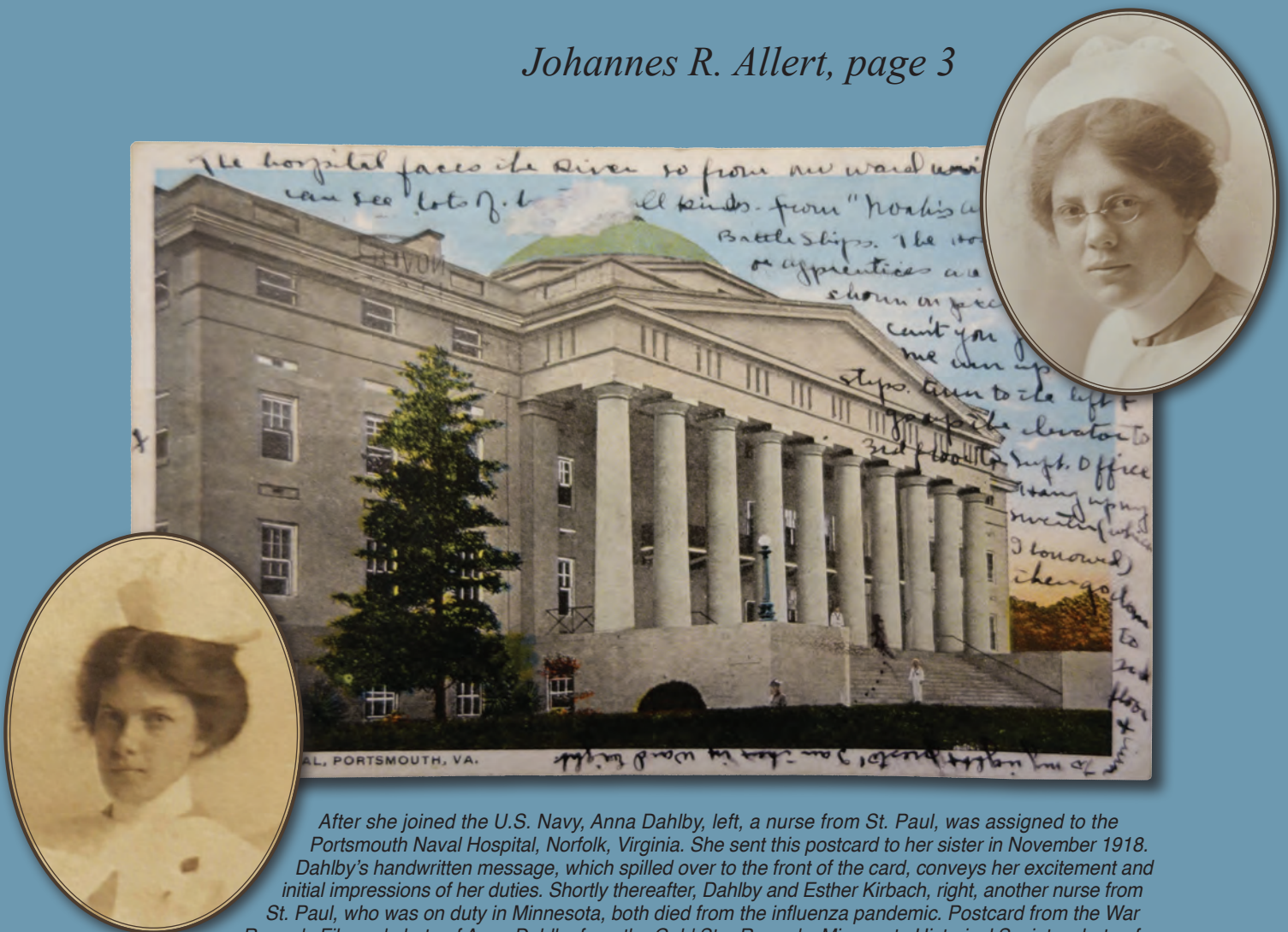


The Ties That Bind: Mounds-Park Nurses and the Great War

Johannes R. Allert, page 3



After she joined the U.S. Navy, Anna Dahlby, left, a nurse from St. Paul, was assigned to the Portsmouth Naval Hospital, Norfolk, Virginia. She sent this postcard to her sister in November 1918. Dahlby's handwritten message, which spilled over to the front of the card, conveys her excitement and initial impressions of her duties. Shortly thereafter, Dahlby and Esther Kirbach, right, another nurse from St. Paul, who was on duty in Minnesota, both died from the influenza pandemic. Postcard from the War Records File and photo of Anna Dahlby from the Gold Star Records, Minnesota Historical Society; photo of Esther Kirbach from the Mounds-Midway Nursing Museum, St. Paul.

