected at the annual meeting as our first honorary life member. ... Miss Street was at the [inaugural] meeting and graciously accepted the honor.”
SPECIAL PRESENTATION TO
Linda Quiney

Following Sheila Rankin Zerr’s induction as an honorary life member, BCHNS Treasurer Sue Forshaw presented historian Dr. Linda Quiney with a contribution towards the publication of her upcoming book. Dr. Quiney expressed her sincere gratitude for the Society’s support, and much excitement was generated for her future publication.

Earlier this year, the BC History of Nursing Society received a unique request from Linda Quiney, an Affiliate Member of our group. Linda was originally a teacher in Toronto schools but following the raising of twins, she returned to school at the University of Ottawa to pursue an MA in Women’s History and then doctoral research where she discovered the St. John Ambulance Voluntary Aid Detachment, or VADS, of the First World War. This was followed by postdoctoral research into women’s role in developing the Canadian Red Cross Public Health programs of the 1920s.

After moving to Vancouver in 2004, Linda taught part time in the UBC Department of History. Following her retirement, she became an affiliate of the UBC School of Nursing Consortium for Nursing History Inquiry and prepared to finally transform her doctoral work into a manuscript. In order to publish the manuscript, funding was required. The BC History of Nursing Society agreed in principle to fund a specified amount if other funding could be found. This action resulted in Linda requesting and receiving the outstanding funding needed from the St. John Ambulance in Ottawa.

We are delighted to present Linda with our share of the publication costs and look forward to reading her publication. - KATHY MURPHY
The anniversary celebration ended with a captivating presentation by honorary life member Glennis Zilm on Nursing on the Battlefields, Canada’s Military Nurses: 1885 to 1945.

From Kathy Murphy’s introduction: “As a founding member of the BC History of Nursing Society and The Canadian Association for the History of Nursing, Glennis has played a major role in bringing history alive for audiences across Canada through her writing, speaking, and acting as an amazing role model. She has held significant positions with the History of Nursing group as well as facilitating the recognition of national nursing leaders. Glennis has received many awards recognizing her longstanding contributions to the history of health care in Canada as well as supporting the UBC School of Nursing."

Glennis focused her presentation on the origins of Canadian Military nursing, WWI military nursing (emphasizing Vancouver nurses), and WWII military nursing. She argued that advances in science and technology—both military and medical—impacted medical and nursing care on the battlefields. These technologies included advancing weaponry such as nerve gas and the atomic bomb, for example, and emerging medical treatments such as anesthetics, antibiotics and immunizations. Yet it was the practices and contributions of the military nurses that stole the show.

Glennis delivered her presentation in the historical uniform of Mrs. Kate Miller, Canada’s first military nurse (ca. 1885). According to Glennis, Miller was “one of three nurses and one assistant from the Winnipeg General Hospital who set up the field hospital in Saskatoon” during the North-West Rebellion. In addition to Mrs. Miller, several BCHNS military nurses were featured in the presentation. We learned, for example, that Joan Doree nursed at Basingstoke in England, “where a great many patients with severe burns were treated, and advances were made in treatment using plastic surgery.” Glennis also acknowledged the service of BCHNS Nursing Sisters June (Plummer) Newton, Shirley Ridalls, and Nina Rumen. June Newton attended the tea with her daughter Joanne Whitelaw. Graduating from the Royal Jubilee Hospital in 1941, June served with the Canadian Military in WWII, and was assigned to the Canadian Field Hospital in Caserta, north of Naples in 1943. You can read more of her story in the March 2011 BCHNS Newsletter.

We were also reminded of BCHNS member Edith Landells, who “collected the memories of nurses between about 1990 and 1999 – and left a unique and remarkable 3-volume legacy of information in The Military Nurses of Canada: Recollections of Canadian Military Nurses” (Glennis Zilm). According to the CNA Memorial Book, the volumes “will stand for many decades as one of the most significant and valuable histories of Canadian Nursing.”

One other strong link between the BCHNS and the preservation of Canadian military nursing history that stood out in the presentation was the story of the restoration and protection of the stained glass Nurse Memorial Window and the subsequent enduring notecard series.
A letter from BCHNS secretary Nina Rumen to the RNABC (dated March 8, 1990) about the window and the cards was unearthed in the BCHNS archives. The letter reveals that one of the Society’s earliest activities was supporting the Nursing Sisters’ Association of Canada, Vancouver Unit, in advocating for the restoration and maintenance of the Nurse Memorial Window at the Canadian Memorial Church, United Church of Canada (located at 15th Avenue at Burrard Street in Vancouver). The campaign to restore and protect this important military nursing monument was successful, and a series of notecards was printed and sold to raise funds for the window and more. In time, the BCHNS accepted stewardship of the cards. The story is perhaps best captured on the back of the Memorial Window notecard:

