

## Brilliant, Creative, Dedicated, Driven, Inspired and Inspiring: Isabel Adams Hampton Robb, 1860-1910 Part II: Miss. Hampton's Employed Years



**A**s described in "Part I: Miss Hampton's Employed Years" in the Spring 2008 issue of *Courier*, Isabel Hampton Robb revolutionized standards of nursing education and set in motion the development of local, state, national and international nursing organizations.

Her resignation as Principle of the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing to marry Dr. Hunter Robb in 1894 shocked and frightened the nursing world and health care community. Many believed that what she had done and initiated could not be sustained without her leadership. As Part II will describe, there was no need for this concern, for Mrs. Robb's seminal nursing leadership did not miss a beat.

### Organizing as a Private Citizen

In 1894, Hunter Robb and Isabel Adams Hampton were married in St. Margaret's, Westminster, London, England. The beautiful bride carried a bouquet sent to her by Florence Nightingale. The happy couple departed on an extended honeymoon – during which Mrs. Robb signaled her uninterrupted professional commitment and leadership by informing colleagues of the ongoing planning of the upcoming meeting of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools.<sup>1</sup>

After their honeymoon, Dr. Robb established his obstetrical practice in Cleveland, Ohio and Mrs. Robb developed their home and domestic routines. During this period Mrs. Robb maintained regular contact with M. Adelaide Nutting (her hand-picked replacement at Johns Hopkins) and Lavinia Dock. She continued to advocate for a program of higher education to prepare nurses for supervisory positions and urged nurses' self-governance and organization to establish nursing as a profession.<sup>2</sup> When Cleveland's Lakeside Hospital Training School for Nurses needed assistance, Mrs. Robb became a member of the Lady Board of Governors utilizing her educational skills and marshalling the best lecturers and affiliation opportunities for the student nurses of Lakeside.<sup>3</sup>

Adept at juggling the demands of home and hearth, Mrs. Robb adored both her sons, Hampton and Philip, and spent many hours with them shepherding their educational and social development. The loss of her second son at birth was devastating. In a poignant letter to Lavinia Dock, expressing her appreciation for the condolences of the "Sisters," Mrs. Robb wrote:

*Dear Docky –  
...physically I'm doing well, but ah me, there is no heart or desire to begin again without my baby I had so counted on, there was no good reason apparent why he did not live, he was a splendid big strong boy*

*– who "fought for his life" – that makes it so hard –. I fear I'll not be quite equal to any meetings before the first part of May. I can't think straight enough to write more...<sup>4</sup>*

### 1894 – Society of Superintendents of Training Schools

Miss Hampton's opening address at the International Congress of Charities, Corrections, and Philanthropy at the 1893 Chicago's World Fair clearly articulated the challenges facing the nursing subsection. After discussion of the issues facing the superintendents present at the Congress, they took action. On June 16, 1893, they adopted a platform of resolutions establishing the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses. The Society's three goals were: "to promote fellowship among nurses; to establish and maintain universal standards of training; and to further the best interest of the profession." The Society convened its first convention in New York City on January 10, 1894 electing Linda Richards as President. Isabel Hampton Robb served as President in 1909.<sup>5</sup> In 1912 the Society evolved into the National League for Nursing Education (NLNE).

### 1897 – Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States and Canada

Through Mrs. Robb's leadership, nurses across the country and world began to understand the importance of having a voice in their profession and establishing their allegiance to the patient rather than to the physician. Many physicians coveted their control over nursing and resisted Mrs. Robb's beliefs and standards. Others whole-heartedly advocated higher education believing that "over-education" of a nurse was impossible.<sup>6</sup> In 1897, the Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States and Canada formed (changing its name in 1911 to the American Nurses Association) electing Isabel Hampton Robb its first president. One year after marriage it was clear that Mrs. Robb still dominated the nursing leadership stage.

### 1899 – Nursing Enters Teachers College

At the 1898 Annual Convention of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, Mrs. Robb issued a call for higher education of those in nursing education and noted, "There are already training schools for teachers established, notably one just recently affiliated with Columbia University in New York. Why should we not take advantage of them?"<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Robb's call prompted the appointment of an Education Committee, including Mrs. Robb and M. Adelaide Nutting, to study and report back on the matter. At the 1898 Annual Convention Mrs. Robb reported that meetings had been held with Dean James Russell of Teachers College (TC) Columbia University and plans were being finalized for a "Course in Hospital Economics, 1899-1900" which would open in October 1899. Mrs. Robb, M. Adelaide Nutting, and Lavinia Dock were among the first instructors, offering their services and travel expenses pro bono.<sup>8</sup>

Entry educational requirements were stringent and tuition expensive at \$400 per student for the eight-month course. Annie Goodrich—future TC lecturer and committee chair, Director of the Visiting Nurse Service in NY, organizer of the Army School of Nursing and Dean of the School of Nursing at Yale University—did not qualify for entrance into TC's program, commented: "...[I have] been educated by governesses and in boarding schools." Three nurses were accepted into the fledgling program and Anna Lowell Alline along with Alice A. Gorman became the first graduates in 1899.