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Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

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A Message from the Editorial Board

In this issue, Johannes Allert shares the stories of nurses trained at the Mounds-Park Nursing School who volunteered to serve in the military during World War I. In addition to helping wounded servicemen, they faced an unexpected challenge: the devastating influenza epidemic of 1918. At the same time, as Don Empson tells us, John Wardell was operating his Highland Spring Company, which furnished water from a natural spring near Randolph and Lexington to homes and businesses throughout the city. During Prohibition, Wardell's associated soft drink business had a spike in popularity! And M.D. Salzberg describes how, at the Minnesota State Fair, a Boy Scout Service Camp gave scouts the opportunity to live in a tent city while assisting visitors during that Event. Don't miss John Guthmann's review of our latest book, *Fort Snelling and the Civil War*. Come out to hear Steve Osman, its author, at our annual Members' Event on September 14! Please see our website at www.rchs.com or call 651-222-0701 for more details or to reserve tickets.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

The Ties That Bind:

Mounds-Park Nurses and the Great War

Johannes R. Allert

In the weeks leading up to the Armistice that ended World War I, Anna Dahlby, a graduate from Mounds-Park Nursing School, arrived at Portsmouth Naval Station in Norfolk, Virginia, to begin her new career as a navy nurse. In a letter to her family in St. Paul, she confessed to feeling homesick, but quickly added, “I am so happy and content as can be. I am so glad I am in service and shall surely never regret that I enlisted.”¹ Her comments mirrored thousands of other women’s sentiments and reflect their evolving roles brought on by the Great War. Assisted by the American Red Cross, the United States military actively recruited women for service. Possessing discipline, training, credentials, and the desire to serve beyond one’s self, Dahlby, along with twenty-four graduates from Mounds-Park School of Nursing, heeded President Woodrow Wilson’s exhortations to “Make the World Safe for Democracy.”

Credentialed Nursing

Credentialed nursing emerged from the late nineteenth century as the new standard in Minnesota and throughout the nation.² Consequently, the need for accredited schools also increased. Established in 1907 under the auspices of Northwestern Baptist Hospital Association, Mounds-Park School of Nursing was one of several in the metro area and Mounds-Park Sanitarium served as a training platform where students put nursing theory into practice.

Embracing a holistic model, the school’s objectives were clear: to prepare qualified women in the arts and skills necessary to provide intelligent and scientific nursing care while ministering to the physical, mental, and spiritual needs of the sick. While adhering to these high standards, nurses were also expected to foster within themselves a sense of spiritual purpose “so that she may take her place as a valued member of the community in which she lives.”³ Although not required, some nurses chose careers as medical missionaries and served in locations as distant as China.⁴ High educational standards combined with strict religious and moral

codes created a cadre of trained, certified, and disciplined staff willing to serve where and when needed.⁵ Although eager to receive nurses, the military was unprepared to recruit, screen, and equip the massive influx of volunteers and therefore relied upon the abilities of the American Red Cross to assist.

Possessing both global and financial resources that rivaled America’s military, the Red Cross aided the allied war effort in a myriad of ways. Aside from providing financial and materiel support for humanitarian relief, the organization served as the military’s official, albeit temporary, reserve source that provided credentialed nurses for the army’s and navy’s emerging Nurse Corps. The military accepted nothing less.⁶ A nurse from the Red Cross could opt to take the oath of service and become a member of the military, but this arrangement was not reciprocal.

Military service emphasizes obedience, service above self, reverence for traditions, a recognition and respect for structure, and discipline. Furthermore, military service requires adherence to uniform standards in both appearance and bearing. Military personnel are familiar with rank structure and the responsibili-



After the United States entered World War I, the American Red Cross produced this recruitment poster to encourage young women to serve as nurses. Poster by Dan Smith. Poster courtesy of the Mounds-Midway Nursing Museum, St. Paul.

ties associated with it. When required, they must be willing to travel and serve in distant, sometimes foreign, places.

Similarly, the women inculcated within a religious-centered environment emerged from their training as nurses with, at the very least, an understanding of that Christian ethos. Those nurses who volunteered for military service readily identified and adapted to that structured environment. These were the ties that bound them together and while neither the military nor the medical community were ever fully ready, both were sufficiently trained to deal with crisis situations. Whether it was mass industrial warfare on the Western Front or the influenza pandemic that struck



The Class of 1912 at the Mounds-Park Nursing School. Esther Kirbach is second from the right. The author's grandmother, Bertha Stoltz-Allert, is in the center. Photo courtesy of the Mounds-Midway Nursing Museum, St. Paul.

in the fall of 1918, the titanic events that unfolded in the early twentieth century severely tested both of those institutions.

War Wounds and Pandemic

Esther Kirbach, a 1912 graduate from Siren, Wisconsin, became one of the school's earliest Red Cross volunteers. Soon after, other nurses followed. In all, twenty-four nurses from Mounds-Park Sanitarium served in the ranks of the military. Of these, nineteen went into the U.S. Navy while the remaining five volunteered for service in the U.S. Army. Of those within the naval service, thirteen were sent to Great Lakes Naval Station in Illinois, four to Portsmouth Naval Station in Virginia, and two to Mare Island, California.⁷ Until 1918, the navy had little need for nurses, but this changed dramatically as the U.S. Marines went into action overseas. Filling out the U.S. Army's 2d Division, the 4th U.S. Marine Brigade participated in some of the fiercest fighting of the war, adding another nickname "Devil Dog" to their growing list of monikers.

The cost was heavy, particularly during the final months of the war. From September 11 to November 11, 1918, the Marines fought in three separate actions at St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne (Blanc Mont), and the Meuse River crossing resulting in 3,027 casualties.⁸ Immediate treatment occurred at Army Base Hospitals but the responsibility for long-term care and recovery fell to the U.S. Navy. Accordingly,

patients were promptly shipped from Brest, France, to the various naval hospitals state-side for additional medical care and rehabilitation. Not included in the figures were the ever-growing casualties brought on by the great pandemic—influenza.

The influenza pandemic, first reported in Boston on September 7, 1918, quickly spread across the United States and throughout the world. Labeled the "Spanish Flu," the pandemic overwhelmed the nation's social and medical structure. This vicious strain of influenza

attacked the lungs preventing adequate levels of oxygen from entering the blood stream. Subsequently, victims often developed severe pneumonia and essentially drowned in their own bloody secretions pooling in their lungs. Some turned so dark from the lack of oxygen that people feared the "Black Death" had returned.

