



Margaret M. Allemang Society for the History of Nursing

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FEATURE ARTICLE

They didn't toe the line: Ottawa public health nurses, social justice and family planning, 1967-1972

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(This article is dedicated to the memory of Marion Dewar who died suddenly in September 2008).

As a participant in the Associated Medical Services (AMS) Nursing History Research practicum in 2007, and as a public health nurse, I was interested in researching primary sources about the work of Ottawa public health nurses (PHNs) related to contraception before and just after it became legalized in 1969. I interviewed four PHNs who worked during the years 1967 to 1972 at the City of Ottawa Public Health Department (so named until 1969) and the Region of Ottawa Carleton (RMOC) health unit (so named in 1969 and beyond). Other primary sources for this research were Health Department and health unit Annual Reports 1967-1972 and journal articles from the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* published during that period.

Although provision of contraceptive devices or information was illegal in Canada before 1969, some PHNs used various means to circumvent the law and the health care system to provide necessary contraception information to their clients. They did so while working within a power structure of federal legislation, the Medical Officer of Health, municipal politicians and school principals. My research shows that a social justice ideology guided them in providing care for their clients who were unable to access these services otherwise. Social justice is understood here as "the fair distribution of society's benefits, responsibilities and their consequences" (Canadian Nurse, 2006, p. 18). The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) only officially recognized social justice as an organizational priority in 2002 (Canadian Nurse, 2006); however, it has been an unstated component of public health nursing for a much longer time.

Birth control information and devices were available for those who could afford to pay for physician services and contraceptives before Medicare was established in 1969 (McLaren, A. & McLaren, A. T. 1997). Some PHNs believed it was unfair for privileged clients to be able to receive contraceptive services while others could not. Katie Keys was one of those nurses. As a PHN, she provided contraceptive information to clients in home visits before it was legal to do so. Later, as the nursing supervisor of the Ottawa Family Planning Clinic in 1970 she ensured that adolescents (even underage ones) received services at hours that were convenient for them (Keys, 2007). Marion Dewar (who was later to become Mayor of Ottawa and an MPP) also provided contraceptive information to clients in home visits before 1969 and contraceptive counseling to students in both public and Catholic High Schools (Dewar, 2007). Both Keys and Dewar educated and supported adolescents who wanted therapeutic abortions despite Keys' philosophical and Dewar's religious convictions.

As a school nurse, Eleanor Campbell gave contraceptive counseling to adolescents before 1969, knowing that it was illegal, because she thought it was their right to have that information (Campbell, 2007). As a PHN working in the Family Planning Clinic after 1970, Donna Anderton recalled having to advocate for the appropriateness of adolescents' clinic visits when their parents found out (Anderton, 2007).

Annual Reports showed that the Family Planning Clinic was a popular service with attendance increasing by 300% from 1970 to 1971 and by 150% from 1971-1972 (Annual Reports, 1970, 1971, 1972).

Articles in the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* in 1967 described three Ontario health units that provided contraceptive services before 1969, thereby taking the risk of being prosecuted under the Criminal Code (Dunton, 1967; Fitzgibbons, 1967; Washburn, 1967; Wilson, Moss, Laugharne, & Read, 1967). The City of Ottawa did not take that risk, and instead their Family Planning Clinic

opened after decriminalization of contraception in 1970 (Annual Report, 1970). However, a number of Ottawa PHNs, including Keys, worked at Planned Parenthood-run birth control clinics as volunteers on their own time before 1969 (Keys, 2007).

PHNs provided contraceptive counseling before it was legal to do so because of their own beliefs in social justice even without policies in support of their work: the Canadian Public Health Association did not have a policy in support of contraception until after decriminalization in 1969 and the Canadian Nurses Association only approved a statement on family planning in April 1971 (Palki, Lennox, & McQuarrie, 1971).

How did PHNs serve their clients within their power structure? How did they avoid toeing the line? To quote Katie Keys, "You spent your life finding ways to go around the line" (Keys, 2007).

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BOOK REVIEW

Eunice Dyke: Health Care Pioneer

Marion Royce

Dundurn Press: Toronto and Charlottetown, 1983
ISBN 0-919670-67-9

Eunice Dyke was a pioneer in health care as the first Superintendent of Public Health Nurses in the Toronto Department of Public Health. In later years she was renowned as a strong advocate for the health and welfare of the aging population. The Cholera epidemic of 1832 brought by immigrants from Ireland sparked the need for a public health authority as it spread through Upper Canada. The Public Health Act of 1882 brought the realization for permanent services, which previous health laws did not. The growing incidence of Tuberculosis in the early 1900s furthered the need for action on communicable diseases and sanitation. Dr. Charles John Oliver Hastings became the Medical Officer for Health and began a crusade to prevent disease and control sanitation.

