

February 2005

Margaret Allemang Centre  
for the History of Nursing

# NEWSLETTER

## Feature Article

### **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF RADIATION ONCOLOGY NURSING AS SEEN IN THE CANADIAN NURSE: 1924 TO 1958**

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*Lisa was the first recipient of the Allemang  
Centre for the History of Nursing Writing Prize  
in 2004. The following is a shortened version  
of the paper she submitted.*

Radiation therapy for the treatment of cancer was established in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century. Surgery was the only curative treatment for malignant disease for one hundred years prior. X-ray and radium therapy led to new patient care needs which demanded unique medical and nursing interventions. In contrast to the nursing knowledge of surgical oncology patients, the physical care of patients receiving radiation therapy was unfamiliar territory for nurses. Oncology content in nursing curricula was scarce. One nurse stated of the nursing care for radiation treatment side effects and ultimately the state of oncology nursing knowledge, "It was very much trial and error because we just didn't know". This paper examines the issues that influenced the development of radiation oncology nursing knowledge in Canada from 1924 to 1958. Monumental advances in radiation oncology contributed to the social and political environments impacting the development of education for nurses caring for oncology patients. The arrival of radium and x-ray therapy to Canada introduced a new

specialty in nursing; the development of radiation therapy as a separate medical specialty along with the centralization of radiotherapy services in Canada introduced a new medical professional, radiation therapists and the advent of Cobalt therapy pushed the limits of technology beyond nursing's capabilities. For nursing education, it was an uncertain time of transition between different pedagogical philosophies. Articles about radium/x-rays and nursing care of cancer patients published in various issues of the *Canadian Nurse (CN)* are analysed to discern the impact of the socio-political events in nursing education and radiation therapy on the shaping of radiation oncology nursing education. The content and the authorship of these articles show that Canadian nurses caring for cancer patients were caught in the crossfire of a rapidly developing technology controlled by male physicians and a lack of organized nursing leadership in education and practice to guide the emergence of a new nursing practice specialty.

## Membership Renewal 2005

Have you renewed your membership for 2005? Please remember to do so. We rely on membership fees to continue the work of the Centre and further the goals.

Share this newsletter with a friend or colleague and encourage them to join. An increased membership can provide funds to engage in more projects and retrieval of nursing history artifacts. Check our website: [www.allemang.on.ca](http://www.allemang.on.ca)

## Book Review

Gill, Gillian. *Nightingales: The Extraordinary Upbringing and Curious Life of Miss Florence Nightingale*. New York: Random House, 2004, 535 pages.

Carol Helmstadter

Florence Nightingale has become a hot subject in the past few years, inspiring a number of interesting biographies, among them, Hugh Small, *Florence Nightingale: Avenging Angel*, Barbara Dossey, *Florence Nightingale: Mystic, Visionary, Healer*, and a wonderful study by Mary C. Sullivan *The Friendship of Florence Nightingale and Mary Clare Moore*. A new book on Nightingale, written by Dossey, Alex Attewell of the Florence Nightingale Museum in London and others, has just been released. In addition there is *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*, a University of Guelph project headed by Professor Lynn McDonald, which will publish all of the known works of Nightingale, over 16,000 items, in electronic form and sixteen volumes of selected writings. Seven of these volumes are now in print and available in the bookstores. Soon to come will be two on Nightingale and nursing. These two volumes are being edited by a team of five nurse historians and one historian of women. Three of the six members of the team, Kathleen MacMillan, Joyce MacQueen and Carol Helmstadter, are or have been directors of the Allemang Centre.

In the midst of this wealth of material Gillian Gill's *Nightingales* is not redundant because it takes an interesting approach in that rather than being a straightforward biography of Nightingale, it is the story of Nightingale and her immediate family -- her father, mother, and sister. The book concentrates on Nightingale's background, her earlier life, her expedition to the East during the Crimean War, and ends with her physical and nervous collapse in 1857 when she took up the lifestyle of an invalid, rarely leaving her bedroom and refusing to see more than one person at a time. Nurses will be disappointed that Gill does not cover the period when her influential nursing school at St. Thomas's was established and developed.

Gill holds a PhD in French literature and has taught at Yale, Wellesley and Harvard although she does not at the moment hold an academic position.

