

NHS Newsletter

Spring 2004

A publication of the
Newfoundland
Historical Society

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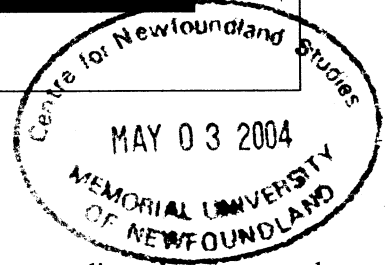
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NEWFOUNDLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

News, resources and events for Newfoundland & Labrador's history community



Symposium 2004

The Symposium on the history of health care in Newfoundland and Labrador was off to a successful start on Thursday evening, when Peter Twohig delivered his talk entitled *Beyond Grenfell and Toward a Regional History of Health and Medicine* to an assembled crowd of more than a hundred. In his presentation, Twohig dealt with both history and current concerns. He maintained that historians

must move beyond local studies and the history of "Great Men" and significant institutions. He advocated new regional studies that would explore the neglected history of nursing and other "fluid" professional roles, as well as past health care innovations. Such studies, he hoped, might help move current debate away from limiting "crisis" mentalities so that we may look not only to defend

medicare but to expand and extend it.

On Friday evening, the crowd showed up again to hear surgeon Dr. Georgie Chalker, pharmacist Brian Healy, nurse June Russell and family doctor David Parsons talk about their personal experiences in the province's health care system starting in the days before Confederation.

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President's Remarks

Spring 2004 has been a wild one for heritage in the province. Unbelievable news came forward - that the government would postpone the opening of The Rooms and that almost half of the archives and museum staff would be laid off. Then the public service strike hit.

The combined crises will certainly delay scholarly, and private research and publishing for some time. Of course, we can survive in the short term without archives and museums. Long-term denial of access to public documents becomes a serious problem for the

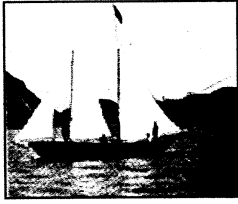
functioning of society. We hope that the new provincial archives and museum will be able to open by June 2005.

The society hosted a full slate of 6 lectures and a symposium on the history of health care during the May 2003 - April 2004 year; we reprinted Jim Hiller's *Confederation* booklet, sold many copies of our other titles and published 3 issues of the newsletter. We continued to lobby for the return of history to the school curriculum and maintained a presence on the Provincial Department of

Education's history in the schools working committee, the Newfoundland Quarterly Foundation, the Association of Heritage Industries Partners Group and on the Folk of the Sea monument committee.

In April I finish up a two-year term as president of the society. The position has certainly allowed me to meet wonderful people. People who are very interested in Newfoundland history, who regularly and reliably attend the lectures and

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The schooner **Albatross**, used by Dr. Conrad Fitzgerald who served the people of Fortune Bay from 1873-1928.

"In Labrador, 80% of the population of Okak and 20% of the population of Cartwright died as a result of the virus known as the Spanish Flu."

PASSAGES

On March 25, we were very sad to learn of the death of Gert Crosbie, long-time member of the Historical Society, frequently seen at the Society's lectures and symposia. Member Colin Karasek also passed away recently. Colin was a member of the Society for more than 20 years.

We offer our condolences to their families and wide circle of friends. They will be missed.

Tributes will appear in the Fall Newsletter.

Symposium 2004 (continued from front page)

Bert Riggs, head archivist at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives, introduced the panellists. After their entertaining and informative presentations the general discussion was quite lively, with audience members relating their own experiences and asking questions. Listeners were loath to leave the Hall, even though a wine and cheese reception awaited them. On Saturday morning, the crowd was smaller, but still enthusiastic. The morning began with a session on the very timely issue of health care and health policy in the province, presented by three leading co-investigators of the Coasts Under Stress initiative. Dr. Linda Kealey, professor of History at the University of New Brunswick, provided an overview of the restructuring of the health care system in the province during the period from Commission of Government to the adoption of Medicare in 1969 (*From Mosdell to Medicare: Health Care in Newfoundland, 1930-70*). Three overarching themes framed her discussion: the "shifting dialectic" between centralization and decentralization; the dialogue between local and external

models in organizing health care; and the relationship between health issues and economic conditions.

