

Isabel Maitland Stewart: Educator, Researcher, Innovator, Mentor

Part II: The TC Years and Beyond

“Part I: Early History and Career at Teachers College” in the Spring 2009 issue of *Courier* described how Isabel Maitland Stewart became a dynamic force for nursing education at Teachers College (TC). Appointed as Director of the TC Department of Nursing in 1925, Isabel Maitland Stewart traversed the social and financial challenges attendant in the latter years of the Progressive Era to move the TC nursing program forward.

A Long and Distinguished Tenure as Director

As noted in Part I, M. Adelaide Nutting encouraged Miss Stewart with these words, “You have at least – a 10 year job before you.” Miss Nutting’s prediction proved to be an understatement. Between 1925 and 1947, Miss Stewart molded the TC curriculum and the profession through her involvement in the NLNE and as the founder of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Nursing (1937-1941). She revised her 1914 edition of the *Standard Curriculum for Nursing Schools* in 1917, wrote and revised *A Curriculum Guide for Schools of Nursing* in 1927, and chaired the Indexing Periodical Nursing Literature Committee and the NLNE Education/Curriculum Committee. Mildred L. Montag recalled that Miss Stewart “was more of a curriculum person [interested in] international nursing because she traveled so widely.”¹¹

Miss Stewart welcomed discussion and debate about curriculum standards and she knew how to control the tenor of debate, “Conflict is not in itself bad, indeed a certain amount of it is stimulating and necessary for healthy growth – [but] conflict that is chronic and destructive becomes so harmful.” Her renowned support of curricula standards earned her the moniker “Miss Curriculum.”¹²

While curriculum was her first love, she found the desire to do research more and more compelling. Time and motion studies which improved business and industry captured her imagination. What could these studies mean for nursing? In 1928, the Lincoln Hospital Board of Trustees invited the TC Department of Nursing Education to study its hospital and school utilizing time and motion methodology. The resultant *Lincoln School Study* represented the first university-sponsored nursing research using a team approach. This unique study examined not only the usual grading and curricula used, but it expanded to assess the nursing process and the results of care in terms of patient comfort and safety through the application of nursing standards. This quality of research analysis is today’s evidence-based practice; but this was “cutting edge” research in 1928. In 1929, Miss Stewart wrote:

If nursing is ever to justify its name as an applied science...some way must be found to submit all our practices as rapidly as possible to the most searching tests which modern science can devise....Nurses may not be prepared to make the more difficult studies at

once, but if a few will prepare themselves to start in a small way and to show what can be done, others will undoubtedly become interested, and in time, resources will be found, if the results warrant them.³

From the results of the *Lincoln School Study*, Miss Stewart obtained grant funding to study the curricula of nursing courses encompassing the basic hospital diploma courses and the collegiate nursing programs. Virginia Henderson, TC alumna and an extraordinary researcher in her own right, acknowledged the progressive spirit of Miss Stewart: “[she] tried to get a research institute at TC before 1930...And she deserves all the credit in the world for having tried to get that started, and it was Miss Stewart who had the “Nursing Education Bulletin...way ahead of its time.”¹⁴

As the Great Depression loomed, Miss Stewart turned the challenges faced by every nursing program into research opportunities benefiting the NLNE first and TC second. R. Louise Metcalfe [McManus] conducted a time study of all the activities of supervisors who also functioned as principals of their schools of nursing. The information she collected along with other students, provided research opportunities for the students and data for the Education Committee. As she remembered,

Both Miss Nutting and Miss Stewart held their responsibilities for advancement of the profession *through* the National League, to be paramount –...I would say that the work of the Education Committee certainly centered at the College and the leg-work for the Committees was done by students at the College as requested by Miss Nutting or Miss Stewart....⁵

Another study report completed by Miss Metcalfe, “Achievements of Nurses in Relation to Intelligence Test Ratings,” became a template for measuring various dimensions of nursing achievement and aptitude.⁶

