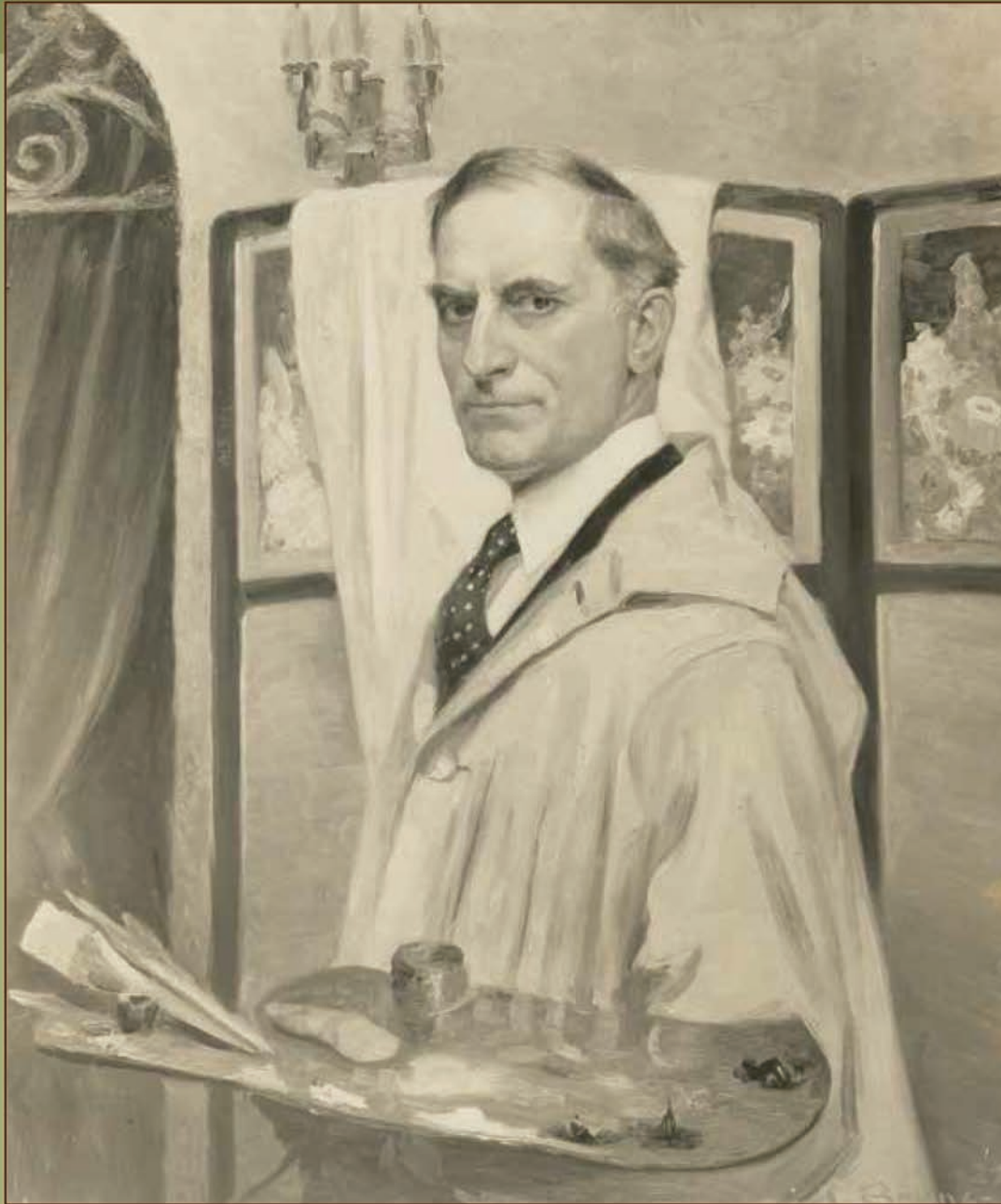


Madame la Doctress in France

**"Dr. Nellie:" One Physician's
Experience Overseas in the Great War**

JOHANNES R. ALLERT, PAGE 12



Carl Bohnen self-portrait

A St. Paul Artist Behind Enemy Lines

Carl Bohnen, World War I, and Americanism

STEVE TRIMBLE, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

In the World War I years,
the number of Minnesotans who

registered for the draft
541,607

were classified as fit for service
400,464

served in the military
118,497

were drafted
76,718

served in Europe
57,413

died in the war (civilians and military)
3,480

served and died from disease
(mostly influenza)
2,175

killed in action
1,432

SOURCES: Franklin F. Holbrook and Livia Appel,
Minnesota in the War with Germany, 2 vols.
(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1932)
and David Thompson.

ON THE COVER



A black and white photograph of Bohnen's 1937 self-portrait in oil. Photo courtesy of Steve Trimble.

