

## UPCOMING EXHIBITION

### THE CARING PROFESSION: CENTURIES OF NURSING IN CANADA [UNE HISTOIRE DE CŒUR: DES SIÈCLES DE SOINS INFIRMIERS AU CANADA]

Canadian Museum of Civilization  
16 June 2005 to 3 September, 2006

*The Caring Profession* will be the first ever major exhibition to explore four centuries of nursing in every region of Canada. It will bring together the two parallel nursing traditions in Canada, the religious Catholic model and the secular British-inspired model. The Caring Profession will contribute to an understanding of the historical and current role of nurses in the health care system.

This object-rich exhibition will be based on the Canadian Nursing History Collection, a special repository of over two-thousand artifacts at the Canadian Museum of

Civilization and the Canadian War Museum. The core of the collection was formed by the transfer of objects from the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) in 2000. The CNA archival material was transferred to our partner, Library and Archives Canada (L.A.C.); included are 35 metres of textual records, 1700 audio-visual materials, and 9000 photographs.

We have developed a special research portal to the database on the artifact collection, the "Canadian Nursing History Collection On-Line" available on website of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and we hope in the future it will connect with nursing material held by the L.A.C..

*The Caring Profession* will show how nurses have made a profound effect on the quality of Canadian life. Personal stories will be told through artifacts, video, quotations, first-hand accounts and the opportunity for the public to "meet a nurse." The themes are divided according to the locale of nursing:



Mary Bolton and fellow graduates of the Cornwall General Hospital School of Nursing, 1918. Collection Canadian Museum of Civilization

**In the Hospital.** This section will begin with the founding of the first hospitals in New France. Run by well-educated and well-trained nuns, these hospitals contrasted with the squalor of those in British North America. In the later nineteenth-century, when modern medicine made hospitals sites of therapeutic, rather than custodial, care, a new, modern-trained nursing force was required to run the expanding wards. These changes will be illustrated by artifacts from bloodletting lancets and whiskey bottles to surgical instruments and anaesthetic masks.

The religious environment of the early hospitals will contrast with the spic-and-span of the modern.

**At the Bedside.** Most people think they know what nurses do, but this zone will show the complex training and procedures required to ensure the comfort, security and health of the patient. Nurses' keen sense of observation (eg. thermometers), their attention to patients' privacy (bedpans), and comfort (bed warmers), their prevention of cross-contamination (sterilizing forceps), and their own therapies (enema syringe), often made a crucial difference to a patient's recovery. A touching video of nurses playing with children immobile in their iron lung "prisons" will be featured.

**In the Home.** Until the 1930s, most nursing was done in the patient's home, not in the hospital. Charitable nursing organizations, such as the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON), ensured that impoverished patients would receive adequate care. Graduates of nurse training programmes worked for wages in the homes of paying patients. A further aspect of

this zone will deal with care at birth. It charts the evolution of midwifery in Canada from the *sage-femmes* of New France to the present-day certified midwives and will feature such artifacts as breast pumps and the Dionne quintuplet incubator.

**In the Community.** Until the early twentieth century, there was little organized effort to control infectious diseases (such as cholera and diphtheria) which ravaged the population. The creation of departments of health, with nurses as front-line workers, eradicated many of these contagions. Public health nursing has used education to prevent, identify and control health problems. Public health nurses often lead public debate on the root causes of ill-health, witness the Toronto street nurse, Cathy Crowe, whose street visiting backpack and contents will be on display. A school setting will also be evoked, with photos of children lined up for their vaccination.

**On the Frontier.** In Canada, many nurses worked in remote areas, far from hospitals and other medical help. The Canadian Red Cross set up a series of Nursing Stations in frontier areas of Canada, where nurses birthed babies, pulled teeth and fixed broken limbs of patients they reached on horseback, sled or skis! Northern nursing among aboriginal people will also be featured. We will have a railway speeder which nurses used to get their patients to hospital, as well as photographs of nurses in helicopters and Newfoundland dorys.

**On the Battlefield.** Guest-curated by Cynthia Toman. This zone will focus primarily on Nursing Sisters in the First and Second World Wars. Trained nurses readily "filled the ranks" of the Canadian armed forces nursing service, becoming the first women officers in the world, and making a significant

difference in the care of sick and wounded soldiers. Three sub-themes are threaded throughout this zone: filling the ranks, making a difference (nurses' work as the salvage of soldiers), and leaving a legacy. The main design will show the evolution of a field surgical unit, from a First World War setting to a more recent Peacekeeping one.

**On Campus and On the Picket Line.** Up to now all the zones will have focussed on the caring aspect of what nurses do. Another part of the story was the struggle for recognition of nurses in the health care system. Based mainly on newspaper headlines, this zone will explore the strategies nurses have used to win respect and independence, including unionization. A video of nursing leaders will discuss the current "quiet crisis" in nursing, with recommendations for the future.

A book with chapters written by experts, and edited by Christina Bates, Dianne Dodd and Nicole Rousseau will present current research towards an overview of nursing in Canada. It will be launched together with the exhibition on June 16, 2005.

**Christina Bates**, Curator, Caring Profession, Chair, Canadian Nursing History Collection Committee

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