

Early Days of the Nursing Station

COLLECTOR: **Gertie Fowler**

CONTRIBUTOR: **Peggy Hancock**

Gertie Fowler:

Today is September 8th, 2009 and my name is Gertie Fowler and I'm here in Forteau today with Peggy Hancock and Peggy is going to talk to me a little bit today about the early days of the Nursing Station and we're here in the Nursing Station, so Peggy would you like to share some ah..... memories and whatever you know about the hospital.

Peggy Hancock:

Welcome to our Bed and Breakfast, it was formerly known as the Louie A. Hall Nursing Station that was built by the Grenfell.... International Grenfell Association in 1946.

It was built to replace Dension Cottage that was built in 1907 and the funds were donated by Lady Louie A. Hall from the USA. She came here with Lady Grenfell for a visit and saw that the Dension Cottage was in need of great repair. So she donated the funds in 1939 but however war broke out at the time and it was impossible to get supplies to the Straits. So the hospital never got constructed until 1945 and it opened in 1946 and the International Grenfell Association had there head carpenter Teddy McNeil to do the construction of the Nursing Station.

It was in operation from 1946 to 1983 when they opened a new Health Clinic here in the Labrador Straits then the Grenfell Association used it as a residence for their staff until 1992 and then in 1993 we purchased it and opened it as a Bed & Breakfast.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh. Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

This room here which is now our private dining room for our guest was originally a when it opened in '46 it was originally the outpatient clinic the patients would sit here in the hallway and wait to see the nurse or the doctor who was here at the time.

Then in the later years they moved the clinic to the basement area and had an outpatient clinic down there and this became a patient ward.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh. Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

And... the kitchen is all original except for the modern appliances. This is the kitchen where all the staff did the cooking for the patients and staff that was here living at the time.

There use to be an old stove here that use to burn coal then in later years they put a propane stove here. Ah... the cupboards are still original. That was built when the hospital was built in 1946.

Gertie Fowler;

Oh. Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

And as so for the pantry this is all original where all the supplies and food was stored, extras. Because at that time there was no.... no fridges around and the porch in the front entrance where you came in, there's cupboards there that would be used in the winter time as a storage for keeping food cold.

Gertie Fowler:

Alright. Beautiful.

Peggy Hancock:

This room here is what we use as.... it's what we refer to as Miss Taylor's Parlor. What it was, was the head nurses living room. She also had her office in here with her filing cabinet, her desk and over by this window over here was the RT system for talking back and forth to St. Anthony. Back then it was radio band that you would, if you were living anywhere in town or even in L'Anse au Loup, when you turn your radio on a certain band, if Miss Taylor was on talking to St. Anthony and gettin' the flights ready and the skid flights ready, we always knew who's patient.... what patients was in the hospital and what was wrong with them because it was all broadcast over the air.

Gertie Fowler;

Okay and you could hear it.

Peggy Hancock:

You could hear everything.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

The only time that staff came in here, except Miss Taylor or doctors that was visiting, is whenin the morning, she always had a morning prayer with all her staff and any other times, it was off limits. She would also take all her meals in here. She had her own dining room table in here and if any doctors were here at the time visiting, they weren't

allowed to eat with the staff they had to eat in here. It was more hierarchy and staff was below you then at the time.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. Yup.

Peggy Hancock:

This room here use to be in the early 40's it was when it opened up it was ah a linen closet here but in later years there was two bedrooms made here which is now part of my dining room, it was took as a maternity ward.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh.

Peggy Hancock:

There was a maternity ward and a patient ward. And right here which is our private quarters, there use to be ah glass pocket doors that use to slide back into the wall for taking patients bed in and out.

Gertie Fowler;

Oh. Right.

Peggy Hancock:

And then in here, is what we call the men's ward ...ah... there use to be three beds in there. Those doors are original, they use to open up and this use to be the patients bathroom and then in here use to be... first it was the maternity ward. I was born in here on Christmas Day and my husband was born here on Halloween. And I always tell my guests the witch and Santa Claus brought us.

Gertie Fowler:

(laughs) Perfect.