It is important to realize that while enrollment in many nursing programs declined nationwide during the Depression, the enrollment of international and national students at TC expanded slightly. That is a credit to the foresight and creativity of Isabel M. Stewart. She emphasized democracy in the program. In the words of student and fellow colleague, Martha E. Rogers, Miss Stewart “had a social conscience and she believed that nursing had to be socially responsible. She was a knowledgeable risk taker. So she wasn’t afraid to rock the boat – [and] she was very smart in how she rocked it!”⁷

As a devoted member of the Stewart family and a private duty nurse, Isabel Maitland Stewart traveled often to Europe. On one such trip in 1908, she visited hospitals and schools of nursing



to “find out all I could about nursing in Great Britain.” Although she was unable to meet with Miss Nightingale, she did meet with Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, editor of the *British Journal of Nursing*. Miss Stewart was “staggered” about the lack of preparedness and “old-fashioned” nature of British nursing. In her words, “This trip greatly broadened my experience and knowledge of nursing and its history.”⁸

With the 1914 outbreak of hostilities in Europe, Miss Stewart advocated for preparing nurses for duty in the field. Finding a paucity of published recruitment and educational materials on military nursing, Miss Stewart wrote materials to fit the need and chaired the Curriculum Committee of Vassar College Training Camp. This Training Camp provided a locus to boost the nursing profession among collegiate women as well as the war efforts.

Her continuing advocacy for military nursing preparedness education within the NLNE continued after the end of WWI and culminated in many advances. In 1940, Stella Goostray, a well-respected nurse educator, an active member of the NLNE and colleague of Miss Stewart’s, wrote to ANA President Julia Stimson urging action to establish the Nursing Council for National Defense.⁹ As the former Superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps, Major Stimson understood the urgency of the request and the Nursing Council of National Defense was established. Ohio Congresswoman Frances Payne Bolton, another champion of the Vassar College Training Camp, continued her support of military nursing education in the House of Representatives. The Appropriation Act of 1942, otherwise known as The Bolton Bill, created the funding for Cadet Nurse Corps in World War II.¹⁰

A prolific writer, Miss Stewart authored two additional books: *A Short History of Nursing* with Miss Lavinia L. Dock, 1920; and *The Education of Nurses: Historical Foundations and Modern Trends* in 1943; 17 pamphlets on a myriad of subjects from workplace hours and conditions to educational standards for entry, graduate, and post-graduate nursing education, to the military preparedness of nurses during both World Wars; and 123 articles in many national and international nursing and educational journals.¹¹

Post Retirement

Following her retirement from TC in 1947, Miss Stewart remained very active as the Chair of the NLNE Committee on Historical Source Materials.¹² During these years, she received many awards such as the "Pro Benignitate Humana" from the Republic of Finland, 1946; the Mary Adelaide Nutting Award from the NLNE, 1947; Silver Bicentennial Medallion from Columbia University, 1954; the Florence Nightingale Medal from the International Committee and the Red Cross, 1955; and three honorary doctorates: Doctor of Laws, Western Reserve University, 1948; Doctor of Humane Letters from her alma mater, Columbia University, 1954; and an honorary Doctor of Laws, The University of Manitoba, 1956.

At Miss Stewart's 84th birthday celebration, January 14, 1962, the TCNEAA surprised and honored her by announcing to her and guests in attendance, the Alumni Association's establishment of the Isabel Maitland Stewart Research Professorship in Nursing – the first endowed chair at TC honoring a nurse. The public announcement came one month later.¹³

After a rich and fulfilling career as educator, researcher, innovator, and mentor, Miss Stewart died quite suddenly of a myocardial infarction on October 5, 1963. She was visiting her nephew at the time of her passing. Her funeral services were held at St. Paul's Chapel on the campus of Columbia University. Isabel Maitland Stewart never left her beloved New York. In accordance with her request, she was cremated and her ashes were scattered on the Hudson River.¹⁴

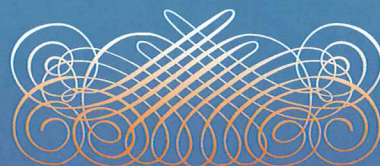
The American Nurses Association posthumously inducted Miss Stewart into its Hall of Fame, Class of 1976.¹⁵ To honor her, TC inaugurated the Isabel Maitland Stewart Conference in 1963. The 47th Isabel Maitland Stewart Conference on Research in Nursing will be held April 23, 2010.