He recognized the need for a core of public health nurses and sought the appointment of Eunice Dyke.

Eunice Dyke was born in 1883; the fifth of six children. She was a graduate of the Johns Hopkins Training School for Nurses and committed to public health nursing. Her training had been interrupted by

a year as a patient at the Muskoka Sanatorium with Tuberculosis, so she had first hand experience and understanding. In May 1911, Eunice Henrietta Dyke was appointed as a public health nurse to take charge of the Tuberculosis work of the department. Thus began her drive to develop a public health nursing service of a high quality.

There were many challenges not only from Tuberculosis, but issues of child health and welfare persisted, and the family became the focus as the department grew. Unemployment in 1920, after the war, again increased pressure on the department. Immigration and the rise of non-English speaking residents with Tuberculosis caused further health concerns.

Dyke received international prominence in 1923, when the League of Red Cross Societies in Paris invited her, to spend four months as a consultant in public health nursing. Over the years many changes had been made on the public health front often dictated by war, the depression and the economy. By 1931 the Division of Public Health Nursing had 115 nurses, however by 1933 the staff was reduced to 12 nurses, due to the depression.

Dyke had taken a course in Public Health Nursing in 1915-16 offered by Simmons College in Boston. Education of public health nurses was a major concern of hers.

Inservice education sessions were offered at lunchtime; the Public Health Nurses Association offered weekly meetings on public health issues; Dr. Hastings had Saturday morning gatherings to speak to the nurses. In 1921, a diploma certifying one-year completion of a public health nursing program from the University of Toronto was mandatory for appointment to the Toronto Department of Public Health nursing staff. Miss Dyke was also active in CNATN (Canadian National Association of Trained Nurses), later in 1924, renamed the Canadian Nurses' Association. Not all nurses endorsed the concept of further education, seeing clinical experience as equally important.

In 1932, Miss Dykes was dismissed from her position of 21 years by Dr. Gordon Jackson who replaced Dr. Hastings. Relations with the successor were frosty, and although she and Hastings might disagree they had similar goals. Dyke was a strong woman with definite opinions and could be difficult if thwarted. Protests from nurses, organizations and other supporters were futile. Tribute was paid to her at a reception at the Royal York Hotel 5 May 1933, with recognition as a pioneer. The 30s were difficult times of unemployment, housing and social issues. Miss Dyke turned her attention to these issues, and was instrumental in establishing the Second Mile Club, originally for women, but later accepting men. Her energy never flagged for various social causes. Possibly ahead of her time in Public Health, she was definitely a pioneer. Later she focused on more social issues, geriatric care and needs of the elderly. She died in 1969, and the Canadian Public Health Association recognized her with an honorary life membership.

Royce's history of the life of Eunice Dyke describes in great detail public health nursing and the social, political and cultural issues of the times. The book provides another perspective on the history of nursing, and efforts at social justice.

Dorothy Wylie

125 Years of Public Health in Toronto

A celebration of the 125th anniversary of Toronto Public Health is on exhibition at the Toronto archives. *An Infectious Idea: 125 years of Public Health in Toronto*. This exhibit presents a selection of archival photographs and documents from 1883

to the present, exploring themes such as health services for children, the struggle for clean water and air, and the development of public housing and social services. At the height of the potato famine thousands of Irish refugees came to Toronto, outnumbering the city's inhabitants two to one, and presented a public health crisis.

The exhibit runs throughout 2009, open Mon to Fri 9:00 to 4:30, and Sat 10:00 to 4:30.

City of Toronto Archives.

255 Spadina Road (just north of Dupont St.).

Toronto's First General Hospital and the Irish Famine of 1847

An archeological assessment of the corner of King and John in preparation for a new building, revealed artifacts from the past and portions of the first general hospital erected on that site. The Toronto General Hospital was constructed at that corner in 1819 and was in operation there until 1854. After the war of 1812, a large number of immigrants arrived in Toronto. Many of them were destitute and sick after the long sea journey. The city fathers became alarmed at the situation and recognized the need for a hospital for those who lacked families and housing, and were unable to care for themselves. The most dramatic event in the history of the hospital occurred in 1847, during the height of the Irish Potato Famine. Between 1200 and 1400 patients were treated in the hospital during the typhus epidemic of that year.

Heritage Toronto Enews, March 2009.