Peggy Hancock:

Now it's my daughters bedroom. She sleeps in the room that we were born in.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh, that's nice. Beautiful.

Peggy Hancock:

And all of our guests stay upstairs on the upper level.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay, we'll go upstairs now.

Peggy Hancock:

This here is what we call a nursing aid room. We named it after the different staff that stayed here. The nursing aids ... there use to be four beds in here and they would come here if they got hired as a job and they stayed here. They didn't go home, only on their days off probably.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh. Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

It was.... 'cause where they had no transportation and things were better off here so they stayed in, they lived in. This bed in that room now, came out of the first hospital in 1907.

Gertie Fowler:

Is that right?

Peggy Hancock:

My Uncle use to have it in his house and he got it from the old hospital when they moved out.

Gertie Fowler:

Nice.

Peggy Hancock:

This here is the nursery room. The nursery room is where they use to keep children, that was in here on long term basis.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh, right.

Peggy Hancock:

Like if there was children, like one, two, three year old whatever was in here sick for a long time close to the staff at night time.

Gertie Fowler:

So they could have a closer watch.

Peggy Hancock:

Yeah.

This is my ghost room, I call it. The Mary Fowler Room. Aunt Mary Fowler was a lady from Newfoundland, she married in Capstan Island and she had... when her husband died she had no family here and she use to work as a cook in Dension Cottage, so when she had no family and became ill Dr. Curtis kept her in here until she died. And we refer to it as the ghost room because the girls who use to work here at the time, after she died they use to play tricks on the doctors.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Peggy Hancock:

They use to use the invisible thread, and make the rocking chairs move, and pull the clothes of their bed night time. So I always tell our guest it's a ghost room.

Gertie Fowler:

It's a ghost room, very good.

Peggy Hancock:

This is Mary Taylor room.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh, okay.

Peggy Hancock:

Mary Taylor came here in 1953 and she was here until 1983 when ah... they opened a new health clinic. They moved her in there. She moved the staff in there and then she retired. So this was her room for thirty years.

Gertie Fowler:

Was that her bed too?

Peggy Hancock:

Nope.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

The beds are not original.

Gertie Fowler:

Alright. I thought the head and foot probably was.

Peggy Hancock:

This room here is what we call Jean Skelly room, she was a nurse from Belfast Ireland and she came here in the '60's and she was here for about approximately 13 to 15 years. So her and Miss Taylor was here as two nurses at the same time, and we named that room after her.

Gertie Fowler:

Perfect.

Peggy Hancock:

And we have two bathrooms here. Originally when this opened in 1946, it was one huge bathroom but when they started getting nurses come that stayed for long periods of time, they split it in two and made two bathrooms so that the nurses would have their own private bathroom.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh, okay. Yeah. Beautiful.

Peggy Hancock:

Up here is our attic, which this use to be originally when it was a hospital, this was used as all storage.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh. Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

They would store supplies up there. Medical supplies and we've re did it and made a children's playroom.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh that's nice. Yeah.... well.

Peggy Hancock:

And up... also up here we have a dental chair that came out of the ...came of the old Strathcona.

Gertie Fowler:

Is that right?

Peggy Hancock:

With the medical...

Gertie Fowler:

Where did you manage to get that too now?

Peggy Hancock:

It was left here. The medical...

Gertie Fowler:

Nice.

Peggy Hancock:

The Strathcona Medical ship that use to go through the Straits, and where we all had to go aboard every year and have our scratches and chest x-ray done.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmmm.

Peggy Hancock:

And then there was also a dentist on board and we have the old dental chair here.

Gertie Fowler;

Oh. Perfect. So we're going to the attic. Oh my, that's really nice.

Peggy Hancock:

That's the old dental chair over there.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes.

Peggy Hancock:

Well, that's nice.

Gertie Fowler:

Gorgeous. So do you get many children to stay.

Peggy Hancock:

All the children loved to stay up here. It use to be my daughter's sleep over place.

Gertie Fowler:

Is that right? Really nice.

Okay well is that all you want to add to your.....

Peggy Hancock:

No.

Gertie Fowler:

You got more to tell me? Okay. Let's go.

