

JOAN OF THE NORTHWEST

Johanna 'Joan' Matheson (1842-1916)

When, for the first time in Canadian history, nurses officially supported Canadian troops in the field, Joan Matheson of Perth, Ontario, was among that history-making contingent of 12 women caring for casualties of the 1885 Northwest Rebellion.

Born at Gairloch, Ross-shire, Scotland, on May 20, 1842¹, Johanna 'Joan' Matheson was the daughter of Roderick Matheson (1796-1873) -- War of 1812 veteran, Perth merchant, member of the Legislative Council 1851-1867 and Dominion Senator 1867-1873.² Her father had first married Mary Fraser (1802-1825) at Montréal in 1823 and following her death married Annabella Russell (1811-1854) during an 1830 visit to his home at Loch Carron, Ross-Shire. Annabella was the daughter of Rev. James Russell (1761-1844) and Isabella Munro Fraser (1781-1853) of Gairloch, Ross-Shire. Joan was born at the home of her maternal grandparents during a visit to Scotland³ by her mother; the only one of the 13 Matheson children⁴ not born at Perth, Ontario.

Joan Matheson received her primary and secondary education at Perth and lived at Perth until 1881 when, at the age of 39 years, she enrolled at the Bellevue Hospital Training School for Nurses⁵ in New York City. The Bellevue school, opened in 1873, was only the second⁶ (secular) school of nursing established in the United States and the first based upon the principles and writing of Florence Nightingale. The first Canadian (secular) nursing school did not open until the following year, 1874, at General and Marine Hospital in St. Catharines, Ontario.⁷ Joan graduated as a trained nurse in 1883 and worked at New York's St. Luke's Hospital until volunteering to join the military expedition to the Canadian Northwest in the spring of 1885.

Why, at the height of the Victorian era, a middle-aged spinster, from a wealthy small-town upper-class family, would first choose to study nursing in the continent's largest city, and then volunteer to serve in a combat zone on a far and unsettled frontier, can only be guessed at. Few women of Joan Matheson's day did such things. Women's activities were confined to the private sphere. A Victorian woman's vocation was to marry, have children and manage a respectable home, representing marital stability, domestic virtue and the central social unit for the transmission of culture and the maintenance of social stability. Victorian values were prudish, materialistic and obsessed with social status. Women could not vote and were, legally, not even 'Persons'.

¹ May 20, 1842 is actually her date of baptism.

² See profile of Roderick Matheson elsewhere on this website.

³ Some sources say she was born in Canada but her baptism and death certificates both show Scotland as her place of birth.

⁴ John Robertson (1825-1833), unmarried; Roderick Edward (1825-1901) m. Jane Farrell; William Marshall (1832-1895) m. Anne Francis Emery; Isabella Russell (1834-1911), unmarried; Flora Madeline (1836-1894) m. Henry Dowsley Shaw; Mary Fraser (1837-1851), unmarried; Annabella (1839-1919), unmarried; Eliza Jean/Jane (1841-1929), unmarried; Johanna/Joan (1842-1916), unmarried; Charles Albert (1844-1917), unmarried; Arthur James (1845-1913), unmarried; Alan Frederick (1848-1928), unmarried; Rose Thyeur (1851-1895), unmarried.

⁵ Several accounts incorrectly state that she studied nursing at St. Luke's Hospital, New York. St. Luke's Nursing School did not open until 1888.

⁶ The first nursing school was established in 1872 by the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston.

⁷ The Mack Training School for Nurses, with two nurses trained by Florence Nightingale on its teaching staff. Now part of the Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology.

Nearly 50 years into Victoria's reign, however, a small number of middle and upper-class women were beginning to imagine something more, and often the portal to a life beyond the rule of father, husband or elder brother, lay in nursing⁸, an occupation made worthy and endowed with respectability by the Queen's approval of Florence Nightingale's work during and after the Crimean War (1853-1856). Joan Matheson's nephew, Douglas McNichol, concluded that,

I am quite sure this was the reason why Johanna Matheson considered it acceptable to make the commitment she did in training as a nurse. This is not to say that she did not encounter resistance, but as I understand it, she was not of the wall-flower category. Johanna overcame the Victorian prejudice against female employment. She seized the opportunity to give meaning to her life and avoided being slotted into the grey spinsterhood of the Victorian age.⁹



Joan Matheson, Victorian Lady

In 1882, as Joan Matheson was completing her studies at Bellevue Hospital in New York, government surveyors¹⁰ in the Canadian Northwest Territory¹¹ began quartering the land that would become the Province of Saskatchewan. After the Red River Rebellion of 1869–1870, many Métis had moved from Manitoba to the Northwest Territories and established new communities along the South Saskatchewan River. They divided and allocated their land according to their traditional seigneurial system of strips running back from the river, but the government surveyors began laying out square concessions. In 1883 Métis families of the parish of St. Louis found that their land and village site, including a church and a school, had been sold by the Government of Canada to the Prince Albert Colonization Company. With the buffalo gone, Hudson Bay Company jobs disappearing, land titles withheld and settlers flowing in from the east, in an atmosphere of lingering resentment from the failed uprising of a decade earlier, further loss of land represented potential starvation for the Métis.