Medical experts eventually identified the problem, but they lacked a cure. To contain its spread, officials issued temporarily closings of schools, theaters, and even churches.⁹ Undaunted, one St.



The Mounds-Park nurses who volunteered for service in the Red Cross in 1917. Photo courtesy of the Mounds-Midway Nursing Museum, St. Paul.

Paul pastor relied upon the newspaper to spread his Sunday gospel sermon to his congregation and anyone else interested.¹⁰

In the neighboring state of Iowa, Camp Dodge served as an induction center for thousands of Minnesotans entering service and it was there that many succumbed to the flu. Conditions deteriorated to the point where a wholesaler in funeral supplies and mortuary service in Des Moines Iowa, included a letter with the deceased warning relatives of the late soldier that:

... it has proven an impossible task to give the remains of the deceased the complete preparation for burial that would be insisted upon in normal times. It is possible in this instance that the work of embalming may not be satisfactory to us or relatives of the deceased and that for this reason it is advised that if the casket be opened, the difficulties under which the embalmers have had to perform their services, be remembered by those interested.¹¹

Exacerbating the problem was one of the worst natural disasters in state history. Known as the Moose Lake forest fire, it occurred on October 12, 1918, leaving destruction, 450 deaths, and hundreds displaced.¹² The Minnesota Chapter of the Red Cross quickly dispatched medical supplies, clothing donations, and relief teams, including Esther Kirbach who was assigned to St. Luke's Hospital in Duluth, Minnesota.

Anna and Rose

Meanwhile, her fellow alums entered the ranks of the U.S. Navy to care for the wounded and injured Marines returning home from war-torn France. Among them were Anna Marie Dahlby (Class of 1916) and Anna Rosalie Olson (Class of 1917). Archived letters chronicling their experiences provide insights into their roles and reactions to military life. Due to the hurried nature of their profession and work schedules, their letters often resemble diaries written in real time. Far from the frontlines, these stateside nurses cared for the injured and dying, provided solace to their next-of-kin, endured hardships and shortages, encountered unwanted sexual advances, and faced a deadly enemy in the form of the influenza pandemic.

The second eldest of four children born to Carl and Anna Dahlby, Anna's parents

were among the cofounders of Mounds-Park Sanitarium.¹³ When Anna graduated from St. Paul's Bethel Academy in 1910, she enrolled at Rasmussen Business College. After working as a secretary in her father's plumbing business, she embarked upon a new career path in health care. Accepted into Mounds-Park in 1913, she graduated in May of 1916. Employed as a dietitian at Mounds-Park, Anna heeded the clarion call for service and traveled to Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia. Just one day after her twenty-sixth birthday, she joined the U.S. Navy on October 24, 1918. Photographs of Anna feature a young woman with a quick smile and her letters express warmth, humor, and affection.

Born in 1887, Anna Rosalie Olson, or "Rose," as she preferred, was the eldest of seven children who emigrated with her Swedish parents when she was just nine weeks old. In 1908, her mother died and until her father remarried in 1911, the responsibility for raising her siblings and managing the household fell to her.

As a young adult, Rose attended Baptist Missionary Training School in Chicago and graduated in 1914.¹⁴ That same year, Rose enrolled at Mounds-Park and completed her studies in 1917. Preparing to enter the medical missionary field, she decided instead to join the war effort. Rose lived a pious life and her letters reflect a sense of serious professionalism. She frequently mentions her roommates, Rachel Dahl (Class of 1915) and Mabel "Bunny" Benson (Class of 1916). Unabashedly proud of her faith, ethnicity, alma mater, and branch of service, Rose arrived at the U.S. Navy's Great Lakes Naval Station in Illinois on October 16, 1918, and promptly took the oath of service, becoming a member of the United States Naval Reserve Force (USNRF).

The previous month, Rose's younger brother, Chester "Archie" Olson, serving in the U.S. Army, arrived at nearby Camp Grant, Illinois. Archie's sense of anticipation was evident in a letter home to their pastor on September 18, 1918. "I have no idea what my new work is going to be," he wrote, "but whatever it be, I am here to do my work in the best way I can."¹⁵

The army's reclassification of Archie as a medic unwittingly placed him on the



An undated photo of Rosalie Olson. Photo from the First Swedish Baptist Church Jubilee Book, 1923, Minnesota Historical Society.

front line and at the very epicenter of a war against influenza that first appeared within the camp on September 21, 1918.¹⁶ Two weeks later the pastor received another letter from Archie, informing him of the newly imposed quarantine brought on by influenza:

Most likely you have heard of the terrible epidemic going on in this camp and all over the country. I have been working in the hospital as a medic [*sic*] and have been kept very busy. The epidemic broke out in this camp about two weeks ago and in the first few days there were 600 to 700 cases reported daily. We had to give up our barracks to make room for the sick so I have been sleeping in a tent. The influenza spread rather fast and many cases turned into pneumonia and I'm sorry to say that it has resulted in hundreds of deaths.¹⁷

In a separate letter, Archie confided to his younger brother that witnessing the deaths of four soldiers in four hours "got on my nerves." Despite this, he maintained his composure.¹⁸ On October 12, 1918, Archie's father finally received word advising him that the worst had passed. Yet, the fatalities were high. Over 1,060 died at Camp Grant giving it the distinction of having the highest fatality rate recorded among all state-side military installations.¹⁹

Despite the seventeen influenza patients remaining on his ward, Archie expressed

relief that the figure had dropped significantly, down from eighty-seven the week before. He continued, "I suppose Rose is ready to leave anytime for the Navy [*sic*]. I would like to see her come here but this camp is well supplied." He concluded, "I hope we will never see such an epidemic as we had. I think I have a furlough coming."²⁰ Unfortunately, Archie's hopes were misplaced. Unlike the Moose Lake fire that quickly ran its course, the pandemic was just completing its first round.

