

THE ALUMNI of the VICTORIA GENERAL HOSPITAL (VGH) SCHOOL of NURSING

By Gloria Stephens, class 1953A



BETHA PICKLES as LADY SUPERINTENDENT (1892 -1898) & HER DAY STAFF 1894

The Victoria General Hospital School of Nursing Alumni (VGH) was officially established Tuesday March 2, 1920 by the Superintendent of Nurses, Bertha Pickles and has never digressed from having meetings on the first Tuesday of the month for one hundred years. An amazing feat. The Alumni has operated continuously since this date by volunteers and totally funded by the VGH School of Nursing Alumni. The school actually started in 1890 and graduated 5000 nurses when the school closed in 1995.



VGH – 1890 to 1948 when a new hospital was built



When the above hospital was replaced by this structure to the left and kept the original name of Victoria General and is currently known as the Victoria building, VG site as part of the Queen Elisabeth 2 hospital complex. At the opening of this building in 1948, it was the highest hospital in Canada. Graduates of this school obtained their nursing experiences in these two building and as well another structure known as the Centennial Building which opened in 1967.

The first Alumni President was Mildred Holloway (Hall) class of 1909, Gertrude Keith class 1919 as secretary and Ethel Redmond



MILDRED HOLLOWAY
(PICTURE: 1958)



GERTRUDE KEITH
(PICTURE 1958)



ETHEL REDMOND
(PICTURE 1958)

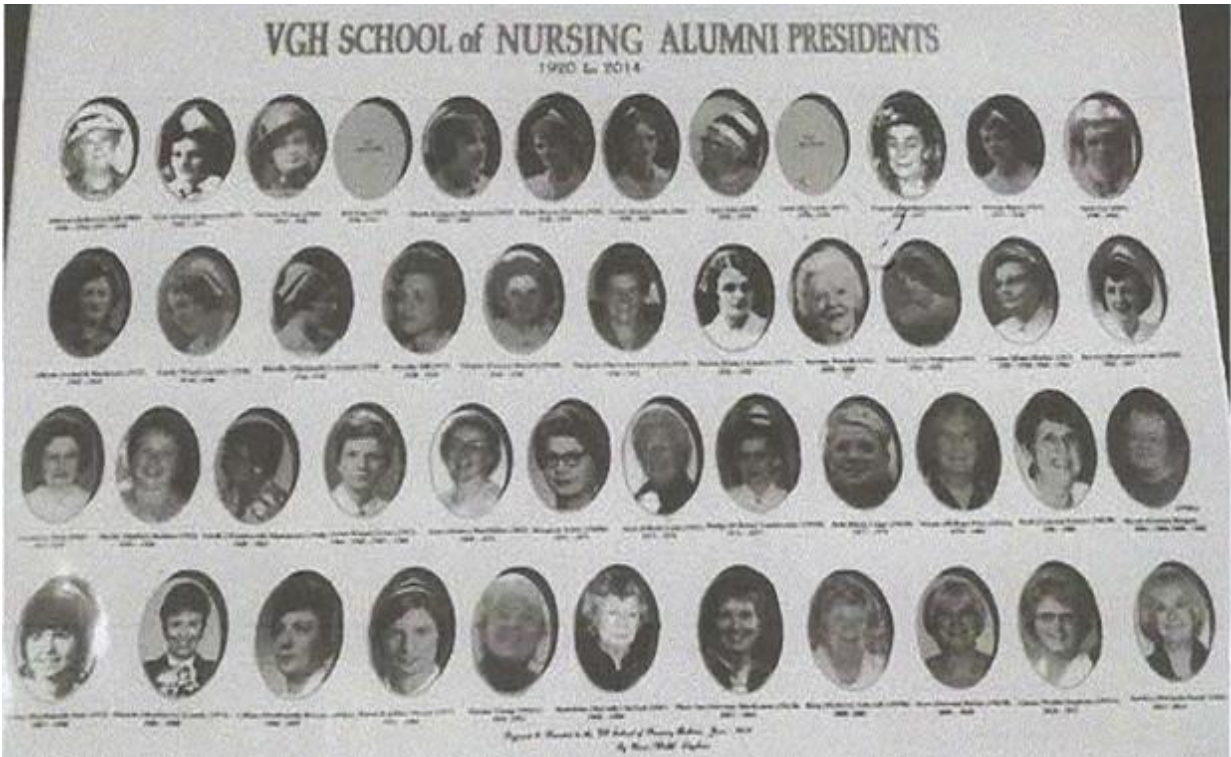
class 1918 as the treasurer, with the fee being \$1.00 dollar per year. The motto: “Respect the Past to Build the Future”. To date there are 300 dues paying members and at the regular Tuesday meetings about 30 to 35 attend to hear invited speakers, short business meeting and special social time with

'goodies' and tea or coffee. The current fee \$20 per year by January 1st. One can become a Life Long Member by paying, at once \$150.

Regular meetings are held the first Tuesday of April, May and October through to December from 1 to 3 PM in the church hall of Hope United Church on Connaught Ave, Halifax, NS. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) is held in June at this same address. Notices are sent through the quarterly Newsletter, emails or via post.

