

The Canadian Nurse

A MONTHLY JOURNAL FOR THE NURSING PROFESSION IN CANADA

VOL. V.

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No. 1.

COBALT RED CROSS HOSPITAL.

The history of the Cobalt Red Cross Hospital is an example of perseverance and determination, in face of difficulties and struggles, which probably few would be willing to encounter. It is owing to the great love for nursing which Mrs. Saunders, the matron, possesses that the institution stands, as it does today, a splendid monument of devotion to her own profession, coupled with a desire to alleviate pain and minister to the physical benefit of sufferers in Cobalt.

It was in 1906 that Mrs. Saunders first took up her abode in the Silver City. A house was rented by her from her brother, and many were the schemes adopted by which even a slight degree of comfort might be given to the afflicted. Nobody



knew that there was a trained nurse in Cobalt, and it was only when an explosion took place on May 18th of the same year that the value of Mrs. Saunders' knowledge and ability was demonstrated. The escape which she herself experienced was such as not to prove by any means an incentive to the average person in proceeding with nursing work. Several tons of dynamite exploded within half a mile of Mrs. Saunders' home, and she had only been out of the house three minutes when the catastrophe occurred. A cloak hastily thrown over her was all that she saved. Nothing daunted, however, she commenced working at a camp with no less than eight of one family in her charge, three of whom were seriously ill.

Since that time—practically the foundation of a nursing institution in the great silver camp—Mrs. Saunders has not

This image is the Cobalt Hospital, 1907, before additions. Annie is standing fourth from the left, wearing a dark coloured dress. The ambulance is in front of the hospital.

really enjoyed what might be termed a "breathing spell." Patients have all the time been on the increase, and, at first, as sanitary arrangements were anything but up-to-date, the difficulties to be contended with can hardly be realized to their fullest extent.

Assistance was procured from Miss Fitzgibbon, another trained English nurse, and as fever cases were continually being received all the beds were occupied, and the workers had to snatch what little rest they could obtain in hammocks. The first winter brought with it a most arduous task, that of keeping the building properly heated, yet, in spite of numerous handicaps, deaths were comparatively few and far between.

Cobalt's one main cause for anxiety—fire—naturally formed a continual source of fear, for facilities and appliances such as are installed to-day, did not exist at the time referred to. In 1907 Mrs. Saunders, realizing the necessity of increased accommodation, sold out her home and purchased the present building on Silver Street.

During the spring of the present year steps were taken by prominent men of the town, including members of the Council and mine managers, to relieve Mrs. Saunders of much work. The result of this kindly interest is that a staff of three graduate nurses, a secretary, orderly, and cook are assisting her in her noble work.

The important fact is now to be faced that there is by no means ample accommodation, although twenty-eight patients can be treated on an average. There are often very serious cases of typhoid, but no women can be cared for, and consequently they must be sent to New Liskeard, North Bay, or Toronto.

So the Red Cross Hospital is a small but undoubtedly appreciated hospital. Five doctors attend to the patients, but no medical man resides on the premises. There is no out-patient department, and consequently casual accidents happen, which mean quite a lot of extra work. An ambulance outfit is also in operation, under Mr. C. Campbell.

Such is the state of affairs for Cobalt and the surrounding mines. The institution commenced with one bed, and what the absence of the hospital would now mean is a matter which, probably, none knowing the district well would care to contemplate.

In all the work connected with the hospital Mrs. Saunders has not solicited one cent for maintaining it, and the Board of Directors now existing is the outcome of entirely spontaneous assistance. In her exceptional enthusiasm for the work, Mrs. Saunders seemed to forget all else, and it was not by any means before the required time that helping hands were stretched out.

After all these vicissitudes and trials, the credit of what has been achieved is due to Mrs. Saunders. What she has done for Cobalt is only properly realized by those knowing the inside history of the Cobalt Red Cross Hospital.

Charles Hinks.

Cobalt.

