

## VIGNETTES, VG NURSES, and INFECTIOUS DISEASES WITHIN NOVA SCOTIA

By Gloria Stephens –May 2020

The month of May being ‘National Nurses Week’, the ‘International Year of the Nurse and Mid-Wife’ and also the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Florence Nightingale’s Birthday plus this covid 19 pandemic inspired the writing of several vignettes involving VG graduate nurses with infection diseases and treatments. From early records, the trail of VG nurses and doctors, dealing with infectious diseases will show a century of care starting with the cholera epidemic in Halifax during the late 1700’s and early 1800’s.

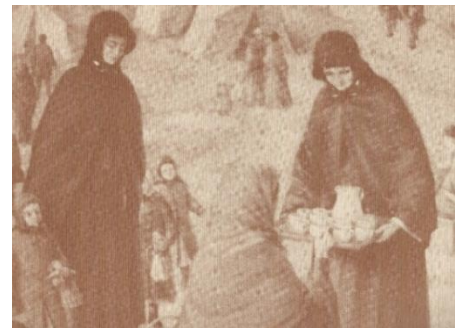
### CHOLERA:

In 1752, the sick, poor and the insane were crowded into a wooden structure at the corner of Queen Street and Spring Garden Road – called the ‘Poor Asylum’ and also known as ‘Bridewell’. Bridewell served as a prison, asylum for the poor and a hospital for the civilians. There were no separations of patients, no matter their health condition.

*The original Bridewell was a palace, built in London, England by King Henry VIII in 1553. Eventually the place was given to the City of London by King Edward VI to be used as an orphanage for ‘wayward women’.*

In 1832 – Cholera hits Halifax and the citizens were terrified of its spread and demanded that the City Council do something to contain the disease. A facility was developed on Lawlor’s Island, in Halifax Harbour, as an isolation place for communicable diseases. (20,000 died in Canada of cholera during this epidemic.) Bonfires were all over the city driving off the noxious smell of the ‘death carts’ heard rumbling through the streets as the dead were collected. The poor were often buried in multiples and in unmarked graves. There wasn’t a designated hospital for infectious diseases, in fact there wasn’t a city hospital at all. The first mention of having a medical hospital occurred during the cholera epidemic of 1833 but nothing came of this. The first city hospital was opened in 1859.

In 1866 there was another outbreak of Asiatic cholera in Halifax and this attracted the full attention of the government and the public. The Premier, Honourable Charles Tupper, the Mayor H.H. Ritcey, the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, P.C. Hill, agreed upon legislation which was adopted without opposition that a new hospital must be built. The City hospital of 1859, a wooden structure, was replaced in 1867 and called the Provincial & City hospital. *Charles Tupper was appointed City Medical Officer and took an active part in the epidemic of the Asiatic cholera. He influenced the founding of Dalhousie Medical School, the closure of Bridewell as a hospital.* The cholera came from passengers off the sailing vessel ‘England’ and the victims were isolated on McNab’s Island and Lawlor’s Island. The Sisters of Charity established an emergency station on McNab’s Island as shown here in a painting by Sister Agnes Benchman (1879-1973) which shows the Sisters providing care to the victims. (Copied from 1986 calendar celebrating the Infirmary Hospital 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday) Dr. John Slayter, brother to Dr. W. B. Slayter, was considered “hero of this cholera epidemic” of 1866, having lost his life through treating the patients afflicted.



### SMALLPOX

During the Napoleonic War of 1802 and the 1812 war with America, many prisoners at Melville Island died from smallpox and other such infectious diseases and were buried on Deadman’s Island.

