

Living Up to Every Possibility: M. Adelaide Nutting, 1858-1948

Part 2: The Realm of Nursing Education and Administration and Beyond

Isabel Maitland Stewart, highly influential colleague of Miss Nutting, and her successor at Teachers College, said of her, "Miss Nutting was one of the prime movers in that whole area of work...interested in woman's work far beyond her own field."¹ Like many of her nursing leader colleagues of the time, Miss Nutting was a powerful advocate for women's suffrage, seeing the right to vote as a crucial tool for women to gain some degree of power over nursing and other health-related legislation. While she wasn't as active in the fight for the right to vote as her colleague, Lavinia Dock, she was known to believe strongly in the movement, marching in parades alongside other nurses. Despite the opposition of many physicians and hospital administrators, many of the nursing leaders of this time saw suffrage as an important goal.² When the right to vote was achieved with the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, women nationwide benefited from the leadership of these nurses and the others who fought for their rights in the suffrage movement.

Miss Nutting was also a leader in the field of household economics, and was one of the founders of the Home Economics Association and the *Journal of Home Economics*.³ She made vast improvements in the Home Economics program at Teachers College where she crystallized her philosophy of Hospital Economics. Miss Nutting set up two goals: to organize and unify the program, bringing in the most prominent and stimulating lecturers she could find, and to procure sufficient funds to ensure adequate financial support for the work.⁴

As the presidential-appointed chairman of the committee of nursing of the Council of National Defense, Miss Nutting staked an interest in the affairs of military nurses and nursing, as well. The outbreak of World War I brought both potential for the advancement of nursing in the military, and fear that a nursing shortage brought on by war would bring about a decrease in hard-won standards for nursing education. Advocates for short-term courses in nursing, (including Dr. S.S. Goldwater, the Superintendent of Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York and Jane A. Delano, the Director of the Department of Nursing of the American Red Cross) met with resistance by Miss Nutting and



Undated photograph of M. Adelaide Nutting held in the archives of the Foundation of NYS Nurses.

her colleague, Annie W. Goodrich. President Woodrow Wilson, siding with Miss Nutting and Miss Goodrich in favor of maintaining high professional standards for military nurses decisively settled the matter, saying, "This is no war for amateurs."⁵ With this victory under her belt, she went on to advocate for officer status for nurses in the armed forces, a goal which was reached in 1920.

While Miss Nutting's work was destined to leave its own mark on nursing history, Miss Nutting herself took a keen interest in the history of nursing, which she sought to preserve through collecting rare books and memorabilia. First at Johns Hopkins, Miss Nutting began collecting historic texts for the nursing school library at the urging of Johns Hopkins staff member Dr. Osler, who was doing the same for the medical library. One of the first books she obtained for the library was Florence Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing*. This acquisition sparked a lifelong interest in Florence Nightingale's work. Miss Nutting went on to collect texts and memorabilia relating to the famous nurse throughout her career. She saw Florence Nightingale as "one of those whose home is the universe and her work is the heritage of all humanity...the great genius of the nineteenth century, the creator of a new world for the sick."⁶ Miss Nutting would go on to become one of the founders of the Florence Nightingale International Foundation, an organization which is still active today, and held the title of honorary president of the Foundation until her death.

Due in part to the strength of the Johns Hopkins nursing history collection that Miss Nutting founded, she and a fellow Johns Hopkins teacher, Lavinia Lloyd Dock, were able

to author their own contribution to nursing history libraries: *A History of Nursing*, first published in 1907, widely viewed as the seminal work on American nursing history.⁷ While Lavinia Dock did the majority of the writing, Miss Nutting wrote the outline for the book. In a brief autobiographical sketch, Dock wrote the following about her experience writing *A History of Nursing*:

It has been a trait of my nature to be pleased with myself as I went along, and greatly dissatisfied with myself on looking back; therefore there is little in my career that I can think now very well of. Not long ago I wrote to a friend "If I ever meet St. Peter at the Gate there will be a conversation something like this:

Peter: 'Well, what is your record?'

Me: 'Well, there are only two things I am really satisfied with.'

Peter: 'Well, what are they?'