NEWS ITEMS

Florence Nightingale Anniversary Rose

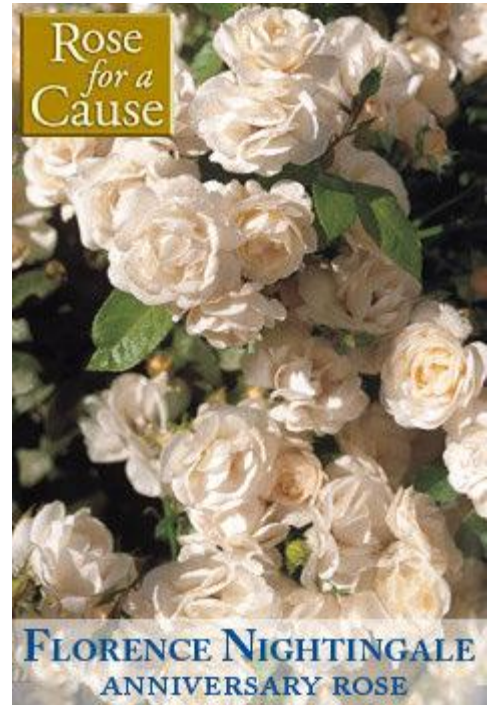
The Florence Nightingale International Foundation (FNIF), the premier foundation of the International Council of Nurses, is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. The Foundation is planning several exciting initiatives to mark this milestone anniversary, one of which is the release of the Florence Nightingale Anniversary Rose.

This is an outstanding scented floribunda with the combined merits of beauty and steadfast vigor befitting Florence Nightingale's legacy. The Jackson and Perkins Company offer this rose in tribute to the founder of modern nursing. This is a Cause rose, meaning that 10% of the net sales of this commemorative rose will be donated to the Florence Nightingale International Foundation (FNIF) Girl Child Fund, a program dedicated to assisting orphaned children whose parent was a nurse and died as a result of contracting HIV/AIDS.

For more information about the rose and other anniversary initiatives visit www.fnif.org.

Glenna Zilm

BC History of Nursing Society, History of Nursing News, March 2009.
Vol. 20:1. p7.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Remember to renew your membership for 2009. Your support is needed to carry out our mandate of information sharing to promote and preserve nursing history.

HISTORY OF NURSING WRITING PRIZE

The Allemang Society is offering a prize of \$500 for the best essay in the history of nursing written by a student in the year September 2008 through August 2009.

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 **June 30, 2009**. The prize will be awarded at the 2009 AGM.

Papers may be submitted either by email or in hard copy. Electronic copies should be in Microsoft Word and 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 email. The accompanying two copies should have no identification.

Please send papers to:

Lynn Kirkwood
570 McCann Road
Portland, ON
K0S 1V0
Email: Kirkwood@rideau.net

UPCOMING MEETINGS

Margaret M. Allemang Society for the History of Nursing

AGM Saturday, September 26, 2009 at 3pm.

The Annual General Meeting will feature **Christina Bates**, historian at the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Her topic: **Starched White Bibs: Moulding the Student Nurse's Body, Behaviour and Identity.**

Canadian Nurses' Association

Annual Meeting Thursday June 11, 2009,

Marriot Hotel, Ottawa, ON

2009 CSHM/CAHN Annual Conference

The Canadian Society for the History of Medicine joining with the Canadian Association for the History of Nursing is holding a joint conference at **Carleton University, Ottawa, from May 29-31, 2009. The theme of the 2009 Congress of the Social Sciences and humanities is: Capital Connections: nation, terroir, territoire.**

See www.cahn-achn.ca for more info.

OBITUARIES

This section is to recognize the contributions of past nurses and others to the health profession and to society as a whole. Their accomplishments are noteworthy.

Marion Dewar **1928-2008**

Marion Dewar (Bell) died in Toronto, September 15, 2008, after a serious fall. She was born in Montreal in 1928, and raised in the town of Buckingham, Quebec. She graduated from Saint Joseph's School of Nursing, Kingston, Ontario in 1949, and nursed in the Ottawa region until 1952. She married Ken Dewar in 1951, and worked for the Victorian Order of Nurses. She later attended the University of Ottawa and was a public health nurse from 1969-1971.



Dewar became an Ottawa alderman in 1972, and was elected Mayor of Ottawa in 1978 until 1985. One of her major accomplishments was a program called Project 4000, which arranged for 4000 boat people from Vietnam to relocate in Ottawa. Other achievements were improved public access to municipal decision-making, low-cost housing and childcare.