In 1815, 2000 Black refugees arrived in Halifax from America and 76 were sent to Melville Island suffering from smallpox and were quarantined there. Two doctors and a nurse were sent to care for the ill and were also quarantined. Many of the Blacks died and were buried on Deadman's Island. Between 1803 and 1856, there were approximately 400 buried on Deadman's Island. The Melville quarantine hospital remained for some time as immigrants arrived from Europe. One of the original structures still remains on Melville Island as seen in the middle of the picture. In 1855, Melville Island was used as a recruitment centre for the Crimean War and then continued by the British as a military prison. The British granted the land to the Canadian Government in 1907 and it was used to detain German prisoners from WW1. In WW2, prisoners were sent to McNab's Island, in the mouth of the Halifax Harbour and Melville Island was used as an ammunition depot. There is a record (1800's) showing that a woman, who worked at the prison, was hung, accused of stealing a spoon. The spoon was later found, but too late.



In 1816 over 100 black refugees were admitted to the 'Poor House' in Halifax, from the ship Chesapeake, suffering from dysentery and smallpox and were treated by Dr B. Almon. After treating these victims, he petitioned the House of Assembly for the cost of the supplies and his professional services. In 1838 he was appointed to the Legislative Council as a result of his outstanding advancements in public health issues of the day. Dr. Bruce Almon died in 1840 at the age of 52 having contracted typhus while carrying out his duties in treating the passengers suffering from typhus on a ship which had just arrived in Halifax.

During 1827 another outbreak of typhus and smallpox occurred in Halifax. The population panicked, so a place was designated as a quarantine area called 'Bankhead Farm' just outside the city. Anyone with a fever was sent here to recover or die.



Picture (1860) includes John Thomas Lane, Clerk of Customs House, dressed in traditional Mi'kmaq clothing and Dr. Frederick W. Morris. On the table is a jug containing 'Paddy Lane's smallpox cure'. Lane was elected medicine man of the Shubenacadie Indian Band.

At one point Morris administered the 'Indian Remedy' cure for smallpox and he was disciplined for this, by his name being taken off the Medical Society list. His action 'violated rules of the Society' for prescribing medicine not recognized by doctors within the Society. He continued to work in the Dispensary until his death in 1867, in poverty.

*Dr. Edward Jenner (1749 – 1823) developed a vaccine preventing the spread of the smallpox variola virus, May 14, 1796.*

In 1876 – Rockhead was built in the city's north end, overlooking Bedford Basin, corner of Leeds & Gottengen Streets. Half of the building was used as an Infectious Disease hospital for diphtheria, typhus, smallpox, and measles, which were rampant at the time. The other part of the building was used as a prison. *At the time of the Halifax Explosion on December 6, 1917 the building sustained major destruction: there were 10 male and three female prisoners plus the guards, inside. Four prisoners escaped and others were moved to another jail. No patients were injured nor nursing staff.*



After 1892, several VG School of Nursing graduates nursed in the medical side of Rockhead, one being Margaret Settle, class of 1947. 1940 Rockhead was again a quarantine hospital for returning troops with cerebra-meningitis under DVA and Nursing Sisters were staffing the hospital

*Margaret joined the Immigration Medical Services at Pier 21 in 1949 and her first assignment was nursing at Rockhead, processing and nursing the ill refugees who were suffering from various infectious diseases. Her quarters were actually within the building. Many of the immigrants were from WW2, still bearing the Nazi tattoo number on their forearm. Some that she nursed were from the Holocaust camp at Dachau Aushiortz. She served at Pier 21, the only nurse from 1950 to 1972 when Pier 21 closed, as the immigrants were now arriving by plane. She was then transferred to the Airport and retired in 1991, after 40 years of public service. At the Airport her uniform changed from white dress to a white blouse, navy blue skirt, jacket and hat but her duties remained the same: nursing the ill, immunizations, helping the new-comers to settle in. Margaret died at age 92, February 21, 2016. Her hat is stored in the VG School of Nursing Archives, Bethune Building.*



In 1885 the Halifax Port Officer, Dr. Wickwire, boarded the steamer 'Boston City' to attend a sick sailor and planned to admit him to the Provincial & City hospital. Dr. T.R. Almon was summoned, examined the patient and diagnosed him as having smallpox. He immediately notified the City Medical Officer who ordered the patient to remain on the ship. Dr. Almon was congratulated for preventing the spread of smallpox in the city.

