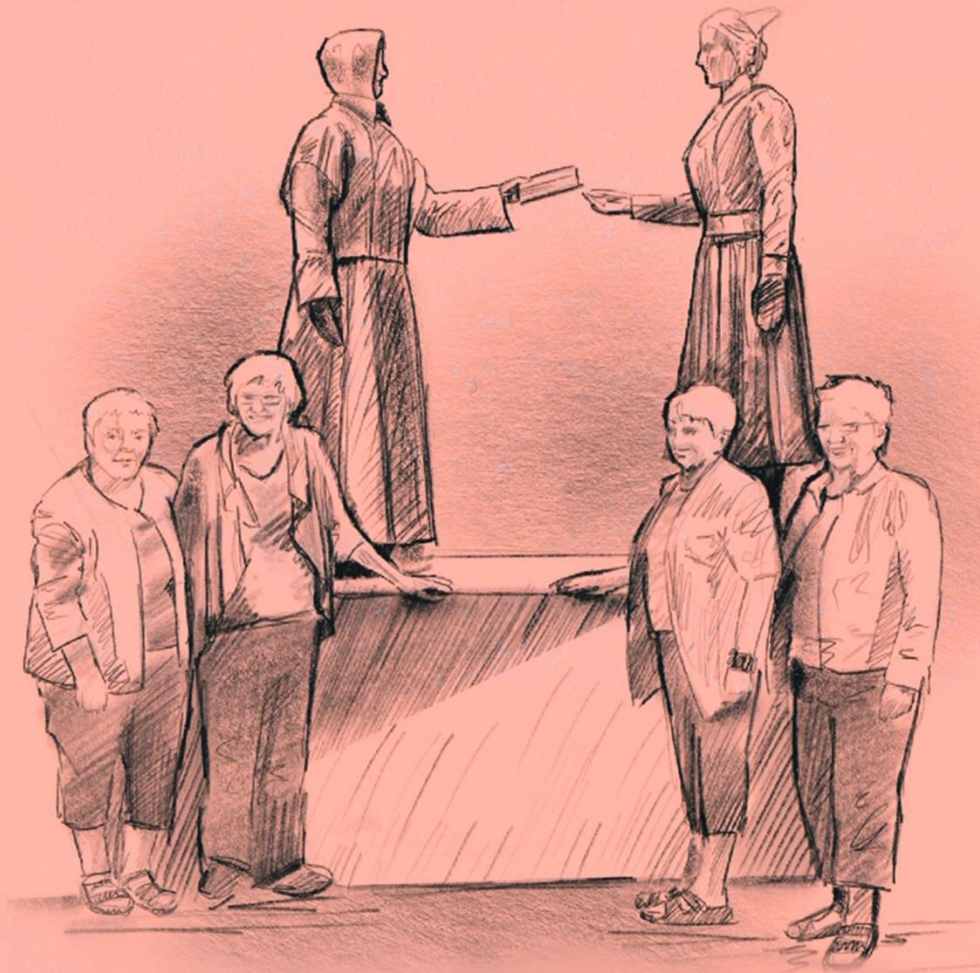


From First to Last: The Nuns and Nightingales Memorial Story



Commissioned by the Alumni Association
of the Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing

Chapter 1: History

The history of the Grey Nuns, and the nurses of the Holy Cross Hospital is one of resilience, dedication, and pure nerve from first to last. These women formed a community stretching over a hundred year history and defined by their actions, and the simple conviction to do what they felt called to do, no matter the odds against them. When a thing is right to do, then that thing must simply be done.

The story begins with need.

Fort Calgary was established in 1876 by Colonel James Macleod and immediately began to grow. The Canadian Pacific Railway came to Calgary in 1883, bringing with it work, expansion, supplies and people. However, much of the manual labour was dangerous at this time; more people meant more risk of sickness, and since Calgary was such a new town, and in many ways isolated from the rest of the blossoming country, there were very little in the way of medical professionals, supplies, or charity to help the city grow. Bishop Vital Grandin had sent word to a number of religious institutions in the East. His request was answered by the Sisters of Charity in Montreal, asking for nuns to come and establish a much needed hospital.