Nursing Duties

Upon arriving at their respective stations, both Anna and Rose dutifully wrote home to their parents. Compared to their former civilian life, they were impressed by the military's pace and tempo. Completely enamored by Great Lakes Naval Station, Rose stated:

October 16, 1918

Dear Folks,

I have been here about seven hours only and I believe I could write a book already. This place is beyond my expectations, it is wonderful. It has been a gala day. On arriving in Chicago the first thing that greeted us were hundreds of "Jackies" [sailors] parading. Such a sight to advertise the Liberty Loan Drive.

Most pleasing to Rose were the complimentary remarks made by the nursing superintendent:

... when she heard I was from Mounds-Park she told me our nurses were some, if not, the very best they had. She spoke highly of them and I guess they are all looked up to as being the best behaved of all, so I am sure glad I belong to them.²¹

Yet, the comments made by nurses who experienced the horrific ordeal of influenza the previous week troubled her.²² Some of the sailors exposed to the virus in Boston had transferred to Great Lakes and transmitted the deadly contagion. The death toll at Great Lakes rose to the point where bodies were literally stacked upon one another like cordwood in the station's morgue. This image, seared into the memory of one nurse, continually haunted her in her dreams.²³

If Anna heard similar stories, she kept them to herself. A postcard, dated November 8, 1918, featured a scenic picture of the entrance to the Portsmouth Naval Hospital. Cramming as much information as she could, Anna marveled at the size and scope of the naval installation adjacent to the Elizabeth River exclaiming, "We see lots of vessels of all kinds, from 'Noah's Ark' to Battleships."²⁴ In another letter she wrote that, whenever possible, she and her colleagues walked along the riverbanks to unwind and interact with the locals who made their livelihood from the water. "We never get tired of looking at the river, especially when the sun shines and the waves are high. It is a wonderful sight. I am surely glad I could get here and see these things. It will be something I shall never forget."²⁵

Rose and Anna both noticed the military jargon, including the word "chow" a term for mealtime. Anna particularly grew fond of navy slang:

I am getting to be a regular sailor, at least in my grammar. Sailor slang is more popular here. When patients are too noisy, we say "Pipe down!" Other phrases are "I hope to tell you." "I do, you know." "Scrub the deck!" (the floors are always called decks), "Shove off!" and many other expressions. It all sounded very funny to me at first and at times I did not know what they were referring to, but it does not take long to get used to things.²⁶

Rose, on the other hand, appreciated the sense of military decorum that pervaded her installation and provided an interesting analogy. "... we [Rachel Dahl] took a long walk because it was such a beautiful afternoon and we went to 'Colors' which is very beautiful and impressive when



From left to right, Rachel Dahl, Mabel "Bunny" Benson, and Rose Olson pose for the camera in their nurse's capes at the Great Lakes Naval Station, about 1918. Photo from the Rose Olson Letters in the Swen Bernard Collection, Minnesota Historical Society.

they take down the flag. It is almost like a prayer every morning and evening.”²⁷

Both women weighed the costs of purchasing new uniforms and scurried to meet navy regulations. Anna asked her mother to dye one of her sweaters black to comply with requirements and mail it as soon as possible.²⁸ Always savvy when it came to finances, Rose compared the price of a navy coat versus a cape and opted for the less expensive but more practical cape.²⁹

As an older facility, Portsmouth Naval Station struggled to accommodate the mass influx of nurses. This was evident in Anna’s letters when she expressed frustration over her frequent room reassignments. In one month, she chronicled three moves.³⁰ Both women readily embraced the opportunities now available to learn about new medicines and medical techniques. Additionally, they were, for the first time, placed in charge of men. Anna exclaimed, “I have one corpsman with me and *he does the work*. Nurses are not supposed to do much of anything but boss the job.” She added, “I can’t get used to this.”³¹

On one ward, Rose was assigned four corpsmen whom she sized up quickly:

“[Tullet] is an actor by profession, been on the stage for a long time, but is positively the best man to take care of the patients and keep the ward clean. Other corpsmen are slack at times, but not Tullet, he just works and works and is so courteous and kind to all. I was disappointed when I heard he was from the stage, but there is a lot of good in him anyway. Donnelly is almost what you call a restless, shiftless Irishman from New York. He is apt to live a gay life and shirks his work and has to be kept after by us nurses but is always courteous and a gentleman to us. . . .”