The early years were fraught with financial concerns and negative comments within the pages of *The American Journal of Nursing*, but through perseverance, by 1907, a Chair of Nursing and Health was established at Teachers College and held by M. Adelaide Nutting. By 1910, the post-graduate school of nursing was financially secured through a very generous endowment by Mrs. Helen Hartley Jenkins.<sup>9</sup>

### 1899 – The International Council of Nurses

Following their work together at the World's Fair, Isabel Hampton Robb and British colleague Ethel Bedford Fenwick, continued their professional association through various activities including membership in the Matrons Council, a small international group of nurses interested in professional development. At the 1899 Matrons Council conference, a committee was established to plan for the new nursing organization, the International Council of Nurses. Mrs. Robb and Lavinia Dock were American representatives to the committee, with Miss Dock being elected as Honorary Secretary. The first international meeting of the new organization was held in Buffalo, NY in 1901.<sup>10</sup> Thus, eight years after the 1893 World's Fair, countless American alumnae, local and state nursing organizations, two national American nursing associations, proliferation of nursing associations in other countries and an umbrella international nurses organization confirmed Mrs. Robb's organizational genius and gentle, but oh so firm, tenacity.

### 1901 – The American Journal of Nursing Launched

In her address to the Associated Alumnae at its first annual convention in April 1898, Mrs. Robb noted the need to develop publications and literature dealing with matters of concern to the profession.<sup>11</sup> In 1900 Mrs. Robb took the position that the proposed nursing journal should be nurse-owned and financed by a joint stock committee comprised of Associated Alumnae members. Despite unexpected internal strife regarding whether profits should go to individual stockholders or to a fund that would permit the Associated Alumnae to own the journal, *The American Journal of Nursing* was launched in October 1900 with Sophia Palmer as editor.<sup>12</sup> Twelve years later, Mrs. Robb's long-held goal was achieved when ownership of the *Journal* was transferred to the American Nurses Association.<sup>13</sup>

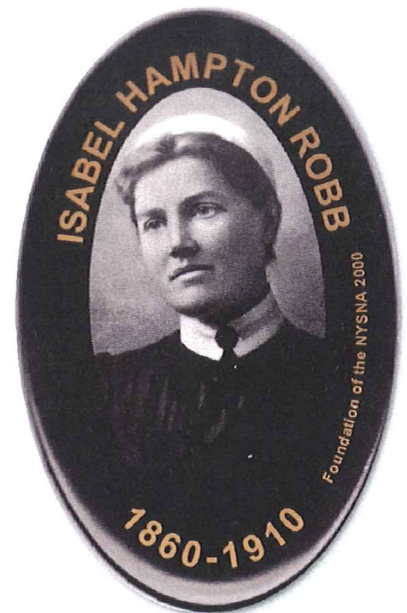
## Isabel Hampton Robb Collector's Pin Available

Isabel Hampton Robb, 1883 graduate of Bellevue Hospital's nursing school, was a brilliant leader. As superintendent of the Illinois Training School (1886-1889) and of the Training School for Nurses at Johns Hopkins Hospital (1889-1894), Robb fought to limit hours of work, eliminate student stipends, and extend the required course of study to three years. She persuaded Teachers College Columbia University to offer nursing courses in 1899. She was the first president in 1897 of Nurses Associated Alumnae of the U.S. and Canada, which became the American Nurses Association. Robb also led the 1893 organization of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, which ultimately became the National League for Nursing. Her untimely death was a wrenching loss to the profession and public.

To purchase pin (shown below, 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 New York State Nurses  
Veronica M. Driscoll Center for Nursing  
2113 Western Avenue, Suite 1  
Guilderland, NY 12084-9559

The Isabel Hampton Robb pin, released in October of 2000, is 8th in a series of 15 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.foundationnysnurses.org/giftshop.htm>



**Isabel Hampton Robb Collector's Pin**  
\*Many sources cite 1860 as Mrs. Robb's birthdate. Nancy Noel cites it as 1859.

