

{ ONCE UPON A TIME IN QUINCY }

First nursing school graduation in late 1800s was spectacle

By ARLIS DITTMER

On Thursday evening Sept. 6, 1894, at 8:00, a graduation exercise was held at the Temple of the congregation of B'nai Shalom at 427 N. Ninth in Quincy. Every seat was taken and some were standing to witness this unusual graduation. It was the first graduation of trained nurses in the city. Blessing Hospital Training School for Nurses opened for students in 1891.

"A Training School for Nurses is a new departure in Quincy, and much thought and money has been expended in making it a thoroughly successful institution," said the Quincy Daily Herald. It was a community occasion to attend this graduation.

Three students completed the work and the graduation was planned for June, 1894. But according to the Quincy Daily Whig, "so great has been the demand for the nurses and so constantly have they been occupied that their graduation has been necessarily postponed."

Their training was arduous. They worked with physicians and patients from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Night duty was 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. and was served one month at a time. When not on duty, the students were expected to attend the weekly lectures provided by the physicians and the classes taught by the superintendent. The school preferred applicants of "superior education." Many pupils dropped out of training or were asked to leave due to "unsuitability."

The superintendent who presided over the school

and this first graduation was Harriet E. Sewrey of Barrie, Canada, a graduate of the Protestant Episcopal Hospital, Philadelphia, Pa. She had come to Quincy early in 1893 as head nurse. Shortly after, she was promoted to the superintendent position. The three first graduates were; Clara Bell from Sadorra, Ill., Jessie Cline and Martha D. Fitzgerald, both of Quincy.

Rabbi Eppstein of Temple B'nai Shalom was not at the exercise as he was out of town but was mentioned at the ceremony by the Rev. Dr. Dana as having an "active interest and hearty sympathy" for the hospital and training school and "always willing to aid and assist the work." The Temple was described as "very handsomely trimmed with flowers and potted plants." The Ushers were Mr. Emil Nelke, Mr. Al Ellis, Mr. Charles M. Rosenheim and Mr. Harry Wood, all in evening dress. The audience was mostly women.

Seated in the front rows were the 10 pupil nurses in their uniforms of blue and white striped calico dresses and blue caps. The program consisted of music, three short addresses, and the awarding of diplomas. It lasted 90 minutes after which the public was invited to the new Nurses' Home for refreshments. The home, described as "two houses...thrown into one," opened in July at 426-428 N. Tenth and was furnished with donations from the citizens of Quincy. Having a nurses' home was considered an integral part of nursing education as the pupils were on duty

Graduating Exercises

OF THE

Blessing Hospital

Training School for Nurses,

ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1894.

GRADUATING CLASS OF 1894.

JESSIE ANNETTE GLINE,
MARTHA DEAN FITZGERALD,
CLARA BELL.

ORDER OF EXERCISES.

ORGAN PRELUDE,	MR. J. E. HOFER
OPENING PRAYER,	DEAN MOORE
ADDRESS,	DR. S. H. DANA
VOCAL SOLO,	MISS GERTRUDE PEASE
ADDRESS,	DR. INCE

MUSIC—INSTRUMENTAL DUET.

Address and Presentation of Diplomas,

BY MR. R. W. GARDNER,
President of Board of Trustees C. A. & H. A.

HARIET E. SEWREY,
Matron of Hospital and Training School.

Printed Program for the First Graduation of Blessing Hospital Training School for Nurses. | Photo courtesy of Blessing Health System Archives

for long hours and had only two weeks off a year.

The program opened with Mr. J. E. Hofer playing the Temple organ accompanied by Carl Gardner on the violin. After the prayer by Dean Moore of the Cathedral, the first speech was by Rev. S. H. Dana, D. D. His talk was about the three kinds of nurses, the old fashioned indifferent nurse who was "lacking in nearly every necessary qualification,

lacking in education."

His second example was the family member filled with apprehension and too many questions for the doctor. The third kind of nurse was trained who was "calm, deliberate, self-possessed ... [and] equipped through experience for every emergency." Miss Gertrude E. Pease followed with an alto solo of the hymn, "Only a Cup of Water, 'twas All I Had to Give."

ABOUT HSQAC

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The next address was by the Rev. Dr. Ince of the Vermont Street Baptist Church. The Quincy Daily Herald said he was "our tall, blonde and handsome friend," while the Quincy Daily Whig said his "address was full of apt illustrations and witty sallies, brilliant with well worded sentence and splendid oratory." He spoke about the five needs of Blessing Hospital: sympathy, service, a library where patients could get "mental food," cash and an ambulance. When discussing the need for service, he felt the farming community would "cheerfully and liberally" help if they were aware of the needs and also mentioned the Sisters of Mercy of St. Mary Hospital as an example to emulate.

He had suggestions for cash by challenging each citizen to contribute \$1 rather than leaving the support of the hospital to just a few wealthy individuals.

Robert W. Gardner, President of the Charitable Aid and Hospital Association gave the last remarks of the evening and had the honor of presenting the diplomas. He spoke about the history of the school, particularly the financial difficulties, and congratulated Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Neustadt for raising \$1,150 for the school in a short period of time. He then read letters from a number

of people who had employed the trained nurses and described nursing as "one of the grandest and noblest avocations of women."

Though the training school was small and had only three graduates and 10 pupil nurses, Blessing Hospital had more patients than ever, with families calling for nurses in their homes. Both the graduate nurses and the pupil nurses were in constant demand. That fall, typhoid fever broke out and calls for nurses had to be suspended when 40 calls were received in one day. Even Miss Sewrey got typhoid and the newly graduated Clara Bell stepped in as substitute superintendent during her illness.

This first graduation was followed by the second class graduation in May of 1895. This time, Rabbi Eppstein was in town and gave one of the addresses at the Vermont Street Methodist Church. Nurses have graduated every year but two (due to changes in the curriculum) since 1894, providing the community with 125 years of nursing education and over 2200 professional nurses.

Arlis Dittmer is a retired medical librarian. During her 26 years with Blessing Health System, she became interested in medical and nursing history—both topics frequently overlooked in history.