In 1898 to 1900 there was another smallpox outbreak in Eastern Canada. Again, in November of 1920 another outbreak of smallpox struck Halifax City. Christine Hannah McInnis was a VG graduate, class 1918 received a citation for her dedication to duty in nursing patients with smallpox during the 1890 and the 1920 epidemics.



The ship SS City of Auckland sailed from Calcutta in January, 1938 and arrived in

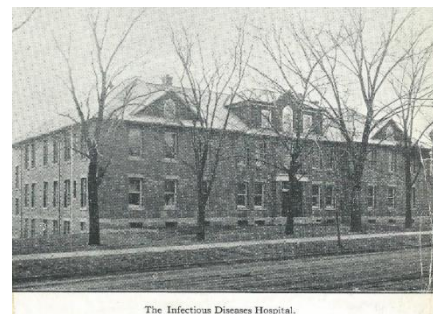


Halifax port in March with two ill sailors diagnosed with smallpox. Since the population became complacent about getting vaccinated there was a great danger of another outbreak in the City. All hospital staff and patients were vaccinated with the exception of the very elderly and very ill. The two ill sailors, Dr. Collins, Nursing Sister M.C. Macdonnel and Registered Nurse Walter K. Wilson (VG graduate class 1929); were sent to Lawlor's Island and quarantined for three months until the patients were recovered. *Walter was a staff member of Camp Hill hospital where he worked in medicine, surgery and infectious diseases. He retired in 1969. Walter died in Glace Bay, 1982 at the age of 78.*

## **TUBERCULOSIS (TB)**

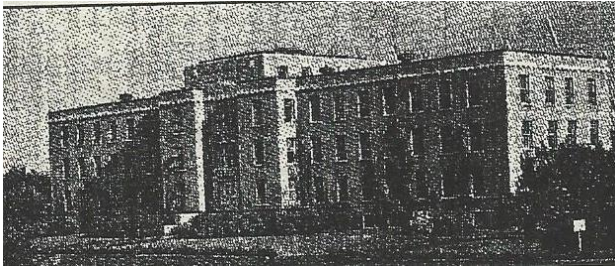
In 1891, Dr. D.A. Campbell started the isolation of TB patients at the VG hospital and a Tuberculosis (TB) Hospital was built in Halifax. *The TB bacillus was isolated by Dr. Koch who also devised the tuberculin injection. This was a major advance in medicine for the public's health.*

In 1901 separate units/wards were developed for Children and for Infectious Diseases at the VG Hospital. With so many returning from war with infectious diseases in 1918, the facility at Rockhead could not accommodate the influx. The medical profession insisted on a larger and separate hospital. After a considerable debate the Mayor, Joseph B. Kenny agreed but the building could not cost more than 95000. When it was completed at the cost of 110,000, the Mayor resigned. The Infectious Disease hospital was built on



Morris Street, next to the TB hospital in 1928. Affiliations for student nurses was organized for the Infectious Disease hospital, Nova Scotia Hospital and the TB hospital, in order to meet the standards of nursing education set out by the 'Graduate Nurses Association of NS'.

The original Kentville Sanatorium opened in 1903 and among its earlier patients were soldiers who returned home from WW1 with TB. A new facility was opened in 1932, considered at the time to be 'World Class' and operated until 1979. Because treatment for TB took a long time, patients lived at the San for several years. At one time the facility boasted its own radio station, Post Office and Newspaper called the 'Health Rags'.



THE KENTVILLE SANITORIUM

Nova Scotia led the way in Canada by building sanatoriums and isolating TB patients. At first the only admitted patients were those diagnosed with 'incipient TB' because only this type thought to be 'curable'. Early diagnosis was difficult but by 1940 and the 1950's the incidence of TB was on the decline. Patients not only suffered from the disease but often lost jobs, shunned by neighbours and friends and some even abandoned by their physicians who were discouraged by the long illness and not able to help them. A story has been written that one discouraged patient in 1915 shot his doctor and then himself for not being cured.