The Canadian Nurse

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Vol., VI

TORONTO, JANUARY, 1910

No. 1

BEGINNING OF COBALT'S GREATEST NEED.*

On my arrival in Cobalt after a tiresome journey, during which there was no such thing as getting a cup of tea or hot water, my earthly wealth had dwindled down to about two shillings, or 50 cents. Carrying as much of my luggage as possible I wended my way down the railway track in the direction of the La Rose mine, where my brother was employed. This was on April

* Mrs. Saunders is an English graduate, trained in 1885 at the Warneford Hospital, Leamington, England. On March 23rd, 1906, she left England for Toronto, after having just recovered from a long illness, arrived in Toronto on Easter Sunday, and borrowed her fare to Cobalt, on which memorable journey but one other woman than herself was on board, all the rest being men of all sorts and conditions in life.—Ed.

17th, and my brother, after caring for me as best he could, rented me a small house which he had just had built opposite the La Rose mine, one room upstairs and one downstairs, rental \$10.00 per month. Having cleaned and put the house in good shape I moved in my earthly "knick knacks" which I had brought with me and settled down in an effort to accustom myself to strange and new surroundings.

Troubles and hard work in great quantity immediately cropped up. Being unaccustomed to nursing in a mining camp, the work seemed doubly hard and rough, and to make matters worse my old enemy, rheumatism, forced me into bed for a whole week.

After getting about again, my next venture was at washing the heavy under garments worn by the miners. With no wringers available, the task of washing and wringing these dry was so very heavy as to almost dishearten and cause me to feel like giving up and declaring myself as against women engaging in such work.

Next I found myself in a new role, "the wood chopper." I had to keep my stoves going. Talk about men braving the elements in a new country. No man ever took it more seriously than I did, but I won, and in a little while I had the outside of my domicile looking somewhat clean and pretty. The house being new, the painting of the windows came next and was shared between my youngest son and myself. By this time what little comforts and cleanliness were possible appealed to my peace of mind and I had just begun to feel a little wee bit at home.

Just a month after my arrival, to be exact, May the 18th, we had a terrific explosion of seven tons of dynamite within half a mile of the house. Being warned by Captain John Harris with others I escaped and had just been out of the house three minutes when the catastrophe occurred. The little town, all in quietness, hundreds of prospectors dreaming of the wealth that was to be theirs on the sale of their claims, little dreamt a few minutes before that such a calamity was due to overtake it, carrying destruction of homes in its wake. I escaped, doing up my hair as I ran, an old cloak thrown over my shoulders and a red cotton bag in my hand.

On the day of that long to be remembered explosion, which I try to forget when I can, I drank from a rusty tin can water from Cobalt Lake with thankfulness in my heart, even though knowing it was from Cobalt Lake. With the awful noises of the explosion over, it was found that several of the inhabitants were burned out, homes completely wrecked, my own amongst the number.

A French lady and two children were amongst the injured whom I volunteered to nurse. Bunk rooms used by the men had been placed at our disposal in caring for the injured. One little girl of twelve, who had the measles, was badly injured about the face, and one little boy was badly injured in both eyes.

Up to this time my identity as a nurse was unknown even to Dr. McLaren, who, by the way, was the first doctor I met in the camp, but I now volunteered to nurse, although homeless myself for ten days but for the kindness of the oldest mining man and one of the most estimable gentlemen in

the camp, Captain John Harris, of the La Rose mine, who generously gave up his room to myself and my boy, who was with me. From that time on rest to me was indeed very scarce.

Naturally enough my first effort was to get my little house repaired. This done, Dr. Hair called upon me and asked me to prepare my place that same evening for an operation on a patient for appendicitis at nine o'clock. These preparations and the operation were carried on during a violent thunderstorm. We worked with lamps on boxes, doing everything possible for the patient. Drs. Hair, Schmidt and Campbell were present, Dr. Hair remaining all night with the patient, who died forty-eight hours later, but might have had a chance for his life had the operation been performed months before. No help being available, I had to even wash the patient's linen. In fact, my duties were many and varied.