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SARAH M. RISSER

Message from the Editorial Board

World War I, then known as the Great War, had an impact on Ramsey County in unexpected ways. Steve Trimble explores how Carl Bohnen, a well-known local artist, journeyed to Germany in 1914 to further his career and was subsequently caught up in that conflict. Further, his experiences after he returned to St. Paul in the summer of 1917 highlights the anti-German sentiment in Minnesota at the time. Dr. Nellie Barsness was the first woman doctor to graduate from the University of Minnesota medical school and later practiced in St. Paul. As profiled by Johannes Allert, the U.S. Army would not enlist women who volunteered as doctors, but the French military gladly accepted her service. Thus she was able to help many soldiers deal with traumatic injuries during her time overseas. On a lighter note, this issue also shows how Ramsey County residents have been using the Mississippi River for recreation for generations. Sarah Risser traces the early history of the Minnesota Boat Club, which established its headquarters on Raspberry Island in 1870. Although the Club went through some challenging times, Risser shows that rowing on the Mississippi persisted through the years because dedicated amateurs have always valued their sport.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon.

“Dr. Nellie:” One Physician’s Experience at the Front in the Great War

JOHANNES R. ALLERT

Within the peaceful confines of the Ben Lake family cemetery stands a memorial that is more a monument than mere headstone. The granite stone honoring the late Dr. Nellie N. Barsness is indeed large. Crowned with a caduceus, the symbol of medicine, the shrine is elaborately engraved and chronicles the deceased physician’s accomplishments. Towering over the other markers, it appears completely out of place amid the rolling farmland of Pope County, Minnesota. Yet, grateful recipients of the scholarship named in her honor, make the trek to this remote location to pay tribute to the state’s first woman to receive a medical degree from the University of Minnesota. Her role as a pioneer, however, was not limited to local medicine, for she was also a veteran who served with distinction in the French Army during the Great War.

Trailblazing was a common characteristic among the Barsness family and Nellie was no exception. In the post-Civil War era they were among the first Norwegian settlers to put down roots in the area which bears their name—Barsness Township. Born the third of nine children on July 9, 1873, Nellie and her siblings were raised in a household where religious piety, self-respect, and respect toward others and their private property were practiced.¹ Nellie’s appreciation for country life was reflected in her fond memories where “we were fascinated by the snow-white clouds floating high above us

and where the days ended with a brilliant sunset that never quite repeated itself.”²

Equally appreciative of learning, Nellie worked hard at her studies and was particularly fascinated by words and their meanings.³ As a young adult, she attained a teaching certificate from St. Cloud Normal School (later St. Cloud State University) and for a time, taught school in South Dakota. There, a chance meeting with a burn victim, a woman who had escaped a raging prairie fire by clinging to the sides of the family’s well inspired Nellie to pursue a career in medicine. As she later recalled, “I knew that there was a place for women physicians because there were women and girls who neglected their health.”⁴

Entering the University of Minnesota’s school of medicine in the fall of 1898, Nellie completed her studies in June of 1902 and became the first woman from the state of Minnesota to graduate from the program.⁵ “At the time” she remembered, “some considered being a doctor was a man’s job. If my father was a little embarrassed about my choosing the medical career, he lived to be grateful.”⁶ Taking up residence in St. Paul, she interned at Luther Hospital and specialized in electrotherapeutics, a procedure used in muscle stimulation.⁷ In 1904, Dr. Nellie was selected to attend the nation’s first conference dedicated to another emerging technology, the x-ray, in Niagara Falls, New York.⁸



Dr. Nellie N. Barsness wearing the uniform of the Women’s Overseas Hospital U.S.A. prior to her 1918 service in France. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The Guns of August

A decade later, Europe became tragically mired in a series of events involving complicated alliances between France, Great Britain, and Russia that eventually set them on a collision course with the Central Powers made up of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Sparked by an assassin's bullet in 1914, the conflict later referred to as "The Great War" brought about modern industrial warfare resulting in the collapse of four empires.

Determined yet unable to maintain American neutrality, President Woodrow Wilson eventually acquiesced to external and internal pressure to intervene on behalf of the Allies and asked Congress to declare war against the Central Powers on April 6, 1917.⁹ Yet years of isolationism left the nation's military woefully unprepared for this new type of warfare and despite the military reforms of 1916, the nation's army remained underequipped and understaffed. Its medical component was no exception.¹⁰

Medical staffing was further complicated by the army's unwillingness to emulate its allied counterparts, particularly France, concerning women physicians. In general, the U.S. Army remained entrenched in its traditional values and balked at openly recruiting women. Instead, it relied upon the American Red Cross, the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Association, and the Salvation Army to funnel women into the war effort. Women served in a variety of roles as: nurses, physical therapists, switchboard operators (also known as the "Hello" Girls), entertainers, ambulance drivers, stenographers, (facial) reconstruction aides, and welfare workers; however, no such provisions were made concerning women physicians, and this remained official policy until the closing days of the war.¹¹ Indeed, even talent and opportunity had its limits. Prior to 1917, the only female doctor residing in Minnesota who had served in the U.S. military during wartime was Dr. Addie R. Haverfield. Rather than face rejection and miss out on any military benefits, Dr. Haverfield had agreed to serve as a nurse during the Spanish-American War.¹²