Dr. Stephen Bornstein of Memorial University's Centre for Applied Health Research and Dr. Stephen Tomblin of the University's Political Science department then provided a sweeping 'tag-team' presentation of contemporary trends in the organization of health care services, with particular focus on the stakeholders, the levels of discussions, and the various social, economic, and political factors in play as policy is formulated for the delivery of health care at national and provincial levels (*Trends in the Organization of Canada's Health Systems since 1980: Where Newfoundland Fits*).

The second session was entitled Crises in Health Care and included papers by Ron Knowing on the Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and Terry Bishop-Stirling on the incidence of tuberculosis in Newfoundland and Labrador from 1900-1950. Knowing spoke of the intensity and enormity of the so-called Spanish Flu, tracing its origins in the animal

population through to a human mutation in China or possibly Kansas in the US, which then spread to Europe and back to the Eastern US and St. John's. More than 30 million people died from this influenza worldwide, Newfoundland losing nearly two thousand of its population of 250,000. In Labrador, 80% of the population of Okak and 20% of the population of Cartwright died as a result of the virus. He spoke of the rise of spurious "remedies" and "cures" (injections of creosote and iodine), advertisements for which started to appear with frequency in the local papers. He also spoke of the "crisis in faith" noted by those working as missionaries and religious counselors.

Bishop-Stirling gave an illustrated presentation of the occurrence of the dreaded TB from 1900 to 1950. She spoke of the rise of volunteerism during that period and the changing thinking among the population. *Continued on page 4*

Membership Committee Report

The members of the membership committee for this past year were Debby Andrews, Emma Butler and Rosemary Healy. Most of the meetings were held by phone or e-mail and consisted of discussing ways to increase membership and issues around increasing

membership fees to meet the rising costs of managing the Society's activities. Several notices were sent out to remind members that fees, essential to the Society's operating budget, were overdue.

At a special meeting to discuss the finances of the

Society held in April, it was decided to increase the fees from \$24 to \$28 starting next year.

Our membership now stands at 530, and we hope to increase that number to 600 by 2005.

Rosemary Healy, Chair

Devotion to Duty of the Highest Order

The following was sent to the editor by Miss Jean Lewis, retired nurse:

Miss S. Squires, Director of Departmental Nursing Services wrote the following in her 1941 annual report.

"It is interesting to note that in all the great marine disasters the Departmental nurses have played an active part, yet from their terse monthly reports one would never gather that they did anything over and above their line of duty. Yet, the display of courage, heroism and devotion to duty has been of the highest order.

An instance passes in review: A tidal wave brought sudden and terrifying devastation to inhabitants of the South Coast. The report sent in by the parish priest at that time says:

The nurse, scantily clad and wearing house slippers (all her belongings being lost) went from house to house, tending the sick and injured, quelling fears and restoring confidence. She attempted to travel, but roads were blocked by boulders and wreckage. She secured a horse and rode it until it dropped, then she continued on

foot. Soaked, chilled to the marrow, she continued her work of mercy all night and part of the next day.

This nurse's report to headquarters was

Well, but busy."

The nurse in question was Margaret Giovanini.

Editor's Note:

Miss Lewis read this excerpt at the conclusion of the first afternoon session of the Health Care Symposium on March 27, 2004. It was followed by a standing ovation for Mrs. Giovannini.

"She secured a horse and rode it until it dropped, then she continued on foot."

President's Remarks (continued from front page)

who care about the history and continuation of the society. Thank you for this interest and for all your kindnesses to me personally.

Particularly helpful to the society with monetary and in-kind gifts over the past couple of years were His Honour the Lieutenant Governor Ed Roberts, Sen. Bill Rompkey, Andy Wells, Paul Johnson, Barbara Doran, Robert Forsey, Hon. Fabian O'Dea, John O'Dea, W.H.Whiteley, Dr. Ian Rusted, Jeffrey Vile, June Russell, Helen Reid, Mary Bridson, David Cumming, Andrew Cook and Peter Twohig. All the

speakers, chairs and introducers have been very good to us as well and I extend an expression of thanks to them from the society.

