

Bendigo Historical Society, Public History Talk - Essential Work - Training as a Nurse at the NDSN 1950 to 1989, and the NDSNGA Inc. 1975 to 2025

7/3/25 LaTrobe Art Institute, View St. Bendigo

Thank you Euan.

This talk about the Northern District School of Nursing and the Northern District School of Nursing Graduates Association Inc. covering the years immediately post war until the present day is quite a daunting prospect. So this is a thumbnail sketch only and I will talk to both organisations from the following perspectives.

-Firstly as a graduate of the NDSN and the then Bendigo Base Hospital (BBH). I commenced my nursing training in January 1970 and completed my training at the end of 1972. I was in School 75, had not long turned 17 and together with 51 other mainly still teenage girls started on a career that I have never regretted. In that school there were students from associate hospitals - Castlemaine, Swan Hill, Mildura, Echuca with the most from Bendigo. Our first for nightly pay packet held \$14 with \$14 already deducted for board.

-And secondly on retiring back to Bendigo, I have been on the Committee of the NDSNGA since 2015 and secretary since 2022. At the 2015 reunion there was a request, as there always was, for people to join the committee and assist with archiving the very large NDSN Collection. Over the preceding years I had attended several five yearly reunions but was not living in Bendigo at that time. So I joined the committee. I have learned a lot about the Graduates Associated from the stalwart determined women on that committee. Many of whom have been committee members for decades with one person from its inception in 1975 - Joan O'Shea. Joan started at the NDSN in School 1 in 1950 and was a BBH student. On graduation she worked at BBH and later was a tutor sister at the NDSN. She is the font of knowledge re these two organisations. Two other committee members - Fay Bourke and Marie Worme joined the Graduates Association soon after 1975. Fay also was a tutor sister at the NDSN.

I found three books very helpful when preparing for today's talk .

A. "our" book The First of Its Kind - Nurse Education and Training at the NDSN" compiled by the NDSNGA Inc. 2015 edited by Jenny and Ken Pata.

B. Remember our WW2 Nurses. the Service and Sacrifice of Bendigo nurses in WW 2 by Murray Poustie 2019

C. Lister House The Story of the NDSN 1975 by Frank Cusack

LEAD up to the ESTABLISHMENT of NDSN (1950 - 1989 = 49 yrs)

1947 / 1948 The long standing need for changes to the then current nursing training had culminated post war state wide. Contributing factors included;

-Great shortage of nurses following WW2. This was a critical period with many soldiers returning with wounds and conditions not seen before and in need of specialist treatment. New drugs and treatments were available and nurses needed the knowledge and skills to meet this challenge.

-Nurses suffered dreadful conditions and pay

-Lack of standardisation of training and education and therefore quality of care was adversely affected

- Problems recruiting and keeping nursing students, particularly those who started with a minimum level of education and
- Small local hospitals had their own training schools with varying curriculum / lecture hours and usually inadequate training experiences.

-1948 The Hospitals and Charities Commission (today's Department of Health Victoria) and Nurses Board of Victoria (NBV) agreed that the Northern Region be an area for a trial model with a new approach to nurse training.

- Events moved quickly

- Tacit consensus from participating regional hospitals was reached

- Committee of Management formed with representatives from above

- Dissent along the way as some participating regional hospitals felt they were losing control of their nurse's training and therefore their workforce - this parochialism continued in varying degrees over the coming decades. Many other matters became areas of disagreement. It was not a smooth process.

The original nine participant regional hospitals were Bendigo and Mildura (the two large Base Hospitals) Swan Hill, Echuca, St Arnaud, Castlemaine, Dunolly, Ouyen, and Kyneton. (Inglewood included in early discussions, had been deregistered as a nurse training school a few months before by the Victorian Nurses Board.)