From this start I continued, taking in every kind of patients, sickness, accidents, explosions big and little. Sometimes I was paid, and often not. Just a month after the big explosion wherein I was warned in time to escape by Captain Harris, I was called upon to attend Captain Harris, who had met with a very severe accident through blasting, losing one eye and having a badly cut ear. I accompanied Mr. Harris to the Toronto General Hospital, and after witnessing his painful operation, returned to Cobalt, where I immediately took up a private case, and with the money earned I bought the first enamel bedstead for operations and any particularly difficult surgical work.

My next call was to Haileybury to attend Mr. W. Bagshaw, who had sustained a compound fracture of the thigh. He was sent to the Toronto General a few hours later. Typhoid had broken out in the meantime, and I prepared immediately cots with a chair between them, and as the patients came in I put in more cots. Five really bad cases was my portion at once, and between washing, scrubbing, ironing and baking for the house my lot was a busy one. Help was impossible to obtain. Having no sanitary arrangements the work was much harder than now, it being necessary to bury the excreta both night and day, which was extremely difficult in the cold winter.

My patients were now coming in very fast, and being handicapped for room added to the difficulties, taxing the brain as well as physical energy in caring for and comforting the sick. At this time I was able to secure the assistance of a graduate nurse from Toronto. It being necessary to wash the patient's clothes, Sunday was often considered a good day for washing, as we were able very often to get friends of the patients to watch for us while we washed. Again we often had the washerwoman's luck with broken lines, which generally necessitated washing them all over again. At this time I had a great many accidents from the mines, many fatal, the results of blasting accidents familiar to new mining camps filled with many inexperienced miners. (We had no deaths but bad cases first 18 months.)

For the matter of rest, we "snatched" what little we could, mostly in a hammock. Our space, figured out to the very best advantage, proved large enough for thirteen patients. In a corner, screened by sheets, we made a small private ward for a lady patient. The winter was intensely cold, a trying time for us. Boys were brought in from the mines, some very ill. Our

priests and clergymen were very kind, coming as often as possible and helping the boys in many ways.

The foregoing describes in a concise way only a few of the many trials of nursing the sick in a new country where help is difficult to obtain, unsanitary and other primitive conditions adding much to the many difficulties which are always simplified to such an appreciable extent with modern conditions.

Such a busy life of incessant effort has been mine that I have felt I have never had an hour to spare, on the contrary I can always see so much that might be done, with always a lack of help to be considered, that I feel my work is never done.

The fall of 1907 and 1908 were particularly trying times with me, with sickness to myself, trials and money difficulties coming as they do with extensions to buildings, the ever present danger of calamity through fire in a hospital full of patients. Lately, however, even with water and sanitary conditions still too primitive, matters are better, conditions are better understood. We have had numerous changes and additions to buildings. We can now accommodate 100 patients normally, although, with the tents, we have been caring for many more than this number. We are well supplied with everything necessary, beds, linen, etc. Our operating room, although small, is good. However, the many months of worries and troubles in getting matters advanced to the present state have fallen heavily upon me, and at times I have felt doubtful if there was any good to be done, even for humanity's sake, in continuing with the struggle I have had from the very commencement.

I beg to say that I have been splendidly assisted by co-workers during the recent epidemic of typhoid. The united efforts of the mine managers and men have been greatly appreciated, especially of late through the trying times we have had with fever. The Hospital Board and our staffs, Doctors McLaren, Hair, Schmidt, Taylor, Young, Bond, Munro, in and outdoor staffs, orderlies and general helpers have done grand work. The ladies of the town have my sincere thanks for their untiring efforts in assisting us whenever an opportunity was presented. Our medical men, who have always been so prompt in response, has risen to emergencies with such commendable generosity to our cause that I am deeply grateful to them. I can better appreciate their good services than describe them. I would like to say more of the needed improvements for the sick, especially our poorer classes of patients, but possibly some generous soul with more time to spare will come to the rescue with some timely suggestions.

The District work has been very well cared for. I enclose a copy of one slip we used.

Number patients treated in District the three months being:—
September.

No. Patients.	Male.	Female	Children.	Visits.	Deaths.
93	36	44	13	578	0

October.					
63	20	31	12	896	2

November to 13th.					
38	10	20	8	319	0

A. E. Saunders.

Red Cross Hospital, Cobalt, Nov. 15th, 1909.