The third was a young Norwegian-American named “Sahol” from Rochester, Minnesota. Initially, Rose felt “provoked” by him and considered him an “independent and not very conscientious” individual whom she once placed on report for going off duty early two days in a row. Although Sahol was disciplined for his actions, Rose stated he held no grudge and that the two parted on good terms. Lastly, there was “Smith” who was “a



Esther Kirbach from Siren, Wisconsin, Mounds-Park School of Nursing, Class of 1912, was one of the first nurses to volunteer for service in the Red Cross. She died of influenza while assisting with relief efforts following the Moose Lake Fire of 1918. Photo courtesy of the Mounds-Midway Nursing Museum.

happy go luck lad [who] acts like an overgrown kid and when he gets scolded he apologizes and feels so awful bad.”³²

On a separate occasion, Rose wrote of an encounter with a pharmacist from Detroit who “you would call a fast man, but he soon found out how far he could go with me.” He later expressed admiration towards her for “being more respectable than the average woman.” Rose later shared the incident with Dahl and asserted that their good reputation at Great Lakes was due in no small part to their affiliation with Mounds-Park—and of course being Swedish.³³

Most evident, were their mixed expressions of compassion and amazement

at the resiliency of the injured Marines returning from overseas. Anna exclaimed:

It makes my heart just ache to see these strong young men crippled[,] but they seem so cheerful. I really haven’t seen any of them discouraged yet. It is really wonderful how they are able to keep up their spirits.³⁴

Rose observed, “We are admitting more and more Marines and it makes one’s heart sick to see some of them, especially some of the shell shocked, or gassed. . . .” She noted the severity of one particular Marine’s wounds: “. . . [he] had his eighth operation last week. Removed a piece of steel about four inches long laying on the

lung.” Rose then expounded upon his injuries, offering up a sober message:

He is also shell shocked and has more pieces of shrapnel in him, some near his stomach and all over his body. He has been “over the top” *eleven* times and between operations is up and around quick and alert and a very fine, tall, stately well-built young man. His mind is slightly affected [*sic*] due to the shell shock. They are all crippled in one way or another blinded or something else, but a happier bunch I have never seen. In their units, they sing and laugh and [are] always happy, never grumbling or dissatisfaction—an object lesson to many who have their whole bodies and are dissatisfied in any way.³⁵

In another, more sanitized version, Rose wrote home to her church congregation stating:

I like my work, it is very different from what I expected. At present I am in charge of a Marine Ward. I have twenty of them and they have been “Over the Top” and have gone through the full meaning of war. Some will never again be able to do a full day’s work. Every day I hear them tell about their experiences that are very thrilling and I see their scars and mutilations and wonder how they ever survived. All the Marines of the middle west who need medical attention are to be sent here to Great Lakes. We expect several hundreds of them soon coming direct from overseas. These boys need our prayers.³⁶

Yet, there were other times where Rose felt:

... as if I was a matron at a reformatory rather than a nurse. You have to watch them when they play cards so they don’t gamble and I know when I turn my back that they do gamble. I also have to keep them from smoking in the wards and that is another thing a “Jackie” has learned to do since he joined the Navy.

Moreover, she frets over what she considered the numerous “foolish and unwise” ways several of the enlisted spent their pay while on liberty.³⁷ Despite their human failings, she always acknowledges they are a most grateful lot:

“... we nurses are kinder and more gentle with them than some of the corpsmen and I never met a more appreciative patient than



Anna Dahlby, center, with fellow nurses at Portsmouth Naval Station. Photo from the War Records File, Minnesota Historical Society.

our sick “Jackie.” They think the world of a nurse and I have patients that would positively give their life for a nurse who has been good to them.³⁸

The Pandemic’s Toll

The women also chronicle their time spent on rotating shifts and rotations through various wards, including the pneumonia ward, where they witness influenza’s return, inflicting its toll on both patient and healthcare worker alike. This loss took on a more personal meaning when on November 4th, Rose learned of the fate of Esther Kirbach, the Red Cross volunteer in Duluth. “Just learned today that Kirbach is gone.” She lamented, “It surely makes us wonder who goes next. I sympathize with Kirbach’s sister and must write her a letter.”³⁹

On November 10, Anna described the cacophony of ship’s horns and whistles blowing in the harbor along with the church bells ringing in town proclaiming peace had finally arrived only to discover it was all premature. Only the Kaiser had abdicated leaving Anna to exclaim, “I guess we will have to wait patiently and it will not be long before real peace will be proclaimed.” She and the rest of the world did not have long to wait. The following day, the much-anticipated Armistice finally arrived. Four days later, Anna remarked, “I was so surprised to

hear about Esther Kirbach. It seems too bad that she had to go so suddenly, but she was never strong.”⁴⁰

While finishing up her night shift on the morning of November 16, Anna quickly scribbled another note to her mother:

Was quite busy all last night. Three new patients came in this morning from the USS Newton. They all have pneumonia and are quite sick. Am off duty now and just going to start getting ready for bed. The same old story “Sleep in the day time.”

In closing, Anna promised to “start a real letter in a couple of days” and signed off “Best Love to you all. Lovingly, your daughter—Anna”⁴¹

On November 18th, Anna took ill and was admitted to the hospital where she was diagnosed with influenza. By November 23rd, bronco pneumonia set in. Finally, at 5:40 on the morning of November 26th, just two days before Thanksgiving, Anna died.⁴² Following a formal naval ceremony conducted on the station, Anna’s body was shipped home for burial. The Dahlbys held a private service in St. Paul for Anna on December 1, 1918, and laid their eldest daughter to rest at Union Cemetery.⁴³ Unlike the three navy nurses who lost their lives to influenza during hostilities, she did not receive the Navy Cross.⁴⁴

Anna's death prompted letters from the authorities. First came a letter of consolation from Lenah S. Higbee, Superintendent of the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps. Making no distinction between overseas or stateside work, she specifically recognized and honored Anna's service and sacrifice stating:

... your daughter had given evidence of unusual professional qualifications; had made for herself a firm place in the esteem of the Hospital authorities, and had endeared herself to all co-workers. The official records in her case state she died in the service of her County.⁴⁵