Ernest Frederick "Buddy" Boudreau, VG class of 1929, nursed at the Kentville 'San' who received \$5 dollars a month more than female nurses in order to keep him employed even though he and the female nurses did the same work. As a 'staff nurse' he had twelve patients confined to bed who required total nursing care each day. During WW2 he was a member of the Army Medical Corps and served overseas. On return he rejoined the San staff in Charge of the Pavilion and soon became Supervisor of the 'old Infirmary' and the Children's Annex. Ernest nursed the 12 hour night shift for 22 years. He retired in 1969 and lived his life in Florida. The writer's Aunt Myrtle K. Wentzell spent a year in a public ward at the VG hospital, Halifax with no improvement and with the insistence of her sister, Vida, was transferred to the San where she spent a considerable time and returned home improved. While in the San, Myrtle wrote many poems and one being:



"ODE TO THE SAN", June 1939.

*The sun is shining down upon the Valley,  
Across the apple orchards blow the gentle breeze,  
For it is June and at the NS Sanatorium,  
You find Peace and Rest, all nature in tune.*

*No sounds are heard save those of happy bird-songs,  
Who've built their nests among the shady trees.  
Here oft from the city, town and country,  
Come men and women who have sought release*

*For tired bodies, and 'tis here they come for healing  
And in our 'SAN' they find relief.*

*So, to this grand and noble Institution  
Folks come from nearly every walk of life,  
Their ills are cured and they have found new friends*

*They sing the song "Bless Be The Tide That Binds"  
For here in this old NS Sanatorium,  
They've found a quiet, peaceful, restful state of  
mind.*

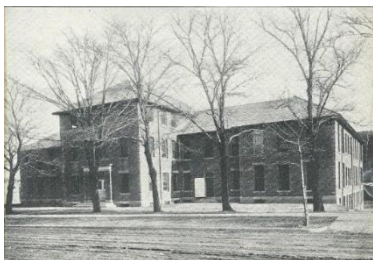
In October 26, 2003 there was a “Celebration of the San”, in recognition of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its opening and the above poem was printed in the program. The hymn mentioned in Myrtle’s poem was sung as well.

Josephine Landry (Hanway), VG class 1906, reorganized the TB Society in Cumberland County which resulted in building a 16 bed unit to the Highland View Hospital in Amherst, NS. She received the OBE for her many years establishing ‘out-reach’ hospitals in the Maritimes dedicated to TB patients.

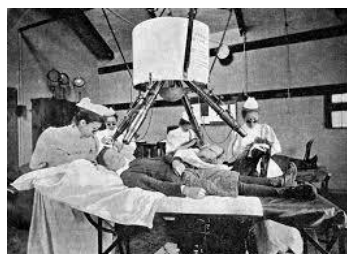
In 1919 - Public Health was officially recognized as a Federal Health Department, making many changes, rules, regulations and standards to improve the health of Canadians. As an example from 1919 onward cause of death had to be documented and statistics formed. The Department determined three priorities: child mortality, TB deaths and Home Care. Schools began hiring nurses to monitor pupil’s health along with sanitary inspectors. Dr. F. Montizambert was Canada’s first Director General of Public Health and also he was Canada’s first Deputy Minister of Health in 1918.



A second TB Hospital was built in 1921, on Morris Street, to treat post-war (WW1) veterans who returned from overseas, having the disease. The place was also referred to as the Morris Street hospital. This hospital was managed by the City Charities Committee until 1935; then the City Health Board & City Medical Officer until 1940, after which it was managed by the Committee of Public Health & Welfare. The TB, Morris Street hospital was closed in 1959 when the patients diagnosed with TB were sent to the Sanatorium in Kentville, NS.



Mildred Holloway (H. Hall), VG class of 1909, was the first Receptionist at the TB Hospital. She also nursed at the Infectious Disease Hospital, in Halifax. Mildred was a founding member and first president of the VG School of Nursing Alumni in 1920. Mildred died in 1965.