MRS. A. E. SAUNDERS
Superintendent

R. P. ROGERS
Chairman

J. G. SHEWAN
Secretary

THE RED CROSS HOSPITAL



Address all Correspondence to the Secretary.

Cobalt.....19....
Canada

DISTRICT NURSE'S REQUISITION
No.....

Name of Patient _____

Location _____

Required at Once _____

District Nurse.

Note—This Report must be filled out and left at the Hospital with the District Nurse's Daily Report each morning

MRS. A. E. SAUNDERS
Superintendent

R. P. ROGERS
Chairman

J. G. SHEWAN
Secretary

THE RED CROSS HOSPITAL



Address all Correspondence to the Secretary.

Cobalt.....19....
Canada

DISTRICT NURSE'S REPORT

Patient	Visit		Nature of Sickness	Doctor	Remarks
	From	To			

District Nurse

Note—This Report to be made to Superintendent every morning for previous day's work.

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TORONTO, AUGUST, 1910

No. 8

THE COBALT HOSPITAL.

The President—I will now ask Mrs. Saunders to give us a little talk on her hospital in Cobalt.

Mrs. Saunders—If I can do so, Madame President, I will try to make a short address, but you must not expect very much, as I am not accustomed to speechmaking.

I went to Cobalt on the 17th April, 1907, and on the 18th May we had an explosion which wrecked all the houses around, and made about 150 people homeless for a matter of ten days. I was the first nurse who went into Cobalt. None of the doctors nor anyone knew I was a nurse, because I had not intended to take up that work. My intention was to lead rather a quieter life and to leave my nursing behind. I came from England after having had a very severe illness, and the doctors advised me not to take up any strenuous work for a

long time, but it was forced upon me. Unfortunately I didn't know what I had to contend with. The idea, of course, was to work in a private way among private cases. I was mostly placed amongst the French and foreign element. For about six months I was handicapped by not being able to speak to anyone in my own language. I did not go about very much, but by degrees the patients were brought to me when they knew there was a nurse in town. I was the only woman nurse at that time who could attend under a doctor's instructions upon medical and surgical cases, but there were numerous difficulties to contend with. We hadn't the water, and we had to fetch it from the creek and carry it as best we could in all sorts of vessels, and we were short even of that kind of things, and we had to boil the water and strain it before we could give it to the patients; also we had to dig in the ground and bury all the excreta.

Everything was very amateur to begin with, and having one's home wrecked, all my resources were wrecked as well, and I could not work with those things which I had brought from England. But, as time went on after the explosion, the people got to know it was really a great relief to keep the patients clean and attend to them. There were quite a few mines, but they were only recently established, and they had not had any accidents until June 15th, when the captain of the La Rose Mine, during blasting, was very badly injured, and I brought him down to the Toronto General, and that was the beginning of Cobalt's history with reference to bringing patients down to Toronto, although I expect now there are lots in this audience that have had patients from Cobalt in most of the hospital wards. Our efforts were very amateur, but as time went on the mine managers realized the great need for a hospital, however small.

I began with one bed, and that was christened with a case of appendicitis, and there were three doctors brought from South Lorraine. We had to wait many hours before a doctor could be brought in, and the patient had been lying a number of weeks without any real aid, and the case was too far advanced, and the doctor saw, to his dismay, he could not proceed to do any good. The doctor said, had the man been operated upon earlier it would have been, from a doctor's point of view, successful. It was not a very nice beginning to have one's first case lost. Since that time I have not had really time to sit down and write or think of anything, because one thing follows upon another. Having started my little hospital with one bed, it gradually grew till we had thirteen. I came down to Toronto and found a graduate nurse. To get a nurse was paramount. I managed to get one for ten weeks, and she really helped the hospital to what it is now. Without her efforts I could not have done what I have done. Still, the hospital grew and grew, and I made four moves. I was burned out the first time, and the explosion wrecked the second one, and the third time fire came. The fire fortunately did not destroy the hospital, and it was very providential it did not. Then following that was the epidemic of typhoid, which I suppose most of you have become aware of. With so many in a small place, where nurses were very scarce, it made it very trying, but I had the united efforts of most of the hospitals in Toronto, and in Ontario; they sent their nurses, I think almost on 24 hours' notice, and in the majority of cases every nurse was very successful. The most of them liked the work, but of course there were some who did not like the work; some would only take certain cases. Nurses that make nursing their profession must forget about the high fees for the time being if they want to help humanity. We cannot gain from experience if we are going to gain always by the pocket. I can assure you we have quite a nice hospital now, which, from one bed, in three years has grown to 80 beds. We have just got the patients back from the tents in which they were placed, and everything is nice and clean, and the hospital is renovated.

