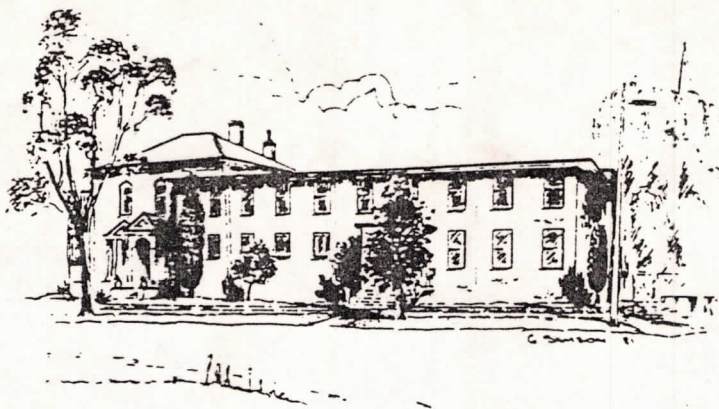


# THE NORTHERN DISTRICT SCHOOL OF NURSING

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## BACK GROUND INFORMATION THE NORTHERN DISTRICT SCHOOL OF NURSING

After World War Two, there was a great shortage of nurses in many Australian hospitals. The country areas often suffered staff shortages because there were insufficient girls within the community who wanted to take up a career involving a way of life quite different to the average eight hour day.

Most nurses were compelled to live in Nurses Homes, where they were only allowed out two nights a week and even then had to be home and in bed by 11pm or, they had to obtain a special 'late pass' to go to anything finishing late, such as a Ball.

Wages were always poor compared with other professions; hours of work often far exceeded the forty-eight hours for which payment was made. Discipline was stern and gradings in seniority were marked.

In an effort to improve training and educational standards and to increase the number of girls selecting nursing as their career, The Hospital & Charities Commission appointed Miss Gwen Williams as the first Executive Officer of Nursing Services - she later became Matron of the Bendigo & Northern District Base Hospital on the retirement of Miss A. Esler in 1952.

Miss Williams was one of the people responsible for the establishment of the first regional trainingy for nurses, this was established at 'Lister House' in March 1950. *school*

As a result of the enthusiasm displayed by Dr. Peter Slater and Mr. Campbell Hurry, Manager of the Bendigo & Northern District Base Hospital, in strongly supporting improved standards, Bendigo was chosen to be the home for a pilot scheme, a method of training which had been very successful in the correlation of theory and practice.

The staff of the School spent many hours visiting hospitals in the region, trying to obtain uniformity in standards and endeavouring to see that students worked in specialised areas after they had received theoretical instruction. Some of the hospitals associated with the Northern District School of Nursing had difficulty in providing sufficient experience for student nurses and in 1952 a warning was issued by the General Nursing Council of England & Wales that graduates of the School would not be recognised if the smaller hospitals continued to be training schools.

This led to the introduction of a circular training scheme, whereby students from the small hospitals spent an allotted period of time at one of the Base Hospitals.

Over the years, the hospitals being affiliated with the School have varied, as some have de-registered as training schools and others have been admitted.

The two original staff members, Miss Nancy Long and Miss Margot Scott, were all things to all students. They set the high standards which were responsible for the success of this School. They were educators, supervisors, mentors and friends, although generally, the girls under their care were rather over-awed by their range of knowledge.

As well as theory, students had practical sessions to learn about the types of procedures which were performed on patients with the particular conditions that were being studied in a specific study block. They set trays and trolleys, learning to wield the supposedly sterile lifters, trying to remember the instruments required and describing how they would care for a particular patient. Hours were spent bandaging, testing specimens and trying to pass a variety of tubes in all directions - trying to remember which tube went into which opening !

In 1973, it was decided the School should have students who were not attached to any hospital. These girls could be allocated to a specific ward or department in any of the hospitals after completing the relevant study block, thus ensuring that practice would follow theory. ~~However~~, Hospitals had to ensure that all areas or wards were adequately staffed and this often took precedence over seeing that each student had theory before practice. These Pilot Schools did not continue after the second intake of students and eventually the Victorian Nursing Council insisted the School became the controlling body with regard to clinical rotation of students.

In the 1960's, after several unsuccessful attempts to include male students, they were finally accepted for general nurse training.

The idea of Nurses' Week, was to aid recruitment of students and was initiated by Miss Gwen Williams in March 1952. It aimed at bringing the work of nurses to the people of the community. ~~This year in Bendigo, it will be conducted in May.~~

Now that nursing education is being conducted in colleges throughout Victoria, it is an appropriate time to look back at the almost forty years the Northern District School of Nursing has been the driving force in this region for improving the standards and education of nurses. Staff Nurses (first year sisters), have also been catered for with a follow up year introducing them to the additional responsibilities of administration and other areas not included in the three year basic training.

There were times when there was hope post graduate tertiary study opportunities would be established in country areas before the basic training was altered. As in many other areas, country students have more difficulty achieving improved standards while choosing to live outside the metropolitan area.