This was followed by a letter from the Portsmouth Base Commander who commended Anna for "her willingness to serve and the patriotic spirit which prompted her to come into work."⁴⁶ On December 17, 1918, the Dahlbys received another letter of condolence, this time from the Nursing Director of the American Red Cross who readily acknowledged the "less conspicuous deeds of those combating disease in the service of the United States. . . ." Emblematic of religious sacrifice, the Director asserted, "Miss Dahlby died a martyr to her calling and worthily upheld the noblest traditions of the United States. The memory of her sacrifice which she so readily made will inspire others to render devoted service to their fellowmen."⁴⁷

The Plague Continues

Rose's correspondence omits any reference to Anna's death and although the killing overseas had ceased, the battle against influenza at home raged on. In a letter dated December 18, 1918, a sense of unease pervades her words as she advised her parents that should an emergency arise at home, they should send word via an urgent telegram rather than a letter to "avoid delays and red tape." Rose continued, "This last week there have been several deaths here of the 'flu' but there is every precaution to prevent an epidemic. I hope and pray that we here shall be spared from that dreadful plague."⁴⁸

When Christmas arrived, Rose declined invitations to parties where dancing occurred because she considered it a



Private first class Archie Olson in 1919. Photo from the Swen Bernard Collection, Minnesota Historical Society.

sacred holiday. Instead, she volunteered for extra duty and found the experience very rewarding:

I am so thankful that I am so well and I know it is an answer to a prayer. When the boys get seriously sick we ask them if they are ready to die. I never felt more like a missionary before in my life as I have since I came into the Pneumonia Ward and I never enjoyed a better Xmas day before. I felt I was doing something for these dear boys so sick and so far away from home.⁴⁹

Her compassion was not limited to servicemen. In one instance, the Chief Surgeon requested she write a letter to the father of a deceased seventeen-year-old Marine from St. Paul whom she cared for on the Influenza Ward. On another occasion, both Rose and Rachel Dahl comforted a grieving mother from St. Paul who came to say goodbye to her son, another Marine who fell victim to the flu.⁵⁰

On New Year's Eve, Rose volunteered again to tend to the flu patients. "We have the sickest and most serious of any unit. New patients coming in every day and so very sick so I surely am busy but like it very much." She further stated, "We have

had quite a number of sick nurses, but they are all very well now." This included the recovery of both Dahl and Benson who briefly fell ill.⁵¹

Repeatedly throughout the winter months, influenza reemerged and continually strained the medical staff. In a letter of February 3, 1919, Rose wrote, "We admitted eight flus yesterday and expect as many more again today and then our ward will be full. An average of 3 to 4 die every week in our unit." Rose revealed how dire the situation was among the nurses:

We had a military funeral for another nurse last Thursday, a victim of the flu. She had a cold all winter and would not give in that she was sick. She worked with a temp of 102 before they found out she was sick and the poor girl only lasted days then. We have quite a few sick nurses, but I am in good spirits and health. I try to take precautions to keep well also. We have patients that have had temps as high as 106 and it is nothing unusual to have 104 and 105 temp in the flu ward. In civilian nursing that was alarming.

Rose alluded to rumors of an early "mustering out" by spring and though the thought of civilian life and higher wages appealed to her, she admitted, "It will be harder to settle down to private duty after these hours and this kind of duty."⁵²

While supervising the Spinal Meningitis Ward on the night of March 3, 1919, Rose and her corpsmen were alerted to a fire drill conducted by a visiting Chief Surgeon there on inspection. Questioning the wisdom of the physician, she vented, "... why they should choose a unit where there are such awful sick patients I don't know. . . ." Two nights later, she resumed her correspondence and despite regulations, allowed an exhausted corpsman a brief respite. "My corpsman is sitting on a chair sound asleep, he has worked hard all night and is so tired."⁵³

In a letter from March 9, 1919, Rose thanked her step-mother for sharing good news of home; yet she could not reciprocate. "We almost expect a double funeral tomorrow. Both of these nurses were good friends of mine. In the midst of all this we had to forget our own sorrow because we also had a military wedding." She later confirmed, "Miss Hokanson died at 7 pm and the wedding was at

8 pm but the death was kept quiet until the bride and groom had left at 10 pm.”

Rose also provided details of new polices initiated to ensure nurses’ health and well-being. “Each one of us has to have our temp and pulse taken every day by a supervisor nurse and see if they can’t prevent the nurses from getting so sick. So many nurses work and have fever and they try to work it off and then they suddenly collapse and nothing can be done.”

Concluding, Rose asserted her experiences in the U.S. Navy validated her higher calling to both God and country. While she appreciated hearing from her alums at the nearby Baptist Missionary Training School in Chicago, she opined “. . . frankly speaking I believe I do more missionary work than many of them. I may be mistaken but I have had the opportunity to talk and give advice to many a ‘Jackie’ this winter and I know I am a dear friend to many of them.”⁵⁴ Yet, this bond was reciprocal because Rose always maintained that “. . . our Navy boys are just fine, they will always have a warm spot in my heart.”⁵⁵

Her last archived letter, from April 9, 1919, written at 3:30 a.m. expressed anticipation as she looked forward to visiting Archie at Camp Grant over Easter. Since her arrival at Great Lakes Naval Station six months before, Rose emerged as an experienced, fully integrated team player who recognized that with power, came responsibility. Caring for those they supervise and for the one in charge, Rose stated, “Dahl and I try and cook coffee every morning about 4 am and treat all the corpsmen and doctor, a real little party, it is a much needed stimulant to keep them at their posts of duty.”⁵⁶

Despite the previous rumors of a discharge, Rose remained in service until that summer. Gradually, the cases of influenza abated and on August 17, 1919, Rose received an honorable discharge from the U.S. Navy. For her, the war was finally over.