Patients were given heat treatments by a large light as shown in left picture. An x-ray machine being demonstrated to nurses, used specifically for TB patients at the Morris Street hospital. The Superintendent at the time was Agnes Cox, VG graduate, class 1909. In 1940-’42 she



was President of the VG School of Nursing Alumni.

In 1930 when Dr. George Murphy was Minister of Health (1930-1933) he brought in the ‘Anti-TB Program’. He also established the Provincial Public Health Nursing Program at Dalhousie University, 1932.



Dr. Paul Nonamaker received his ‘Specialist’s Certification’ in Thoracic Surgery in 1951 from the Royal College and became one of the pioneers in thoracic surgery in Atlantic Canada. His early thoracic surgery was performed at the Halifax TB hospital on Morris Street. The surgery at the time for TB patients was a Thorocoplasty. This procedure did not always ‘cure’ the patient and left the patient with a severe deformity of the torso. After 1957 all TB surgery was performed at the ‘San’. Dr. Nonamaker then established the first service for Thoracic Surgery at the VG hospital and became Chief of the Department, which he held for 20 years.



## INFLUENZA 1918 - SPANISH FLU

The Flu of 1918 started with a virus in wild ducks, spread to pigs and then to humans. Pneumonia was the main cause of death. March 1918, was the first recorded case, being a cook in the US Army at Camp Funston, Kansas, and by the end of the month 1100 had the flu with 38 dead. When the troops were deployed to Europe the virus went along and by May the flu spread like 'wildfire' affecting civilians as well as the troops. At the time, the main focus was the war and England and the US Newspapers were not allowed to report anything about the flu as it may affect the war effort but as Spain was neutral, the Spanish journalists could report and eventually the news spread stating how the flu was killing so many, thus the name 'Spanish Flu'. After an apparently quiet time the '2<sup>nd</sup> wave' hit in September with the 'power' to kill a perfectly healthy young man or woman within a 24 hour period of showing the first symptom. The flu spread quickly because when the infected soldiers returned from Europe they were not quarantined and those ill were sent to Cogswell Street hospital in Halifax or to their homes across Canada. There were 500 million who succumbed to this virus, killing more than the 'bullets of war'. The threat of this virus actually lasted about two years as there was a third phase in January of 1919 when it raised its 'ugly head' in Australia and again spread quickly throughout the world. This 'wave' was almost as deadly as the 'second wave', with the number of deaths, but as World War 1 had ended there were regulations put in place, but not soon enough to control the disease.

It has been documented that the flu was not contained better because of the following: 1) Health Officials did not impose quarantines during the war-"The relentless needs of warfare justified insuring the risk of spreading infection" 2) severe shortage of nurses and doctors, because of the war 3) American Red Cross refusing to engage African American nurses to help with the shortage 4) Science simply did not have the tools to develop a vaccine for the virus as microscopes, at the time, were incapable of viewing the small virus and it wasn't until the 1930's that this technique was possible. 5) Doctors, nurses and the general population were not equipped with knowledge to combat this ferocious disease. Isolation techniques were just being developed along with vaccines as this was not widely used until about the 1940's.

In 1917, Eveline Pemberton was Night Supervisor at the VG hospital during the famous Halifax Explosion. The Lady Superintendent, Bertha Pickles (1917 - 1920), wrote in her annual report about Evelyn: "Proved most satisfactory in her department duties". In 1918, Evelyn Pemberton and eight other VG graduate nurses were sent to Boston to assist in the nursing of victims of the terrible Influenza epidemic. They reported to the State House and were then reassigned, spending several months there before returning to Halifax. Eveline Pemberton became the first Registered Nurse in Canada and was a founding member of the Graduate Nurses Association of NS.



