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Margaret M. Allemang Society for the History of Nursing

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PORTRAIT OF LEADERSHIP

BUSH NURSE PIONEERED PRACTITIONER ROLE: The story of Mary Bergland

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The portrait of healthcare in the north is framed by obstacles of distance and isolation. It is spattered with the difficulties of inadequate services, supplies and support. But it is on this canvas of adversity that some of the greatest works of human tenacity, compassion and courage have left their mark.

One of the great artists on this northern landscape of health care was Mary Bergland. Through her spunk, unyielding conviction and unshakable personal vision, she pioneered the role of the nurse practitioner.

Mary Snider Bergland was born in Stanley, near Thunder Bay on June 2, 1902. She studied at the School of Nursing at McKellar General Hospital in Fort William (now Thunder Bay). She practiced as a private nurse in Fort William and Port Arthur for nine years before moving to Ignace in 1932 when her husband Tony started a new job with the Canadian Pacific railway (CPR). This was her last paid position for 40 years.

Bergland put her nursing career on hold to have three children, Eleanor, Neil and Wayne, but found that settling in Ignace was not an easy transition. Busying herself with the care of her household and young family, Bergland's thoughts were never far from nursing. She openly expressed admiration for the town nurse. "I think she always missed it [nursing]," admits Bergland's daughter, Eleanor Barr. "Mom told me she was kind of

jealous of Mrs. Tate because she was so well thought of in town. She wished that people would think of her as highly and, of course, they did in the end”.

In 1939, the doctor left Ignace. The town of 600 people was left without a provider of basic medical care or services. Mary Bergland found herself responding to her community’s need and, for 30 years, she continued to practice as the only health care worker within a radius of 110 km.

“She had people come to the house because she had no one to mind the children and her husband was working on the railway 12 hours a day,” remembers her daughter. The Bergland kitchen became the waiting room and the examining room. The real heart of the Bergland “clinic” was, however, the family bathroom. The toilet seat became the place that people came to be treated,” says Barr. “This was where kids came to get their shots, this is where people came to get stitched up; and this is where dogs sat to get the quills taken out of their nose”¹.

In an area subsisting mainly on trapping, hunting and fishing, along with some industrial work, there were bound to be accidents. Although everyone knew Bergland was a nurse, it was only when cinders were removed from eyes, cuts were sewn, burns were bandaged, stomachs were pumped, and broken arms were set, that people began to appear at Bergland’s clinic. “They used to say, ‘if you hadn’t sat on Mary Bergland’s toilet you weren’t really a resident of Ignace,’” laughs Barr.

Cabbage for Cash

There was nothing curious about how Bergland conducted her business. Keeping track of her daily encounters in journals, she recorded everything she earned, even though she was seldom paid in cash. “Most people didn’t have much money then,” Bergland admitted to a journalist when asked how she financed herself. “People paid what they could. Oh, I’d get cabbage, carrots, a fish or two, odds and ends and small amounts of cash from time to time.”

These small amounts of cash were meticulously recorded and declared to Revenue Canada even though she used her own money to buy equipment and wound dressings.

Word spread quickly in the community. Soon, doctors in Dryden, 110 km to the west, began to support her work. Convinced of her integrity and competence, they arranged for Bergland to purchase narcotics, antibiotics and other medications. When asked about the risks involved in administering medications, Bergland admitted to being nervous. “I’ve had to administer morphine, heroin stuff like that---even with penicillin you know, you take a chance if the patient turns out to have a bad reaction. What else could I do? There wasn’t anybody else to help”².

“She took a lot of risks,” says Barr. “But she was never hurt. We never really worried—nobody ever robbed our house even though everyone knew we had drugs and our house was a very busy place”.