- Lister House was purchased as the premises for the NDSN in 1949

- Miss Long appointed as Founding Dean in February 1950 with that appointment pivotal to the subsequent success of the NDSN

- Accommodation for students was found initially with the purchase of Eurella in View Street. And then as the need grew Edgbaston followed by Mayfort both in Wattle St were purchased – all large Victorian homes all in some disrepair.

Remodelling was underway on Lister House and was still in progress when the first school commenced.

Two vital appointments were made and both women deserve to have their professional credentials acknowledged.

Miss Nancy Long - Founding Dean, her appointment was pivotal to the success of the NDSN - commenced February 1950 (1950 to 1973)

Much admired, dignified, strict disciplinarian, a great negotiator, very well regarded by her students - "firm but fair"

CV

Born in Talbot Victoria

1936 General Nurse Training - Ballarat Base Hospital

1941 Midwifery

1942 Infant Welfare Certificate at Tweedle Babies Home Footscray

1942 Sister in charge Children's Ward Ballarat Base Hospital

1943 Commenced matriculation classes at night school

1946 first recipient of the Hospitals and Charities Commission's, Florence Nightingale Award

1946 Under this scholarship studied at Royal College of Nursing London and was awarded the Tutor Sisters Diploma with a distinction in Nursing Education

1947 Studied Nurse Training and Hospital Organisation in Scandinavia and the UK

1948 Returned to Australia and joined the Alfred Hospital as Tutor Sister

1950 Appointed Founding Dean of NDSN

1960's Achieved international recognition when the International Council of Nursing awarded Miss Long a Rockefeller Foundation grant to study Nurse Education and Administration in the USA and Canada.

Sadly a serious illness prevented her from taking up the grant.

1974 That illness caused her to retire early in late September of that year.

1980 Awarded an MBE (subsequently her family donated her framed photo, MBE and Citation from Q E 11 to the NDSNGA Inc. and it is now in the safe keeping of the Bendigo Historical Society) it is currently hanging in their "Treasures" Exhibition at History House, McKenzie Street

1986 Miss Long died aged 67

Her legacy is immeasurable and she was acknowledged as one of Australia's foremost experts in nursing education and training. She remains revered by many of her students.

Miss Majorie Scott - Assistant Dean commenced in early 1950 (1950 to 1977)

Excellent tutor sister, highly regarded and respected. She was Miss Long's 2 I/C and a great support to her.

CV

Born in Yea Victoria

1940 completed General Nurse Training at BBH

1941 Midwifery at BBH

C 1942 Infant Welfare Certificate in Melbourne

She worked as a ward sister at Bendigo, the Austin and Alfred hospitals

1943 Appointed Sister Group 11 in the RAF Nursing Services

1944 Posted to a Medical Training Unit in Melbourne, and one month later she was posted to No. 1 Medical Evacuation Air Transport Unit Sandgate, QL for further training. She was one of the first 15 nurses to be selected and posted to the Med Training Unit (later became known colloquially as the Flying Angels).

Two months later she embarked from Townsville for service outside of Australia mainly in the New Guinea / South west Pacific arena. They flew into war zones rescuing and evacuating wounded soldiers first to Lae Hospital New Guinea then on to Australia.

1945 Embarked from Townsville to work out of Morotai Island (Indonesia).

1946 Appointment terminated. She was one of the volunteers to stay on throughout demobilisation which commencing in October 1945 - giving another 9 months of service. She was the first white woman into Borneo at the close of WW2 hostilities when the island was still in Japanese hands.

1947 - 1950 TAA Hostess

1950 Appointed Assistant Dean of the NDSN

1977 Retired after 27 years with the NDSN as Assistant Dean Education

1998 Died aged 80

Miss Margot Scott is featured in Murray Poustie's book Remember our World War Two Nurses - The service and sacrifice of Bendigo nurses in World War two - 2019. It includes some wonderful photos.

Publication was supported by the NDSNGA Inc. thru a COGB Council Community Grants Program. Included in Sister Scott's obituary- was the closing statement "She left behind a legacy of courage and devotion to her country, her career and to humanity."

