

## Living Up to Every Possibility: M. Adelaide Nutting, 1858-1948 Part 1: A Nurse's Illustrious Career

**M**ary Adelaide Nutting was the first recipient of the National League of Nursing Education's leadership medal which bears her name. Miss Nutting, as she was known to her students and colleagues, accepted the medal saying, "I don't deserve it."<sup>1</sup> She would certainly be the only one surprised that she would be the recipient of such an award! Even a brief glance into her successes, both in nursing and outside the field, shows there are few so deserving of this honor as this early leader in professional American nursing.

Born in Quebec, Miss Nutting was thirty years old when she began the nursing program at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing. While many factors must have contributed to her decision to enter the field of nursing at this point in her life, her recent experience caring for her mother during a long illness, without a doubt, had an effect on her choice. Her career began at Johns Hopkins, where she held a wide variety of teaching and administrative positions after graduating in the school's first class in 1891. Only three years later, she stepped into the role of superintendent of nurses when Isabel Hampton, who would continue to be a valued friend and colleague, married and left the position. In this role she put into practice many of Miss Hampton's ideas and visions, and developed her own innovative methods of

improving the school. She introduced social subjects into the curriculum, established scholarships and tuition fees, began payment of lecturers, and hired full-time instructors and supervisors. In 1901, she founded a ground-breaking 6-month preliminary course preparing the new student for hospital experience.<sup>2</sup>

Miss Nutting is perhaps best known for achieving one of the most important firsts in nursing history: Appointment as the first nurse in the world to the position of professor of nursing, a title she assumed in 1907 upon agreeing to direct the fledgling nursing program at Teachers College Columbia University. But while she is most often remembered for her role as an educator at Teachers College and Johns Hopkins, the full portrait of Miss Nutting cannot be drawn without observance of her strengths in other areas. As one admirer wrote, "Miss Nutting belongs in the ranks of those administrators who are born, not made."<sup>3</sup>

This observation is reinforced by the remarkable work accomplished at Teachers College under the guidance of Miss Nutting and Isabel Hampton Robb. Miss Nutting served on the committee of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, which was chiefly responsible for influencing Teachers College Dean, James E. Russell, to begin a program in hospital economics in 1899 and, eventually, nursing education. At the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event, Dean Russell looked back on the time and said, "Forty years ago I surrendered to a group of determined nurses."<sup>4</sup> Determined they would have to be to weather the difficult early years of the course, which was fraught with financial and administrative difficulties. Miss Nutting initially turned down the leadership position at Teachers College, citing her need to carry on her work at Johns Hopkins.<sup>5</sup> But she was eventually persuaded by Mrs. Robb and Dean Russell of the great need for her abilities and the opportunities she would have at the fledgling program.



Not only were her administrative talents exactly what was called for to bring order to the young program, but her determination and skills in fundraising would prove highly valuable. She believed that nursing schools needed to seek financial independence of hospitals through endowments, and sought to do exactly this with the fledgling nursing education program at Teachers College. In this respect, she followed in the footsteps of Emma Willard, a pioneer in education for women, who sought endowments for schools for women a century before Miss Nutting did the same for nursing education.

Early in Miss Nutting's tenure, the course continued to face harsh financial problems.

Miss Nutting became convinced that an endowed chair in nursing was necessary to assure some level of financial security for the course. She sought the support of the general public for the program. Miss Nutting believed the purpose of education, particularly nursing education, was not personal gain but an opportunity to benefit society, and, therefore, society had an obligation to make education possible for all potential students. As she wrote in the program's Fourteenth Annual Report:

*We are not training nurses entirely for the benefit of hospitals, doctors, nor for private patients, but we are training them for useful service to the people in all matters which affect their health and well being; for intelligent efforts toward the prevention of illness as well as intelligent and skillful care of the sick, and just as medical scholars for instance may turn to the community and say, "Give us money for buildings and teachers so that we may supply you with well trained physicians," so, we, in view of the public as well as private importance of our work, have a right to turn to the community and say help us also – so that we may train and send out to you women who can understand their responsibilities and meet them fully.<sup>6</sup>*

Her fundraising efforts paid off considerably. While financial concerns continued to be an issue at the school throughout her tenure,

Mary Adelaide Nutting



the program maintained a stability and a rate of growth that were impossible before Miss Nutting took the reigns. When she arrived at the school in 1907 only nine students were enrolled in the nursing education course. Upon her retirement in 1925, that number had grown tremendously to 346 regular session students and 316 summer session students.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout it all, Miss Nutting was first and foremost an advocate for the professionalization of nursing. Seeing nursing as a highly skilled vocation, Miss Nutting saw nursing students as an exploited group and spoke freely on what she deemed injustice and inadequacy in the hospital training school system. Speaking at an 1896 Superintendents Society meeting, Miss Nutting said: "Now what are training schools? Are they charitable institutions? Is it a condition of employer and employee? When we read in some circulars of nurses' wages, one might think it. They are really, however, educational institutions, and it is time that this fact be better appreciated."<sup>8</sup> ☉

Look for Part 2 of this piece in the spring issue to read about M. Adelaide Nutting's contributions outside of nursing education and administration.