She has written biographies of Mary Baker Eddy and Agatha Christie. The Nightingale volume makes wonderful, easy and racy reading, exposing the bisexuality of Richard Moncton Milnes, Nightingale's most serious suitor, and hypothesizing that the daydreaming which Nightingale considered such a sin and constantly tried to stop, was actually masturbation. There is considerable supposition throughout the work and also some imaginative writing. For example, Gill writes that Selena Bracebridge, arrived in Balaklava "crazy with anxiety" when she came to take Nightingale back to Scutari following her near mortal illness. Statements such as the above do not seem to be supported by the documentation. These sections make for livelier reading but a historian might question them.

The chapters on the most best known part of Nightingales's life, her work during the Crimean War, may be somewhat disappointing to nurses. This is a scholarly book and Gill develops the context of Nightingale's political and social world well, using extensive old and up-to-date secondary sources, as well as writings of some of the nurses who worked under Nightingale. But she uses only selected volumes from the collections of Nightingale's writings at the British Library, Claydon House and the Wellcome Institute. As a result, the context of nursing in the 1850's is very weak and Gill fails to understand the severe problems with discipline which existed in the nursing workforce, and in fact, in the earlier Victorian workforce as a whole. In a chapter entitled "Woman Trouble" she explains these difficulties not as a structural problem of the nursing labor force, but as a result of Nightingale's difficulties relating to women. She thinks Nightingale despised women of her own class and was too opinionated and erratic to be comfortable in a group of women she did not know. In fact, Nightingale had a number of very close friends of her own class, Selena Bracebridge, Mary Clarke Mohl, Elizabeth Herbert, and not least of all, her own mother. A careful reading of Nightingale's own writings would seem to indicate that Nightingale's problems with her

nursing party arose rather from her view that, in the case of the ladies and some of the religious sisters, they should be nursing whole wards of patients, and nursing them rather than what she called petting individual soldiers or acting as a surrogate chaplain. In the case of the working class nurses the problem was that many were unreliable and did not do their work.

There are a few errors in the nursing chapters, which is always to be expected in any first edition. Eliza Roberts, whom I have never seen referred to as Elizabeth Roberts, had not worked at King's College Hospital for a number of years, but had been a Sister on one of the surgical wards at St. Thomas's for over twenty years. Because of her extensive clinical experience and expertise she became Nightingale's best nurse and her amanuensis. She also could hardly be called a "friend" of Nightingale's. Rather Nightingale was prepared to overlook Roberts's poor literacy level, vulgar manners and horrible temper because of her professional expertise. In fact, Nightingale used Roberts as her personal servant as well as her head nurse. This was not unconventional in the 1850's as it would be today. And Gill identifies Mrs. Roberts as Mrs. Richards in footnote 31 on page 510.

These mistakes, unlike the failure to research the nature of the nursing in the 1850's, however, are minor points. In general, this is an excellent study, an excellent read, and nurses will enjoy and learn a great deal from it.

## Other Reading

Shalof, Tilda. *A Nurse's Story: Life, Death and In-between in an Intensive Care Unit*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2004, 337 pages. The author tells of her life as an intensive care nurse in a busy large city hospital. The book is funny, yet sad, and reveals the true inner workings of an ICU, along with the "dark" humour often used by nurses to cope with their exciting, but stressful responsibilities on a day-to-day basis.

Bridge, Linda & Knowles, Kathy. *The Hopefully Human Nurse: Simple Strategies for Overhauling Your Lamp*. This is the first book

in the Hopefully Human Series written by two Alberta nurses to inspire Canadian nurses to exercise their self-respect. Hopefully Human Products, Box 1092, Lethbridge, AB T1J4A2. The book is being launched at Lethbridge Regional Hospital on 11 February 2005.

Robinson, Jane. *Mary Seacole: The Charismatic Black Nurse who became a Heroine of the Crimea*. London: Constable & Robinson, 2004, 233 pages.

Known as the other Nightingale of the Crimea this book is a full-length biography of her life and experiences. Last year Mary Seacole was named first in an online pole to nominate 100 great black Britons (see next article on Seacole).

Toman, Cynthia & Stewart, Meryn. (Guest Eds.) *Special Issue on Nursing*, Canadian Bulletin of Medical History, 21(2), 2004, 472 pages. Nine articles and four book reviews examining the history of the nursing profession up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Allemang Centre members have contributed to the content. The issue includes an article by Judith Young, "Monthly" Nurses, "Sick" Nurses, and Midwives in 19<sup>th</sup> century Toronto, 1830-1891, and an article by Christina Bates, *The Material of Practice: The Canadian Nursing History Collection*. This latter article describes some of the artifacts in the collection (including the cap collection donated by Gloria Kay) on display at the Canadian Museum of Civilization nursing exhibit opening 16 June 2005 in Ottawa. There appears to be an awakening interest in nursing history, but as the guest editors point out "...significant gaps remain in nursing historiography, and nursing practice continues to be ignored or marginalized within the wider body of health care historiography" (page 223).

