

Harriet Anne Boomer

Harriet Anne Boomer was a leader among the group of women who founded a good number of the still surviving women's organizations in turn of the century London.



Harriet Anne Mills was born in 1835 in either Taunton or Bishop's Hall, Somerset, England; the daughter of a solicitor Thomas Milliken Mills and his wife Anne Benton. In 1851 her father died and her mother was asked to take over the children's school in Red River, Manitoba. Mrs. Mills and her two daughters May Louise and Harriet, sailed to York Factory on James Bay and then were canoed southwest by Indians to their destination. In 1856 Harriet and Mrs. Mills return to England after May Louise married a future chief justice of Quebec.

In 1858 Harriet married Alfred R. Roche who had connections with the Hudson's Bay Company and also an interest in South African mines. While traveling to South Africa in 1876 Alfred died. Harriet latter wrote two books about their adventures; an account of the voyage entitled "Trek in the Transvaal" and latter an aid to Huron College, "Notes on our Log in South Africa" (London, Ont. 180). In November 1878 Harriet married Rev Michael Boomer and as her obituary stated; "Since then has spent most of her life and energies in London". Boomer was appointed dean of the Anglican Diocese of Huron and principal of Huron College. He presided over the organizational meeting of the University of Western Ontario, and became its first president until 1885. He died in 1888.

Harriet played a remarkable role in establishing and administering a wide variety of women's societies, many of them associated with medicine. Her main activities centered around the London Local Council of Women, founded in 1893 as an umbrella group for all women's guilds. She was president for some twenty years around the turn of the century. The women's groups raised funds to construct the children's wing of Victoria Hospital.

In 1903 Harriet was also Vice-President or Ontario's Council of the National Council of Women. Harriet was also a member of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire and although she was never the London regent a Harriet Boomer chapter was named in her honour. She established the first Red Cross Society in London to aid soldiers fighting in the Boer War. The Society lapsed for a while but in 1914 Lady Beck was elected president and Harriet Boomer, then almost eighty was elected

honorary president. Their campaigns helped raise almost one million dollars for war work.

Harriet was the first president of the Victorian Order of Nurses from 1906-1912. She also had connections with the Board of Education, the Canadian Club, the Mother's Union, the St. John's Ambulance Association, and the Women's Christian Association.

At her funeral in 1921, conducted by Bishop David Williams at Bishop Cronyn Memorial Church the establishment of London was in full force. The pallbearers included County Judge Thomas Talbot Macbeth; City Solicitor, Thomas G. Meredith; Fred P. Betts, K.C., of Cronyn, Betts and Coleridge; Harvey Skey, manager of the Bank of Montreal; and the Honorable Charles S. Hyman. Political to the last she insisted the memorial tributes be limited to one or two flowers per person and except for a few large organizations, everyone obeyed her. The London Free Press praised her as, "perhaps London's most philanthropic and patriotic worker".

**Source: An Illustrated History of London, Canada , Frederick H. Armstrong
pages 167- 168**