

Geneseo Visiting Nurse Association

In 1914, Mrs. Josephine G. Buckley of Geneseo, secretary of the St. Michael's Episcopal Church branch of the Girls' Friendly Society, saw an opportunity to improve public health services for Geneseo residents. The Girls' Friendly Society had fundraised through local events, helping to furnish the Village of Geneseo with its first visiting nurse, Miss Katharine Lesser. The ladies' organization eventually concluded, however, that a visiting nurse program would be better able to meet public health needs if it were a separate organization in partnership with Village of Geneseo officials. Thus, the Nurse Association of the Village of Geneseo was formed in January 1914. Its purpose was to employ a registered nurse to make house calls for chronic cases as well as emergency situations and provide public health education.

The Nurses' Auxiliary was established almost immediately to help support the equipment needs of the Village Nurse. This formed the basis of the present Geneseo Loan Closet, which provides residents with durable medical equipment, such as walkers, wheelchairs, and crutches.

In 1918, as the "Spanish Influenza" pandemic swept through the region, the meeting minutes of the Geneseo Visiting Nurse Association, as it came to be known, capture little of the Village Nurse's intense work. During two meetings in 1919, the tremendous labors by Miss Louise Krotzsch, the Village Nurse at the time, were primly summarized:

"Meeting Tues Mar 25 [1919]

The meeting was largely a discussion of the diphtheria conditions of Geneseo at the present time.

It was suggested that the Secretary write a notice for the paper, showing the efficient way in which the village nurse has cooperated with the health officer + the doctors in the influenza epidemic, in the discovering of the preventive measures taken against further cases.

A dance + play are to be given May 2 by the Girls' Friendly. Village nurse asso. asked to cooperate in serving refreshments.

Meeting adjourned till 2nd Tues in Apr.

Annual Report [June, 1919]

There is little doubt that the Village of Geneseo was saved from a serious epidemic during the time that the surrounding towns were in the throes of Influenza though the work of the Village Nurse.

She also did efficient work during an epidemic of Diphtheria in the Italian Quarter. ...

Miss Krotch was of great assistance in discovering probable cases of tuberculosis during the recent tb. clinic. ...

The value of the work of a village nurse in a community of this size cannot be overestimated.

Newspaper articles around this time praised the Village Nurse for her long days and “persistent and unobtrusive campaign for better sanitation and greater cleanliness in our homes.”

The Geneseo Visiting Nurse Association saw the resignation of Miss Krotch in 1920, but continued operations. The Village Nurse assisted the elderly, visited expectant and new mothers, tracked cases of communicable disease, distributed milk and cod liver oil to undernourished children, and provided instruction in sanitation, among many other responsibilities. A clinic, first held on Court Street, was later located in the Village Building on Main Street. The Village Nurse worked under the direction of local physicians, and funds for the program came from village appropriations, the Community Chest, individual charitable donation, and fees paid by patients. If a patient was not able to pay, however, services to them were free. Although well-known Geneseo men served as advisors initially, the executive committee consisted mainly of women during the Association’s operation.

In 1964, the *Livingston Republican* reported that Geneseo was the only village in the region that still supported a visiting nurse. But by autumn of 1975, with the modernizing system of hospitals, clinics, and county and regional home health care agencies, the Geneseo Visiting Nurse Association was discontinued after 61 years of service.

Livingston County continued to be served by a local home health agency, operated by the Livingston County Department of Health, until the Visiting Nurse Association of Western New York purchased the agency in 2013.

(By Holly Watson, Deputy County Historian, 5.2020)