## February: Black History Month

### MARY SEACOLE: THE JAMAICAN NIGHTINGALE

Judith Young

*Mary Seacole practised as a nurse in the nineteenth century. A contemporary of Florence*

*Nightingale, Seacole was also an adventurer, humanitarian and social activist as well as an entrepreneur who considered gold prospecting. We would know little of her life had she not published a book in 1857 which detailed her experience in Panama and the Crimea.*

## **Part 1**

Mary Seacole was born in 1865 in Kingston, Jamaica of a Creole mother and a Scottish military father. Like many traditional woman nurse/healers, Seacole learned from her mother.

Jamaica, like most British colonies of the time, supported a naval and military base, in this case in and around Kingston. Seacole's mother ran a boarding house and was well known, particularly by the local British military, for her skills as a nurse/healer. From age twelve, Seacole assisted her mother caring for invalid officers or their wives who boarded in their house. She developed a taste for travel and as a young woman accompanied relatives to England, and did some buying and selling in Haiti and Cuba.

Seacole's account of her life up to 1850 is sketchy, however, we do know that she developed her skills in Creole medicinal art and married. Her husband was "delicate" and she kept him alive by "kind nursing and attention" as long as she could. Following her husband's death, Seacole decided she had developed enough confidence in her own powers to remain "an unprotected female" despite many pressing candidates to fill Mr. Seacole's shoes.

Mary suffered further loss with the death of her mother, however, she continued her mother's work gaining an increasing reputation as a skillful nurse and "doctress". In 1850, a cholera epidemic swept Kingston and she further enhanced her reputation through caring for the sick.

Following the cholera epidemic, Mary decided to give into her "disposition to roam" and traveled to the Isthmus of Panama, where her brother had recently set up a store and a hotel. This was the time of the first California gold rush. Mary planned to assist her brother, set up her own store and minister to the sick. She took two servants and went well supplied with

various goods.

She soon found herself in the midst of another cholera epidemic and due to her previous experience was able to diagnose the first cases. She also rightly believed the disease to be contagious, even though transmission was not understood at the time. Her treatment of cholera depended on the "constitution" of her patient, but included the use of mustard plasters, calomel (a purgative), "strengthening" medicines, water and cinnamon and rubbing the body with warm oil or camphor. She avoided opium which she felt weakened the patient. Her practice appeared an eclectic mix of traditional and regular mid-nineteenth century medical therapies. Through care of rich and poor alike, Seacole secured her reputation in Panama.

Despite her successes, Seacole found life in Panama rough and lawless. Although generally well-treated herself, she was very aware of racial prejudice and was particularly critical of American attitudes to slavery. While in Panama, along with some local people, she helped a young slave cruelly treated by her mistress, to escape. She encountered prejudice when passengers on an American ship bound for Kingston refused to have her on board. She returned home around 1852, on a British vessel.

(Part 2 on the Crimea will continue in the next issue).

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## **Editor Newsletter**

**Dorothy Wylie.** Please contact her regarding news items, short articles, announcements, etc. 304 - 65 Scadding Avenue Toronto ON M5A 4L1. e-mail: [wyliedm@aol.com](mailto:wyliedm@aol.com)

## **News Items**

### **Kathleen MacMillan PhD RN**

Congratulations to Allemang Centre's President Kathleen MacMillan on her appointment as the Dean, School of Health Sciences, Humber College. We wish her well in this new endeavour.

*Canadian Nurses also held as PoWs*  
Letter to the Editor, Toronto Star, 10 November  
2004

I wonder how many of your readers know there were two Canadian nursing sisters also taken prisoner after the siege of Hong Kong. They were the first and only Canadian nursing sisters to become prisoners of war. They were Kay Christie of Toronto and May Waters of Winnipeg.

They were released from Stanley Camp on Sept. 23, 1943, when the American government was negotiating the second repatriation of its remaining civilian internees throughout the Far East. At the request of the Canadian authorities, all our Canadian civilians in the Far East were included in the operation carried out under the auspices of the International Red Cross. Exactly 10 weeks after leaving Hong Kong, they disembarked at New York and were then taken by bus and put aboard a special train for the overnight trip to Montreal. The next morning they said their good-byes and returned to their respective homes.

Kay Christie was my husband's aunt and therefore we have an interest in this story. These two women are rarely written about when there are accounts of the Hong Kong prisoners.