Postwar Duties

Following her discharge, Rose received a State War Bonus totaling \$165.00 for her time in service—ten months and two days.⁵⁷ Archie was also discharged that summer and returned safely from his or-

deal at Camp Grant. Completing his War Record Questionnaire in 1922, Archie listed the influenza pandemic as the most significant moment in his military career. Treating combat casualties came second.⁵⁸

Conservative figures later released



This memorial plaque honors the sacrifices of Esther Kirbach and Anna Dahlby in World War I. Today a nursing scholarship in their names serves as a “living memorial.” Photo courtesy of the Mounds-Midway Nursing Museum.

by the U.S. Army Surgeon General in 1928 attributed 57,460 deaths (Army and Marine) to influenza while the Navy listed 5,027. These figures do not differentiate between patients and health-care professionals.⁵⁹

Despite everything Rose endured, her faith, devotion to her profession, and service to others never diminished. In her civilian life, Rose served as a medical missionary at the Italian Baptist Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. In 1923, she traveled to Puebla, Mexico, and served as the head nurse at Latino Americano Hospital. She later returned to the United States and worked for eleven years as a nurse at a Christian Center in Weirton, West Virginia. In 1941 she sailed to Kodiak, Territory of Alaska, to work at an orphanage until 1944 when she accepted a position as a nurse at her former alma mater, the Baptist Missionary Training School, in Chicago.

Indeed, Rose’s experiences were diverse and challenging, but they undoubtedly paled in comparison to her time spent at Great Lakes Naval Station. Eventually, Rose retired in 1954 and returned to Minnesota to care for her stepmother in Cambridge. There, she joined the local Swedish Baptist Church and remained a member of the community until

the time of her death in 1966. Rose Olson was buried in St. Paul’s Union Cemetery and rests not far from the grave of Anna Dahlby. In honor of her military service, taps were played over her grave by members of the American Legion.⁶⁰ Yet, unlike Archie and Anna, her military service was omitted from her marker.

In 1924, Mounds-Park Sanitarium dedicated a plaque honoring the sacrifices made by Anna Dahlby and Esther Kirbach in the Great War. Additionally, a “living memorial” in the form of a nursing scholarship was named in their honor. Within the confines of the St. Paul City Hall-Ramsey County Courthouse, the Memorial Hall, dedicated in 1935, prominently features the Native American “God Of Peace” onyx statue. Facing the statue are two large columns listing the names of 350 Ramsey County fatalities of the Great War, among them are Esther Kirbach and Anna Dahlby. In 1940, Anna Dahlby’s parents received \$50.00 from the state for her service; however, officials miscalculated the dates and listed Anna as having only served nine days rather than one full month. The Dahlbys never disputed it.⁶¹

Although neither the Mounds-Park school nor the affiliated hospital exist today, both the memorial plaque and the nursing scholarship endure. Symbolically, the nursing alumni acknowledge what the Red Cross referred to as “less conspicuous deeds of those combating disease. . . .” So, it comes as no surprise that when visitors enter the Mounds-Midway Nurses Museum, the first thing they encounter are the photos of Anna Dahlby and Esther Kirbach and their memorial plaque. Across the generations, these remain the ties that bind.

Johannes Allert graduated from Minnesota State University, Mankato and later received his Masters in Military History from Norwich University. Currently he is an adjunct professor for Rogers State University and is working on a larger project titled Discovering Minnesota’s Lost Generation: Reflections and Remembrances of the Great War. The subject of nurses resonates with Mr. Allert because four of his relatives graduated from Mounds-Midway School of Nursing.