The high calibre of both Miss Long and Sister Scott stands out. Over the coming decades they were ably supported by a Committee of Management, dedicated staff and a talented team of tutors – always ready to help.

And so in early 1950 the Northern District School of Nursing opened - “the first regional independent nursing school of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere.”

On the 23/3/1950 the first school of 39 students were welcomed. In that year 4 School intakes of 90 student nurses in total was achieved. Their associate hospitals were Bendigo, Mildura, Echuca, Swan Hill, Dunolly, Kyneton, St Arnaud and Castlemaine.

Many ups and many many downs were experienced by Sr Long and her team initially and over the following years.

An early, very uplifting and rewarding event was that in 1953 following School 1 sitting the NBV State Final Exams a School 1 trainee nurse - Judith Jackman - gained the highest marks in the state.

Frank Cusack’s book *Lister House The Story of the NDSN , and The First of Its Kind -Nurse Education and Training at the Northern District School of Nursing* give an excellent detailed report of those early years of establishment. Relations and discussions between the Hospitals and Charities Commission, the NBV, associated hospitals, and individual doctors and importantly the NDSN are covered almost forensically by Cusack.

Lister House history - the building became integral to the NDSN, it wasn’t just a school it was a place where students grew up, gained confidence, made many friends and were well supported. The tutorial, cleaning, catering and gardening staff all contributed under the excellent leadership of Miss Nancy Long and Sister Margot Scott. So the history of the house deserves a mention as Lister House is synonymous with the NDSN.

LISTER HOUSE History

Dr Neptune Scott opened a hospital in the building (C 1916 till his death in 1944.)

He named it Lister House after Dr Joseph Lister the Scottish pioneer of antiseptic surgical techniques. The building was then purchased by the Hospital and Charities Commission in 1949 for the NDSN. Buildings of the size required were in short supply as were building materials post WW2.

(Prior to Dr Scotts purchase the house was built as a private home in C 1860’s then it became Girton College- a girls school from 1884 -1911)

The MODEL of Nurse Education and Training introduced in 1950 included Theoretical, in-house education and practical training for specified study blocks of time, across a 3 year curriculum within its own premises.

Also the concept and model of circularity was argued about and modified over the years. It involved the movement of students from smaller to larger hospitals and the NDSN – and this was to be an ongoing bone of contention.

Smaller hospitals were to have their students placed in the larger hospitals so that they received better practical placements and therefore experiences. Hospitals didn’t want to lose their workforce any longer than needed as students were already to attend specified study blocks at the NDSN.

UNIFORMS

1950 to 1972

Grooming, make up, nail polish and hair styles rules were strictly applied.

The uniforms changed little between those years - they included a blue dress in 1950 with the addition later of a white apron, white cuffs and collar and a white material belt. All coming together with shank buttons and studs.

Also we wore a white cap with your year designated by being plain for first year, a frill added for second year and finally a blue strip completing the third year designation.

Uniforms were supplied, came packed in a shallow case, were very stiff with starch, initially cumbersome to put together, and laundered at the Benevolent Home laundry service. There were certain days for putting your uniforms out for the laundry collection with a short turnaround. A lot of us put our uniform together the night before a shift to save time. We soon worked out how to tuck our dresses and aprons up at the waist, and covered by the belt they were able to be made shorter.

Capes were indispensable and we purchased them at our own expense. I had mine lined with red tartan fabric to make it warmer as did many others. They were practical and warm.

Brown shoes - sensible lace ups – polished – we called them granny shoes however they were comfortable.

1972

A radical event occurred when a Melbourne designer Noelene King was approached to design a new uniform. It was a primrose yellow and white dress.

The cape had gone and the uniform was completed with a short yellow (cortelle I think) jacket.

Shoes were white or brown

Cap as we wore denoting which year the nurse was - first second or third but with a brown stripe instead of blue for third year nurses.

