

A History of the Aberdeen Hospital School of Nursing

By

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For Nursing History Nova Scotia Society

Diploma School of Nursing in Nova Scotia
Aberdeen Hospital School of Nursing (AHSN)

Location: 835 East River Road, New Glasgow, NS

History of School and Years Opened and Closed: 1897-1995

In November 1895, an Appeal was sent out to the people of New Glasgow, Stellarton, Westville, Trenton and Pictou County outlining the urgent need of a general hospital and a contagious disease annex. Statistics showed that in two years, 175 cases of contagious diseases had occurred in New Glasgow and Trenton alone, many of which were fatal. Simultaneously with the opening of the hospital, a training school for nurses was established under the direction of Miss Jessie M Sheraton, a graduate of Saint John General Hospital, Saint John, New Brunswick. She was also the Superintendent of the Hospital. She was described by her students as very forceful, commanding and a great disciplinarian. The Aberdeen Hospital School of Nursing was the fourth nursing school opened in Nova Scotia and graduated 1837 students.

School of Radiology 1929 – 1972 (26 graduates)

School of Laboratory Technician 1960 – 1972 (36 graduates)

Entrance Requirements:

Applicants as a rule should have been between the ages of 21 and 30 years and they must have received at least a good common school education, although women of higher education were preferred. They were also required to present certificate of good moral character and health.

Each student was expected to have on admission:

White oxfords with soft rubber heel

White hose

Wrist watch with second hand

One pair bandage scissors with name engraved

Classroom supplies including red ball point pen

Drinking glass or mug

Face cloths

Those wishing for this course of training had to apply either personally or in their own handwriting to the Superintendent. Candidates were received at any time as vacancies occurred. At the end of two months' probation, if considered satisfactory, the candidate entered upon the regular course of training and adopted a hospital uniform and signed an agreement to complete the full course of two years and

to conform to all the rules and requirements of the School and Hospital. Pupils could be dismissed at any time for inefficiency, misconduct, unsatisfactory record, or any other reason which were deemed sufficient.

Service Component:

The pupils served as assistant nurses in the hospital. When circumstances arose the services of nurses may be had for private nursing. When so employed, the minimum charge was one dollar per day, payment to be made weekly to the Superintendent.

Payment (Stipends):

No payments were made to nurses during the two months of probation. After acceptance, they were paid \$5.00 per month to cover necessary expenditure, it being understood that their training is a full equivalent for their service. The School of Nursing was funded totally by the revenue from patients in the hospital. There was no government help.

The pupil nurse assigned to district nursing would make periodical visits to the homes of the sick requiring her services at no cost to the patient. The pupil nurse assigned to private nursing would be sent to families requiring her full-time at a cost within their means.

Private duty nurses were paid \$10 per week or \$1.50 per day and board; any travelling expenses incurred will be added.

1919 - No payment was given to the nurses during the three months of probation. After acceptance, they were paid eight dollars per month for the first year, \$12 per month for the second year and \$15 per month for the third year to cover necessary expenditure.

The operation of the School of Nursing was dependent entirely on the Board of Trustees. The Hospital, in turn, relied heavily on the students' participation in the care of patients and the labour associated with such.

Funding always took a multitude of sources and ingenuity to keep the Hospital and School of Nursing running which was particularly burdensome in the 1930s. Significant sources of funding were the "Industrial Contracts" whereby major employers garnisheed wages of employees (25-35cents a pay) and in return the employees received Hospital services. Services were specific in nature and had an overall cap above which the patient was charged.

Good relationships between the Hospital and the District it served were essential to maintain contracts, donations and bequeathals.

In March 1931, the Hospital moved to reduce Nursing Students' salary to \$10/month. Students were to provide own texts and uniforms and make a \$25 deposit on entrance. This will be returned on graduation but will be forfeited on dismissal or leaving before graduation.

A stipend for the Class of 1972 was \$5.50 every 2 weeks in 1970 then raised to \$7.28 in July 1971. After this class there was no financial reimbursement for students.

Length of Program: 2 year program 1897-1899; 3 year program 1898-1972; 2 year program 1973-1993

To adjust between the 2 year programs and the 3 year programs there were no students graduating in 1900 and no intake of students in 1970.

Classes were admitted in February and September. During the probationary period, which covered from four to six months, the courses were given by instructors (seldom more than two). The remainder of classes was given by physicians, who also set and marked the examinations. If a student succeeded in “getting her cap” at the conclusion of her probationary period, it was taken for granted she would pass all further examinations – including Registered Nurses’ Examinations. The practice of admitting two classes of students each year continued until 1958.

The diplomas presented to the graduates were specially lithographed for Aberdeen Hospital and a fine work of art. The badges represent the Nova Scotia flag in detail surrounded by a blue ribbon bearing the words Aberdeen Hospital 1899 in gold and enamel.

Uniforms:

The first students’ uniform consisted of a dark blue dress covered by a white apron. The class of 1973 introduced a change in uniform from bib and apron to a simple white dress with light blue piping accents which matched the light blue band worn on their caps in second year.

The last class to wear the school’s nursing cap in a graduating photo was 1991.