After two years of preparation, Sister Agnes Carroll, Sister Olivia Beauchemin, Sister Elizabeth Valiquette, and the young Postulant Sister Madeline Beemer, later called Sister Gertrude, set out from Montreal on January 21, 1891 in order to bring much needed medical treatment to the swelling community of Calgary. Who can say what thoughts went through their heads as they passed through frozen hills and snow sheeted prairies to the heart of the prairie? Calgary's first Grey Nuns to enter Calgary came with \$73.75 between them, and an incalculable conviction to care for the people building a city in the prairie. In spite of their lack of resources, the four sisters soon procured a place to start... a small building with four beds no running water, one stove, and candlelight as the only illumination in the night. The first patient, it is said, was so poor that all he had was Typhoid. Yet this small shelter became the fortress from which the nuns would oversee the battle against illness, injury, and death. They were humble, courageous, and vital to the foundation of Calgary. The institution they founded would go on to house the first open heart surgery in Alberta, the first cancer center in Alberta, and many other achievements.

Who can say whether Calgary would have thrived without the faithful services provided by these women? How many families owe the continuation of their lines to these four women, who stepped off a train in the middle of the night? Many others from this time have been noted and honoured, even Bishop Grandin

has had a school named after him, but the nuns and the nurses they trained remained largely unsung, until four alumni from the Holy Cross Hospital decided to take on the task of immortalizing the institution of the Grey Nun and the Holy Cross Hospital. They did not exactly step off a train in the middle of the night, but they certainly did embark on their task with no idea the challenges they would face, knowing only the need for remembrance of their heritage.

After 105 years of service, when the Holy Cross Hospital was privatized under the Klein government, the graduates of the Grey Nuns set out to memorialize the achievements of their institution.

Chapter 2: Idea

The Alumni Association of the Holy Cross School of Nursing was founded in 1926. Besides giving the alumni a welcomed opportunity to stay in touch, it also provided a method for the women to continue their good work in the Calgary community. Though largely retired, the Holy Cross Alumni had never stopped living the spirit and ideal which the Grey Nuns began. They do charity works, feed the hungry, provide a bursary for a nursing student at the University of Calgary every year, and more.

During a regular meeting of the Holy Cross Alumni in March of 2007, President Rita Williamson (McAleese-1951) made a suggestion to her fellow nursing alumni. Her suggestion was simple... it was the 100th anniversary of the Holy Cross School of Nursing, and she felt that the nuns and nurses deserved commemoration. The alumni agreed immediately; it seemed a worthy idea, and simple enough. From that meeting four of the Holy Cross Alumni, Rita Williamson (McAleese-1951), Barbara Nesselbeck (Barrett-1960), Dolores Bramall (Tench-1958), and Anne Busch (Silbernagel-1958), set out as the Commemoration Committee. If only they knew the four year endeavour that would come out of that moment... well, they would have done it anyway. At this time, they had in mind a modest figure, perhaps something that could be set quietly on a tabletop in a corner

of city hall. Perhaps this is appropriate, because the first Grey Nuns came with modest ambitions too, with no way of knowing how far their actions would carry them. Just as the first home of the Holy Cross Hospital was only a hint of what was to come, so too none of the society could know how far their simple goal would carry them.

From that meeting four alumni set out with a simple goal: find a way to honour the dedication, resilience, and charity of the Grey Nuns and their nurses.

It was 2007 Calgary was in a recession, and as with the original four Grey Nuns there simply was not enough money to go around.

It was approaching the 100th anniversary of the Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing, and now, as then, when a thing is right to do, then it simply must be done. The Holy Cross School of Nursing had closed in 1979, after producing 2409 nurses. The women of the Grey Nuns deserved a legacy.

In the annual news letter, the Commemorative Committee described their goal to memorialize the Holy Cross, its nurses and its nuns, and received a generally positive response. Their initial idea was a wall featuring the names of the graduates.