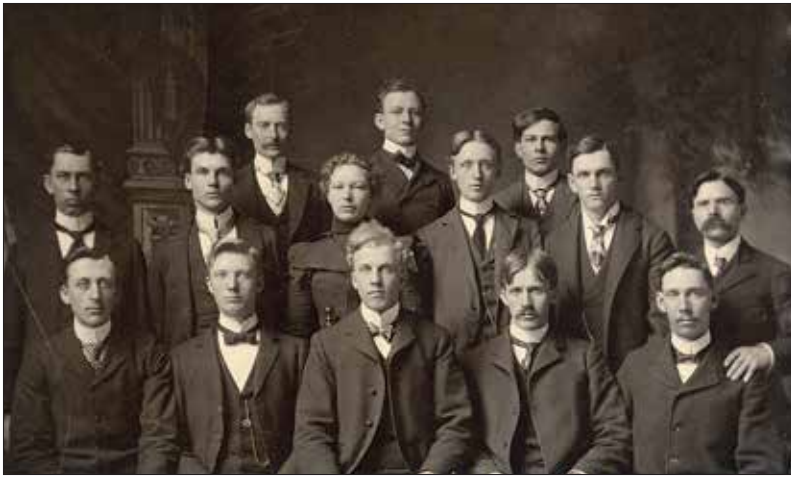
Unwilling to settle for anything less, Dr. Barsness, instead, chose her own path. "After ceaseless efforts to enter the Medical Reserve Corps of the United States Army who would not open its portals to women physicians," she related, "I

left St. Paul on September 22, 1918, to enter the French Army through the Women's Overseas Hospital (W.O.H.) U.S.A. (under the auspices of the National American Women's Suffragette Association) and [was] appointed Ophthalmologist and assigned to a Gas Hospital (Number 3) at Cempuis, Oise, France."¹³

Traveling to New York City, Dr. Barsness spent the next several days obtaining uniforms, her passport, French currency, and gathering other essentials for the journey. When she arrived at the pier to board her assigned ship, a large military policeman of Irish descent placed in charge of security, initially mistook her medical insignia for the Flying Corps.¹⁴ Aboard the French liner *Niagara* were 1,660 other individuals representing the U.S. Army, Red Cross, YMCA, and the Salvation Army all dressed in their respective uniforms.¹⁵ With dirigibles aloft patrolling the coastline and destroyers alongside for escort, the convoy departed for France. Bureaucratic red tape and shipping priorities, however, prevented the shipment of the W.O.H.'s mobile equipment specially designed to disinfect victims of gas attacks. This equipment, along with stores of blankets, linen, pajamas, and other vital medical supplies all destined for overseas remained on the docks and did not arrive until after the Armistice.¹⁶

On the second day out to sea, influenza broke out aboard ship. The virus killed nine and weakened several others on the vessel. As the convoy entered hostile waters and the threat from submarine attacks increased, evasive maneuvers along with frequent lifeboat drills became routine. Much to everyone's relief, the ship along with its passengers arrived without contact with the enemy or more personnel losses at the docks of Bordeaux.¹⁷

The following morning as the soldiers, some staggering with weakness from influenza, disembarked from the *Niagara* and headed inland for the front, Dr. Barsness noted with concern the hasty manner that America's youth had received their training along with the "short term graduate officers who often recognized the power without the responsibility of their position."¹⁸ Finally ashore, she, with the help from the locals and a well-educated Moroccan officer who spoke fluent English, eventually



The 1902 graduating class at the University of Minnesota's medical school. Dr. Nellie Barsness, middle row, third from the left, was the first woman from Minnesota to receive a medical degree from the University. *Photo courtesy of the University of Minnesota.*

reached her duty station at Cempuis, which was in northern France about forty miles from Paris and close to the border with Belgium.¹⁹

In France

Upon her arrival, Nellie Barsness witnessed firsthand the endless misery and constant rationing brought on by war where “there were chocolate days [in Paris] when the people stood in line for hours.” Demand frequently exceeded supply and often people left empty-handed. Those fortunate to receive their meager portion often sent their share “to the men folk at the front.”²⁰

At the war's outset, the French government initially barred women from serving in any capacity, including medicine, but after four years of warfare, 1914 protocols became a distant memory. Having already treated 15,000 gas casualties and with the Allies' Meuse-Argonne offensive well underway, the French physicians expressed overwhelming relief and gratitude at

