

An Oral History

By Irene Wright

INTRODUCTION

This article is based on a tape made by Irene Wright on March 9, 1983, at her house. It was part of The North Falmouth Oral History Program sponsored by The North Falmouth Village Association. Her tape is in the archives of the Falmouth Museums on the Green. Jeanne Sarnosky of the Visiting Nursing Association asked Fran Ross, the VNA archivist, if there were any record of the VNA hiring Irene. Fran Ross told Jeanne that she had found the name Irene Metzner listed 6th on the inside back cover of "the little 'gold' anniversary booklet that someone put together many years ago." The editors thank these two women for their help. We salute the VNA for its many decades of service to the town. The Oral History Program of the North Falmouth Village Association is a valuable resource for historians, one much appreciated by the editors of *Spritsail*.

My Years with the Falmouth Nursing Association

I arrived in Falmouth on the Fourth of July, 1927, brimming over with enthusiasm for my work as Public Health Nurse at the Falmouth Nursing Association and also with appreciation of the beauty of the Town of Falmouth for I was born and brought up in the city.

At that time there were only two nurses, Ruth Newcomb and I. Our program consisted of calls in the homes, running clinics and providing school nursing in Mashpee. The fee at that time was only fifty cents. We worked and lived in the little white cottage on Locust Street in Falmouth next to what is now the Irish Pub. [now Grumpy's] The office and clinic rooms were downstairs and our living quarters were upstairs. Since we were on 24-hour call we were required to live there. There was a housekeeper who cooked and kept house for us. At one time our housekeeper was a Mrs. Dahlborg, one of the Dahlborgs of Silver Beach. Also the clerk at one time was Ida Small Sylvester, so you see North Falmouth was well represented during my stay in the cottage.

I drove a Model T Ford Coupe to make my calls which included the whole of Falmouth with its many villages. My first day, Ruth and I went together on our calls. At the Bernard Wrights' in Teaticket we attended a new mother and baby; then on to East Falmouth and across Hatchville Road to North Falmouth. It was a narrow, winding road; Route 151 was not in existence at that time.



Ruth Newcomb, Irene Wright's nursing colleague, on a home call.
Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

The one and only road from Falmouth to Boston, Old Main Road, ran through North Falmouth on the west side of town.

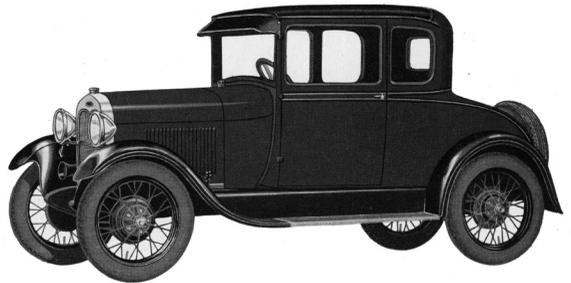
Since the nearest hospitals were in Hyannis and New Bedford, most of the babies were born at home and the nurse accompanied the doctor on all maternity cases. I remember getting a call from Andrew Rose in West Falmouth saying he couldn't reach the doctor. When I got there, he greeted me with open arms saying, "You're an angel sent from heaven!" I didn't feel like an angel; the baby arrived before the doctor

got there. During my time serving with Ruth Newcomb, quite a few babies in East Falmouth were named Ruth and Irene.

There were only four doctors in town, old Dr. Tripp, Dr. Jones, Dr. Pattee and Dr. Wiswall. The town had just acquired its first ambulance and there was a rule that a nurse must accompany the patient on all ambulance calls. I was the first nurse to ride in the new ambulance. We were taking a patient to Cape Cod Hospital and what a ride! Chief Wells drove that ambulance at 80 miles an hour.

A little over a year after my arrival in 1927, Ruth resigned and I became supervising nurse. On November 19, 1932, I married Norman Wright. Since the nurse had to live at the house center on 24-hour call duty, I resigned on January first, 1933, and became a member of the North Falmouth community.

I loved every minute of my years with the Falmouth Nursing Association from July 4, 1927, to January 1, 1933.



A 1927 Model T Ford Coupe similar to the one driven by Irene Wright to make her nursing calls.
Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.



V N A

A glimpse backward: 75 years of caring

HEALTH OF YOUNG FALMOUTH IS CHECKED BEFORE SCHOOL ENTRY
 MAY 17, 1934
 One, hundred and eleven Falmouth five-year-olds kept a corps of health workers busy last week.