In 1884, the Métis invited Louis Riel (1844-1885) to return from the United States where he had been exiled since the Rebellion of 1869-1870. Riel appealed to the Canadian government for redress, but with no clear response coming from Ottawa, Riel, Gabriel Dumont (1837-1906), Honoré Jackson (1861-1952) and other Métis leaders took their fate into their own hands. At Batoche, on March 19, 1885, they declared a Provisional Government of Saskatchewan. The Canadian Government responded with force.

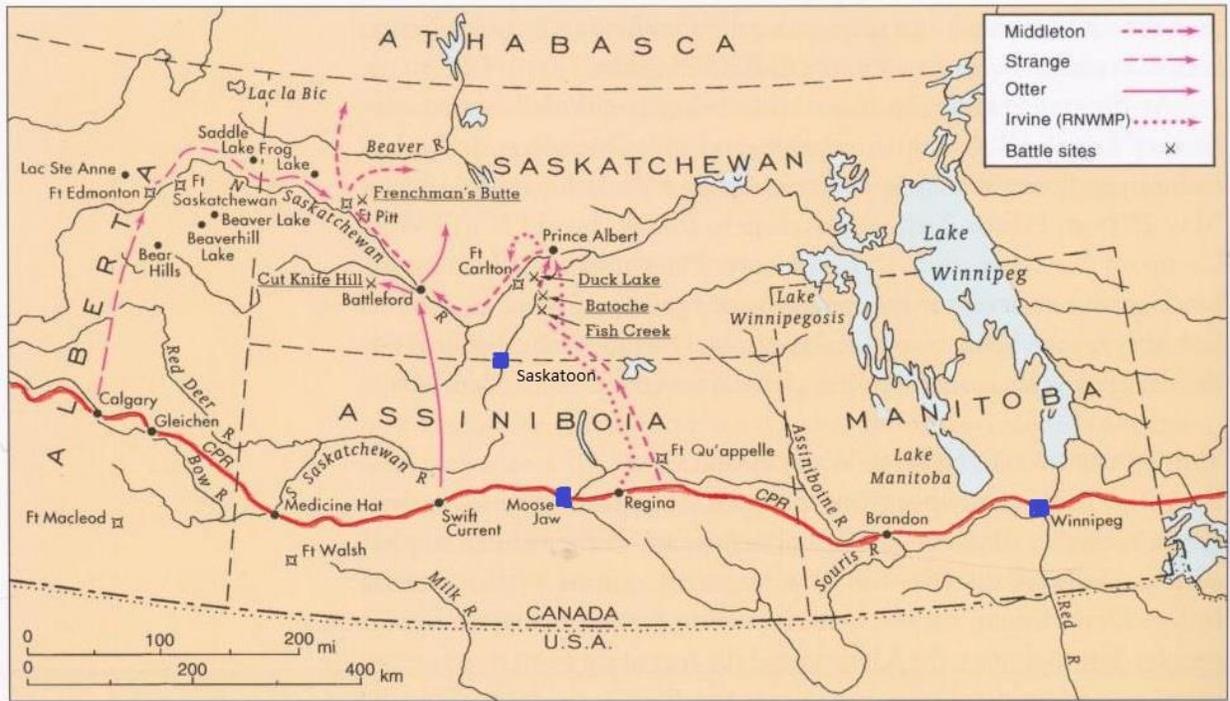
⁸ The majority of the few women who worked outside of the home were school teachers, and even they were required to leave their jobs when they married.

⁹ *Country Roads* magazine, *Auntie Jo's Medal*, by Douglas McNichol (1988).

¹⁰ One of the Dominion Surveyors at work in the Northwest Territories was Alexander Walker Kippen (1857-1855) who was born at Perth, the son of one-time Town Mayor Duncan Kippen (1831-1926), and who died at Batoche fighting in the ranks of the Canadian Militia. See profile elsewhere on this website.