Bergland cautiously told a visiting police officer that, technically, he could arrest her for her illegal stash of narcotics. While explaining to him why these drugs were necessary, she received an urgent summons to attend to a young railway employee. In what was to become one of the most dramatic cases of her career, Bergland flew to the rescue, the officer by her side. Bergland describes the incident that occurred in 1951: “The man had got his leg caught in as coupling and one of the box cars had backed up. Before he could whistle “Dixie” his left leg from mid-thigh was gone. Luckily I had some sutures to stop the bleeding. Before I got there, they’d made a tourniquet out of his braces. Had some stuff for shock and I got some hot water bottles filled from the house. Made sure the kids had something for supper and arranged for the stationmaster to clear the track from Ignace to Dryden. We got hold of an engine and caboose doors wide enough to take a stretcher on. We had to tie the poor man on and tip him sideways.”³

Lives owed to Bergland

Bernie Kirkowski survived although his railway career ended that day. He has since claimed he owed his life to Mary Bergland. The police officer, somewhat shaken from what he had witnessed, turned to Bergland shortly after the rescue and reassured her about the illegal drugs. “I understand now why you need them” was all he said.

Following the incident, the CPR connected Bergland’s house to the company’s water system and assumed all her water expenses until the day she moved out of the house almost 40 years later. This is just one example of the various remuneration schemes Bergland received for her services. Her journals, quoted in an article which appeared in *The Canadian Nurse* in 1976 abound with more examples”;

August 5/56: Called on Cheryl Young-- getting over the flu. Given lunch and two packs of cigarettes. Called on Dennis Smyk--given supper and one dozen eggs. Take--2 packs of cigs and 1 dozen eggs.

August 15/56: Dressed Mrs. Hershey’s hand, administered ¼ cc morphine. Dressed G. McNabb’s hand. Dressed Mrs. Sockin’s foot. Infection has set in. Gave 1 cc penicillin. Pat Johnson paid \$10.50 for previous treatment. Was given some blueberries (beautiful). Take -- \$10.50.

When immunization services were being established by public health nurses across Canada, Bergland brought them to Ignace. She assumed responsibility for immunization by visiting

most of the one-room schools in the area and paying for the serum with her daily “takes”. She even snowshoed through the woods to reach remote Indian settlements where she persuaded mothers to let her vaccinate their babies.

Besides caring for the people of Ignace, Bergland’s home also became the highway first aid post. Her husband discovered this while glancing at a road map one day. “He was really upset to see our home cited on the map as the first aid post because that made it officially a public place, there should have been some kind of compensation for all the people sitting on our toilet seat or tramping through our house” says Barr.

That sentiment was echoed by other members of Bergland’s family. The feeling of being cheated out of a “normal family life” is very strong in her daughter. “Imagine if you are a kid and you come home and see something boiling on the stove,” remembers Barr. “You’d expect it to be food for dinner, right? In our house, it was usually syringes.”

Without an ambulance or even a car (Bergland never learned to drive) the railroad served as the umbilical cord to the city. This service proved to be essential for Bergland in dealing with numerous accidents and emergencies. She also relied on the CPR for access to a telephone (there were only two in town) to connect with the Dryden doctors for their advice, her daughter saw the situation differently. “The fact that she performed these services and took these risks and there was no compensation, official or otherwise, is truly mind-boggling”.

No Compensation

While Barr admires her mother’s contributions to the community, she continues to express regret that Bergland worked under these conditions. She believes this is indicative of the value attached to health care in isolated communities. “There should have been a lot more thought given to health care in the north. Even today it seems the focus is still on the big cities. The question hasn’t really been successfully addressed”.

Bergland performed many procedures considered unusual for nurses at the time. She worked with the doctors as part of a team. “But it is hard to be a team when one member of the team gets paid and the other doesn’t, when one member of the team has an office and the other doesn’t,” says Barr. Bergland always lived in fear that one day she would be penalized for practicing medicine without a license. In 1972, a letter arrived from the Ontario Medical Association (OMA). Bergland was afraid to open the letter, although it was, in fact, a notification of receipt of an honorary OMA membership. To this day she is the only nurse to be awarded that honour.

Bergland received other honours during her career. In 1957 she was presented with the Award for Service medal; from the Canadian Red Cross. She received the St. John Ambulance pin for outstanding service and, in 1986 RNAO presented her with their highest honour, the Award of Merit. She had previously received recognition as Woman of the Year, has been profiled in medical and nursing journals and on TV Ontario's Distant Voices series.