I feel honoured to attend this meeting. I have been asked three times to attend a meeting in Toronto. It has given me very great pleasure, and I feel it an honour to come to this meeting of the Society of Superintendents of Canada. The mine directors have sent me down to get ideas and learn from others. I am very anxious to get any ideas that I can pick up, to help my own hospital, or to help any nurse in any possible way. I have three Toronto General graduates and a novice nurse from the Toronto General, and I have one from Ottawa, and two from St. Luke's, in Ottawa; I have five probationers and three seniors. It is really the result of three years' work. It has not been alone; it has been by united effort. In 1908 I had worked as hard as I could work, and I was laid aside for eight weeks with acute rheumatism, and then the Town of Cobalt understood the need of coming to the aid of the hospital. On our books we have about 4,000 men, and out of the 4,000 we generally get a number of surgical cases; we treat the medical and surgical cases and the isolation work for the mines. We have about forty mines, and each man pays into the hospital fifty cents per week.

I started the system when I was very poor. No one paid for a time; they thrust the patients on us, whether they were town cases or not, and did not trouble to pay for them. When a case came in it would mean that you had to see to everything and get everything for your patient and assist the doctors in their work. We had to do that for the simple reason that in the early days there was nobody else to do it. So that in 1908 it was a very important time in my life, but I have made such splendid friends, and have had such thoroughly honest and reliable nurses, that I speak with great gratitude, and I am sure I could not have accomplished anything if it had not been for the united efforts of the nurses, especially during the epidemic of typhoid.

Cobalt has a very great name for wealth, but I can assure you there is a great work to be done in Cobalt. Conditions are very bad in the houses. I would like to get a recognized and organized system of distribution. In Cobalt house rent is very high, and the conditions are not sanitary; they were dreadful, but they are better than they were. Lately more interest has been taken in the nursing scheme from sheer necessity.

My work now is easy. The directors have taken the hospital over from me, and they are paying me in a year's time the proceeds for my work. I don't mind, so long as I can see the work is improving. Whoever succeeds me I think must improve much on the methods.

I am afraid this is not a very interesting talk, but I am not accustomed to speaking publicly; I am more fitted to do practical work than to speak in a public way. I thank you all very much for listening to such a weary detail. I cannot relate to you the incidents I would like to, because it is taking up too much space, and possibly I have not the best way of cutting it very short and making it concise.

Mr. Jones, the President, told me he wanted me to come down and not worry myself about speechmaking unless I felt I could do so. I thank you one and all for giving me this invitation to be amongst you.

Mrs. Downey—I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Mrs. Saunders and the medical profession of Cobalt, and the laity, for the great consideration and kindness that the nurses from the Central Registry got when they went to Cobalt during the time of this epidemic. Calls were sent to the Registry from Mrs. Saunders, possibly from different members of the Board at Cobalt, and from private individuals there, and I am glad to say the Central Registry was able to respond to every call. The nurses responded promptly to the call of duty, and all that went up there knew they were going, as it were, in time of war, and went to do their duty, and I am glad to say they wrote me that the consideration and kindness shown to them by the members of the profession and also by the laity was very great. The work was hard and the means very crude, and the trials were great, but at the same time they were treated very well and everything done to make their life as pleasant as possible. The Central Registry thanks the members for all their kindness.

The President—The meeting is now open for any discussion. I think Mrs. Paffard has something to say.

Mrs. Paffard—I am afraid I am something like Madame President, with reference to her address this afternoon. She is afraid she is going to have bad friends after it; I am afraid I will be in the same position.