### 1910 – A Visionary Light Extinguished Prematurely—An International Calamity

On Friday, April 15, 1910, while talking with a friend and walking to her son's dance class, Isabel Hampton Robb tried to avoid being struck by a rapidly approaching automobile. She stepped backward between two streetcar tracks as her friend ran ahead to the curb. She was killed instantly between two passing streetcars on Euclid Avenue in Cleveland. Shockwaves rolled over her family as well as her nursing colleagues upon learning of her tragic demise.<sup>14</sup> *The British Journal of Nursing* on April 28 declared her death "An International Calamity,"

*It is impossible to express the sorrow which will be felt not only in the United States, but throughout the nursing world....Destiny decreed that she should play a great part in the evolution of nursing, and, as often happens dowered her with the qualities necessary to a leader with lavish hand. Splendidly strong, physically and mentally, capable, forceful and magnetic, with a personality which not only charmed but commanded respect, she was able to impress others with her own strong convictions, and to carry them to fruition for the benefit of her profession...Isabel Hampton Mrs. Robb belongs not only to America, but to the nursing world at large, which will always feel the uplifting influence of her life, revere her teaching, and keep her memory fragrant.*<sup>15</sup>

And at the August 1910 Nurses Associated Alumnae Meeting, President M. Adelaide Nutting, student and life-long professional soul-mate of Mrs. Robb, shared:

*Mrs. Robb was... the first president, and I remember when she was first appointed. She went back to her sitting-room and closed the door and she did what President Roosevelt is said to (have) done when he learned of the overwhelming majority by which he had been elected President. She sat down and put her face in her hands and cried and said, "I cannot do it." But she did do it. And that spirit of humility, that of approaching her work with the full consciousness of the tremendous possibilities, I think was one of the secrets of her power;...with a spirit of deep humility praying that she might have the strength and power to do her work.*<sup>16</sup>

In 1976, in recognition of her extraordinary contributions to the nursing profession, Mrs. Robb was posthumously inducted as a charter inductee of the American Nurses Association Hall of Fame.

Florence Nightingale, Mrs. Robb's admired and respected international collaborator, died on August 13, 1910. In September 2010, the centennial anniversary of the deaths of two of nursing's most illustrious legends, the American Association for the History of Nursing will hold its annual meeting in London. ☪

#### (Endnotes)

- 1 Nancy L. Noel, EdD, RN, *Isabel Hampton Robb: Architect of American Nursing*, Doctoral Dissertation Teachers College, Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 100.
- 2 Ibid. 1.
- 3 *Isabel Hampton Robb: Woman of Decision, First President of the ANA* (Boston: Boston University, Mugar Memorial Library Nursing Archive, n.d.) notes prepared by Nancy L. Noel, EdD, RN. This pamphlet is in the holding of the Foundation of NYS Nurses, Bellevue Alumnae Center for Nursing History: Eileen Bonner Papers, MC 24.
- 4 "Sister(s)" is the term of endearment Bellevue alumnae used in addressing each other. The letter dated "Tuesday Mar. 7<sup>th</sup>" was written sometime between 1896 and 1902. The 1900 Federal Census lists her eldest son "Hampton born 1896" and the 1910 Federal Census lists her youngest son "Philip H born 1902." This letter is in the holding of the Foundation of NYS Nurses, Bellevue Alumnae Center for Nursing History: Bellevue Alumnae Association Collection, MC19, Series: People, Box 2, Folder 4 Isabel Hampton Robb.
- 5 Robert V. Piemonte, EdD, RN, "On Nursing Organizations," in anthology by Thelma M. Schorr, BSN, RN, FAAN, et al. *100 years of American Nursing: Celebrating a Century of Caring*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1999), 38, 207.
- 6 Noel, 176-180.
- 7 Christy, Teresa E, EdD, *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), 15.
- 8 Ibid, 16-17.
- 9 Mrs. Robb and Grace Hoody Dodge were friends. Dodge was a businesswoman and philanthropist who had been previously involved with academics at Columbia University and supported Mrs. Robb and her committee in their quest; Minnie Goodnow, RN, *Nursing History 7<sup>th</sup> ed.*, (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co, 1942), 306, 316.
- 10 Noel, 128-129.
- 11 Lyndia Flanagan, Compiler, *One Strong Voice: The Story of the American Nurses' Association*. First Edition. (Kansas City, MO: American Nurses Association, 1976), 310.
- 12 Noel, 180.
- 13 Ibid, 182.
- 14 "In memory of Isabel Hampton Robb," *Visiting Nurse Quarterly*, April 1910, This pamphlet is in the holding of the Foundation of NYS Nurses, Bellevue Alumnae Center for Nursing History, Bellevue Historical Collection.
- 15 "An International Calamity," *British Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 44. (April 23, 1910), 880.
- 16 "Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States: Minutes of the Proceedings." *The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol. 10, No. 11. (August 1910), AJN, 809.

The History column is contributed by Cathryne A. Welch, EdD, RN, Director, Bellevue Alumnae Center for Nursing Research, Foundation of New York State Nurses; and Gertrude B. Hutchinson, MA, RN, Foundation of NYS Nurses Archivist.  
E-mail: [mail@FoundationNYSNurses.org](mailto:mail@FoundationNYSNurses.org)  
Phone: (518) 456-7858