Curriculum: The very first course of lectures was delivered by the medical and surgical call staff and was as follows:

General and regional anatomy- 8 lectures

Physiology-6 lectures

Medical nursing- 6 lectures

Surgical nursing- 8 lectures

Eye, ear, nose and throat - 5 lectures

Students were on duty 12 hours per day with one afternoon a week to themselves and had a 2 week yearly vacation.

One of the significant changes was the establishment of a two year program in 1971. The final class of students graduating from the three year program was 1972.

The new program, implemented on a provincial basis, generated a great deal of study and interest. A curriculum was developed by the school with organized theory, and clinical application in order to maximize the value of learning experiences. The pupils served as assistant nurses in the Hospital.

Ongoing assessment of the curriculum led to revisions within the philosophy and organizational framework. The school consistently met provincial standards in surveys conducted every five years by the Registered Nurses Association of Nova Scotia.

Affiliations:

Nova Scotia Sanatorium 1952 – 1972; 28 days – 2 months

Nova Scotia Psychiatric Hospital 1966 – 1995; 12 weeks

VON – 2 day field work

Rehabilitation Centre (Pictou) and the in-house Addiction Program –some Classes spent time at these Centers.

Living Arrangements:

The students lived on the upper floor in the hospital or outside the hospital until the nurse's resident was completed in July 1919.

The original "Nurses' Home, adjacent to the original Aberdeen Hospital, was opened in 1920 and there was accommodation for twenty-seven nurses. 1st floor was reserved for the

Superintendent and Supervisors. Students were on 2nd and 3rd floors and the classroom was located in the basement.

In 1941, due to overcrowding, the MacNeil house was bought to accommodate 23 nurses. With the building of the new Aberdeen Hospital plans were made to build a new Nurses' Residence. In 1959, the new Nurses' Residence was completed and accommodated 165 nurses. In 1974 two married nursing students in the Class of 1976 were permitted to live at home, otherwise all nursing students lived "in residence" during training.

Life of a Student:

Students' hours of duty were from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. or vice versa. On day duty, one would have 3 hours off daily, but would often attend class during this time; on night duty, one would receive two hours off daily, but would relieve or be relieved, by another student. On day duty one received one afternoon off a week, five hours on Sundays and holidays. On night duty after 1945, one received one night off a week.

First graduating class photo on record is 1921

First class yearbook on record is 1957, last yearbook 1994, the last graduating class did not produce a yearbook.

On entering the School, students were assigned a "Big Sister" or "Big Brother" from the senior class to assist with the numerous adjustments to be made.

The "Capping" service held at the conclusion of the probationary period in the three year program was replaced with a "Blue Band" ceremony when the two year program students, who successfully completed their first year, were awarded a blue band to wear on the nursing cap.

The "Carol Sing" was held annually; the students and instructors, holding lighted candles, moved from room to room in the Hospital, singing Christmas Carols to the patients and staff on duty.

Rules and Regulations:

Pupils may be dismissed at any time for inefficiency, misconduct, unsatisfactory record, or any other reason which may be deemed sufficient.

Graduation:

Students completing a full course and passing final examinations received a Pin and Diploma of the Aberdeen Hospital. Graduation exercises traditionally were held at the First Presbyterian Church in New Glasgow, in a solemn, dignified manner. The starched uniform, apron and bib were replaced with a long sleeved white uniform, and in recent years, before the School closed, they wore a nurse's cape and carried a bouquet of red roses.

Site of Archives (if available): Archives are located in the basement in the Aberdeen Hospital



Pin

The diplomas presented to the graduates were specially lithographed for Aberdeen Hospital and a fine work of art. The badges/pins represent the Nova Scotia flag in detail surrounded by a blue ribbon bearing the words Aberdeen Hospital 1897 in gold and enamel.

Cap:

Left to right – probation to first year; third year of the 3 year program, second year both 2 and 3 year programs, graduation cap



RINGS OF THE ABERDEEN HOSPITAL SCHOOL OF NURSING

According to our sources, every Graduating Class prior to 1942 chose a different class ring. Some years the students chose a ring already designed by a previous class. Currently there are 13 different ring design examples in the Archives Collection. The earliest Aberdeen Hospital School of Nursing ring with provenance in the Archive Collection is 1927.

The creation of the most recognizable and prolific “**AH**” ring came into being when the Superintendent of Nurses spoke to Nell Dickson Miller (Class of 1942). She requested that a ring be selected in hopes a uniform design would be pleasing for future class rings. From different class rings, the feature most befitting the Aberdeen Hospital School of Nursing was chosen. Marjorie MacLellan Halliday, Class of 1942, sketched the ring design which was then presented to New Glasgow jeweler Dave Neima. He made the ring at a cost of \$9.95. Class # was divided and placed on either side of the ring (i.e. **19 AH 76**), the numbers were slightly raised and sideways. According to most sources, with the exception of the Classes of 1946, 1947, 1974 and 1975, all other Aberdeen Graduates who had chosen to purchase a ring wore this design. In

addition, some members of these Graduating Classes had a choice to purchase the 1942 version.

The 1942 version was made from 10K gold, 8 sided (4 large and 4 small); a diagonal line from the top left hand corner to the right lower corner divided the ring into 2 sections. The top right side of the ring had a black background with "AH" in gold. The lower left area of the ring, all gold, contained a slightly raised cross.