Trapped in a haze of gas on the front lines in France, two American soldiers repair phone lines while wearing gas masks. *Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.*



the arrival of Dr. Barsness and her colleagues from the W.O.H.²¹

A former orphanage surrounded by high walls and located just a half-mile from the front now served as Gas Hospital 3 and was the interim link in the long medical chain containing over 600 beds for treating soldiers exposed to chemical warfare. Adjacent to the hospital, an open field functioned as a training area where troops frequently drilled while overhead, Allied aircraft conducted missions against the enemy from a nearby aerodrome. A road next to the hospital acted as a vital artery for transporting troops and equipment to the front. Combined, the activity created a constant din. Four blocks away, a long trench dug in the local cemetery was used to bury the dead. Despite its proximity to the graveyard and a large red cross outside, the hospital remained under recurrent threat from enemy aerial attack. Dr. Nellie and her colleagues were now at the epicenter of the war.²²

One of the greatest challenges facing the medical units on the Western Front was countering the effects of gas warfare which accounted for 9% of the U.S. military fatalities and 31% of its casualties. The effects of chemical agents placed an additional burden, both physically and psychologically, upon the average soldier to the point where some claimed they were victims of a gas attack when in fact they were not, thereby creating a new term “gas hysteria” amid the ranks.²³ The two most common forms of chemical warfare were phosgene and mustard gas. Known as a pulmonary irritant, phosgene injured the lungs and respiratory system. In extreme cases the victims drowned in their own secretions. Similarly, mustard gas also affected the respiratory system, but it was more insidious because acute exposure could also result in blindness and severe blistering. Additionally, this chemical agent could linger for days in low-lying areas and affect the person treating the injury as much as it did the victim.²⁴

At the Hospital

Each night during the fall offensive was marked by the arrival of between fifty and seventy-five casualties. Before they were moved to the main ward for treatment, a brief history of each soldier was recorded. While being treated for gas exposure, special attention was given to the

patient's eyes. During this procedure, tainted clothing was quickly disposed of and patients were given showers and clean clothes. Although this step appeared simple, it involved potentially serious risk. Exposure to the deadly contagion that permeated the discarded clothing often made members of the medical staff ill.²⁵ At some point, they all fell victim and, in some instances, pneumonia or pleurisy set in.²⁶ Having to cope with this additional hazard also explains the numerical limit on new intakes: anything more was simply overwhelming.

"The suffering of the gassed patients," Dr. Nellie recalled, "whether external burns or internal, was often terrific." Compounding the problems associated with caring for the injured was the increase in influenza cases and the dwindling stock of medicines and supplies.²⁷

As the Allied offensive began to wind down in the fall of 1918 and rumors of a possible Armistice circulated, Dr. Nellie observed that hopes for peace were countered by the grim realities where "every minute of war was killing and mutilating the cream of mankind," each one "[s]omeone's husband, son, or father." Armistice eventually arrived on November 11, but later that evening, while soldiers celebrated with songs and fireworks, Dr. Nellie recalled, "... we received our last consignment, all in a horrible state."

Among the wounded and gassed, Dr. Barsness encountered German prisoners whom she described as both very young and very "sulky." At that point, she stated, "I began trying to resuscitate my almost forgotten limited German vocabulary and soon they tried to outdo each other to assist me and show good manners." She concluded, "Who could hate those young boys? Some mother undoubtedly continually praying for their safe return."²⁸

By Christmas of 1918, the remaining casualties were either discharged or transferred elsewhere for further treatment and Gas Hospital 3 was finally deactivated. Yet, the work of the W.O.H. was not yet finished. Summarily, the physicians were transferred to Nancy to replace the Red Cross doctors who had been sent elsewhere. Shortly after their arrival, Dr. Nellie opened a clinic for the benefit of the local populace and occasionally examined as many as 200 patients in one day, some of whom had made the long trek over the war-ravaged countryside.²⁹



During her one and only furlough, Dr. Barsness split her time between touring the battlefields of Verdun and relaxing in Nice. Viewing the immense carnage of the devastated area and reflecting upon the enormity and scope of the campaign, Dr. Nellie wrote, "... one could not help but realize it required [both] a leader of a mastermind and intelligent, loyal, and brave soldiers to gain victory in war." Concluding, she stated, "Verdun, famous for its strong fortifications and [the famous phrase] "They Shall Not Pass!" was now [reduced] to a mass of rocks, victorious but sorely broken."³⁰ In stark contrast, her trip to Nice resembled a veritable paradise filled with "green grass and trees, flowers in bloom, happiness." No signs of devastation, only peace and warmth.³¹

New Duties

By April of 1919, Dr. Nellie and the W.O.H. were transferred to Rheims, an ancient city completely devastated by war. Again, their mission involved assisting with relief work among the displaced population. Statistics contained within the history of the W.O.H. note that approximately 20,000 homes were destroyed as well as much of the city's infrastructure, including sewer pipes and broken water mains. Exacerbating the problem was the return of the city's inhabitants, many of whom were ill, thus increasing the chances of an epidemic. Lacking public transportation, electricity, water, stores or shops to purchase even basic necessities, refugees resorted to wandering the streets