¹¹ The Northwest Territories of the 1880s are now the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

On March 26th about 200 Métis and Aboriginal warriors defeated a combined force of 90 militia and North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) at Duck Lake outside Batoche. In actions uncoordinated with the Métis, but prompted by many of the same fears and broken promises, a band of Cree sacked Battleford on March 30th and on April 2nd another Cree raiding party killed nine people at Frog Lake. Then on April 5th about 200 Cree forced the surrender of Fort Pitt.



Northwest Rebellion 1885

The day before the March 26th Battle of Duck Lake the Federal Government in Ottawa began mobilizing militia units in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. They were quickly dispatched westward by rail, although ad hoc arrangements had to be made to transport the men and supplies across unfinished gaps in the Canadian Pacific Railway, then still under construction from Lake Superior to Winnipeg. Nevertheless, in less than a month nearly 3,000 eastern troops joined about 1,700 troops already mobilized in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories under the command of Major General Frederick Middleton (1825-1898).

In April, as the militia call-up was underway, orders were issued from Ottawa that a medical and surgical department be organized for service with the Northwest expedition. Many women immediately volunteered as nurses, but Dr. James Bell (1852-1911), Surgeon Major in charge of Base Hospitals, influenced by the writing of Florence Nightingale and the experience of the American Civil War, wanted only trained nurses. *"No volunteer nurses,"* a telegraph from the Northwest made clear. *"If you can send an organized body under a trained head, they will be welcome".*¹²

¹² *Caregiving on the Periphery: Historical Perspectives on Nursing*, by Myra Rutherford (2010)



Mother Hannah Grier- Coome

The solution arrived at was to approach the Sisters of St. John the Divine through the Anglican Church Synod of Toronto. Mother Sarah Hannah Roberta Grier-Cooome (1837-1921) had only founded the order a year earlier, but she and several of her followers had completed two years of nursing studies at Trinity Hospital, New York, as part of their novitiate with the Sisters of St. Mary, an Anglican educational and nursing order at Peekskill, New York. At the request of Toronto archbishop Arthur Sweatman (1834–1909), Mother Hannah agreed to take charge of a Base Hospital at Moose Jaw, at the head of a six-member team consisting of Novice Amelia Elizabeth Hare, Postulant Helen Augustine Crouch and Postulant Helena Frances, reinforced by lay nurses Mary Campbell MacKenzie, Florence Caroline Cottle and Joan Matheson.

MacKenzie and Matheson were graduates of Bellevue Hospital Nursing School in New York, and Mackenzie was then working at Bellevue while Matheson worked at St. Luke's, New York. Cottle was a graduate of the Mack Nursing School at General and Marine Hospital in St. Catharines and was working at London Ontario General Hospital. The Anglican Church seems to have also played a role in recruiting the secular volunteers MacKenzie, Cottle and Matheson. All three were Anglicans and Joan Matheson, at least, was closely involved with her church; described by the *Perth Courier* as “a consistent and earnest member of St. James Church to which she did much to sustain ...”.

Mother Hannah was provided a travel budget of \$200 by the Canadian Government and the Sisters of St. John the Divine nursing team set out from Toronto in mid April, travelling by rail to Owen Sound, Ontario, and crossing Lakes Huron and Superior by steamboat.

*... even nurses had bad hair days. During the lake voyage from Owen Sound to Port Arthur, the mother superior, having experienced difficulty in dealing with her long hair in the confined space of her cabin, and realizing the problem of managing it in a battlefield hospital in the wilderness, cut off the long black tresses and threw them overboard, an example which the other sisters followed.*¹³

From Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) the women continued west by rail, where the CPR track was complete, and by sleigh or wagon over the gaps still under construction. Six weeks after the original call to duty they reached Moose Jaw on Saturday, May 30th.

¹³ *Prescribed Norms: Women and Health in Canada and the United States Since 1800*, by Cheryl Lynn Krasnick Warsh (2010).

As Mother Hannah and her nurses were making their way westward, on April 24th a force of 200 Métis defeated 900 Canadian militia at Fish Creek, and at the Battle of Cut Knife on May 2nd the Cree held off a force of militia and regular soldiers armed with a Gatling gun¹⁴. Then on May 9th General Middleton concentrated his force and attacked Batoche where the greatly outnumbered Métis, fighting to the last bullet, were overwhelmed on May 12th. The Provisional Government collapsed, and Louis Riel surrendered on May 15th.

Cree resistance continued, however, and a NWMP detachment failed to subdue a Cree force at Frenchman's Butte on May 28th. Reinforcements pursued the Cree and finally disbursed them at Loon Lake on June 3rd, forcing the surrender of Chief Big Bear a month later. By the end of the year, Louis Riel and eight first nations leaders¹⁵ had all been hung.