Ethel Redmond, VG graduate, class of 1918, was one of the eight nurses who accompanied Pemberton to Boston and at the time was a 'Senior Student', along with Ethel Taylor, a graduate nurse. They were taken to Anna Jacques hospital in Newbury Port and remained there for 10 days and later were moved to Amesbury where the Town Hall had been opened and filled with patients. They spent 10 days here. The VG hospital recalled Redmond and asked her to go to Lockport, NS where there were about 800 ill people and dying at the rate of 15 a day. Being involved in all the dying as a student nurse was very traumatic for Ethel but she survived and due to her 'good nursing care' managed to save several as well as herself from getting the flu. Reta MacDonald and Mrs. Pugh accompanied Redmond to Lockport. Ethel received a Commendation from the hospital for her dedication in the care of these ill patients, in Boston and in Lockport. (Actually all

the nurses who went to Boston were recognized by the US government for their assistance) Another VG graduate assisted with the epidemic in Massachusetts, Christine H. McInnis, class of 1918. She also received a special Citation from the American Government for her nursing abilities during this epidemic. Christine was called "The Nightingale of Nova Scotia". Three nursing students of the VG School of



Nursing died during their training days from this influenza epidemic: Etta Clarke, Merna Baker and Agnes Cox, all promising future nurses.

Rebecca McIntosh, a WW 1 Nursing Sister and a graduate of the VG Class 1915, became ill with influenza and after two weeks, she died in the Canadian General Hospital in Kimmel Park, Wales, where she had been nursing. She is buried at Bodelwyddan, St. Margaret's church yard, in Flintshire, Wales. She had served with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Forces.

Dr Frederick Montizambert (1843 – 1929) became the quarantine officer for Canada and was responsible for setting up 'quarantine' places across Canada, preventing the spread of the flu which was killing 1000 per day and by October 1918, 50,000 Canadians died between 1918 and 1919, more than during WW1. One of the quarantine places was on Lawlor's Island in Halifax Harbour where he sent 2000 Doukhobours from a ship which just landed at Halifax full of ill passengers. Lawlor's Island was closed in 1936 as a quarantine area after functioning since 1866.

The positive outcome following the 1918 epidemic: the Federal Government developed a Federal Health Department in 1919; funds were made available to expand hospitals; Public Health courses for medical personnel were started at Dalhousie University; International Red Cross decided to extend its program to peacetime activities. The negative response : no Stanley cup playoffs that year; there was social and economic disruption; many children were without parents; many families were without the main 'bread winner'; business were in need of employees as so many of the workforce died.

### ***POLIO:***

The Mount Hope hospital (also known as the NS Hospital for the mentally ill) served another important aspect of patient care, that being the first institution to serve Nova Scotia polio victims in 1945, under the direction of Dr. C.E. Kinley. This site was chosen because, at the time, there was a separate unused building so the patients could be isolated.

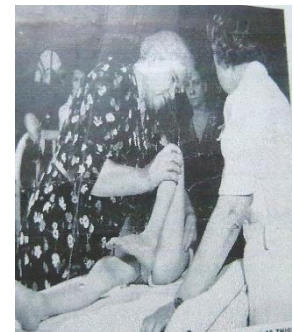
Nurses lived in residence on the hospital site. The nurses worked a 12 hour shift with one afternoon off a week. Their uniforms were individually purchased but the hospital provided aprons to help protect them from the polio virus. Gloves were not worn but the nurses were advised to wash their hands frequently. Masks were not worn either. Actually there were no particular precautions described to protect the 'workers'. Instruction as to how to nurse these victims of the dreaded polio disease only came about when Dr. Kinley and a nurse Mable, returned from Massachusetts, having learned the Sister Kenny 'Hot Pack and Physio' treatment. Dr Kinley then sent nurses to learn this method of treating the polio victims. Mabel said "Everyone was so busy during a shift that there was no time to worry about yourself. One day a young patient fell and fractured his arm and a cast could not be applied until the severe muscle spasm subsided, after hot packs were applied. Giving nursing care to patients who required the Iron Lung machine, was like giving care to patients in a coffin". The polio clinic at the NS Hospital closed when a new clinic was designed at the VG hospital about 1950, still under the direction of Dr. C.E. Kinley. Sister Kenny exercising a patient's leg before the application



of hot packs.