During her travels in France following the Armistice, Dr. Nellie bought this postcard that shows the devastation that the war brought to the city of Verdun. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



In 1919 when Dr. Barsness travelled from Nice to Nancy in France, she used this transportation document “for a single person without baggage and without horses.” Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Shortly before Dr. Barsness’s departure from France in the fall of 1919, President Raymond Poincaré honored all the members of the staff of the Women’s Overseas Hospital at Cempuis with his nation’s *Medaille d’Honneur*. Photo courtesy of the Pope County Historical Society, Glenwood, Minn.



foraging through the debris and wreckage where their homes once stood.³² Fortunately, the vital hospital equipment that was delayed stateside during the war arrived in time to provide aid and relief to the displaced.³³

The damaged structures, weakened by bombing and shellfire, became hazards and Dr. Nellie recalled that at night “... it was common to hear these walls crashing with the least little breeze.”³⁴ She continued, “When outside we would be covered with white dust (stone and lime) and our faces became rough and gritty.”³⁵

Added to the danger were the vast quantities of unexploded ordnance, including gas bombs and shells, employed during the war against the city and surrounding area. On many occasions, individuals digging through the city’s ruins or working in the nearby fields encountered unexploded bombs and grenades, resulting in fatalities or injuries.³⁶ One evening, Dr. Nellie and her fellow workers were almost overcome by a gas shell that exploded nearby their quarters.³⁷ A century later, Europe still deals with this problem.³⁸ German prisoners, pressed into service under the watchful eyes of French guards, helped rebuild the old city. The shortage of manpower made this arrangement necessary; however, the Germans undoubtedly considered this a form of payback. Gradually, over time, Rheims came back to life.³⁹

Evident in Dr. Nellie’s recollections was her sense of humility. On many occasions she was overwhelmed by the kind expressions of gratitude displayed by the French citizens who came to her for help at the most unexpected times. Whenever patients were unable to come to the clinics, she would make house calls. “We brought medical aid, clothing and food when possible,” and when her examinations were completed, invariably her patients, living in abject poverty would say, “Is there anything here that *Madame la Doctress* would desire?” At cafés in Paris, people from all walks of life, often stopped at her table and thanked her and her fellow Americans for their work.

On one of her trips to “the City of Light,” she paid a visit to a rehabilitation clinic for French soldiers mutilated by the war. “As they marched across the dressing room, they looked like well men.” Admiring the technological advances and craftsmanship employed, she recalled that, “inside the dressing room, each man was taken over to a doctor who took one piece [cosmetic mask] after the other from the face or head leaving an unbelievably horrible sight. Even hairs were planted on the masks. We can but marvel with gratitude at the scientific art that can give life again to these innocent victims.”⁴⁰

By early September 1919, the duties of the W.O.H. were turned over to local agencies who renamed the hospitals at Nancy and Rheims the “American Memorial Hospital.” Before their departure, French President Raymond Poincaré honored the staff of the W.O.H. and each received the *Medaille d’Honneur* for the hazardous work performed at Cempuis. Additionally, a congratulatory letter from a representative of the American Fund for French Wounded, provided his personal endorsement, stating, “After five years of relief work throughout the war, I have never seen anything to equal in utility or organization [to] the Rheims Temporary Hospital.”⁴¹ In their own postwar assessment, the W.O.H. proudly asserted, “Our endeavor has always been to do the things that the French have wanted us to do, at the time they wanted it done, and in the way they wanted it done.”⁴² With her overseas work finally at an end, Dr. Barsness expressed a twinge of regret. “The goodbyes with patients at the different clinics and hospitals was heartrending to me. I have many lasting French

friends that will always cement my friendship to France.”⁴³

Back Home

Having spent fifteen months overseas, Dr. Nellie returned stateside and, like many veterans, considered the Statue of Liberty in New York’s harbor “a welcomed sight.”⁴⁴ From there, she boarded a train and traveled across the county to Idaho where she spent two weeks relaxing at the ranch of her sister, Johanna. Returning to St. Paul, Dr. Barsness received word of the tragic death of her youngest sister’s husband. Immediately, she boarded a train and traveled to Saskatchewan, Canada, where her sister, Thilda and nephew (Dr. Nellie’s godson) Henry Jr. lived. With her youngest sister now a widow and her nephew fatherless, Dr. Nellie opened her heart and home to them. Together, the threesome made St. Paul their home.⁴⁵

Never one to remain idle, Dr. Nellie returned to Europe where she completed her postgraduate work in eye surgery. Resuming her medical practice back in St. Paul, Dr. Barsness specialized as an ear, nose, and throat doctor. She also worked in a part-time capacity for the University of Minnesota, examining women candidates for the medical school, and made weekly visits to treat inmates at the Women’s State Reformatory in Shakopee, Minnesota. For several years, she also served as the state’s Health Director for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union where she stimulated interest in improving health measures that paid dividends throughout the state’s public health program.⁴⁶