Wounded from both sides received immediate treatment on the battlefield in first aid tents behind the lines, in conditions shifting from rain, to hail, to snow, to blazing heat. Doctors and soldiers trained in first aid treated the Militia and NWMP casualties, while the wives and daughters of Métis fighters tended their wounded. After the Battle of Fish Creek, 30 Militia wounded, and others who were sick, were carried over a two-day, 42-mile, journey to Saskatoon. There, they were first billeted in a school and about 20 private homes. Later the largest houses along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River were requisitioned as hospitals and the local women asked to help care for the wounded and sick.

Doctors Thomas Roddick (1846-1923)¹⁶ and Surgeon Major Campbell Douglas (1840-1909) worked in the Saskatoon Base Hospital for a few days but, as fighting continued, were needed to provide immediate medical and surgical care to the wounded and sick in Field Hospitals closer to the battles. On May 7th Roddick summoned nurse Loretta 'Kate' Miller from Winnipeg. A graduate of the Montréal General Hospital Nursing School, Miller was Head Nurse at Winnipeg General Hospital and had volunteered her services if needed. She arrived on May 12th, and immediately set to work organizing and directing the care of the wounded.

On the same day Nurse Miller reached Saskatoon the Battle of Batoche ended with the defeat of the Métis forces. About 80 men of the Dominion Force were wounded in the fighting and two days later 27 of them were sent to the already over-stretched hospital at Saskatoon. A week later, however, more nursing help arrived from Winnipeg General Hospital in the persons of nurses Phebe Parsons, Bessie Hamilton and Mathilda Elkin and Nursing Assistant Margaret Morris. The journey had taken them three days by train to Troy (now Qu'Appelle), Saskatchewan, then overland by horse-drawn democrat¹⁷.

¹⁴ The first use of a machine gun by the Canadian military.

¹⁵ Wandering Spirit (Kapapamahchakwew), Little Bear (Apaschiskoos), Walking the Sky (aka Round the Sky), Bad Arrow, Miserable Man, Iron Body, Ika (aka Crooked Leg) and Man Without Blood.

¹⁶ Later Dr. Sir Thomas Roddick.

¹⁷ Four-seater buggy.

*Two [three?] nurses, an assistant and two dressers arrived today [May 23rd] by trail and were at once put on duty under the superintendence of Nurse Miller. The latter had hitherto been most indefatigable in her attendance of the wounded. In fact, much of the success which attended the treatment of our wounded at Saskatoon was undoubtedly due to the skill, kindness and untiring devotion of Nurse Miller. Nurses Elkin and Hamilton are likewise deserving of praise for their unremitting attention to duty.*¹⁸

The nurses were tasked with implementing physician's orders, the medical treatment of the wounded, and monitoring patients' progress. They did not wear uniforms, but plain print dresses, covered with a small tea apron, and a Red Cross band on one arm for identification. Old linen, blankets, sheets and nightshirts for the wounded were received from the women of Winnipeg. When not on ward duty the nurses prepared medicinal and food supplies and made and rolled bandages. Off duty they slept in tents on cots by the river.

The wounded in the Saskatchewan Hospital were from both the Dominion Army and the opposing Métis force. Near the end of May a decision was taken to move those well enough to travel from the adhoc Saskatoon Hospital to a Base Hospital being established at Moose Jaw. They were taken aboard the steamer *Northcote* and a towed barge, carried to the elbow of the Saskatchewan River, then loaded on nine wagons and hauled overland to Moose Jaw, arriving on May 26, 1885 after journey of 100 miles by boat and 85 miles by wagon. Dr. Roddick and Moose Jaw resident Mrs. Agnes Bellamy¹⁹ organized volunteers to feed and care for the arriving wounded until Mother Hannah and her nurses arrived from Ontario four days later.

The Sisters of St. John the Divine nurses reached Moose Jaw on May 30, 1885, escorted by Toronto's first Medical Officer of Health, Dr. William Canniff (1830-1910)²⁰, who had volunteered to join Mother Hannah's team. Surgeon Major Douglas later recalled that; *"Their arrival was most opportune as some of the men were much in need of skilled nursing"*.²¹ Mrs. Bellamy later wrote that she and her local volunteers were also, *"... so glad to see the sisters, as we had no experience of dressing wounds"*.²²

¹⁸ Surgeon Major Campbell Mellis Douglas VC (1840-1909), quoted in *Caregiving on the Periphery: Historical Perspectives on Nursing and Midwifery in Canada*, edited by Myra Rutherford (2010).