Endnotes

1. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F (Letter from Anna Dahlby to Family, November 10, 1918).
2. Dorothy and Carl Schneider, *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1991), 54–55.
3. Mary Danielson, "Mounds-Midway School of Nursing," *The Minnesota Registered Nurse* (January 1947): 9.
4. Daniel Hoisington, *This Cap of White: The Story of The Mounds-Midway School of Nursing* (Roseville, Minn.: Edinborough Press, 2007), 26.
5. In Franky and John Schaeffer, *Keeping Faith: A Father-Son Story about Love and the United States Marine Corps* (Berkeley, Calif.: Carroll & Graf, 2002, 2003) the father provides the analogy that military service, particularly in the Marine Corps, provides a life not unlike religious orders. They have their maxims, songs, discipline, order, and an ethos of service above self. In the words of the Schaeffers, "they are a mystery religion. Exclusive and closed . . ." (261). The letters written by the individuals featured in this article demonstrate that culture is timeless.
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8. George B. Clark, *Devil Dogs: Fighting Marines of World War I* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1999), 429–34.
9. Iric Nathanson, *World War I Minnesota* (Charleston, S.C.: History Press, 2016), 98,100–102.
10. "Preachers in Print—Reverend Swanson Delivers Sermon Through Pioneer Press Due to Grip Ban," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, November 10, 1918, p. 8.
11. Public Safety Commission/War Records Commission, Gold Star Roll, Oscar Thingbold, Date of Death October 12, 1918, Minnesota Historical Society, Box 114.D.4.6F.
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13. Hoisington, 11.
14. Obituary for Anna Rosalie Olson, *The Cambridge Star*, April 7, 1966, p. 2.
15. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, Box 109.F.7.12F (Letter from Archie to Pastor, September 18, 1918).
16. John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 213.
17. Ibid.
18. Minnesota War Records, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter from Archie Olson, October 15, 1918).
19. Carol Byerly, "The U.S. Military and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918–1919," *Public Health Report*, 125 (2010): 82–89 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862337> (accessed April 30, 2017).
20. Minnesota War Records, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter from Archie Olson, October 15, 1918).
21. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter home, October 16, 1918).
22. Ibid. "The girls have been telling me how dreadful it was during the epidemic it is like a horrible nightmare to them."
23. Barry, 202.
24. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Questioners, Box 76, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F. Anna Dahlby (postcard).
25. Ibid., Anna Dahlby, Letter to parents, November 10, 1918.
26. Ibid., Anna Dahlby, Letter to parents, November 15, 1918.
27. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter home, December 19, 1918).
28. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Questioners, Box 76, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F. Anna Dahlby (Letter home, November 10, 1918).
29. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter home, December 9, 1918).
30. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Questioners, Box 76, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F. Anna Dahlby (Letter to parents, November 10, 1918).
31. Ibid., Anna Dahlby letter home, November 14, 1918.
32. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Army-Navy-Red Cross Nurses, Anna Rosalie Olson file, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F (Letter home, undated).
33. Ibid., Letter home, April 3, 1919.
34. Minnesota Historical Society, War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Questioners, Box 76, 109.I.2.6F. Anna Dahlby (Letter home, November 10, 1918).
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36. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter to Rev. Swanson, November 26, 1918).
37. Ibid., Letter home, December 9, 1918.
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39. Kirbach's death occurred on November 3, 1918. Death Certificate 3277. Her death was also reported in the *Duluth News Tribune*, Vol. 50 No. 177. Pg.1 [author: what is the date this was in the newspaper?]
40. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Army-Navy-Red Cross Nurses, Anna Dahlby file, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F (Letter home, November 14, 1918).
41. Ibid., Letter home November 16, 1918.
42. Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, Gold Star Roll, Minnesota Historical Society. Box 114.D.4.2F.
43. Ibid.
44. Of the four nurses awarded the Navy Cross, three received it posthumously. Naval History. Net <http://www.naval-history.net/WW1NavyUS-CasualtiesAlphaNurses.JPG> (Accessed April 25, 2017).
45. Minnesota Historical Society, War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Questioners, Box 76, 109.I.2.6F, Lenah Higbee, Letter of condolence, November 30, 1918.
46. Ibid., Captain L.W. Spratt, Letter of condolence, December 10, 1918.
47. Ibid. Director of Nursing Jane Delano, Letter of condolence, December 17, 1918.
48. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter home, December 18, 1918).
49. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Army-Navy-Red Cross Nurses, Anna Rosalie Olson file, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F (Letter home, December 27, 1918).
50. Ibid., Letter home, April 9, 1919 and Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter home, February 3, 1919).
51. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Army-Navy-Red Cross Nurses, Anna Rosalie Olson file, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F (Letter home, December 27, 1918).
52. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter home, February 3, 1919).
53. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Army-Navy-Red Cross Nurses, Anna Rosalie Olson file, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F (Letter home, March 4, 1919).
54. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Rose Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F (Letter home, March 9, 1919).
55. Ibid. Letter home, February 3, 1919.
56. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Army-Navy-Red Cross Nurses, Anna Rosalie Olson file, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.I.2.6F (Letter home, April 9, 1919).
57. Minnesota Office of the Adjutant General, World War I Bonus Files Index, Minnesota Historical Society, Box 130.F.6.9B, Warrant Number 12676.
58. Minnesota War Records Commission, Collected Materials, Swen Bernard Collection, Chester "Archie" Olson Letters, Minnesota Historical Society, 109.F.7.12F.
59. Byerly, 82–89 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2862337> (Accessed April 30, 2017). Based on the author's research to date, in addition to Esther Kirbach and Anna Dahlby, Mary Cummings (U.S. Army); Lydia Whiteside (U.S. Army); Sabra Hardy (U.S. Army); Ruth Cutler (Red Cross); and Esther Amundson (U.S. Army) were all from Minnesota and died from influenza. Only Kirbach and Dahlby were graduates of Mounds-Park. Whiteside, Hardy, Cutler, and Amundson died while on overseas duty. The memorial list at the St. Paul City Hall-Ramsey County Courthouse includes only the names of Kirbach, Dahlby, Cummings, and Cutler. Further research is needed to determine whether there are other Minnesota women who served during the war, died from influenza, and should also be recognized for their sacrifice in the line of duty.
60. Obituary for Anna Rosalie Olson, *The Cambridge Star*, April 7, 1966, p. 2.
61. Minnesota Office of the Adjutant General, World War I Bonus Files Index, Minnesota Historical Society, Box 130.F.6.9B Warrant Number C309792.

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This is a 1910 bottle that once contained a soft drink sold by the Highland Spring Water Company in its early years. The bottle is particularly significant because its paper label is so well preserved. The backside of the bottle, visible through the glass, reads: CONTENTS OF THIS BOTTLE MANUFACTURED BY HIGHLAND SPRING WATER. Within a decade, the company discontinued its soft drink business. Bottle courtesy of Mark Youngblood. For more on the origins of the Highland Spring Water Company, see Donald Empson's article on page 18.