Actively involved in St. Paul’s community, Dr. Nellie became a chartered and lifelong member of the YWCA, and a chartered member of the Como Lutheran Church. Amazingly, despite her hectic work schedule and her involvement with numerous organizations, including the Women’s Overseas League, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the American Medical Women’s Association, and the Minnesota Medical Association, she still had time to invent and receive a U.S. Patent for a seemingly mundane item, commonly found in many public bathrooms today—the sanitary paper seat cover.⁴⁷

When her sister Thilda died of a heart attack in 1938, Dr. Barsness adopted her nephew, Henry Simmonds Jr. and, under her mentorship,

he became a successful physician in his own right.⁴⁸ At the age of eighty-two and still practicing medicine in 1952, Dr. Nellie, along with four other physicians, was accepted into the Minnesota Medical Association’s “Fifty Club” for her continued dedication to medicine for over a half-century. Responding to the question of retirement, Dr. Nellie, paraphrasing General Douglas MacArthur’s famous quote, replied “Old doctors don’t retire. They just fade away.”⁴⁹

In 1955 and still practicing medicine, Dr. Nellie received another tribute during a luncheon held in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she was honored as “Woman Doctor of the Year” by the Minnesota branch of the American Medical Association. The following year, the Minnesota Medical Association recognized her lifelong devotion to medicine and helping others by naming her as “Doctor of the Year.”⁵⁰ Honors from these various organizations, however, could not match the eloquent and heart-felt words written by a fellow physician published in the *Pope County Tribune* three years earlier:

Dr. Barsness has been so busy taking care of the many patients who constantly fill her waiting room that she hasn’t had the time to grow old and is still very active as a doctor. Her list of patients includes many who have had her as a family doctor for years, even through many generations. She is one of the best loved doctors that can be found in any community. She has given more than medicine and treatment to her patients in that she has given herself—her understanding and her gift of being able to give people hope and encouragement to go on facing the tribulations of life. Few people in this age have given more to humanity than she has.⁵¹

Inevitably, Dr. Nellie did fade away and when she died in 1966 at the age of ninety-two, her adopted son, Dr. Harry Simmonds, honored her memory by erecting a grand headstone that marked her grave at the family’s cemetery adjacent to Ben Lake. Following his own death in 1996, Dr. Simmonds bequeathed to the Department of Medicine at the University of Minnesota, a million-dollar scholarship and for the past twenty-two years, the Dr. Nellie N.



In 1927 Dr. Barsness attended a medical clinic led by Dr. Heinrich Neumann von Héthárs, one of the foremost ear-nose-and-throat doctors in Vienna before World War II. This group photo includes Dr. Nellie, who is the first person seated in the front row, left. She was one of only two women doctors in this particular class. Dr. Neumann, seated in the center of the front row with his right hand inside his white coat, was arrested by the Nazis in 1938 because he was a Jew, but he was later released and emigrated to the United States in early 1939, where he died shortly thereafter. *Photo courtesy of the Pope County Historical Society, Glenwood, Minn.*

Barsness Scholarship remains available to any qualified woman candidate pursuing a career in medicine.⁵²

At the gates of the family cemetery stands a weathered mailbox. Inside, a guestbook contains notes of thanks from the many women who have benefited from the scholarship that bears Dr. Nellie's name.

A Life Well Lived

The Great War served as a crucible for Dr. Nellie Barsness and the other women of the W.O.H. Facing rejection from their own country to serve overseas and despite the frequent bureaucratic delays and the inherent dangers of a combat zone, they went anyway.⁵³ In the book entitled *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I*, authors Dorothy and Carl Schneider describe women's involvement in that era as "entrepreneurial" and, as with any venture, it involved both risks and uncertainties.⁵⁴ Like their male counterparts, they departed for overseas service believing they would "make the world safe for democracy" only to return home to a society that wanted to minimize its international re-

sponsibilities and ignore the lessons taught by war. In the interim, women veterans struggled with health issues associated with the war and an unprepared Veteran's Administration slow to respond to their needs.⁵⁵

Incremental progress, however, was made in late October 1918 when the army, faced with a shortage of physicians relented, albeit temporarily, and with support from the judge advocate general, recruited fifty-five women physicians to serve as dispensary doctors, anesthetists, and laboratory technicians.⁵⁶ The United States had to experience another world war along with a new generation of women in greater numbers to serve as a catalyst for that change to take permanent hold. In 1943, the Army recruited its first woman physician, Margaret D. Craighill, who was commissioned as a major and served in the U.S. Army Medical Corps.⁵⁷

Currently, the post of the U.S. Army's Surgeon General is held by Lieutenant General Nadja West, a woman with an impressive record of achievement. She is the army's forty-fourth Surgeon General and the first woman of African American descent to hold this post.⁵⁸ West succeeded Lieutenant General Patricia Horoho, who became the

army's first nurse to do so.⁵⁹ For almost a decade, qualified women have held this high position of responsibility. Such is the arc of history.