For the Committee, the first step was to pursue official channels. The four women spoke at city hall twice, and approached every Politician in the city, where they were encouraged but financially unsupported. One Alderman suggested the

women build and paint chairs to sell at markets. No other Government official in the city had any better ideas. They all applauded the women, and verbally supported their goal, but there was no money or valuable ideas put forward. To begin with they were not even able to secure a location for the project. Possible sights included Fort Calgary, City Hall, the University of Calgary, Rocky View Hospital, and other historic sites around the city, yet nothing quite felt right, and they were unable to get a commitment anyway.

The first donations to the project began to trickle in as ten and twenty dollar bills, mailed from all over by the Alumni. All together they raised \$23, 494.78 as of April 28, 2009. Not bad for some retired nurses. The Sisters of Charity in Montreal, who sent the first Grey Nuns, sent a cheque and their prayers. When Barb got their cheque in the mail, she called Rita up and told her the good news. They had gotten \$1, 500 from the Sisters of Charity... however, when Barb then showed that cheque to her husband he informed her that it was for \$15, 000. Well, Barb called Rita right back and told her that the good news had gotten better.

Another donation of note was when one day Anne Sahara (Cumic-1951), a classmate living in Kansas, USA, sent a Canadian thousand dollar bill in the mail. Rita opened the envelope and could not believe her eyes when the bill fell out. It was very lucky the letter made the trip up. Nobody had ever seen a thousand dollar

bill before, as they were no longer being produced. The group photocopied it for posterity and sold it off to Mark Williamson.

As the Commemorative Committee toured the city, speaking with different Aldermen and other Government officials, speaking at City Hall and even with the Mayor, one thing that stuck out to Barb in particular was that everywhere they went there were statues and busts of cowboys, carpenters, politicians, lots of horses and lots of cows, but they did not see any women, and especially no nurses.

The more the women looked around, the more they found the need to see their project through. They needed to find somewhere where the final project would be safe through the years. Though they were making slow progress, and the shape of their goal was shifting, the importance of their task was becoming ever more clear.

The idea was beginning to take shape. A brother of Anne Busch recommended the Begg's at StudioWest and an appointment was made. However, when the Committee met with Don and Shirley Begg. The married sculpting team had made a name for themselves with their pioneer spirit and their work casting historically accurate bronze figures. The idea of a wall featuring all 2409 names of the Holy Cross alumni was replaced by a pair of statues, featuring a Grey Nun handing a graduation certificate to a nurse. For two thirteen inch figures and a base, the price was \$20, 000 before tax. The Begg's left the Committee with

homework, however. In order to ensure accuracy, they needed the Nun's habit and the nurses uniform.

Well, the nursing uniform was easy enough. Many of the alumni still had theirs, as well as the exact rules of how to wear them. They certainly all recalled being sent back if their uniforms did not pass the morning inspection.

The Grey Nuns habit, however, was a different matter. The Begg's had to make two trips to St. Boniface Convent in Winnipeg, where the habits were made. They met with Sister Ell to get the exact specifications they needed.

Even more of a challenge were the shoes. The shoes worn by the nurses and nuns were an important part of the uniform. While the alumni recalled the strict guidelines regarding the care and upkeep of their shoes, however nobody had kept them. Without a historically accurate representation it would be very difficult for the Begg's to authentically portray the footwear on the statues. It is not like they could just be wearing sneakers after all. To solve the problem, Anne Bush approached the Military Museum in Calgary, who had a pair of nurse's shoes from that time period that they lent out to the Committee, so that the Begg's could replicate them.

As for the certificate being handed over, that was Rita's own.

Chapter 3: Progress

On July 22, 2009 the Calgary Herald newspaper announced that the Macnab wing of the Holy Cross Hospital, a proud and stout structure full of history, was becoming an official historic sight, meaning it would never be torn down. This declaration came just in time, as the building was being considered for demolishing in order to make way for a highway through the city. The Macnab wing was named after Dr. D. S. Macnab, a long time surgeon of the Holy Cross.