The Alumni is managed by an Executive (minimum of 2 year term) of president, president elect, secretary, treasurer, membership and past president/ nominating chair. The Board consists of the Executive and the Chairs of the Standing committees: Archives, Program, Bursary & Awards, Newsletter, Publicity, Social & Communications.

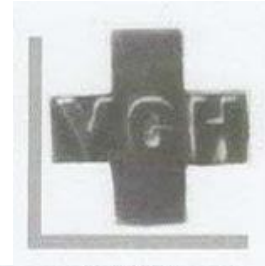
The picture of presidents was prepared and presented to the Alumni by Gloria Stephens (class 1953A) at the end of her term as president of the Alumni, 2010 -2012). This picture hangs in the Ballroom of the Bethune building.



VGH SCHOOL of NURSING ALUMNI PRESIDENTS -1920 - 2014

Following 2014 the presidents were; 2014 -2016, Charlene Day, class '72 A; 2017 – 2019, Sandra Bauld, class '69 (2nd time); 2020 – 2022 – Debbie Dicks, class '76 ,
'20 – '25 Ruby Fraser, '72A

The school's first pin was developed in 1892 as a bronze cross and the right pin was developed in 1931 and continued to be the school pin when the school closed in 1995. In the early years of the school the graduates had to purchase the pin.



The 1931 design continues to be used on all Alumni documents and correspondence. The logo for the Alumni is the last school pin and the motto: "Respect the Past to Build the Future". The Constitution and Bylaws are reviewed periodically and a copy is filed in the Archives and can be viewed on request.



The objectives of the Alumni have changed over the years according to the events of the time but the mandate has remained.

The Alumni has accomplished much during these one hundred years, most importantly, forming the first professional nursing association in Canada, in 1909, 'The Graduate Nurses Association Nova Scotia (GNANS). Members were referred to as 'Senior Nurses'. Eveline Pemberton initiated the idea, at the time, she was a supervisor at the VGH and also owned and operated a 'private hospital' called 'Restholm' on North Park St., Halifax.



E. PEMBERTON



JOBENA FORREST

Jobena (Thomas) Forrest, class 1898 was a charter member and the first president, 1910. Catherine Graham, class 1895, was president when this organization became, through a legislative act, the Registered Nurses Association of NS (RNANS)

In 1925, the first written exam to become a registered nurse in Canada occurred in Halifax and a copy of this exam is stored in the VGH Archives.

The first Canadian Nurses Registrar, was a VGH graduate Frances Fraser who presented the first RN Certificate to E. Pemberton in 1925. Pemberton is now recognized as the first RN in Canada. Frances served with the #7 Dalhousie Stationary Medical Unit in WW1 under command of Dr. John Stewart and Matron, Laura Hubley, a VGH graduate of the class 1898.



FRANCES FRASER

During WW1 and WW2 VG graduates served as Nursing Sisters to the point of almost depleting the hospital of nurses. Many distinguished themselves in both wars, receiving medals, mentioned in dispatches for their outstanding and courageous performances under fire.



One such nurse in WW1 was Laura Hubley (class 1898) who, as mentioned before, was Matron of the #7 Dalhousie Medical Stationary Hospital Unit serving throughout France, and she received the Royal Red Cross 1st. Class Medal.

Another in WW1, VGH graduate, was Margaret MacKenzie who served in Gallipoli and on return graduated in Public Health and became the first Provincial Director of Public Health. She received the Mons Star, King George V Jubilee Medal and the British War Medal. She was from the VG class of 1908.

LAURA M. HUBLEY

Many VGH graduates could be named in WW2 as well, so as a representative, will feature Jean Nelson. She was a Matron of a 1200 bed hospital in Belgium and received several medals: Royal Red Cross 1st Class, Officer Sister of St. John Ambulance, 1939 -1945 Star, France & Germany Star, Defense Medal, War Medal 1939 – 1945 and 8 ribbons. On return she was for many years Director of Nursing at Camp Hill Hospital, Halifax, NS. During WW2 members of the Alumni once again knitted items, packed parcels with food, letters and other items and sent overseas to the Canadian troops. They also made dressing again for the hospital as supplies were difficult to obtain and where they could, did volunteer duties in selected areas of the hospital because of the shortage of nurses.



JEAN NELSON

During WW1, WW2, Korea and Vietnam, in total 200 VG graduates served, which included many male nurses. (*Point of interest – in total 143 males graduated from VGH*) A recently published book describes in detail the lives of these two hundred nurses: “Remembering Nurses Who Served”, (2021) by Gloria Stephens, VG class 1953A

Four VGH graduates made ‘the supreme sacrifice’ during WW1: Minnie Follett, class 1909 , drowned in the sinking of the HMHS Llandovery Castle; Neil McLean, class 1911 killed during the Battle of Courcellette in 1916; Margaret MacLeod, class 1911 of Tb while serving; Rebecca MacIntosh, class 1915 of the Spanish Flu while serving overseas.