The executive and the chairs and members of the society's committees hope you have enjoyed the events they worked to bring you this past year. We hope we see you at the Annual General Meeting on April 29 and at the Labrador Fishery Symposium at Bay Roberts on June 4-5.

After you have enjoyed a wonderful summer we hope to see you at the first lecture of the new season,

on Thursday, September 30, 2004.

Yours in scholarship,
Joan Ritcey



Boys on the wharf in St. Anthony.
PANL photograph

Symposium 2004 (continued from page 2)

"Dr. Crellin delighted the crowd with a show of old patent medicine ads."



Chief Misel Joe

tion about what government should do for them. She spoke of the APC (Association for the Prevention of Consumption) and its objectives, which were threefold: to arrest increase in the number of deaths from TB, to educate the public about the disease and "to induce the Legislature to take the matter in hand as a national work". By 1912, the APC recognized its inability to cope and was calling for legislation to force government to deal with the epidemic. Bishop-Stirling spoke of the various camps and sanatoria that were established during this period and of the beginning of measures that eventually would bring the epidemic under control. The audience responded with 25 minutes of questions for the speakers.

The afternoon sessions were attended by more than 150 people who came to hear about Female Health Practitioners and Traditional Medicine. The first session, ably facilitated by former NHS President Eleanor Dawson, herself a registered nurse and midwife, consisted of papers by nurse Janet Story (*Myra Taylor: Matron of the General Hospital 1916-1939*), Heidi Coombs (*Profile of a Forthright Grenfell Nurse*), and Kay Matthews (*The History and Politics of Midwifery in Newfoundland and Labrador*). The papers were much appreciated by the audience, but it was centenarian Margaret Giovannini, former public health nurse, who stole the show. Responding to more than a dozen questions from the floor, she spoke about her experiences as a midwife, dentist and general practitioner in La Scie and on

the Island's South Coast. Jean Lewis, retired nurse, read an excerpt describing Giovannini's work during the 1929 Tidal Wave from the annual report of the Director of Departmental Nursing Services which prompted the audience to come to their feet, applauding loudly (see "Devotion" page 3).

The second session, chaired by Dr. Jeff Webb, dealt with Traditional Medicine and was capably handled by Dr. John Crellin, retired History of Medicine professor, who spoke on *Home Medicine and the Newfoundland Character* and Chief Misel Joe of the Conne River Mi'Kmaq Band, who explained and described the healing practices and traditions of his people. Dr. Crellin delighted the crowd with a show of old patent medicine ads. It was interesting to see what local companies sold and what preposterous claims they made. His slides pointed out how medicine makers play on one's sense of weakness - that one needs building up, that one's "nerves" need nutrients. Some of the text looked very similar to the claims we see in cereal ads today. Members of the audience asked questions afterwards and one older gentleman recounted a very unpleasant experience with Carter's Kidney Pills when he was a boy, to everyone's amusement. Sagamaw Misel Joe roamed over many topics and drew from childhood memories of how his family, neighbours and playmates viewed health matters but always kept his focus on bodily health, medicines from the land, mental health, family wisdom and the Great Spirit. It was a gentle and philosophical note

on which to end the day's activities.

It was a beautiful, crisp night as a group of 26 people assembled for the symposium dinner at the Battery Hotel. The symposium's keynote speaker, Peter Twohig, was in attendance, as were speakers Brian Healy, Ron Knowling and Terry Bishop-Stirling. They dined on the traditional menu - salad, poached salmon and berry custard tart. John O'Mara delivered the after-dinner speech, a well-prepared short history of medicine in Newfoundland. The overview was serious but the anecdotes were humorous, so the laughter was loud and long, even raucous. Everybody had a good time.

We would be glad to receive any comments about the Symposium from those of you who were in attendance. Did you feel comfortable and welcome? Were the sessions informative and entertaining? Could you hear all the speakers? Do you have suggestions for future symposia? Take the time to drop us an e-mail or a phone call or a note in the regular mail to let us know what you think.

"...one older gentleman recounted a very unpleasant experience with Carter's Kidney Pills when he was a boy, to everyone's amusement."