¹⁹ Agnes Winona Cryderman-Bellamy was born in 1857 at Hampton, Ontario, north of Bomanville, where she married John Bellamy in 1878. After their marriage the couple lived for a time at Mitchell, Ontario, in Iowa, USA, at Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, and finally Moose Jaw, arriving there aboard the first CPR passenger train on May 1, 1883. They spent their first summer at Moose Jaw living in a tent she had made with her own hands. Agnes Cryderman-Bellamy was a community leader for six decades and among her many activities she played a leading role in founding the Moose Jaw General Hospital. She died at Moose Jaw in 1943.

²⁰ Toronto's first Medical Officer of Health 1883-1890. His son was serving with the Militia.

²¹ Surgeon Major Campbell Mellis Douglas VC (1840-1909), quoted in *Caregiving on the Periphery: Historical Perspectives on Nursing and Midwifery in Canada*, edited by Myra Rutherford (2010).

²² Agnes Bellamy quoted in *Moose Jaw Times Herald*, September 30, 2011, *Northwest Rebellion Injured Were Care for in Makeshift Moose Jaw Hospital*, by Leith Knight.

The Ontario nurses were met at the train by Dr. Roddick and General John Wimburn Laurie (1835-1912)²³, escorted to the Moose Jaw Hotel, on the northwest corner of Main and High Streets, and ceremoniously presented with the keys. The hotel, requisitioned by the army, was judged capable of accommodating 30 to 40 patients as well as medical attendants and nurses. As a hotel it claimed to offer the finest accommodation west of the Manitoba border, but Mother Hannah described the narrow two storey building as having interior walls covered only in tar paper decorated with white 'no smoking' signs.

There was no organization, and no facilities, so the hospital had to be made out of nothing".²⁴

The wounded were brought in on farm wagons and, as a consequence, they suffered much during their journey across the prairie. Still no complaint was heard, only expressions of relief when they were laid down in the little camp beds at the hospital.²⁵



Nurse Joan Matheson c1883

By the evening of the nurse's arrival arrangements were complete, and the Moose Jaw Base Hospital was in operation. The ground floor provided space for a 10-bed ward plus office, apothecary and kitchen. Upstairs were ten rooms accommodating two beds each and another 10 patients were squeezed into corridors and corners. Water was hauled in barrels and the privies were outdoors. The only room unoccupied by beds, served as both kitchen and dining room, but the oil-fired cook stove generated such a miasma of heat, smoke and odors that it was soon moved outside to a tent. The greatest nuisance that plagued the facility were gophers running in and out at will.



Moose Jaw Hotel 1883

... the Superior and four sisters of St. John arrived from Toronto, in charge of Dr. Conniff. As might be expected their services were of great value, they established order, regularity and vigilance, and won the respect and affection of all.²⁶

²³ Commander of the Nova Scotia Militia contingent and, at the time, the highest-ranking soldier in Canada.

²⁴ Mother Hannah quoted in *Caregiving on the Periphery: Historical Perspectives on Nursing and Midwifery in Canada*, edited by Myra Rutherford (2010).

²⁵ Mother Hannah quoted in *Moose Jaw Times Herald*, September 30, 2011, *Northwest Rebellion Injured Were Care for in Makeshift Moose Jaw Hospital*, by Leith Knight.

²⁶ Report of Surgeon General Darby Bergin (1826-1896), as published in *The Medical & Surgical History of the Canadian North-West Rebellion of 1885, as Told by Members of the Hospital Staff Corps* (1886).

According to a memoir of Mother Hannah, recreation for the walking wounded was also provided for;

... wounded men are not always ill; and after their wounds had been dressed, the patients able to leave their wards had nowhere else to go. A large marquee was put up and supplied with chairs and tables. Regular meals, at neatly ordered tables, were introduced. Cots, mattresses, and pillows were quickly converted into couches, neatly covered with the blue-and-white striped awning material which had been used for packing.

Then came the opening of the cases the good ladies from Toronto had sent: magazines, newspapers, chess-boards, cribbage, books, pipes, and tobacco even; so that reading, games, and smoking were arranged for.

No one was allowed to enter the new Recreation Room until all was in readiness; and then the delight of the convalescents was extreme. From that hour the wards were deserted, save by the bed patients who also rejoiced at being left in peace, and a very cheerful spirit pervaded the Hospital.