Until this time nurses uniforms had changed little since the Nightingale years –excluding the length of uniforms.

I much preferred the uniform I wore for three years. I was proud of it.

Badges -

NDSN Badge was worn centre collar (oval shape). These badges were presented at Preliminary Training school.

The badges are in the colours of red, white and gold - suggested by BBH Matron Esler C1950.

Change in design in 1972.

The motto of “servientes” in Greek meaning “by serving” was put forward by the Bishop of Bendigo Bishop Riley and agreed upon.

A teacher at the local Teachers College was asked to design a suitable badge incorporating the colours, motto and the Cross of Lorraine. Frederick Curtis 's design was warmly received.

Each training Hospital also had their own badge which nurses wore proudly often on the lapel of their cape.

In 1970 when I started, the status of the model of circularity seemed to be bedded down.

If not a BBH or Mildura BH student then to gain more experience students came to either Bendigo Base Hospital or Mildura Base Hospital for their second year. Experience was gained particularly in theatre, paediatrics, ICU and Casualty.

The model was very important as it included paid study blocks while away from the parent hospital, accommodation on site with full board and most of all a consistent standard of education was provided. Over the years the curriculum was constantly reviewed and enhanced. We loved our time at Lister House – we made lifelong friends and we had fun.

By 1970

First Year blocks consisted of

- Preliminary Training School- first six weeks of initial training
- Return for a study block to prepare for taking the V N C's - formerly the VN Board - First Professional Examination

Second Year blocks covered

- Medical and surgical procedures, paediatrics, Materia Medica,
- Internal exams on above

Third Year blocks

- ICU and consolidation of complex illness, procedures and Materia Medica
- Return for a study block prior to prepare for taking the Victorian Nursing Council's External Final State Examination

The numbers of school and student intakes varied over the years. Some years there were 2 intakes, other years three or four with variable numbers. For example in:

1950 there were four school intakes of 90 students in total.

By 1970 there seems to have been a settling on two annually.

In 1986 the last school had 2 intakes with a total of students 130.

In the early 1970's changes became more evident.

1970 First two male nurses commenced their training

1970 The Hostel Block immediately behind Lister House was opened – each consisting mainly of two bedded rooms, with study, sitting room, laundry and pantry on each floor. My School 75 was the first to inhabit this long awaited Hostel. We loved it. Mayfort was demolished, Eurella was sold leaving only one of the original hostels remaining - Edgebaston

1972 Uniform change. Noelene King Melbourne designer as mentioned

1972 Tertiary education was mooted. Diplomas and degree courses were discussed by the Hospitals and Charity Commission causing concern at the NDSN.

1974 Miss Long retired due to ill health.

1975 to 1989 She was replaced by the very able Mr Sidney Gerry. He had nursing and hospital administration experience in the Royal Navy. He has also been an education officer with the Victorian Nursing Council. Mr Gerry inherited the role at a relatively stable time in NDSN history but there were always challenges including bedding down the introduction of Pilot Schools in early 1973 and managing and supporting the inevitable transition of nursing to Colleges of Advanced Education.

1975 the NDSN celebrated its 25th year anniversary of its foundation. As a result the Graduates Association was formed later that year.

1977 Sister Margot Scott retired.

1978 The Federal Government released a report to the Minister of Education known as "The Sax Report" which concluded that there was sufficient evidence to justify expansion of nurse education into selected Colleges of Advanced Education.

1985 The 1978 Sax Report became a reality when it was announced that the Bendigo College of Advanced Education would be offering a new Nursing course - the province of the College only - there would be no role for the NDSN.

1986 The last schools 107 and 108 commenced their training at the NDSN

1989 They finished their training.

Staff packed up their offices, the school officially ceased to be and the Lister House buildings were then subsequently occupied by the Health Department Victoria's Loddon Mallee Regional Health offices.

