PROFILE OF A LEADER
Alena Jean MacMaster:
Administrator, Educator,
Professional Activist And
Community Advocate

Gautreau, G.
Winans, P.

Abstract
This paper profiles Alena Jean MacMaster, an extraordinary nurse leader, activist, visionary and humanitarian from New Brunswick. Her determination and drive were instrumental in fostering the development and progression of health care, nursing education and nursing services at the local, provincial, federal and international levels. "First, loyalty to the institution in which you serve. The patient is the most important person in the entire institution," was Miss MacMaster's guiding principle throughout her career.

In 1909 Miss MacMaster began her nursing career as one of the first graduates of The Moncton Hospital Training School. After gaining valuable experience and expanding her education horizons in the United States, she returned to Moncton in 1919. Appointed as Superintendent and Director of Nursing at The Moncton Hospital, Miss MacMaster's administrative career was constantly challenged by the need for expansion of services due to demographic changes. As the city of Moncton grew, the need for hospital services also increased, along with the demands that new technology brought to the physical structures.

During the difficult economic times of the 1930's and the turbulent war years, Miss MacMaster forged on, meeting the increasing health care needs of military families that flooded into the city. She sought funding from the Federal Defence Authorities to meet the needs of these people, established a teaching internship with Dalhousie University Medical School and organized a local building fund. Her vision exceeded the boundaries of the hospital compound. As early as 1922 the community at large benefited from laboratory services for public health, and school, venereal disease and tuberculosis clinics.

Her efforts to maintain a high standard of patient care at The Moncton Hospital resulted in full accreditation of the hospital by the American College of Surgeons in 1922. At that time, the American College of Surgeons was the only body that was setting the criteria for excellence in North American hospitals and The Moncton Hospital was one of the first in Canada to be recognized as a standardized institution. When the New Brunswick Hospital Association was formed in 1928, Miss MacMaster was actively involved on committees and within the executive. She represented The Moncton Hospital as a delegate at the inauguration of the Canadian Hospital Council which later became the Canadian Hospital Association.

Miss MacMaster strived for excellence and under her leadership The Moncton Hospital was the only Canadian hospital that received special mention from the American Hospital Association in 1933. This award was for arranging one of the best programs for the observance of National Hospital Day (American College of Hospital Administrators, 1977; Gautreau & Winans-Orr, 1985; New Brunswick Hospital Association, 1934).

As administrator, Miss MacMaster's humanitarian values were demonstrated in anecdotes about patient care. A 1937 graduate recalls seeing Miss MacMaster, at night, wearing a wine coloured dressing gown with her hair braided down her back routinely making her way to the floor to console a grieving family (personal communication, 1984).

The responsibility of educating future nurses was embraced and tackled with an innovative and totally involved approach. A 1934 graduate remarks, "Miss MacMaster brought her nurses up to be able to cope with the world" (personal commu-
As president of the NBNR, Miss MacMaster was also involved with the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) as Honary Treasurer and was a member of a national committee that examined and reported on the survey of Canadian nursing services that had been completed by Dr. Weir in 1932 (MacMaster, 1939a; Weir, 1932). She presented a persuasive paper (MacMaster, 1932) at a CNA meeting regarding the necessity of establishing a Dominion Bureau of Nursing to develop a standardized national nursing curricula which included a standardized educational preparation of students entering schools of nursing and registration exams.

Concerned during the 1930's that the health of the working poor in Moncton was being neglected because they couldn’t afford to pay for health services, Miss MacMaster took charge and began a personal campaign to initiate group hospital insurance. She sought support from NBNR, another local hospital, the business community and from the public. Her dream became a reality in 1937 when the Moncton Group Hospitalization Plan was finalized (MacMaster, 1937a).

Miss MacMaster’s vision was for the Moncton Hospital to provide the best health care possible for the citizens of Moncton. She believed that this would happen if the public became involved in the work that the hospital was doing and that it was her responsibility as the Administrator to set an example of dedication to the hospital for the community to follow (MacMaster, 1937b). She involved herself in the Moncton Hospital Ladies Aid Association and received their support in her efforts to improve hospital services and facilities. The Association raised funds for several large scale projects and for graduation prizes for the nursing students.

There was more to be done. In the fall of 1940, Miss MacMaster invited graduates of The Moncton Hospital to form a Nurses’ Hospital Aid for the purpose of providing funding for hospital equipment and to provide entertainment for the student nurses. In her annual report she remarked on how successful the group had been in their
"worthwhile contribution ... augmenting the funds of the treasury of the Ladies Hospital Aid" (MacMaster, 1940).

The year 1947 saw changes in The Moncton Hospital Act and this legislation forced a total replacement of The Moncton Hospital Board membership. In an act of loyalty, Miss MacMaster wondered her resignation as well (City of Moncton, 1947). She then pursued her nursing career in New York State and in Campbellton, NB.

After receiving several life memberships from various groups and organizations in acknowledgment of her contributions to nursing, a final honour was bestowed to Miss MacMaster by the Moncton community. A new diploma nursing school, The Miss A.J. MacMaster School of Nursing, was named in her honour and opened in Moncton in 1974 (The Miss A.J. MacMaster School of Nursing, 1974). During the opening ceremonies, Miss MacMaster delivered her last public address:

"Nursing has changed a lot from my day but I'm just as interested as always. There's more opportunity for nurses today. There's a great need for nurses and even greater need for understanding nurses. Keeping our hearts in the service is very important in this changing world we live in. So if you are going to be a nurse I hope your heart is in it or it won't mean anything." (MacMaster, 1974).

The Miss A.J. MacMaster School of Nursing graduated 1018 nurses before its closure in 1996. It marked the end of diploma nursing education in New Brunswick, the nursing profession having progressed to an all baccalaureate level of education for nurses (Gautreau, 1998).

Authors

Gérèse Gautreau, RN, MScN is the Director, Education and Communication Services at the Nurses' Association of New Brunswick, Fredericton and former Director at the Miss A.J. MacMaster School of Nursing, Moncton, NB.

Patricia Winans RN, BEd, BScN, MN(C) is a Nursing Instructor with the Faculty of Nursing, University of New Brunswick at Moncton, NB and former Nursing Instructor with The Miss A. J. MacMaster School of Nursing, Moncton, N.B.

This column is a regular contribution by members of CAHN/ACHN.

Canadian Association for the History of Nursing/Association canadienne pour l'histoire du nursing

Diana Mansell, President
430 Hendon Drive, N.W.
Calgary, Alberta
T2K 1Z7

Email: djmansell@ucalgary.ca
Phone/Fax: (403) 289-3194
References


MacMaster, A. J. (1930). President’s address. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NBARN.


MacMaster, A. J. (1936). President’s address. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NBARN, Moncton, NB.


MacMaster, A. J. (1940). Superintendent’s report. Annual report of the Board of Trustees of the Moncton Hospital, 1940.


CJNL, Vol. 12, No. 2, May/June 1999