The Committee felt they had found the ideal space for their commemoration. Now all they needed was a way in. This way was provided by Alderwoman Diane Colley-Urquhart, herself a former nurse, who offered to put in a call to Drs. Peter Huang, the new owners of the Holy Cross building. Dr. Huang agreed, and so the Commemorative Committee and Alderwoman Colley-Urquhart headed down to the building to look around. Originally they were thinking a small bust in the lobby, but during their tour they found the perfect space, a little green space outside of the building, by the street. “Have you considered making it bigger?” asked the Alderwoman as they inspected the space.

“We would need to find more money,” replied the other women... yet it was a good idea, and one that was echoed by Don and Shirley Begg when they met with the Committee. However, the price grew with the scope of the project... for

life sized +10% sculptures it would cost \$155, 450. It was a stiff price, but a worthy cause, and the greater scope would elevate the memorial display to a proper monument, visible not only to those who passed through the lobby of the old hospital, but to any who passed through the scenic park outside the historic Macnab wing, or down 2nd Street. The Commemorative Committee resolved to continue seeking out the necessary funds.

The turning point in the project came when John Williamson, Rita's son, sat down and wrote what he playfully called a "begging letter" to all the high rollers in the city. As he pointed out, many of the most powerful men in the city had relied on the care of the Holy Cross Hospital at some point in their lives.

The first to reply was Allan Markin, owner of Canadian Natural Resources Ltd., who called up Rita on the phone one day and asked how he could know they were a real society. She said that they were a society, with documentation and history, and so he sent over a courier to pick up the proof. Once he had it, Mr. Markin committed \$42, 000 to the project.

In thanks the alumni offered to take him out for lunch. At first he replied that they ought to save their money for the project, but by the end of the conversation he had decided that would join them for lunch. Just their luck, though, the place they chose had a problem with their grill that day, and the waitress told them all they had was meat loaf. Mr. Markin answered that he quite liked meat loaf, and he

would even be okay with a hot dog. He went on to note that the four women looked to be in good health, and that they must have been taking their vitamin D.

Another significant response to the begging letter was Mr. Ronald P Mathison of Matco Investments Ltd., who was actually a cousin of Barb's. He had three sisters and three cousins who had graduated from the Holy Cross. At his request, the Committee had occasion to meet in his office, where they were asked to keep Mr. Mathison apprised of any developments for the duration of the project. The ladies of the Commemorative Committee would diligently keep his office informed of all progress over the coming years.

These events really helped the Committee build confidence, and soon they were approaching many other business people in the city. Even the Mayor of Calgary at the time admitted to being born at the Holy Cross, though he was still unwilling to commit any money. Still, the money began to come in from other charitable individuals and organizations. One notable donation came from the Cliff Bungalow-Mission Community itself, where the Holy Cross Hospital was located, and from Bob and Nola Rintoul, who contributed the base, plaque, and the endowment in memory of Edith Bancroft (Burke-1935).

The monument was getting paid for, which did not exactly mean that it would be smooth sailing in the coming months.

With the sculptor finally paid for, and its construction well underway, the date was set for the unveiling on September 25, 2011. However, the work of the Commemorative Committee was a long way from finished.

In April of 2011, it was a cold day in Cochrane. Many of the Alumni and their families attended Studio West to see the finished monuments before the unveiling. Of everyone there only one person made a negative comment, that the nurse should have been wearing a cape because she was outside. Everyone else was impressed. The Committee brought cookies and snacks, and despite the cold it was a good time for all. Privately at this time, John Williamson spoke with Don Begg about creating a smaller, table sized replica of the monument for Rita.

The project was going well, however with every new progression there were further costs, which of course meant more work for the Committee. With the monument finally paid for, and nearing completion, the Committee discovered that they must also provide a concrete plinth to hold the weight of the monument, and elevate it. Once they secured the plinth, they had to have the land surveyed, and landscaped, and they needed to apply for an endless amount of permits. The Committee even had to interview the residents around the Holy Cross to see if anyone would protest them. Thankfully, none did.