Staffing at the NDSN

Many staff were employed to ensure the NDSN ran smoothly. And to my students eye in 1970 it certainly did.

NDSN was not just a school it was a community. Student nurses grew up and matured there. They were supervised and respected. Albeit looking back with strict supervision and rules, but were of the era.

The tutorial and teaching staff were I found always helpful, catering was very good much better than the BBH. Scones for morning tea was a regular event.

The gardens were always well tended.

Clerical and admin staff filled a vital role as did domestic and maintenance staff.

All the people who filled the above roles have been acknowledged by having their names included in the NDSNGA Inc. "The First of its Kind: book.

That list also includes the names of visiting lecturers.

And also very importantly every nurse has their name listed along with their School and the year they started.

CLOSURE - WHERE TO FROM HERE

At closure in 1989 over 3,000 nursing students had been enrolled at and graduated from the NDSN, Lister House Rowan Street.

Those nurses went on to work in many areas of health both in Australia and O/S.

Including in:

Acute hospitals, Maternity, Paediatrics, Aged Care, Primary Health, Maternal and Child Health, Palliative Care, School Health, Regional and remote Rural, Oncology, Health Administration, Education, Nurse Practitioner Roles, undertook university qualifications and some followed a career in academia.

Many travelled overseas and undertook post grad studies and courses in education, midwifery, maternal and child health to name a few in the UK and other northern hemisphere countries.

Many worked O/S for Non Government Organisation's in war zones and countries in need including Romania, Syria, Ukraine, Niger, Tanzania to name a few.

Following closure of the NDSN in 1989 Nurse Education and Training was initially transferred to the Bendigo College of Advanced Education and subsequently to LaTrobe University, Bendigo Campus.

The NDSN's curriculum and methodology formed the basis of university's modern day model and curriculum.

1989 onwards

NDSNGA. 1975 to 2025

Evolved over the next few years and becoming an incorporated entity.

Following closure many photographs, documents, memorabilia and artefacts came into the Graduates Associations safe keeping. Our Collection Policy assisted us in deciding what we would keep out of thousands of objects, and what needed to be thoughtfully disposed of. Many large pieces of unwanted equipment was offered to the Bendigo Theatre Group, others offered for free on Market Place. I heard of a local GP who was a collector of all things medical/health related and he bought a large number of remaining small items – instruments, a diathermy machine etc. The NDSNGA were all very grateful that the memorabilia and artefacts went to a good home.

We secured a grant from the CoGB and employed Dr Michelle Mathews to catalogue many items, and Sandra O’Conner also photographed many items.

Role and Achievements

- Since 1990 (35 years) an Annual Scholarship been made to an outstanding final year LTU nursing student who has exemplified Bendigo’s LTU’s culture, qualities of connectivity, innovation, accountability and caring.
- Became an antecedent organisation of the LTU Alumni
- Annual newsletter sent to members
- Honored nurses who served in war by wreath laying at Anzac Day and Remembrance Day ceremonies
- 2025 Reunion will be our 11th five yearly reunion held (Covid in 2020 so held 2022)
- Launch of our book “The First of Its Kind - Nurse Education and Training at The Northern District School of Nursing “ Compiled by the NDSNGA Inc. 20215 and launched at the 2015 Reunion. This book has sold over 700 copies and has at least three reprints.
- Established a website and face book page
- Applied successfully for several C O G B Council grants including for the printing of our book First of its Kind and for Remembering our WW2 Nurses (written by Murray Poustie)
- Attendance over the past three decades or so at many public meetings in support the establishment of a museum - to no avail
- Meetings with the CoGBC Council, and State and Federal MP’s re a Museum for Bendigo and a home for our Collection – to no avail
- Formulated a Collection Policy
- Made a financial contribution to the Nurses Memorial on Anzac Parade, Canberra
- Was a major contributor to the exhibition in 2014 “A cure for all Ills – Medicine in Bendigo” covering the earliest times on the gold fields to the modern era.