Since Dec. 4, 1975 there has been an official clinic in Ignace, built by volunteer labour and funded by donations from citizens and businesses. It is named the Mary Bergland Community Health Centre. Although Bergland never worked in the clinic, she did not retire. She continued to be an active member of the Ignace Volunteer Ambulance Association while in her 70s. "She kept a wonderful flower garden and was still painting her own fence when she was past 90," writes Kivi. "She was truly a remarkable woman".

Mary Bergland did not think of herself as remarkable. "I took the Florence Nightingale pledge at nursing school," Berglund once told a journalist. "If you take it [the pledge], you gotta mean it. It was something I had to do...I got the skills and the knowledge, so I use 'em. I consider myself very fortunate".

Mary Bergland died June 22, 1995, just three weeks after her 93rd birthday. She continued to live in her own home until the age of 91 when she moved to Pinewood Court Nursing Home in Thunder Bay.

Quotes

1. Bergstrom, Ingrid. (September, 1976). "Mary Bergland: Backwoods Nurse." *The Canadian Nurse*: Ottawa.
2. *ibid.*
3. Barr, Elinor and Betty Dyck (1979). *Ignace: A Saga of the Shield*. Winnipeg.
- Bergstrom, Ingrid. (September, 1976). "Mary Bergland: Backwoods Nurse". *The Canadian Nurse*: Ottawa.
4. *ibid.*

References

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Kivi, Dolores (Fall 1986). "The Florence Nightingale of the Bush. *Senior World Quarterly*, (pp 10-11).

Trollope Kumar, Karen. (1990). "Mrs. B's Place." Canadian Medical Association: Ottawa.

[Source: Registered Nurse Journal. February-March 1996, pp5-7]. Reproduced with permission from RNAO.

HISTORY OF NURSING WRITING PRIZE

HISTORY OF NURSING WRITING PRIZE

The Allemang Society is offering a nationwide prize of \$250 for the best essay in the history of nursing written by a student in the year September 2012 through August 2013.

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 anywhere in Canada. Students **from any faculty, including nursing, social science, humanities and science**, are invited to apply.
5. The winning paper will be published in the Allemang newsletter, and the recipient will receive a one-year membership in the Allemang Society.

The deadline for submission is **August 30, 2012**. The prize will be awarded at the 2012 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
56C Concession Street
Box 344, Westport, ON K0G 1X0
Email: Kirkwood@rideau.net

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

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

NEWS ITEMS

REPORT ON BEHALF OF THE PRESIDENT 2010/11

We are currently without a President due to Kathleen MacMillan's recent retirement to Prince Edward Island. We are very grateful to Kathleen for her long service and happy that she is willing to remain as a director. We are also grateful to Lynn Kirkwood for her long service on the board. Although Lynn has resigned as a director she will continue to look after the writing prize.

Our major accomplishment in the past year has been the start of a long-planned Oral History Project that focuses on interviews with leaders in nursing in Ontario. Kathleen MacMillan was instrumental in getting the proposal approved and in arranging a partnership with Humber College. So far we have completed five interviews.

We are sustaining our focus on archives by advising and assisting anyone requesting help with the disposition of their archival materials. This spring a significant portion of our World War 1 and 11 memorabilia was transferred to the War Museum in Ottawa. The War Museum declined our uniform collection but will provide help with the disposition of these materials.

Dorothy Wylie continues her able work as newsletter editor assisted by Jaime Lapeyre. The newsletter continues to represent us externally as well.

The 2011 History of Nursing Writing Prize was awarded to Dorolen Wolfe of BC. Dorolen has recently completed her master's in nursing.

Our website (www.allemang.on.ca) continues to be an important source of information sharing and external representation of the association.