“Every time we turned around,” recalls Rita, shaking her head. “There was something else to do, and somebody wanted another five thousand dollars.”

“But we had fun,” added Barb, smiling. “We had a lot of fun, and we certainly got to know each other well.”

It was decided that some aspects of the project would have to be postponed until after the unveiling. The landscaping, for instance, would be postponed.

At last, ready or not, the unveiling day had come. On September 25th, 2011, after working for four years and raising an amount in excess of \$200, 000, it was time to show what had been achieved. In front of over one hundred Alumni, friends, family, institutional representatives, and even some press the Commemorative Committee stood triumphant beneath the proud statue of their history. At last the Nuns and Nightingales monument was unveiled.

It was a great day.

In attendance were several special guests including Bishop Henry, Sister Germain Hetu (1958), a representative from the Grey Nuns, John Marr from the City of Calgary, Drs. Ian, Peter, and John Huang. Dr. Patricia Pitsel, a celebrated Calgarian Psychologist Educator, gave a powerful speech entitled “Holy Cross Memories.” Bishop Henry blessed the monument. When it came to the ribbon cutting, two very special ladies preformed the ceremony. Eileen Walshaw (Schoppe-1929), who had graduated from the Holy Cross in 1929 and at the time was 102 years old, and Ada Griffith (1944) did the ribbon cutting together.

The Committee even placed a time capsule inside the plinth, behind the bronze plaque. Among the contents of the time capsule are the names of all the graduates between 1910 and 1979, the names of the Sisters between 1891 and 1971, a number of pins, crosses, memorabilia, and nursing implements used during the tenure of some of the alumni. All the names were hand written by Dolores Bramall, a lengthy and caring task all itself. Unbeknownst to the Committee one of the Alumni, Betty Savor (Fitzpatrick-1966), took it upon herself to record the event, so they even had a recording to put on the website.

Chapter 4: Legacy

With the statue unveiled, there was still work to do. The small garden surrounding the monument had to be adjusted, elevated, and beautified. That meant more money, and more permits. The Commemorative Committee had done the leg work on getting landscaping quotes and surveys when Mr. Mathison asked to see the quote. He immediately dismissed the price as too much, and decided to cover the landscaping costs himself, in exchange for three copies of the Nuns and Nightingales history book that he could give to his relatives. Like a real gentleman he never did end up sharing how much the project cost him.

Dr. Peter Huang, Dr. Ian Huang, and Dr. John Huang the new owners of the Holy Cross Hospital, were an unexpected challenge for the Commemorative Committee. They were men who was particularly busy and hard to reach, but progress could not continue on the site without their participation. One day in October of 2012, while taking a look at the site with Ron Mathison, the Commemorative Committee spotted Dr. Ian Huang walking through the parking lot from his car.

Having seen Dr. Huang, Rita cheerfully declared “lets talk to him now” and Mr. Mathison needed no further encouragement. He stepped in front of Dr. Huang as he headed back to the building, pointed over his shoulder, and asked “Do you

know who those ladies are?” Dr. Huang nodded warily. He knew. “Well, they want to do some work on the property. It is to your benefit and it won’t cost you anything.”

Having heard that, Dr. Huang agreed to the landscaping, and the planning for the required work to complete the monument site was able to continue. Barb prepared the written agreement for the landscaping, sent it over, and got it back with Dr. Huang’s signature. By the end of 2012 the landscaping was finished, and the area around the monument now looked as good as the statues themselves. At last, the work of the Commemorative Committee was over.

As the Nuns once handed over the nursing certificates to their students, so too had the Holy Cross Alumni handed over their legacy to the city, to stand immortal and proud, a testament to the noble work done by all the graduates of the Holy Cross Hospital, from first to last.



Frame work.