Nursing Service Will Cost More
 SEPT. 16, 1966
 Sixty per cent increase in the Falmouth schools' payment to Falmouth Nursing Association for nursing service in the schools is proposed by the FNA, a jump from \$10,500 to \$17,000 a year.

Nursing Unit Readies Fete At Falmouth
 AUG. 1, 1963
 FALMOUTH, Aug. 1 (AP) — The nursing unit of the Falmouth Nursing Association is here for the annual fete. The unit is here for the annual fete. The unit is here for the annual fete.

Nursing Association Will Provide Nurses For All Falmouth Schools
 JAN. 15, 1960
 School board members Tuesday night signed a contract, already signed by Falmouth Nursing Association officers, under which nurses of the association will carry on the general nursing program in Falmouth schools.

First Annual Report of the Falmouth Nursing Association, 1916-17.
 REPORT OF THE SECRETARY.
 The Falmouth Nursing Association, in affiliation with the American Red Cross, was organized at a mass meeting held in the Town Hall, Falmouth, on July 15, 1916. The work of the Visiting Nurse, Miss E. A. Fisher, began July 15. A meeting was held August 7, 1916. At the annual meeting held August 7, 1916. At the annual meeting held August 7, 1916. At the annual meeting held August 7, 1916.

September Visits Listed By Nurses
 OCT. 18, 1966
 FALMOUTH, Oct. 18.—Falmouth Nursing Association's September report shows 468 visits were made by the staff nurses.

Free Clinic For Polio Vaccine
 JUNE 19, 1965
 FALMOUTH, June 19.—The Falmouth Nursing Association is sponsoring a free clinic for polio vaccine.

Fete on the Village Green
 THURSDAY, AUGUST 8, 1924
 Benefit of the Falmouth Nursing Association

Important Community Work
 MAR. 12, 1943
 "As a war measure Falmouth Nursing Association is omitting its annual report, but we especially need the continued support and help of all our friends at this time."

Kennedys Donate Item For Auction
 JULY 21, 1962
 FALMOUTH, July 21 — President and Mrs. Kennedy have donated an autographed steel engraving of the White House to the Falmouth Nursing Association to be put up for auction at its annual fete on Aug. 2.

Total Proceeds for 1935 Fete Are \$4,361.90. Gain of \$1000 Over Last Year
 SEPT. 12, 1935
 The main committee followed up on the success of the annual fete for benefit of the Falmouth Nursing Association for \$4,361.90. Arthur W. Bell, the association, announced that the fete, and \$275 realized from booths at the Falmouth Heights, in A. N. Thomson, met James T. Johnson's committee.

Montage celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Visiting Nurse Association in 1991. Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

Memories of the North Falmouth Community

Dot Swift was made postmaster when the Post Office was located in the back part of the Superette. The blacksmith shop was standing where the little cottage now stands between the present Post Office and the Superette. The Clifford Hubbards lived next to Bert and Nona Landers. Mr. Hubbard was then a selectman. Nona Landers had a cupboard where she kept medical supplies belonging to the Falmouth Nursing Association, which folks in North Falmouth could borrow.

I remember the old tavern when it was owned by Bill Nye. One time, in return for the use of his front lawn for our summer fair, the Thursday Club agreed to clean and open up the house for Bill. We had a ball, cleaning and exploring many rooms with a historical background.

Mr. Rand had an office in the area now occupied by the Village Casuals. Everyone remembered how much of North Falmouth he bought up, but I remember him by his yacht which he kept in Rand's Canal. He invited Norman's mother and me on his yacht one afternoon for tea. It was very enjoyable, my one and only time I was entertained on a yacht.

I attended the first meeting of the Know Your Neighbor Club which was held about 1943 or 1944 at the home of Mrs. Harold Hunt, now owned by the Keatings. The minister's wife invited the ladies of the church to attend and there were twelve or so there. I believe I am the only charter member now in the club.

Whenever a new minister was to come and live in the old parsonage, the ladies got together to clean and shine it in preparation for his arrival. Polly Mead usually headed up the crew and it was more or less a day of fun. Everybody brought their lunch. Speaking of the parsonage, the present parsonage was built almost wholly by the men of the church. Frank Ogilvie headed up the project and the men worked whenever they had spare time. One Saturday morning the committee wanted to hold an urgent meeting. Norman was in the midst of putting a concrete ramp into the barn and couldn't leave, so they held the meeting in the barn doorway.

I remember the night the railroad station burned. It was a frightening experience since the water pressure was too low and they had to connect the hose to the hydrant almost down to the Post Office before they could control the fire.

Acknowledgment

Spritsail editorial board member Judy Stetson prepared this oral history.