The ladies at the Presbyterian Church at Portage-la-Prairie offered help, and were asked to send fruit, new laid eggs, and fresh, light cake. The hampers which came from these generous helpers provided another pleasant surprise, when the wounded men were set down to feast on piles of delicious cake, and pyramids of fresh laid eggs.²⁷

The nursing team took up residence in a newly-built pine building adjoining the hospital, but on retiring the first night,

... they beheld a vast army of red creatures²⁸ crawling up and down the walls and ceilings. There was nothing to be done then to annihilate these invaders, so the Sisters were fain to yield up their couches to them while they sat on chairs, their garments closely gathered round them, and wished for the day, when steps were taken to prevent further annoyance from the pests.²⁹

Unlike the nurses working at Saskatoon, who wore ordinary dresses and aprons with only a red cross armband to signify their function, the nurses at Moose Jaw wore either their nun's habit or their uniforms from Bellevue and St. Luke's Hospital in New York, and London Ontario General Hospital.

²⁷ *A Memoir of the Life and Work of Hannah Grier Coome, Mother-Foundress of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, Toronto Canada*, by Sister Eleonora (1933).

²⁸ Probably Red Carpenter Ants (*Camponotus* spp.), the largest ant species in North America (0.3 to 1.0 in or 0.76 to 2.54 cm). Carpenter Ants tunnel into soft wood to build their colonies and are most active at night.

²⁹ *A Memoir of the Life and Work of Hannah Grier Coome, Mother-Foundress of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, Toronto Canada*, by Sister Eleonora (1933).

Supplies carried with them from Toronto, and those received from Portage-la-Prairie, were soon augmented by donations flowing in from patriotic and charitable organizations in Ontario and Quebec such as church groups, the Imperial Daughters of the Empire (IODE), lodges and communities at large. On May 29, 1885, only five days after the first casualties reached Moose Jaw from Saskatoon, and a full day before Joan Matheson and the Sisters of St. John team arrived there, the *Perth Courier* reported that her hometown had already despatched medical supplies to Moose Jaw and more were on their way;

Moose Jaw Hospital - The Town of Perth has contributed so far eight packages of hospital supplies for the use of our wounded volunteers in the North-West, at the above hospital, containing besides supplies purchased by cash subscription, the following articles donated by individuals, and kindly received and packed by Mr. Hart at his store:

7 white bed quilts, 17 pairs sheets, 40 pairs pillow slips, 10 pillows, 2 blankets, 24 nightshirts, 70 towels, a quantity of socks, 5 men's undershirts, 70 prepared bandages, 4 yards Canton flannel, 19 yards cretonne³⁰, 13 packages absorbent cotton, 3 leg rest cushions, 1 sofa cushion, 1 dozen camp stools, 3 dozen small pin cushions, several pieces of gray & bleached cotton, parcels of old cotton, old linen & flannel, parcels of prepared wipes for wounds, 2 trunks, 10 Bibles.

Joan Matheson, herself, was among the long list of those acknowledged in the *Courier* story as having contributed to the supplies then being packed at the Book & Stationary Store of John Semple Hart (1833-1917).

Remnants of Sitting Bull's Sioux Nation from Montana, led by his 'brother' Black Bull, were camped near the hospital. Black Bull was not a blood brother to Sitting Bull but was a close ally and had fought with him when the Sioux massacred General George Armstrong Custer's (1839-1876) U.S. 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in June 1876. Black Bull did not return to the United States in 1881 when Sitting Bull led most of the Sioux out of Saskatchewan and back to the Standing Rock Reservation along the border of North and South Dakota.³¹ Some of Black Bull's band at Moose Jaw sought treatment from the Sisters of St. John nurses and some of the Indian women worked at the hospital as cleaners. Black Bull reportedly regarded the nursing sisters as "good squaw"³² and gave Mother Hannah "an excellent picture of a buffalo"³³ he had drawn himself.



Black Bull c1836-c1897

In his final report to the Minister of Militia and Defence, Joseph-Philippe-René-Adolphe Caron (1867-1891), Surgeon General Darby Bergin (1826-1896) lauded the work of the Sisters of St. John nursing team.

³⁰ A heavy cotton fabric usually used for upholstery.

³¹ Black Bull was probably born c1835 in what is now South Dakota. One version of his story has him dying at Moose Jaw in 1897 while other versions have him returning to the U.S. in about 1890 and dying at Standing Rock in the early 1900s.

³² *A Memoir of the Life and Work of Hannah Grier Coome, Mother-Foundress of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, Toronto Canada*, by Sister Eleonora (1933).