From an individual standpoint, what clearly stands out among Dr. Nellie's endeavors and successes were her personal wartime experiences that galvanized her character and represented a defining moment in her storied career. Decades later, she recalled returning to St. Paul on New Year's Eve, 1919. America had already commemorated the Armistice's one-year anniversary; yet after all the time away and her prolonged absence from her private medical practice, she encountered difficulty readjusting to what she referred to as "the slow moving normal life of St. Paul."⁶⁰ Below the veneer of peace, however, Dr. Barsness also detected an immeasurable undercurrent of anxiety pervading society. "Somehow, I seemed to sense a sadness among the people. Many families felt the effects of war. Others were tortured by the severe influenza epidemic. Physicians and nurses were overworked, and the hospitals overcrowded." In a prophetic statement, Dr. Nellie concluded, "The possibility of more wars gave one a sense of insecurity. Parents looked at their small boys and wondered."⁶¹ Less than a generation later, those questions were unequivocally answered.



An undated photo of Dr. Barsness late in her life. She died in 1966. Photo courtesy of the Pope County Historical Society, Glenwood, Minn.

Johannes Allert is a graduate of Minnesota State University, Mankato and holds a Masters in military history from Norwich University. Currently an adjunct professor at Rogers State University, he's working on a new project he calls Discovering Minnesota's Lost Generation: Reflections and Remembrances of the Great War.

NOTES

1. Dated March 21, 1953 is a typewritten collection submitted to the Pope County Historical Society along with personal belongings of the late physician including an office desk, formal wear, and medals she received from the French Government for her service in World War I. Hereinafter referred to as Dr. Nellie Barsness Memoirs, Pope County Historical Society.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid. At a young age, she stated she discovered words sometimes had different meanings. "Smarts," for example, could refer to intelligence or indicate pain, as in "This soap smarts my hands."

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. St. Paul's Luther Hospital, which opened in 1903, was founded by the Norwegian Hospital Society in a mansion at Tenth and John streets. Shortly after the hospital was established, Charles D. Gilfillan, a wealthy businessman and philanthropist, gave the hospital several nearby buildings for its use. One of these buildings became the tuberculosis unit which functioned for that

purpose until 1914 when Ancker Hospital on West Seventh Street became the primary care facility for TB patients in Ramsey County.

8. Jean Murray, "Dr. Nellie Barsness: Paving the Way for Women Physicians in Minnesota," *University of Minnesota Medical Bulletin* (Winter 1998): 12.

9. Michael S. Neiberg, *The Path to War: How The First World War Created Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) chronicles the events leading up to America's involvement in World War I. The author provides a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the country's gradual evolution as a world power and its relationship to global events of the twentieth century.

10. Mary C. Gillett, *The Army Medical Department: 1917-1941* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 2009), 44. Gillett reports, "In the early months of U.S. participation in World War I, the Medical Department found itself in a state of confusion and uncertainty, a state compounded by procrastination on the part of the nation's political leaders and by the resultant confusion and uncertainty of the Army."