Respectfully submitted,
Judith Young, Secretary/Treasurer

Board of Directors 2011-12

Judith Young
Jaime Lapeyre
Carol Helmstadter
Kathleen MacMillan
Dorothy Wylie

The **Archives of the Wellesley Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae Association** have been donated to Ryerson University's Library and Archives. Along with the donation of the archives the Association has provided financial support to maintain the collection. A \$25,000 donation has established an endowment fund; an additional \$5,000 has been provided to catalogue and process the collection. The collection will be fully accessible to anyone wishing to research it and some pieces, like the refurbished silver-plated coffee and tea urns, will actually be put to use by students in the Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. The archives have found a permanent home just in time for the 100th anniversary of the founding of Wellesley Hospital, which evolved from a private hospital to a university teaching hospital. (Report on Giving, Ryerson University, November, 2011)

2012 CAHN/ACHN Annual Conference, June 2012, Medicine Hat, Alberta

The 2012 Annual CAHN/ACHN Conference, to be held in Medicine Hat, Alberta on June 15-17, marks the 25th anniversary of the association. Founded in 1987, -CAHN/ACHN has an ongoing commitment to stimulate and promote historical scholarship of nursing and health. We are pleased to invite you to this conference.

The conference theme is: **Places and People's Health: Exploring Nursing in Diverse Contexts**. Papers will explore the diversity and contingency of nursing knowledge and practice. Aiming at a critical understanding of connections between place and practice, the conference seeks to examine the history of nursing and health care in diverse geographic, social, and political contexts, including rural and remote locations, specialty areas, and various communities. How did communities engage with health politics or respond to professional claims? What tensions arose as health services had to be established or transformed and professional identities changed? How did nurses pioneer new practice domains? How did local, regional, and global contexts of health care shape nursing? The conference will bring together scholars, professionals, and students from different fields and various areas of nursing and health care history. Longstanding members are especially invited to attend.

The Hannah Lecturer at the conference will be Carol Helmstadter, Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto. She is an award winning nurse historian and expert on the history of 19th century nursing. She has published widely on Florence Nightingale and nursing in Victorian Britain, including a recent chapter in *Notes on Nightingale (2010)*. Her new book, *Nursing before Nightingale*, co-authored with Judith Godden, was released in *Nov. 2011* by Ashgate.

For information on local arrangements visit: <http://cahn-achn.ca/>

OBITUARIES

Hall, Dorothy died at Palmerston & District Hospital on Friday, November 11, 2011. She was 87. Dorothy was an outspoken, pioneering Canadian nurse who witnessed despair and misery around the world, and called on doctors in Canada to put an end to their turf war with nurses.

A trail blazer in primary-health-care-nursing she was a pebble in the shoe of physicians. Hall was a long-time consultant with the World Health Organization. She spent 26 years abroad advancing the role of nursing in front-line care throughout Asia and Europe. In Ontario the government asked her to reintroduce the role of nurse practitioner into the provincial health care system to take pressure off doctors. She believed that since medicine could not “cure” many health issues, such as arthritis, diabetes, even pregnancy, these fell to support services including nursing. Her primary concern, however, remained the emancipation of nursing from the field of medicine.



Hall was born in London, ON August 12, 1924. Following graduation from the University of Western Ontario and becoming a registered nurse in 1947, her first jobs were running Red Cross hospitals and clinics in such remote Ontario outposts as Dryden, Lion’s Head and Rainy River, where she delivered babies and provided emergency care on her own. She joined the World Health Organization, an agency of the United Nations, in 1950. Her first posting was Thailand, where she set up schools and clinics, battled malaria, and worked with authorities to shutter opium dens in Bangkok, an operation she understatedly called “exciting”.

In 1955, Hall received a Rockefeller Fellowship that allowed her to earn a master’s degree in nursing at Seattle University. Two years after that she began a decade-long stint in New Delhi as regional officer for the WHO’s Southeast Asia section. For the next ten years, Hall served as the WHO regional officer for Europe, stationed in Copenhagen, and did work in Europe and Russia.

On her return to Canada in the mid-70s, mother and infant health, midwifery and care of the elderly became her areas of concern. In 1993 the NDP government asked Hall to implement the reintroduction – this time as a fully regulated profession – of nurse practitioners. Today, Ontario’s nurse practitioners have advanced training and the authority to diagnose, prescribe drugs and order most tests.

