

WILLIE ELIZABETH GUTHRIE NELSON
Director of Nursing Activities - 1948 - 1958



ELIZABETH NELSON WITH BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT LUNCHEON

In August of 2008, present and former members of the Board of Directors of the health service, as well as former staff, gathered to honor Willie Elizabeth Guthrie Nelson, our first Health Service nurse, for her visionary guidance and pioneering efforts in establishing our nursing policies and procedures and to thank her for leaving an exciting career with great promise to come here to help us. It marked the 60th anniversary of her arrival in Victoria on August 14, 1948, to assume her duties.

Prior to joining the Lunenburg Health Service, Mrs. Nelson received a graduate degree in public health nursing from Columbia University, served with distinction as a Staff Nurse for the Instructive Visiting Nurse Society of the District of Columbia, as Supervisor and Acting Educational Director for the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association in Richmond, Virginia; and as Assistant Nurse Officer and Consultant Supervisor with the United States Public Health Service in Washington, DC.

Mrs. Nelson was the Director of Nursing Activities for the Lunenburg Health Service for ten years, from 1948 to 1958. The following vintage photographs help us visualize the Health Service at work through Mrs. Nelson and through her predecessors over these many years, and they help us imagine what current nurse Deborah Craven's days entail today.







*Nelson interviewing a student with Mr. Revere,
Principal of Kenbridge High School*



Nelson with full board - 1952

Elizabeth met the love of her life, Clay Nelson, while working with the Health Service. They married on October 15, 1950, and she became mother to his two children, Bonnie and Mickey. She and Clay later had a son, Arthur. She remained with the Health Service up until just one week prior to Arthur's birth in 1958. She and Clay and their family moved to Roanoke in the summer of 1964 in order to accommodate Clay's job with the railroad and ensure more quality family time around his schedule.

With this move to Roanoke, Elizabeth returned to nursing. She held positions as an instructor in Obstetrics Nursing at Roanoke Memorial Hospital School of Nursing; as Nursing Supervisor for multiple localities in the Roanoke Valley; and as Administrative Coordinator for the Child Development Clinic in Roanoke.

She was an active member of numerous nursing and community health organizations and worked to improve mental health services for children and legislation for the benefit of the elderly. She was instrumental in obtaining a low-rent housing project in Roanoke for the elderly and handicapped.

She was described as "an outstanding humanitarian by consistently befriending those in need." An example of this is her adoption of a young Korean nurse whom she tutored in English and nursing to enable her to pass the Virginia State Boards. She then arranged for her adopted daughter's wedding to her Korean sweetheart, who later became an American physician. The result of this is now four adopted grandchildren.

In 1980, she received the Nancy Vance Pin Award for outstanding state nurse from the Virginia Nurses Association. She retired in 1982 from the Child Development Clinic in Roanoke. The Virginia Nurses Association recognized her as one of Virginia's Pioneer Nurses at their centennial celebration in 2000.



Receiving the Nancy Vance Pin Award in 1980

On September 3, 1948, Mary Croft Pulley, writing for *The Victoria Dispatch* in her weekly, "The Sixth Column", said:

"A visit to our new Health Center was an interesting experience. It is impossible to visit there and not come away feeling proud that you have such a place in your community. Miss Guthrie impresses one as being one of those rare persons who are both practical and sympathetic. Her references prove that she is also efficient. Her presence is going to prove a blessing to this county or I miss my guess."

Miss Pulley did not miss her guess!

Elizabeth Nelson was a trailblazer for community and public health nursing for over half a century. She died May 6, 2009. In lieu of flowers, she asked that donations be made to the Willie G. Nelson Endowed Nursing Scholarship Fund at Radford University, a fitting end to a life lived in service to others.

NELSON LUNCHEON PHOTOS



Board member Cal Spencer presents Nelson with a plaque in recognition of her contribution to the Health Service and public health nursing



Board member Larry Roach reminisces about what it was like growing up next door to the Nelsons.



Nelson with LHS President Bruce Chandler and Louise



Nelson with Board member, Dr. Dan Baugh



Nelson with daughter, Bonnie



Mickey and Sadie Nelson



Nelson Family



Arthur Nelson, Jane Williams Woolard, Bonnie Nelson, and Mickey Nelson with Elizabeth Nelson



Nelson with Robert W. Williams, Jr.



Robert, Rob, Judy, and Christy Williams



Board members, Dr. Lewis Bridgforth and Dr. Dan Baugh



Janet Watson and Deborah Craven