1 The Indexing Periodical Nursing Literature was a comprehensive index started in 1922 in response to nurses' inquiries for a centralized index carrying all the titles of nursing articles published in all the nursing journals of the period.; Mildred L. Montag was a student of and colleague with I. M. Stewart from 1937-1963. While they had mutual agreements about curriculum, they held divergent opinions about 2-year vs. 4-year basic educational levels.; Joan LeBoeuf Downer, *Education for Democracy: Isabel Maitland Stewart and Her Education 1878-1963*, "Oral History of Mildred Montag," Doctoral Dissertation, Doctor of Education. Teachers College,

Columbia University. (New York: Teachers College, 1989), 40, 50.

- 2 Isabel Maitland Stewart, "Curriculum Revision an Essential Step in the Reconstruction of Nursing Education." *AJN* Vol. 35, No. 1, p 61; Teresa E. Christy, *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), 76; Laurie Scrivener and J. Suzanne Barnes, J Suzanne Barnes, "Stewart, Isabel Maitland (1878-1963) Nurse," *A Biographical Dictionary of Women Healers: Midwives, Nurses, and Physicians*, (Westport, CT: Oryx Press, 2002) 269.
- 3 Christy, 79.
- 4 Joan LeBoeuf Downer, "Oral History of Virginia A. Henderson," 49.
- 5 Christy, 83.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Christy, 82; Isabel Maitland Stewart, *AJN* Vol. 35, No. 1, p 62.; Joan LeBoeuf Downer, "Oral History of Martha E. Rogers," 71.
- 8 Joan LeBoeuf Downer, 217, 218.
- 9 Miss Goostray continued service to the Council as a member of the Board of Directors and later as President of the National Nursing Council for War Service. Major Julia A. Stimson, Retired Army Nurse Corps, served in WWI as Chief Nurse of Base Hospital 21, then Chief Nurse of the American Expeditionary Forces. She also served as Superintendent of the Army Nurse Corps and was the first Dean of the Army School of Nursing. "Julia C. Stimson, 1881-1948." <<http://beckerehibits.wustl.edu/mowihsp/bios/stimson.htm>> 13 March 2009; Bullough, 151.
- 10 Christy, 59, 61, 101-103.
- 11 Nursing Education Alumni Association Teachers College, Columbia University (NEATC,CU), *A List of the Published Writings of Isabel Maitland Stewart*, (New York: NEATC,CU, 1967); Scrivener et al, 269.
- 12 M. Janice Nelson, "Isabel Maitland Stewart," *Nursing Leadership* by Harriet Feldman, (New York: Springer Publishing, 2008), 516.
- 13 Joan LeBoeuf Downer, 32, 34.
- 14 Ibid, 105.
- 15 M. Janice Nelson, 517; American Nurses Association. "Isabel Maitland Stewart (1878-1963) 1976." <[http://www.nursingworld.org/FunctionalMenuCategories/AboutANA/WhereWeComeFrom...>](http://www.nursingworld.org/FunctionalMenuCategories/AboutANA/WhereWeComeFrom...) (13 September 2009). ☉

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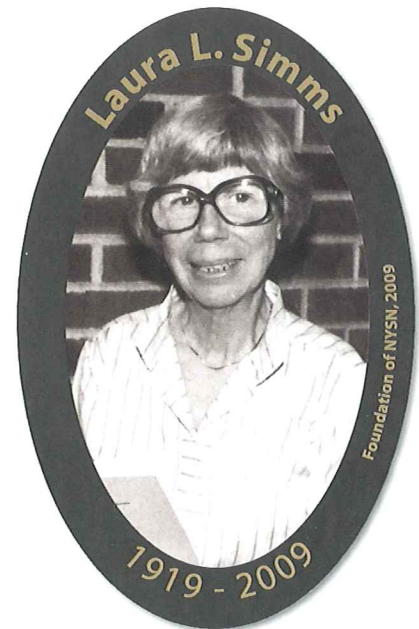
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