In 1951 the polio clinic in Halifax was first located at the Army Barracks at Anderson Square (behind the Cathedral) before being situated to the West Annex, behind the Victoria General Hospital (1948 building). Before the end of summer there were 400 victims in Halifax. The space was limited making nursing the victims of polio difficult because of the large equipment required. Instrumental in establishing the in-patient Polio Clinic was Dr. H. Gordon Quigley.

A quote from Dr. H. Gordon Quigley: "NS was ill prepared for an epidemic of polio. As for the victims who endured the iron-lung, had it not been due to the generosity of an English Nobleman who donated an artificial lung to each county in NS, many more deaths would have occurred. No one, no person or doctor



*in most of the counties even tried to operate a lung, they sent the lung and patient to Halifax, to the VG clinic. It was the hard working volunteer nurses who made the success of the clinic. The staff who worked here were like 'lepers' as no other health care worker would come near the clinic and that included doctors, interns except two. Obtaining equipment like metal suction tips was sometimes a matter of begging or stealing, everyone was so fearful of the disease."*

Veronica Richard was the Nurse-in-Charge. She was a graduate from Timmins School of Nursing. The staff included one orderly and ten nurses who shared shifts to cover 24/7 care as these patients required constant monitoring. Veronica studied the "Sister Kenny" treatment program in New York. She returned to Halifax to set up the clinic along with Dr. Kinley and Dr. Quigley. The nursing shifts were 12 hours and 6 1/2 days a week. *"We ate on the 'run' and frequently worked overtime, without question, when patients needed care and we were short of trained nurses"*, said Veronica.

One of the staff nurses was Maude D. MacLellan, a VG graduate, class 1936. She studied in Minnesota during the polio epidemic of 1942, under Sister Kenny. Maude did further studies at Toronto University in Public Health. She then travelled with the 'Crippled Children's Clinic' throughout NS, administering care to the polio victims. Maude died June 23, 1995 at age 93. The NS Society of Crippled Children introduced the mobile clinics program in 1957.

Working with the 'March of Dimes' program, giving the polio vaccine to children throughout the province was Nancy Connolly (Nunan), VG class of 1958A.

Nellie Wile (Crowe), VG class 1940, received the Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in 1941 and she attended the University of Toronto obtaining a Diploma in Public Health. The Fellowship also included course at Philadelphia on 'Treatment and Prevention of Tuberculosis'; Nashville on 'community nursing'; Minneapolis on 'Sister Kenny's Hot Packs Treatment for Poliomyelitis. On her return to Nova Scotia she implemented the Sister Kenny's pioneering 'hot pack' treatment for polio victims and was the treatment supervisor at the Children's Hospital, Halifax, the Nova Scotia hospital, Dartmouth. Later she developed the 'Drug Awareness' curriculum at the NS Teacher's College. Nellie received the 'Award of Distinction' from Premier John Buchanan for exceptional contribution to the health system of NS.

Margaret Archibald, VG class of 1936, in her final year while working in the operating room she became very ill and lost the use of her right arm. A diagnosis of polio was made and she was one of the first two cases in Halifax that year and the origin was never determined. She spent considerable time in hospital and recovered at home for fifteen months. She returned to the VG and finished her training in the 1941 class. Following graduation she nursed in various places and one being the TB hospital in Halifax'

The President of the USA National Society for Crippled Children introduced the Easter Seals stamp in 1933. The idea gradually spread across Canada, becoming a major fund- raising event by 1957. This was a tremendous boost to the care of polio victims and continues to this day. The connection with Easter is symbolic of 'new life' for those with disabilities.