Dianne Christie, Mississauga.

## Date to Remember

[Saturday 9 April 2005](#)

RNAO Board room

Next meeting of the Allemang Centre for the History of Nursing.

## Upcoming Conferences

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
THE HISTORY OF NURSING/  
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
POUR L'HISTOIRE DU NURSING  
OTTAWA, JUNE 17-19, 2005**

The annual meeting of CAHN/ACHN will be held in Ottawa at the Library and Archives of Canada in conjunction with the opening of the Museum

of Civilization's exhibit: **Nursing: The Caring Profession.** *CAHN/ACHN is encouraging groups and individuals to sponsor a student to this historic event.*

Early registration closes 10 May 2005.

Web site: [www.ualberta.ca/~jhibberd/CAHN/ACHN](http://www.ualberta.ca/~jhibberd/CAHN/ACHN)

## Obituaries

### **Anne Beatrice Bender**

(nee Drake)

Anne Bender passed away on 8 November 2004 after a long battle with cancer. She was born in Nova Scotia and obtained her nursing diploma at St. Joseph's Hospital, Glace Bay. She later earned a BScN from St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish; a Master of Education from Harvard University; a Master of Arts (Education) from Central Michigan University; and was a Doctoral candidate in Higher Adult and Lifelong Education at Michigan State University.

Anne was formerly Dean, School of Health Sciences and Associate President, Quality Assurance at Humber College. On her retirement in August 2004 she was honoured with the distinguished title of Dean Emeritus and awarded the Millennium Lifetime Achievement Award for outstanding professionalism and commitment to Humber College. In 1995 she received the Robert A. Gordon Leadership Award from Humber College Board of Governors in recognition of distinguished leadership, vision and vital role as a catalyst for positive change and achievement in Humber and the Community College system. Ann was the founding President of the Ontario Colleges of Administrative Staff Association (OCASA) from 1995 to 1998. In 2002 she received the Doug Light Award from OCASA for leadership excellence in administration and contribution to the Ontario College system. Anne was active in the RNAO as a strong voice for nursing and nursing education.

### **Irene Patricia Hough**

Irene Hough died on 27 December 2004. She attended school in Englehart ON and graduated from the Toronto General School of Nursing in 1942. She joined the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps serving on the hospital ship Lady Nelson. After the war, and a brief stint of hospital nursing, she joined the RCAF Air Rescue Squadron 123 at Sea Island BC taking part in many daring and dangerous missions.

In 1960 Irene obtained a BScN from the University of Toronto. She then entered public health at York County Health Unit retiring from there in 1985 as Director of Nursing. Irene was a very generous and caring person whom will be greatly missed by family and friends.

**Catherine Mary Poulton**  
(nee Cochrane)

Catherine Poulton (Kay) died peacefully on 12 November 2004. She was a Past President of the Nursing Sisters' Association of Canada. Kay was born on the prairies and graduated from the Saskatoon General Hospital in 1940. She nursed in hospitals in Toronto, Ottawa and Bermuda until 1944. She then enlisted in the Royal Canadian Medical Corps. As Lieutenant Catherine Cochrane she served at 24 Canadian General Hospital in Horley, England until the end of the war. She always referred to the hundreds of young soldiers who came under her care as "my boys". She married Sergeant Ron Poulton of the Canadian Army Maple Leaf newspaper—Lord Strathcona Horse, in 1945. In the decades following the war they lived in many places as Ron practised his career as a journalist. They lived in Winnipeg, East York, West Hill and Cheam, Surrey, England. In all those places they made lifelong friends, she will be sorely missed.

## History of Nursing Writing Prize

The Allemang Centre is offering a prize of \$500 for the best essay in the history of nursing

written by a student in the year September 2004 through August 2005.

Criteria for submissions:

1. The paper may deal with any topic in the history of nursing in any period and in any country.
2. Papers should be a minimum of 8 pages, and a maximum of 25 pages in length including footnotes.
3. Both undergraduate and graduate students may submit.
4. The student must be enrolled in a university or community college in Ontario. Students **from any faculty, including nursing, social science, humanities and science**, are invited to apply.

The deadline for submission is August 31 2005.

The prize will be awarded in October 2005.

Papers may be submitted either by e-mail or in hard copy. Electronic copies should be in Microsoft Word include academic affiliation, address, telephone and fax numbers. Students submitting in hard copy should send three copies. The first copy should have the name, academic affiliation, address, telephone, fax and e-mail. The remaining two copies should have no identification.

Please send papers to the vice-president of Allemang Centre:

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