³³ *Ibid.*

It was not until the removal to Moose Jaw, a more convenient and more healthful situation, to which hospital all were removed from Saskatoon that could be moved with safety, that, I accepted the services of the Sisters of St. John the Divine of Toronto. Dr. Roddick, the Deputy Surgeon General, and the Honourable Dr. Sullivan³⁴ bear testimony to the value of their services and have for them nothing but praise. Dr. Boyd³⁵ of London, who pronounced the hospitals at Saskatoon and Moose Jaw to be the best equipped and best managed he ever saw, also adds his testimony in their favour.

I must congratulate the lady Superior upon the economical way in which she performed her work and of the careful management of funds entrusted to her to cover the expenses of the return journey for herself and staff. Of the \$200 confided to her for that purpose, she returned, if my memory serves me well, \$70. May I be permitted to suggest that a contribution towards the furnishing to their new Home at Toronto would be a graceful act and would be appreciated and approved by the country.³⁶



Moose Jaw Base Hospital, June 1885 – Standing on porch L to R: Mother Hannah Grier Coome, Postulant Helena Frances, Postulant Helen Augustine Crouch, Novice Amelia Elizabeth Hare, two unknown injured soldiers, Nurse Joan Matheson, unknown civilian man, Nurse Mary Mackenzie and Nurse Florence Cottle. Dr. Thomas Roddick is the tall officer on the right holding a white pith helmet.

³⁴ Dr. Michael Sullivan (1838-1915), Purveyor General.

³⁵ Dr. Robert John Boyd (1858-1897), sent by Princess Louise to inspect Army Field Hospitals in the Canadian Northwest and to distribute funds raised in England by the Mansion House charity.

³⁶ Report by Dr. Michael Sullivan (1838-1915), Purveyor General, to Darby Bergin, M.P., Surgeon General, as published in *The Medical & Surgical History of the Canadian North-West Rebellion of 1885, as Told by Members of the Hospital Staff Corps* (1886).

With the rebellion suppressed, on June 26, 1885 Major-General John Wimburn Laurie issued brigade orders striking the Sisters of John Nursing Corps off the strength of the Moose Jaw station, while conveying,

... the feeling entertained by every member of the North-West Field Force, in expressing grateful appreciation of the patriotism that prompted these ladies in their offers of service to nurse their sick and wounded countrymen, and while all are grateful that greater loss of life and more serious sickness has not followed the field operations now happily almost at a close, it is most satisfactory to have received the proof that those who left their homes at their Country's Call have not been forgotten by the gentler sex; but that the ladies of Canada who have been so worthily represented by the party of nursing Sisters who are now returning, at the conclusion of their self-imposed duty, have given practical evidence of their willingness to share the privations and dangers inseparable from Hospital work on Active Service.

It is the wish of every Canadian soldier, that the ladies now returning to their civil duties may carry none but pleasant memories of their association with the Military Service of their Country; and, on behalf of his comrades, the Major-General tenders them sincere and hearty thanks.

During the 33 days the Sisters of St. John managed the Moosejaw Base Hospital they lost not a single patient.³⁷ On July 3rd Joan Matheson and her nursing colleagues dined with General Laurie and Staff,

... a very unusual thing for them, but it was an unusual occasion. After receiving the General's hospitality, they found the road to the station lined on both sides with soldiers, who gave them a great ovation.³⁸

Mother Hannah and her nursing Sisters accompanied the last 20 wounded men from Moose Jaw to Winnipeg by rail, turned them over to the General Hospital staff, and returned to Toronto where they established St. John's House, the city's first women's surgical hospital, and the earliest ancestor of today's St. John's Rehab Hospital, a part of the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center.

Although their tour of duty lasted only a month, Joan Matheson, together with the rest of Mother Hannah's team and the Winnipeg nurses proved that, in the hands of those trained for the job, nursing could, and should in the future, play a vital role in providing treatment to wounded soldiers. When, 15 years later, Canadian troops next saw action in the South African War³⁹, a full contingent of nurses was with them⁴⁰, as would be the case in all subsequent conflicts⁴¹.

³⁷ Although one man died after he was transferred to Winnipeg General Hospital.

³⁸ *A Memoir of the Life and Work of Hannah Grier Coome, Mother-Foundress of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, Toronto Canada*, by Sister Eleonora (1933).

³⁹ aka Boer War 1899-1902.

⁴⁰ Including Nurse Mary Ellen 'Minnie' Affleck (1874-1856) of Middleville. See profile elsewhere on this website.

⁴¹ Dozens of Perth and area women served as nurses in both World Wars.

Each of the twelve nurses who served at Saskatoon and Moose Jaw in the summer of 1885, the first nurses to serve officially with a Canadian armed force, were recognized for their contribution by receiving the same 'North West Canada 1885' silver medal as combatant members of the expedition.