In 1985 she was elected President of the Federal New Democratic Party (NDP) and was a Member of Parliament. She lost her seat in 1988. Then, she became Executive Director of the Canadian Council on Children and Youth from 1989 to 1992. She

continued an active role in politics supporting Audrey McLaughlin's leadership bid. In 1995 she was named the national chair of Oxfam Canada an organization that sought to reduce international poverty and create self-sustaining communities.

Throughout her career she was devoted to helping the poor, weak and disposed of society. She was steadfast in her devotion to these causes. In addition to all her political activities she did voluntary work for a number of organizations. In 2002 she was awarded the Order of Canada. She leaves a son, Paul, also in politics.

Dorothy Wylie

Cambon, Noreen Isabel Marie died on April 7, 2009 at the age of 89. She is remembered for her happy nature, her love of children, and her devotion to her siblings, nieces and nephews. Nonie lived a full and adventurous life. After high school she worked in the Quebec Ministry of Education, and then began training as a nurse in Hamilton. Family members were serving in the armed forces, so she abandoned her training and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. She was one of the first to serve overseas in the RCAF's women's contingent, quickly achieving officer rank and becoming very involved in the then newly-developed and highly-secret field of radar.

A very popular and highly respected officer, Noreen was selected by the RCAF to serve as escort to Victoria Cross recipient Wing Commander Guy Gibson, RAF, (of "Dam Busters" fame) when Gibson came to Canada on a War Bond drive. Nonie also liked to talk about meeting Frank Sinatra and Guy Lombardo at the Stage Door Canteen in New York. After the war, she resumed her nursing training, first at the University of Toronto, and then at the Vancouver General Hospital. There she was the Gold medal winner for the graduating class of 1949. Her love of military life drew her into the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps (RCAMC) as a nurse. From 1950-1968 Noreen served with

distinction in responsible positions in Europe and throughout Canada, including Churchill, Manitoba, where her encounter with a hungry polar bear always made a good tale.

Upon retiring from the RCAMC as a Major, she moved to Vancouver and worked as a medical secretary and for the Registered Nurses Association of BC. In later years she suffered from dementia, but remained cheerful and upbeat. She is remembered for her love of the simple things in life, and was a great letter writer keeping in touch with all past friends, nursing and military. (Excerpted from the Globe and Mail April 18, 2009).

Chesham, Lorna K. (RN) died peacefully at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Hospital on Tuesday, April 14th, 2009. She was born in Campbellford, Ontario, and was a graduate of the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto. She served overseas in WW11 as a Major in the Canadian Army; later retiring from nursing as a nursing supervisor at Greater Niagara General Hospital. (Excerpted from the Globe and Mail, April 18, 2009).

Kruspe, Patricia Ruth died on March 1, 2009 at Oshawa General Hospital. Pat was born and raised in Clifford, Ontario. She was an outstanding student, earning her RN at Toronto Western Hospital and her BSN at Queen's University. She was also a first-class athlete and an accomplished member of the Clifford Ladies softball teams (The Swing Skirts) of the early 1950s. A long time resident of Toronto, she served as Director of Nursing at the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital, Queen Street Mental Health Centre, and Whitby Mental Health Centre. (Excerpted from the Toronto Star, March 7, 2009).



McDonald, Sr. Irene CSJ (Eileen Rita) died peacefully at St. Joseph's Morrow Park on March 20, 2009 in the sixty-first year of her religious life. Sister Irene taught in the school of nursing at St. Michael's Hospital until she was appointed Director of Nursing. After leaving her position there, she then worked with the Basilian Fathers for five years. Following this, she was asked to write a history of St. Michael's Hospital "For the Least of My Brethren", which was a fitting closure to her many years of service there. (Excerpted from the Globe and Mail, March 21, 2009).

Malcolm, Nancy Elizabeth died on April 19th, 2009 after a courageous battle with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia. Nancy graduated from the Atkinson School of Nursing (Toronto Western Hospital) in 1968, Ottawa University in 1970, and McMaster University in 1982. She was a nursing Educator at TWH, Ryerson, and George Brown College, then went to Women's College Hospital as a research coordinator. She held many senior/executive positions at WCH culminating in the position of CEO. She will be remembered for her tenacity and humility, for putting others first, and her leadership skills. She was an ardent team player, who had an engaging personality, and a sense of humor. She was devoted to the patients, physicians, staff and volunteers at Women's College which was her passion and professional commitment for the future of healthcare for women and their families. (Excerpted from the Globe and Mail, April 24th, 2009)

Editor Newsletter

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Dorothy Wylie. Please contact her regarding news items, short articles, announcements, etc. All contributions are welcome.
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