11. Lettie Gavin, *American Women in World War I: They Also Served* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007), ix-xi. Gavin writes, "Women doctors, on the other hand, were never accepted into the Army, although doctors were badly needed, especially during the heavy fighting as the war ground to a close in 1918."
12. Nellie N. Barsness, "Highlights in Careers of Women Physicians in Pioneer Minnesota," *Journal of American Medical Women's Association*, 13:1 (January 1958): 21. Dr. Addie R. Haverfield, a native of Ohio, received her M.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1895. Nellie Barsness was the first woman from Minnesota to receive her M.D. (1902). Dr. Haverfield's service record is confirmed in the Minnesota State Adjutant's Military Service Records. She served from 1 October 1898 to 5 February 1899 as a nurse in Jacksonville, Fla. and at Camp Columbia, Cuba. State Adjutant General, Military Service Records SA 1, Roll 6 (microfilm).
13. Minnesota War Records Commission, World War I Military Service Records, Minnesota Historical Society, Non-Military Service, Box 109.I.2.5B, hereinafter referred to as Minnesota War Records Commission.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Women's Overseas Hospitals U.S.A. Of The National American Woman Suffragette Association* (New York, National Woman Suffrage Publishing, 1919), 9 and 19.
17. Minnesota War Records Commission.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. Richard S. Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 465-67.
24. *Ibid.* pp. 465-66.
25. Minnesota War Records Commission.
26. *Women's Overseas Hospitals U.S.A. Of The National American Woman Suffrage Association*, 11.
27. Minnesota War Records Commission.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Women's Overseas Hospitals U.S.A. Of The National American Woman Suffrage Association*, 17-18.
33. *Ibid.*, 19.
34. Minnesota War Records Commission.
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Women's Overseas Hospitals U.S.A. Of The National American Woman Suffrage Association*, 17-18.
37. Minnesota War Records Commission.
38. The modern term "Iron Harvest" refers to the frequent gathering of unexploded ordinance collected from Belgium and French farmers in the regions where the war took place. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/britain-at-war/10172232/Lethal-relics-from-WW1-are-still-emerging.html> (accessed November 12, 2017).
39. *Women's Overseas Hospitals U.S.A. Of The National American Woman Suffrage Association*, 18.
40. Nellie Barsness Memoirs, Pope County Historical Society.
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42. *Ibid.*, 21.
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44. *Ibid.*
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46. Marcelle T. Bernard, "Dr. Nellie N. Barsness," *Pope County Tribune*, September 10, 1953, p. 1.
47. Patent US1396547—Sanitary Appliance for Closet Seats, Patented November 8, 1921. <http://google.com/patents/US1396547> (Accessed November 12, 2017).
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49. "Woman Medic in Practice Half-Century," *St. Paul Dispatch*, May, 28, 1952, p. 19.
50. "Former Glenwood Resident Named Doctor of the Year," *Pope County Tribune*, November 24, 1956, p. 1 (Second Section).
51. Marcell T. Bernard, M.D., "Dr. Nellie Barsness."
52. Murray, 13.
53. Gavin, 158-59.
54. Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I* (New York: Viking Press, 1991), 1 and 284-85.
55. Dr. Nellie Barsness Memoirs, Pope County Historical Society.
56. Mary C. Gillett, 51.
57. Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, 1 and 284-85. According to Mary C. Gillett, "Responsibility for providing medical care for the 160,000 WACs and nurses of the Army was placed upon the Office of The Surgeon General, both in Auxiliary days and after the change to Army status." She goes on to report, "For the year (1943) of the Auxiliary's existence, these responsibilities toward WACs were handled as part-time duty by a Medical Corps officer. Shortly before the conversion, the responsibility was delegated to the first woman Medical Corps officer, Major Margaret D. Craighill, former dean of a woman's medical college in Pennsylvania" (*Women in the Army Medical Department*, 602). <http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwii/WomeninAMEDD/WACCh31healthmedical.htm> (Accessed 18 May 2018).
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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

*The mission statement of the Ramsey County Historical Society
adopted by the Board of Directors on January 25, 2016.*

The Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to be widely recognized as an innovator, leader, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and using local history in education. Our mission of *preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future* guides this vision.

The Society began in 1949 when a group of citizens acquired and preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family had acquired in 1849. Following five years of restoration work, the Society opened the Gibbs Farm museum (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974). Originally programs focused on telling the story of the pioneer life of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the historic site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, building additional structures, and dedicating outdoor spaces to tell these stories. The remarkable relationship of Jane Gibbs with the Dakota during her childhood in the 1830s and again as an adult encouraged RCHS to expand its interpretation of the Gibbs farm to both pioneer and Dakota life.

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, an expanded commitment from Ramsey County enabled the organization to move its library, archives, and administrative offices to downtown St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An additional expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to better serve the public and allow greater access to the Society's vast collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, due to an endowment gift of \$1 million, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS has continuously focused on ensuring it serves Ramsey County's diverse citizenry. As part of this ongoing effort, please check the RCHS website at www.rchs.com for the opening of an impactful new exhibit, "Selma 70," the publication of the Lower-town Interpretive Plan, and other scheduled events and programs at Gibbs, Landmark, and elsewhere in the community.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY








Pathways to Dakota & Pioneer Life
Experience | Understand | Grow

Rewards for Amateur Oarsmen



The Citizens Cup, left, and the Mayors Cup were presented to the winners of the Junior and Senior Four-Oared races at the Minnesota Boat Club's annual Fourth of July Regatta. Both cups were given to the Minnesota Boat Club in 1877. The elaborate engraving on each cup is visible in these photos and it includes the names and dates of some of the winners of these cups.

Photos of the trophies by Sarah Risser, courtesy of Bruce Kessel, captain of the Minnesota Boat Club.

The Ramsey County Historical Society publishes a wide variety of award-winning books, DVDs and digital content on historical subjects for children and adults.

Our recent publications include a ground-breaking study of Fort Snelling during the Civil War and the Dakota Conflict, *Fort Snelling and the Civil War*; the history and restoration of *Custom House*, the Art Deco-style Post Office in Lowertown; and in partnership with TPT, *North Star: Civil War Stories*, a film on the experiences of African-American Minnesotans who fought in the Civil War, (available as a DVD).

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Dr. Nellie N. Barsness in uniform shortly before her 1918 departure from New York for service with the Women's Overseas Hospital U.S.A. in France. For more on Dr. Nellie and her experiences at the front, see Johannes Allert's article on page 12.