“In 1928, nurses who had served in World War I conducted a national campaign to raise $350 for a Nursing Sister window as part of the Canadian Memorial Church’s ‘Memorial to Peace.’ Designed by Jack Ramsdon of the British Society of Master Glass Painters, it is one of 15 stained glass windows and part of a section honoring the Soldier Sailor, Airman and nurse. In 1989, the Nursing Sisters’ Association of Canada, Vancouver Unit, produced this note card to raise funds to restore the window and provide perpetual care and maintenance. In 1992, the sale of cards led to a $4000 scholarship through the Canadian Nurses Foundation and a contribution to the Nursing Sister Memorial Scholarship. In 1992, the BC History of Nursing Professional Practice Group took on the distribution of cards to promote nursing history. The memorial is one of 12 public monuments in Vancouver honoring nurses.”

The Memorial window notecard was the first in a series of cards thereafter produced by the BCHNS. These notecards remain one of the signature resources of the BCHNS.

Glennis’ presentation proved an inspiring conclusion to the 25th Anniversary event, ultimately reminding us of why we at the BCHNS advocate for and engage in the preservation and study of nursing history. Of the powerful historical work done by the Society, Glennis remarks: “When I look back at what BCHNS has accomplished in 25 years, both through individuals and, best of all, working collectively, we have done so much of which we can be proud. Most of all, I am delighted that even such a small group as we are has helped change the perspective, about nurses (and women), of many other disciplines across this province and across Canada, including history, social science, medicine, and feminism.”

Editors’ Note: While preparing this feature, co-editor Catherine Haney had the opportunity to visit the Society’s archival collection with archives committee co-chair Nan Martin. Of her experience, Catherine says: “I went to the archives to gain a general sense of the history and development of the Society leading up to the 25th Anniversary. When I arrived I discovered that the BCHNS fonds contains 1.33 meters of textual records, 550 photographs, 82 slides, 25 audiotapes, 17 CDs, a great number of artifacts and more to explore. To say the least, I was very grateful for the guidance of archivist Francis Mansbridge and Nan Martin in identifying a manageable selection of early documents to examine. Thanks to Nan’s sharp eye for detail, we quickly realized that many of the highlights of the Society’s 25-year history have been well captured and preserved in its newsletters, and that the newsletters make for a very accessible primary source for the novice historian.” Nan and Catherine’s archival search reminds us that we follow in the footsteps of a long line of newsletter editors - after all, the newsletters date back to 1990 and contribute to those 1.33 meters of text. In featuring the 25th Anniversary Tea in this issue, we hope to similarly acknowledge and preserve an important moment in the Society’s history. – Catherine Haney and Sheila Rankin Zerr.
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

BY KATHY MURPHY

It seems hard to believe that more than 25 years ago, action was taken by a number of concerned RNABC members to collect and preserve our nursing heritage in BC. The first meeting of the History of Nursing Professional Practice Group was held on May 3, 1990 with Dr. Beverly Du Gas as President. As stated in the Archival Fonds on the BC History of Nursing website, their objectives were to provide a forum through which those interested in the history of nursing could exchange ideas and information, to encourage interest in the history of nursing in British Columbia, to promote study and research, to encourage the preservation of materials related to the history of nursing and the lives of individual nurses, to encourage the teaching of nursing history in educational programs, and to disseminate information about the RNABC to its members.

Following the creation of the College of Nurses of BC, the group emerged as the BC History of Nursing Society in 2008. The group has always been open to all nurses and other persons with an interest in the history of nursing. A review of the History of Nursing website reveals the many accomplishments of this dedicated group.

The Anniversary Tea held on September 20, 2015 will be featured in this publication, but recognition needs to be given to those who were the actual founders of this group. There were 37 members who attended the inaugural meeting, led by an outstanding executive board, including: Dr. Beverly Du Gas (President); Helen Shore (Vice President); Nina Rumen (Secretary); Glennis Zilm (Membership Coordinator); Ethel Warbinek (Member at Large); and E. Brenda Flynn (Member at Large).

In a recent meeting with Joy Peacock, Executive Director of the Association of Registered Nurses of BC and Cynthia Johansen, Registrar and CEO of the College of Registered Nurses of BC, the many artifacts and pictures owned by the former RNABC were reviewed, and plans made for appropriate distribution of the items.

2016 CAHN CONFERENCE

Titled Brains, Guts and Gumption: Historical Perspectives on Nursing Education, Practice and Entrepreneurship, the 2016 CAHN/ACHN International Nursing History Conference will be held in Vancouver, Canada, 16-18 June 2016.

Exploring connections between health, nursing and leadership, the conference welcomes papers that analyze the various ways in which nurses have negotiated their roles as educators, practitioners or entrepreneurs, testing new paths of work and practice as the context of health care changed and demanded new responses. Questions of education, practice, health policy and power will be examined, looking at critical areas of nursing’s past. How did local, regional and global health contexts shape nursing practice and education? How did nurses negotiate new domains of work, authority and knowledge? What tensions arose over claims of knowledge, quality training, skill and professional identity? Abstracts on other topics are also welcome.