Saskatoon Hospital -

- Head Nurse Loretta 'Kate' Miller was born at Valleyfield, Quebec, and trained as a nurse at Montréal General Hospital Nursing School. Her 'residence' was recorded on the North West Canada Medal roll⁴² as Stony Mountain, Manitoba, a short distance north of Winnipeg.
- Nurse Phebe Parsons was recorded on the North West Canada Medal roll as a resident of Winnipeg
- Nurse Elizabeth 'Bessie' Hamilton, born 1838 in Ireland, trained at St. Thomas' Hospital's St. John's House, London, England. St. John's House was founded in 1848 as a "*Training Institution for Nurses for Hospitals, Families and the Poor*". The North West Canada Medal roll recorded Hamilton's address as c/o St. John's House, suggesting that in 1885 she had only recently arrived in Canada. In the 1891 census she is enumerated as a widow and nurse still living in Winnipeg.
- Nurse Mathilda Elkin was recorded on the North West Canada Medal roll as a resident of Fort Garry (i.e. Winnipeg), Manitoba.
- Nursing Assistant Margaret Morris was recorded on the North West Canada Medal roll as a resident of Winnipeg.

Moose Jaw Hospital -

- Head Nurse, Mother Sarah Hannah Roberta Grier-Coome, born 1837 at Carrying Place⁴³, Ontario, a widow, trained as a nurse at Trinity Hospital, New York, died at Toronto in 1921.

⁴² See LAC Military Medals, Honors and Awards 1812-1969, www.bac-lac.gc.ca

⁴³ Near Picton.

- Sister Amelia 'Aimée'⁴⁴ Elizabeth Hare, trained as a nurse at Trinity Hospital, New York.
- Sister Helen Augustine Crouch, born 1858 in Bermuda (of parents born in Bermuda), a widow⁴⁵.
- Sister Helena Frances, born 1855 in Scotland, trained as a nurse at the Mack School of Nursing, St. Catherines General and Marine Hospital, St. Catherines Ontario.
- Nurse Florence Caroline Cottle, born 1858 at Woodstock, Ontario, trained as a nurse at General and Marine Hospital Nursing School, St. Catharines, Ontario, in 1886 became 'Superintendent' of London Ontario General Hospital Training School. She moved to the United States in 1888 and became 'First Supervising Nurse' at St. Luke's Hospital Nursing School, New York City, in 1894. She was later Head Nurse at Arnot-Ogden Hospital, Elmira, New York, and proprietor of St. Paula's Private Hospital, Elmira. She died at Boston in 1911.
- Nurse Mary Campbell MacKenzie born 1859 at Georgetown, Ontario, trained as a nurse at Bellevue Hospital School of Nursing, New York. In 1888 she married Dr. Jasper Jewett Garmany (1859-1947), Visiting Surgeon at Bellevue Hospital. She died at Long Island, New York in 1931.
- Nurse Joan Matheson returned to her nursing career in New York City following her tour of duty on the Canadian frontier. She appears to have briefly re-joined the staff at St. Luke's Hospital until moving back to Bellevue when it established its 'Training School for Male Nurses' in 1888. In January 1889 she was appointed Head Nurse of one of that school's five wards at a salary of \$360 per year. The Bellevue school was the first to recruit and train young men in the nursing profession;

*First, to give to Bellevue Hospital a corps of educated male nurses, and second, to furnish a new calling and profession to young men whose education and sense of duty leads them to a career which must alleviate human pain and suffering.*⁴⁶

In 1891 the school graduated its first class of 18 male nurses and Head Nurse Joan Matheson retired later that year, age-49. She returned to Perth where she lived for most of the next 25 years, although she made at least one trip to the UK, probably including to her birthplace in Scotland, in the summer of 1912.⁴⁷

Johanna 'Joan' Matheson, age-74, died at Matheson House on Gore Street in Perth, on June 11, 1916 and was buried in the Matheson family plot at Elmwood Cemetery.

- Ron W. Shaw (2018)

⁴⁴ 'Aimée', a French feminine given name, translated as 'Beloved', suggesting perhaps some francophone ancestry.

⁴⁵ As per 1881 census when she was living in nurse's residence at General & Marine Hospital, St. Catharines, Ontario.

⁴⁶ *Bellevue Hospital Training School for Male Nurses, Annual Report, 1892.*

⁴⁷ American Immigration records; SS *Minneapolis* from London, September 7, 1912, arriving New York September 17, 1912, "in transit to Perth, Canada, Arthur James Matheson, Eliza Matheson, Joan Matheson".