Me: 'Well, doing the History with Miss Nutting and going to jail with the Women's Party.'⁸

Miss Nutting's interest in nursing history was not diminished at all with her move to Teachers College. One of the first courses she taught at the new program was a class on nursing history. Meanwhile, she continued her collecting. So great was her contribution to the nursing education program's library that in 1918 Teachers College named its nursing history collection the M. Adelaide Nutting Historical Nursing Collection. It was initially funded with a \$1,200 gift from the Nursing Education Alumnae Association.⁹

In the archives of the Foundation of New York State Nurses is a pamphlet on the design of the bookplate that was created to accompany

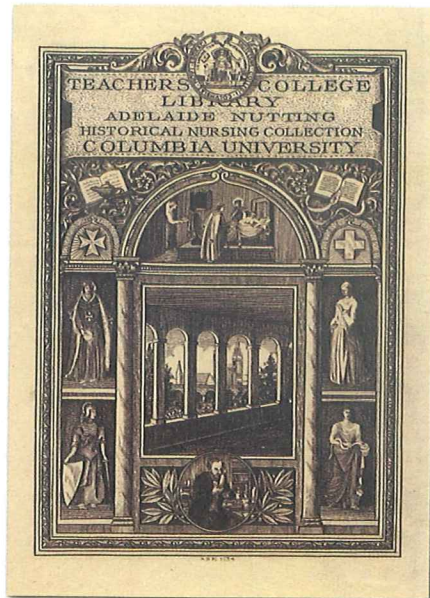
Mary Adelaide Nutting Collector's Pin Available

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 Social Services (WWI) and an Honorary MA from Yale University, and is an ANA Hall of Fame inductee.

To purchase pin (pictured here) 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.foundationnysnurses.org/giftshop.htm> ☉



Top: Bookplate designed for the M. Adelaide Nutting Historical Nursing Collection at Teachers College.

Bottom: Pitcher originally owned by Nutting and donated to the Foundation of NYS Nurses by Margaret Tyson. Legend has it that this pitcher was presented to Nutting as a gift from Isabel Maitland Stewart.

those works held in the Nutting Collection. The bookplate (reproduced above) is heavy with illustrations symbolizing the tenants the Nursing Education Department was proud to uphold:

The two classic figures on either side of the central panel will be readily recognized as Minerva and Hygiea, goddesses of Wisdom and of Health. Nurses of the older and newer day are represented by a Lady Hospitaller of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem and Florence Nightingale, founder of modern nursing, with her historic lamp. Above the left and right columns are the Cross of Malta, emblem of the Knights of St. John, and the Geneva Cross, identified throughout the world with the work of the Red Cross. In the central arch a group of early Christian saints engaged in their ministry of healing, symbolize the spirit of humanity and the fellowship of the healing arts. Woven

into the border are figures of the serpent, the lamp and the book, familiar emblems of medicine, science, learning and service. At the top is the quaint old Columbia University seal, depicting a "Mother of Learning" with her brood of nurslings about her, and at the base of the whole structure, typifying the scientific foundations of modern medicine, nursing and public health, stands Pasteur with his microscope. A monastic cloister occupies the center foreground and through its arches are seen in perspective a group of modern buildings representing a university with its library tower and a hospital, offshoots of the mediaeval monastery, again standing side by side after their long separation.¹⁰

In an 1897 presidential address to the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, M. Adelaide Nutting said, "We must be capable of living up to every possibility which the present offers, and at the same time bear always in mind the alterations which the future will demand. At no time, and in no country, perhaps, have more numerous and greater opportunities for usefulness been offered than here in America in the present decade. The whole land is a fair field."¹¹

In reflecting on the career of this illustrious nurse, it is apparent that she lived up to her own words and seized every opportunity to move forward the professionalization of nursing. ☉

1 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.35.

2 Christy, p.50-51

3 Goostray, Stella. Mary Adelaide Nutting. The American Journal of Nursing 58:11, November 1958, p.1527

4 Christy, p.36

5 Christy, p.61

6 Goostray, p.1525

7 Christy, p.34

8 Dock, Lavinia. "Life Sketch in Her Own Hand," c. 1933. Bellevue Hospital School of Nursing Alumnae Association Records (MC19). Series 1, Box 1, Folder 25. Foundation of NYS Nurses.

9 Christy, p.63

10 "M. Adelaide Nutting Historical Nursing Collection Bookplate" pamphlet. Bellevue Alumnae Association Records (MC19). Box 2. Folder 31. Foundation of NYS Nurses, Bellevue Alumnae Center for Nursing History.

11 Cunningham, Elizabeth V. Education for Leadership in Nursing: 1899-1959. Nursing Outlook 7, 1959.

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