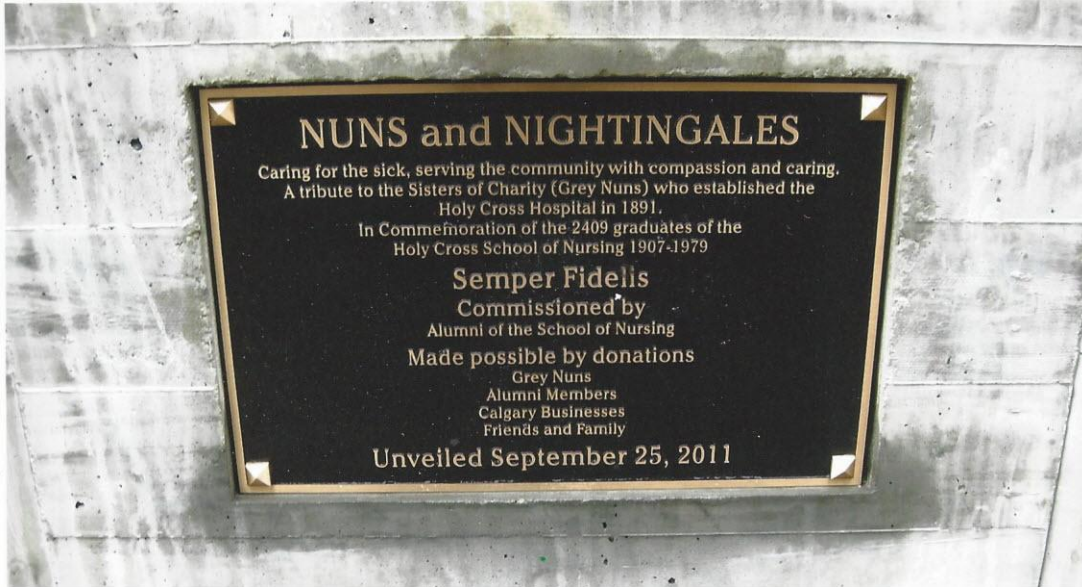
Works in Progress.



The Time Capsule located beneath the statues.



The Day of the Unveiling. September 25th, 2011.



The Plaque beneath the statue.



The Certificate being handed from the Grey Nun to the Nursing Graduate.



The finished product.

Dates of Interest

March, 2007 Rita delivers her speech to the Alumni Association

July 22, 2009 Macnab Wing made a Historic Site

July 27, 2010 The Commemorative Committee signed the official agreement with Studio West for \$148, 000 + GST

June 21, 2010 Mr. Allan Markin responded to begging letter

July 6 2,011 Dr. Peter Huang signed the Consent for Survey

July 28, 2010 Accounting schedule set with Studio West

July 14, 2011 Bon and Nola Rintoul invested \$15, 000 for Base, Plaque, and Maintenance

Sunday, September 25, 2011 The Unveiling

October, 2012 Landscaping provided by Mr. Ron Mathison began

Acknowledgements

Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns)

Alumni Association of Holy Cross Family & Friends

Allan Markin

Ron Mathison— “In honour of my mother Theresa Cush and in recognition of her sisters and sister-in laws, Catherine Cush (1943), Eileen Cush (1945), Betty Cush (Kean -1943), Shirley Cush (1953), and Mona Cush (Merchant- 1960)

Nola & Bob Rintoul— Contribution for base, plaque and yearly maintenance in memory of Kathleen Edith Bancroft (Burke-1935)

Mark Williamson— Enerflow Industries Inc.

Larry Lindholm— Enerflow Industries Inc.

Mr. & Mrs. Pat Toole

Cliff Bungalow/Mission Community Association

Bow River Management



The Commemorative Committee. From Left to right, Barb Nesselbeck (Barrett-1960), Dolores Bramall (Tench-1958), Rita Williamson (McAleese- 1951), and Anne Busch (Silbernagel- 1958).



Alex Williamson, grandson to Rita, is to have had a small part in the history of the Grey Nuns, the Holy Cross, and the Alumni Association of the Holy Cross School of Nursing by chronicling the story of the Commemorative Committee and the Nuns and Nightingales Memorial.

Cover Art by Alex Proppe.