Her laurels were many: In 1981 she was made an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Nursing in England, among the very few non-Britons so honoured. She also received the Medal of Merit from Finland. There were three honorary doctorates from the University of Western Ontario in 1978, from Queen’s University in 1993 and from McMaster University

in 2007. The University of Prince Edward Island's nursing school awards the annual Dorothy C. Hall Scholarship.

But perhaps her proudest moment came on 2002, when McMaster unveiled the \$1 million dollar Dorothy C. Hall chair in primary-health-care nursing to focus on education and research. It was the first endowment of its kind in North America.

[Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, November 18, 2011]

Monteith, Dorothy, of Brantford and formerly of Toronto, passed away after a short illness at Brantford General Hospital on Tuesday, November 2nd, 2011. Born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, Dorothy's academic interests brought her to Guelph, ON to train as a registered nurse. Her notable surgical nursing career included time in Guelph, Chicago and Sudbury, followed by completion of her BScN at the University of Western Ontario and a Masters at Columbia University, New York. She continued her career in various leadership capacities with the Ontario Ministry of Health in Toronto. For 92 fabulous years Dorothy loved travelling, the opera, the symphony and time spent with family. She was a longstanding member of Timothy Eaton Memorial Church and a dedicated lifelong learner. Dorothy was a long time member of the Allemang Society. [Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, November 24, 2011]



Simms, Myrna died on September 13, 2011 and ended her long struggle. She was born in Nakina, Ontario in 1936. In 1956 she obtained a degree in science from the University of Ottawa. Myrna then moved to Toronto where she became a registered nurse at St. Michael's Hospital. She spent her career working in nursing education and with the elderly in administration at various nursing homes. In February 2001 she received a double lung transplant. It was a testimony to her strength and perseverance that she lived the last 10 and half years and was able to spend time with her cherished girls Maeve and Mo who will miss her very much. [Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, September 16, 2011]



Page Beverley, Dawn, nee Campbell passed away November 28, 2011 at the age of 69.



After completing her nursing training at Toronto Western Hospital, and a BScN at the University of Western Ontario, Beverley focused on education, working as an instructor, education coordinator, and in staff development. Her last 25 years of nursing concentrated on Oncology. She retired in 2006 from the Sunnybrook Odette Cancer Centre in Toronto, where she was Education Specialist. Beverley was a founding member and long term board member of the Canadian Association of Oncology Nursing, as well as the founding editor of the Canadian Oncology Nursing Journal, serving as editor in chief from 1989 to 2000. Upon her retirement, Bev immersed herself in many and varied interests. She loved music and painting, and recently completed

a children's book for her granddaughter. She will be greatly missed for her humour and wit, her sense of adventure, and her boundless generosity, patience and strength. [Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, December 3, 2011]



Haig, Mary Jean, nee Vanwyck died at the Algoma Residential Community Hospice, in her 86th year. Born in Toronto, she received her early education at Branksome Hall and Jarvis Collegiate. She graduated from the University of Toronto in 1948 with a BScN, as a member of the first university degree course in nursing. She taught briefly at the U of T until her marriage in 1949. Returning to her profession in 1968, she worked for ten years at the Algoma Health Unit, and ten more as the Easter Seals nurse for Algoma. The latter service earned her a Paul Harris Scholarship from the Rotary Club of Sault Ste. Marie. Volunteer activities included serving as President of the Ontario Nurses Association and membership in the Board of Directors of the Victorian Order of Nurses, Camp McDougall and Sault College. A devoted member of Central United Church, she taught Sunday school, chaired the Outreach Committee, participated in the Study Group, and sang in the choir. A real renaissance woman, her interests and abilities ranged widely from scuba diving and windsurfing, to bridge and landscape painting, and included tennis, swimming, golf and skiing. Mary loved to travel and had a full and rich, and happy life. [Excerpted from The Globe and Mail, January 3, 2012]

<p>Editors Newsletter Jaime Lapeyre. jaime.lapeyre@utoronto.ca Dorothy Wylie. Dorothy is retiring as of this issue</p>
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