With the 1950's epidemic in Halifax, student nurses in the VG School of Nursing were used to fill in for staff and every one received the Salk vaccine. As quoted from such a student, Edith



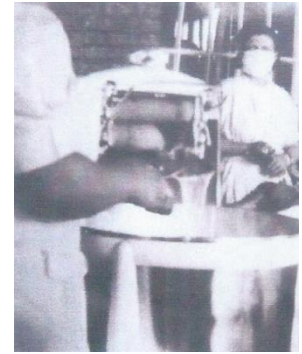
*Bogle, class 1953A: "My work included assisting in the care of 14 patients, all in the Iron Lung machine. The Iron Lungs were all lined up in a large room where the swishing and sucking sound never stopped. The machines acted as bellows and were powered by electricity." Edie continued on with her talk; "There were large washing machines with a ringer at the top. The basin was filled with scalding hot water and large flannel packs were immersed into this water. We used*



*large tongs, about two feet long, to remove the packs from the water and put the packs through the wringer.*



*The packs were tested on ourselves as many patients were not sensitive to heat or cold because of the effect of the polio. The packs were applied to the affected area, covered by a protective sheet to keep the heat longer. These packs were applied 4-6 times a day followed by exercise and massage. It was very difficult and dangerous to the workers moving these washers across the floor to where the packs were needed. Today it would not be permitted, a safety issue. The children and adults were often very emotional because of the long separation from family as no one was allowed visitors while in the infectious stage. I will never forget the crying of patients, the worried faces of parents, but most importantly, watching the positive results of our hard continuous work to help these patients to a normal life, at least as much as possible.*



Jean Livingston, a VG graduate, class 1937, was a Nursing Sister during WW2 and served overseas in a Casualty Clearing Unit during the D-Day invasion. On return to Canada she nursed at the Cogswell Street hospital and during the polio epidemic in Halifax, she was sent to the Civic Hospital to care for these victims. Jean became a patient in the Camp Hill hospital and while there was awarded the Queen Jubilee medal. She died in the 1960's.

The writer (VG grad- 1953A) was a Public Health Nurse during the 1950's in Halifax; school nurse at LeMarchant, baby clinic at Dalhousie Public Health Clinic on University Avenue. At the time of the polio scare in Halifax the writer was involved in administering the polio vaccine to school children and the assignment was at Tower Road School. The Principle at the time was Mr Withrow whom the writer had occasion to know from attending Quinpool Road School in grades 6 to 8.



Dr. Jonas Salk's discovery of the polio vaccine in 1955 has presented a much different picture regarding polio throughout the world. Nevertheless, there are still pockets of the disease in parts of the world where the vaccine has not been used and the World Health Organization is monitoring this very closely.

Dr. Arthur Shears (1924-2013) started the NS Rehabilitation Centre in Halifax, 1956, for polio, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries etc. He was the first Medical Director of the centre. Shears also started the Royal College Residency Program in PMR, and the Dalhousie Physiotherapy Program 1963. Shears served on many Boards including NS Polio Foundation and the NS Crippled Children's Society.



Post-Polio Syndrome affects approximately 25-80% who have previously survived an acute attack of poliomyelitis, which is a viral infection of the nervous system. Symptoms may appear 15-30 years after recovery at an age of 35-60. Symptoms would be muscle weakness, pain and fatigue. The reason for this recurrence is unknown. Treatment is lots of rest to control the fatigue, and to manage activity with energy- saving equipment such as canes, walkers and perhaps wheelchair use. The Post-Polio Syndrome is not 'life-threatening'.

With the isolation techniques and vaccines, the recent epidemics of SARS and N1H1 were effectively controlled in Canada e.g. with N1H1 only 426 died in Canada with numerous being infected. Graduates of the VG Hospital School of Nursing continue to be a member of the health team as they face the challenging nursing situations dealing with an infectious disease. The saga of infectious diseases continues as we are now faced with another deadly virus, the corona covid 19 but as before, the nurses and doctors shall prevail and overcome.

*"Nurses and our professional standing have continued to move forward and remains one of the most 'trusted' health care profession".*