Peggy Hancock:

Right here... right here we have the sterilizer that use to be used in the clinic in the outpatients clinic, that was left here. It's still quite modern. There use to be an incubator here for primy babies but that's down in the Labrador Straits Museum, now.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. Really nice.

Peggy Hancock:

And how I came to be involved in this is, when I moved back here twenty years ago, I

noticed the hospital was closed down and I took an interest in it because of my grandparents. My great grandparents use to own the land that this hospital was built on.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm...hmm.....

Peggy Hancock:

In the early 1900's he gave ah... the James family gave land to the International Grenfell Association to build their first hospital.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh. Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

Then in later years of course, they built the second one on the same property. He also gave land to the Church, I think he sold land to the Church for ten cents, somebody told me, and he gave land to the building next door which use to be the old school house.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm.... hmhhh.

Peggy Hancock:

That I have now turned into an apartment building and also the old Orangeman's Lodge, they gave land to them. So all this land that they gave away, I've been buying back.

Gertie Fowler;

Okay. So.. that's ... well it's nice that you got the interest in it, hey.

Peggy Hancock:

And back in the when it was a hospital in the early 1940's and 50's they use to have what we call WOPS that came here to work with the Grenfell Association, which referred to as Women's Work Without Pay. They would come and live in the hospital for free; free board and meals and they worked with the ladies in the community, teaching them how to do bottling and canning and making their own clothes and different things.

And the International Grenfell Association also had a clothing store on the premises here. One of the very few actually, they use to have clothes come over from the states in barrels and all bundles of clothes would be done up for new babies and for families who didn't have any clothes for their children. In exchange, they would probably come in... the ladies would come in and weed the gardens to get clothes for the children, or the men would bring firewood to get clothes for their families during the winter.

One of the stories my dad often told is ah.... there were even people from the Northern Peninsula that would come across here in their boats in the night time. They would sneak across because they always felt that over here we were better off then them. They couldn't understand how we had clothes and everything to wear. There were two

gentlemen that came over one night, just with their oilskin clothes on, nothing else to get clothes for their family.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes, maid. Yeah. That's a beautiful story ah... Peggy

Peggy Hancock:

This here is a picture of the James family, my great grandfather that donated lands to the Grenfell to have their hospital built.

Gertie Fowler;

Hmmm...hmm...

Peggy Hancock:

Hmmm...hmmm.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, that's really nice.

Peggy Hancock:

And the first baby that was born here, Allan Letto, he was the first baby born here from L'Anse au Clair in 1948.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes, maid.

Peggy Hancock:

And the first baby girl born was Iris Roberts.

Gertie Fowler:

Iris Roberts.

Peggy Hancock.

Hmmm. This here is a ... a plaque from the Orangeman's Lodge that was given to my mom when her great... her grandfather when he came here, the James' from Brigus, NL, he opened the Orangeman's Lodge and this is one of the first plaques where they signed up.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes, b'y.

Peggy Hancock:

And what the Orangeman's Lodge was ...was some kind of ...not a cult but, I don't know what word you would use for that one. They was... men and women join, there's all kinds of secrets to it. I've even been tried to get my dad to tell me about it and he won't tell. I'm sure you won't get your mom to tell you.

Gertie Fowler;

Okay. I must ask that.

Peggy Hancock:

We have all the documents here of the United Church when it was built in 1929, all the original papers how the church was built for \$524 in 1929.

Gertie Fowler:

Boy you wouldn't do much with \$500 now.

Going back downstairs.

Peggy Hancock:

We're going to where the Outpatient Clinic was moved in the 1950's.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

This room here use to be, after they moved the clinic into the basement this was the clinic for the outpatient and right around the walls, you had all of your shelves and medical supplies stocked and everything that was in the clinic.

And here you would come in. Out here was the waiting area for the patients and they would come through here. And this was the original bathrooms, the bathtub and everything, and the sink is all original. In here you had a small pharmacy and dental clinic in later years.

All of these basins and everything are all original. We had the store room here with ...where they kept supplies also they had their own well here for their own water.

Gertie Fowler;

Oh, right.