There was one VGH graduate who made ‘the suprema sacrifice’ during WW2, that being Jessica MacLeod, class 1927 and she was buried with ‘full military honours’ from St Paul’s church, Halifax. She served in the RCAF and nursed in the Shearwater Hospital. She collapsed on duty and died shortly after in hospital.

The Halifax Explosion occurred a few years prior to the Alumni formation in 1917 and the VGH was very involved in treating the victims, so one of the first activities of the Alumni was to knit items of clothing, make parcels of food, dressings and other essentials and gave to those who lost their homes. Nurses also made dressings for the hospital, nurses’ caps and did volunteer duties within the hospital.

In 1938 the VGH School of Nursing Archives was founded by Alfreda MacQuade, class of 1919 and continues to function through volunteers. The archives is funded by the Alumni, having two small rooms in the Bethune building, VG site. This Archives is remarkable as it houses a comprehensive history of the VG hospital, the school of nursing and as well the medical history of Halifax City. The museum items and original paintings are of considerable value. The

collections of records, documents and artifacts indicate the history of ailments, treatments, the nature of society and the advancement of medicine and nursing in Nova Scotia. As an example, on file is the original Minute Book of 1867 when the VG hospital was first being discussed, the first Heart-Lung and Kidney dialysis machines used in the Maritimes, many 'war diaries' of VG nurses who served in wars. The Archives received two prestigious awards: The Phyllis Blakeley Award 1996, for archival excellence and the International Archives Congress Medal, 1992.

(The first uniform belonged to Margaret MacKenzie, class 1908, WW1, who became the first Director of Public Health in NS. The second uniform belonged to Jean Nelson, class 1932, who was a Matron of a 1200 bed hospital during WW2 in Belgium. Her name was accepted for the CNA Memorial Book in 2009, presented by the 'Nursing History NS Society.)



RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE ALUMNI INCLUDES:

- Donated a brick in Victoria Park, Halifax with inscription: "from the VGH School of Nursing"
- Planted a tree with a plaque in front of the Centennial building to replace trees destroyed in the hurricane of 2003
- Place a wreath annually November 11, at the Halifax Cenotaph, since 2003
- Installed a stain-glass window to honour graduates of the VGH School of Nursing, 2004 at the entrance of the Centennial building;



- Provide annually, bursaries to University nursing students who would be associated with a graduate of the VGH School of Nursing
- Provide occasionally, equipment for the nursing student Learning Lab, such as a hospital bed
- Donate food and clothing annually to local charities
- Award presented about every five years, to an Alumni member who has contributed significantly to the workings of the Alumni making them a Honourary Life Member.
- Award presented annually at the AGM called the Florence Nightingale Award. The recipient is selected by the Executive as someone who was an outstanding member.
- Sponsored Victorian Teas, Bridge Evenings and other events for the Alumni members
- Support the VGH Nurses Archives which was developed in 1938 by Alfreda McQuade, a VGH graduate of class 1919.
- Donate articles to Palliative Care, VGH site, such as money to the Music Therapy Fund, blanket warmers
- Donate a sum of money annually to the VGH Site Foundation for patient comfort
- Provide a quarterly Newsletter to the Alumni members. A copy of the first Newsletter is filed in the Archives, which occurred in the early 1940's. The Newsletter contains

stories of graduates and their accomplishments, notices of events, class reunion report, historical articles, obituaries and contact information (Only available to paid-up Alumni members)

- Set up 'educational/ historical displays throughout the city,
- Collect the biographies of the graduates and insert into a binder stored in the VGH School of Nursing Archives, which will remain as the 'school's legacy' for future generations and historians to view.



(G. Stephens describing the 'Biography Book' to Marg Ashcroft & Mary Murchland. This book contains the profiles of the VGH graduates from 1890 to 1995, when the school closed.)

The Alumni believes and supports: current standards of patient care; is a patient advocate thru donations to the hospital's different units; promotes advancement of nursing practice; supports nursing education; believes in Life Long Learning and preserving nursing history through the activities within the VGH Nurses Archives.

EXECUTIVE 2021-2022



(Current Executive & Board- Sandra Bauld - Membership, Nina Wickens, Mary Trott, Gloria Stephens, Madeleine MacNeil - Treasurer, Debbie Dicks (current President), Iris Shea, Debbie Beveridge-Secretary, Janet Young, Edie Ward , not in picture- Lesa Light - Newsletter)

The Alumni remains vibrant with 350 paid active members and as tradition persists, meet the first Tuesday of the month as scheduled as was the first meeting of March 2, 1920. There were plans to celebrate this alumni's outstanding 100 years of accomplishments in 2020 but because of the Covid 19 pandemic, had to be cancelled. This is a 'once in a life-time' milestone, as far as can be determined, this is the only hospital school of nursing alumni to function continuously in Canada for 100 years and still going. A remarkable feat and accomplished through the dedicated efforts of Alumni volunteers. This is the logo used to publish the planned events for the 100th 'Home Coming'.



A smaller event to celebrate the 100th Alumni Association Anniversary was conducted May 6, 2023, by the Executive and Board, in the ballroom of the Bethune building with a 'tea social', numerous posters, a short presentation on the hospital and school history and tour of the archives. So successful that many recommended that these events should be more frequent.