<sup>1</sup> Goostray, Stella. Mary Adelaide Nutting. *American Journal of Nursing* 58:11, November 1958, p.1529.

<sup>2</sup> Goostray, p.1525.

<sup>3</sup> Goodsell, Willystine. Mary Adelaide Nutting: Educator and Builder. *Teachers College Record* p.382-3.

<sup>4</sup> Cunningham, Elizabeth V. Education for Leadership in Nursing: 1899-1959. *Nursing Outlook* 7, 1959.

<sup>5</sup> Christy, Teresa E. *Cornerstone for Nursing Education: A History of the Division of Nursing Education of Teachers College, Columbia University, 1899-1947*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1969, p.1993, 1926, p.382.

<sup>6</sup> Christy, p.39

<sup>7</sup> Christy, p.69

<sup>8</sup> Goostray, p.1526

## Mary Adelaide Nutting Collector's Pin Available

Mary Adelaide Nutting was an outstanding nursing educator and dedicated to the professionalization of nursing. A graduate of the first class of the Johns Hopkins School of nursing in 1891, she became superintendent of nurses and principal of the school in 1894. She championed national standards for nursing, founding the Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses (later the National League for Nursing Education) and helped launch the American Nurses Association.

The first professor of nursing in the world, as head of nursing at Teachers College, Columbia University she transformed nursing internationally. She was honorary president of the Florence Nightingale International Foundation, the recipient of the M. Adelaide Nutting Medal (created by the NLN in her honor), the Liberty Service Medal of the National Institute of (WWI) of the National Institute of Social Services and an Honorary MA from Yale University, and is an ANA Hall of Fame inductee.

To purchase pin (pictured below and at left) send your name and mailing address along with a \$5.00 check or money order made payable to Foundation of NYS Nurses and mail to:

Foundation of the New York State Nurses  
Veronica M. Driscoll Center for Nursing  
2113 Western Avenue, Suite 1  
Guilderland, New York 12084-9559

The Mary Adelaide Nutting pin, released in September 2006, is one in a collection of 14 Center for Nursing History limited edition pins honoring nurses who have contributed to the rich history of nursing in New York. To view all of the pins and additional items for purchase, go to: <http://www.foundationnys-nurses.org/giftshop.htm> ☉

The History Column is contributed by Cathryne A. Welch, EdD, RN, Director, Bellevue Alumnae Center for Nursing History and Center for Nursing Research Foundation of the New York State Nurses Association

E-mail: [mail@FoundationNYSNurses.org](mailto:mail@FoundationNYSNurses.org)  
Phone (518) 456-7858

Thanks to Rachel M. Donaldson, MLS, Archivist, Bellevue Alumnae Center for Nursing History, Foundation of the New York State Nurses Association, for her assistance in preparing the Nursing History column.

Nursing Education Alumni Association  
Teachers College Columbia University

## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Deadline December 18, 2006



44<sup>th</sup> Annual Isabel Maitland Stewart  
Conference on Research in Nursing  
Friday, April 27, 2007  
Teachers College Columbia University

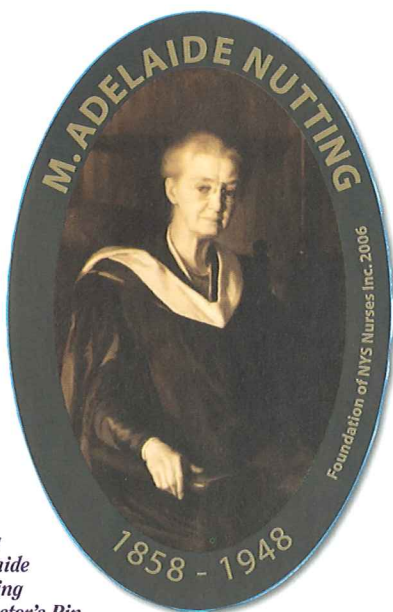
Technology:  
What it Means for Practice and  
Academe Tomorrow

You're invited to attend this celebrated conference and to submit an abstract of your work for presentations and posters. Examples of topics we are looking for: data mining methods; research databases; technology innovations for evidence-based practice and education; health information system design; cutting-edge nursing informatics; virtual nursing practice; online education; practice innovations such as electronic order entry systems, online bidding for shifts; electronic monitoring; etc. If your abstract is selected, you will be provided with complimentary conference registration. You will be responsible for all of your own expenses.

### Guidelines for abstracts:

1. Download form from [www.tcneaa.org](http://www.tcneaa.org).
2. 250 words; minimum 12 font type.
3. Submit via e-mail to Dr. Frank Shaffer: [fshaffer@crosscountry.com](mailto:fshaffer@crosscountry.com)
4. Include title; author's name(s); credentials; street address and e-mail; telephone and fax numbers. Attach a copy of your resume/CV with your submission.
5. Abstracts must be received via e-mail by December 18, 2006.
6. All abstracts will be acknowledged upon receipt.
7. Notices of selected abstracts will be e-mailed in January.

For further information contact:  
Frank Shaffer: 800-530-6152  
[fshaffer@crosscountry.com](mailto:fshaffer@crosscountry.com)



Mary  
Adelaide  
Nutting  
Collector's Pin