Collection Specific work

- Countless hours at member’s homes cataloguing photographs, documents, small items like badges, and books etc
- Meetings with Bendigo Regional Archiving Centre and the BHS re donation of artefacts and memorabilia from the NDSN Collection, and gaining BHS recognition of our cataloguing of those items. As just mentioned this work took countless hours over many years and cannot be underestimated.

- Acknowledging the many committee members who “housed” the Collection in their homes and or garages, and also those who hosted morning tea and lunch at cataloguing work parties and committee meetings over the decades.
- Working closely with Huntly Historical Society to store safely bigger items for many years including beds, screens, wheel chairs etc when they themselves had significant challenges. And also sharing with them a container to store significant items in a dry and relatively vermin and dust proof space. Many thanks to Esme Turner, Margaret Pitson, Annie Peters and Jan Crowe for their invaluable support at Huntly.
- Organising 3 donations of surplus equipment for East Timor via Eaglehawk rotary and the Friends of Maubisse Bendigo.
- And finally we successfully approached the BHS and were greatly relieved when they accepted many of our artifacts including a set of uniforms 1950 to 1989, dolls commissioned by Miss Long for recruitment drives, over 700 photos including from each 108 PT Schools, Miss Longs framed portrait etc, many other documents and artefacts and 29 anatomical charts which had been used daily at the NDSN and many other items.

CONSTITUTION inclusion statements

Three objectives

- 1 Arrange a five yearly reunion
- 2 Provide and circulate an annual newsletter
- 3 Preserve NDSN historical artefacts and memorabilia

DISSOLUTION and WINDING UP OF THE ASSOCIATION STATEMENT

In that event “ all assets shall be put towards the preservation of memorabilia”

And so we come to this point in our history facing the following situation:

- We have more than met the constitution objectives - importantly objective 3
- We have an aging committee - almost half over 85
- No enthusiasm for people to join the committee

Read quote – The First of its Kind – Nurse Education and Training at the NDSN P 261 last paragraph

In common with the School itself, the Graduates Association will, inevitably, cease to exist. Its life is finite and cannot be extended beyond a certain point as its membership is limited to those up to, and including, graduates of each school including the stalwarts of School 108. The reality of the Association’s finite life provides sufficient motivation and desire to have its collection of photographs, memorabilia and artefacts safely preserved and properly accommodated in a facility properly designed for such a purpose. There is much to be learnt from the Associations collection and any restriction of public access, or loss of these invaluable records of an institution unique in Australia’s clinical history, would be nothing short of a social history scandal.

Hence:

Our 11th five yearly LAST reunion will be held on April 26th 2025.
The NDSNGA Inc will then be wound up later this year.

On behalf of the committee I'd like to thank the following people and organisations with apologies if I have left anyone out.

-Euan, Barbara, Kay and Angelo and the Bendigo Historical Society

-The CoGB for our successful grant application funding over the years.

-Danielle Orr and Simone Ewenson from the Co GB for advice on how to best manage the NDSN Collection and Simone for advice on the writing of our Collection Policy

-LTU supporters

-And most importantly all the people who contributed to keeping safe the treasures in the NDSN Collection – from 1989 to the present.

All memorabilia/artefacts donated to the BHS – known as the NDSN Collection - will ultimately be photographed and uploaded to the Victorian Collections website. All this work is done by volunteers. Once the data is uploaded it can be accessed anywhere in the world through that website.

The Victorian Collections website is:

<https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/northern-district-school-of-nursing-graduates-association>

or search

[victoriancollection.net.au](https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/northern-district-school-of-nursing-graduates-association), Organizations, Northern District School of Nursing

And so did the NDSN meet its charter?

I would say ABSOLUTELY

Have the NDSNGA Inc fulfilled the requirements of its Constitution?

I would say DEFINITELY

Thank you

PP Photos and Q and A

Jenny Trewartha

Secretary, NDSNGA Inc.