Call for Abstracts: The conference will bring together scholars, professionals, and students internationally and from many different areas of nursing and health care. We especially welcome abstracts from students. Please visit our website for more information on abstract submission at http://cahn-achn.ca. Submissions are due January 31, 2016.

The CAHN/ACHN conference is hosted by the University of British Columbia (UBC) Consortium for Nursing History Inquiry, and co-sponsored by the UBC School of Nursing, Providence Health Care – St. Paul’s Hospital location, the BC History of Nursing Society, the Margaret M. Allemang Society for the History of Nursing, the Manitoba Association for the History of Nursing, the Halifax Nursing History Group, the Nursing History Research Unit at the University of Ottawa, and the Associated Medical Services (AMS).
As Remembrance Day approaches in 2015, it seems appropriate to feature one of our Second World War nurses. Seventy years ago in 1945, the horror of this war ended. The nurse is Ruth McIlraith (née Littlejohn) 1913 – 2001. She received the five medals shown in the photograph:

1. Royal Red Cross (awarded by King George VI)
2. 1939-1945 Star
3. Italy Star
4. 1939 – 1945 Volunteer & Bar
5. Victory Medal

Ruth enlisted with the Royal Canadian Medical Corps. Her wartime service includes:

- Service aboard Canada’s first hospital ship no.46, the Lady Nelson
- Service in Nanaimo Military Hospital
- After D-Day, service with No 1 Canadian General Hospital at Nijmegen, Holland

A Canadian medical officer during the war, Ruth and two nursing sisters worked with Dutch physician Willem Kolff, who constructed the first working kidney dialysis machine in 1943 during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. In 1946, Ruth became matron of Shaughnessy Hospital. While at Shaughnessy, she also worked on the team to build the first kidney dialysis machine in BC (information courtesy of Glennis Zilm). In retirement, she remained active in a number of organizations, including as a nurse consultant on the DVA pilot project for the Veterans Independence Program, the Veterans Memorial Manor Society and the George Derby Long Term Society. We are proud to report that Ruth was also a member of BCHNS.

With Condolences ...

It is with sadness that we are telling you of the passing of June Newton.

The following is from her daughter Joanne:

June Newton passed away on October 21, 1915.
Her memorial service will be held Thursday November 26 at 11:00 a.m. at the Oakridge United Church on 41st Ave. just east of Cambie St.
Genelle Leifso Volunteers with the Red Cross

Genelle Leifso, a long time member of the BCHNS, recently returned from Nepal after serving for a month as a volunteer with the Canadian Red Cross. The focus of her work was to assist in offering surgical care to the many survivors of the devastating earthquakes in April when 8,800 people were killed, more then 22,000 injured, and 600,000 homes destroyed. In addition, she was involved in improving the local health care infrastructure.

Genelle’s extensive teaching and clinical background prepared her for her role in Nepal. She recently retired as an Operating Room instructor at British Columbia Institute of Technology. She still does casual shifts at Vancouver General Hospital and at Peace Arch Hospital. She left her husband, a General Practitioner, two grown sons, one a Pediatrician and the other a Correction Officer, along with their families at home.

Genelle was assigned to a hospital in Dhunche, six hours travel north of Katmandu. The journey to reach Dhunche was arduous, over mountain roads reduced to trails by mudslides. Dhunche was a popular tourism destination for hikers due to its proximity to Langtang Mountain. The hillside hospital that Genelle was assigned to was reduced to rubble. When the Red Cross arrived, they were able to clear space and erect tents for use as wards, emergency, and outpatient departments. The Operating Room tent was erected inside the hospital warehouse, the only building left standing. She had to climb 240 steps, going up an unstable hillside, to reach the hospital and operating room tent.

The team she was assigned to included twelve Canadians, Red Cross personnel, as well as international Red Cross delegates from the Philippines, Columbia, and Nepal. The teams’ capabilities provided much improved care to obstetrical patients. This specialized care, such as C-Section, previously required patients to be referred to Katmandu. Genelle worked with two other Nepalese nurses, and two local girls (hired as cleaners) to teach them how to clean and sterilize surgical instruments. It was her hope that this legacy would last into the future when a new hospital will be built. These skills would provide for proper sterilization of surgical instruments and prevent transmission of infections.

Genelle was impressed with the spirit of the Nepalese people. Men and women worked together to clear the rubble in the streets. It will be a long time until life returns to normal for the Nepalese people.

Reference: Genelle’s story was first published in the Peace Arch News on August 4, 2015 in an article by Alex Browne.
Articles, news, and ideas for items to be included in the Winter 2015 issue should be sent to Ethel Warbinek, preferably by email, at warbinek@telus.net by Nov 30 2015.