Peggy Hancock:

And it's still there under all that.

Gertie Fowler:

Oh right. So this was...

Peggy Hancock:

This was the laundry room, they use to have two ladies here doing laundry all the time in the later years. And the laundry table is original. In the '60's and '70's there was two ladies doing laundry. At one point they also had laundry they use to have laundry taken out, 'cause I know my grandmother use to do laundry for the hospital.

Gertie Fowler;

Oh.

Peggy Hancock:

And she also scrubbed the floors here and with her money, she bought a table and chair set from Montreal, a dining room set.

Gertie Fowler:

Yes, b'y.

Peggy Hancock:

And I still have it.

Gertie Fowler;

Do you?

Peggy Hancock:

Hmmm.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, that's nice. So was all those washers lived there.

Peggy Hancock:

Those are all mine.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay.

Peggy Hancock:

There was nothing left here, it was just a bare shell. And water up to my knees when I came here.

Gertie Fowler:

My dear you got a beautiful job done.

Peggy Hancock:

I came in and I looked at it and sat down and cried.

Gertie Fowler:

(laughs)

Peggy Hancock:

I thought I was a fool, but now...

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah.

Peggy Hancock:

We have it all done, now. I didn't think I'd see carpet and everything on the floors.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, it's beautiful. Okay, we're going to go back upstairs.

Peggy Hancock:

Out here we have...

Gertie Fowler:

We're here in the main entrance again, hey.

Peggy Hancock:

Out here we have the artifacts and antiques that I have collected. Some of it is original from around this area. We have ah.....all these tools here, carpentry tools they are over a hundred years old, and we have the measuring rulers and shaving razors, they are hundred years old.

Gertie Fowler:

Hmmm... hmmm.

Peggy Hancock:

This here, we have a picture of Dr. Grenfell up, he was ah... from Vermont, he was...died in 1940, and this is a picture of the first hospital Denson Cottage and Sister Bailey was the first nurse that came here when the hospital opened in 1907, Denson Cottage.

Gertie Fowler;

Okay, nice. Really nice.

Peggy Hancock:

This here is a picture of Nurse Gallagher; she was a nurse from England who worked in this Nursing Station first in the early 1940.

And a picture of Steward Howell that's my husband's father. He was a maintenance man here. And he worked here for the first five or six years that Miss Taylor was here.

Gertie Fowler;

So you all have a good connection.

Peggy Hancock:

Yes.

Gertie Fowler;
...with the hospital.

Peggy Hancock:
And this here is a picture of Nurse Michelin, she is from the states. Her daughter was here a couple of years ago. She came to see where her mother worked.

Gertie Fowler;
Yes.

Peggy Hancock:
Nurse Michelin was the first one to administer Penicillin in the area and she ...the first patient was my dad, Edward.

Gertie Fowler:
Is that right?

Peggy Hancock:
Yeah. When he had cut his knee in the woods, before she got here.

Gertie Fowler:
Yeah. That's good, really nice, really good information.

Peggy Hancock:
The German airplane that went down off Blanc Sablon, Quebec, that has a connection to this hospital also. Nurse Greta Ferris was here at the time and she got the call to go to administer the plane accident, and she was the first nurse on site there.

Gertie Fowler:
Is that right?

Peggy Hancock:
Her brother was here, I'd say about three or four years ago and he had all her information and he didn't realize that she had a connection to this hospital, and he was after sending it off to Goose Bay to Them Days.

Gertie Fowler:
Oh.

Peggy Hancock:
When he could of ...

Gertie Fowler:
...sent it to you.

Peggy Hancock:

Yeah.

Gertie Fowler:

Yeah, that's really nice.

Peggy Hancock:

So do you have any questions for me?

Gertie Fowler:

Well, I'm pretty well sure that you've covered everything. It was really ah.... you had a lot of information to share with us, so if that's all you have to add to your information tonight?

Peggy Hancock:

I think so.

Gertie Fowler:

Okay. Well I'd love to thank you for your ah...taking the time to share such nice memories and that with us. So we will cherish them forever. Thank you.

Peggy Hancock:

You're welcome.