

# **The St. Joseph's Hospital and Nursing School Artifact Collection**

**Noelle Tangredi, Volunteer Caretaker of the Collection  
St. Joseph's Health Care London**

## **A Brief History of St. Joseph's Hospital in London, Ontario**

In the winter of 1868, five Sisters of St. Joseph journeyed from Toronto to London at the request of Bishop John Walsh. The women were tasked with teaching parish children, caring for the sick, poor, and prisoners, and providing for orphans. With the purchase of a property, Mount Hope, in 1869, the Sisters moved into a new home and transformed it into a sanctuary for the elderly and orphans. The home underwent significant expansions over the years to meet the growing need for care.

The remarkable work of the Sisters did not go unnoticed, and Dr. W.T. O'Reilly, Government Inspector of Hospitals and Charitable Institutions, convinced Reverend Mother Ignatia Campbell to extend their mission to include hospital work. A property adjacent to Mount Hope was purchased for this purpose, the former home of Justice W.P. Street. On October 15, 1888, St. Joseph's Hospital opened its doors to patients, marking the culmination of the Sisters' tireless efforts and sacrifices to transform the building into a place of healing. With a modest ten beds, the hospital was initially staffed by just three Sisters and four doctors.

Dr. Wishart treated one of the hospital's first patients, Mrs. Wells, who arrived by milk wagon with a fractured hip after slipping on an onion. He set her limb without X-ray pictures and treated her chronic asthma. Her husband, afflicted with cancer, later joined her in the hospital, where they were both cared for until their deaths.

## **From Humble Beginnings: The Story of Our Artifact Collection**

When the Sisters were preparing to move to their new residence in 2007, they entrusted the hospital with over 40 boxes of items connected to the hospital's past. Kept safe at St. Joseph's, the collection grew as staff members and the public added more items, but the lack of space and opportunities for display left the collection hidden from public view.

A passionate group of staff members formed a committee to advocate for a permanent storage area for the collection and a space for exhibits. It took time, but eventually, space was earmarked for an exhibit area and a permanent storage space with a work area. The St. Joseph's Auxiliary purchased custom glass display cabinets for the exhibit area.

During the planning process, we reached out to Western's Public History Department, who had their own medical artifact collection, for support. Professors Michelle Hamilton, Shelley McKeller, and Michael Dove offered support, encouragement, and advice. This exchange helped to put us on the right path to bringing St. Joseph's hidden treasures to light.

Mary Grace Kosta, Archivist for the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, played a crucial role in the development of the artifact collection. After being contacted about the collection, Mary Grace visited us and our boxes of artifacts and provided advice on what to do next. This collaboration led to a partnership for the long-term care of the collection, ensuring proper storage, cleaning, and cataloging. As part of our collaboration, archival material such as manuscripts and original photographs were transferred to the Congregational Archives for climate-controlled preservation and cataloging. Mary Grace set up a program to train students from Western's Master of Library and Information Sciences Program and to date, 17 students have worked on the collection, learning museum registration skills.

Initially, the collection was stored in plastic totes in an empty office, but when a sizable room became available for storage and cataloguing work, The Sisters of St. Joseph generously donated powder-coated shelving that was no longer in use at their archives in Hamilton. As items are removed from the boxes they are cleaned, accessioned, catalogued, and photographed. Then they get stored on the shelving, making it much easier to maintain the collection. We are making efforts to control the temperature, light, and relative humidity in the storage area manually, and practice integrated pest management.

We curated and put on our first exhibit in June 2016. The official opening was attended by members of the Congregation, hospital staff and administration, former employees, and members of the community. The ribbon was cut by Sister Jane Marie Stock, who originally arranged delivery of the collection to us in 2006. Since then, we have also had an exhibit at the provincial Legislature in Toronto.

In 2020, a project grant enabled Mary Grace to purchase museum software and a laptop for cataloguing the collection. To date, 169 items have been catalogued, and an artifact cataloguing manual, developed by Mary Grace, is available for download from the congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph archives website.

## The Collection

The St. Joseph's Hospital and Nursing School Artifact Collection has a specific criterion that all artifacts be associated with the hospital and belong to the time period ranging from the hospital's opening in 1888 to approximately 1980. The majority of the artifacts in the current collection are from the time period between 1900 and 1960.

One of the objectives in curating this collection is to uncover the narratives that lie within these artifacts. These stories might revolve around the individuals who used them, the ingenious minds that invented them, the various ways they were utilized, or the extraordinary journeys they embarked upon. Presented below is a modest selection of artifacts and the stories we uncovered.

### **Pocket Surgical Kit, circa 1880** **George Tiemann & Co. Surgical Instruments** **New York, New York, USA**



**Pocket Surgical Kit,  
Circa 1880**



This pocket surgical kit from circa 1880, is a fascinating glimpse into medical practices of the past. Made by George Tiemann & Co. in New York, this type of kit was a staple for physicians who often treated their patients in their homes rather than in a hospital. The kit has a brown leather case with a purple velvet interior and unfolds to reveal seven surgical implements, mainly scalpels, and two handles that attach to any of the instruments. Although the expandable compartment is now empty, it likely held suture silk and needles at one time. Interestingly, the two handles are likely made of ebonite, a hard rubber designed to look like ebony, and may not hold up under steam or hot water sterilization techniques. The adoption of asepsis in the 1890s led to changes in surgical instrument materials and design, potentially indicating that this kit was not used after that period. The patent date on this set is December 1880, making it one of the oldest items in our collection.

## Hot Water Pig, circa 1890

This warming bottle helped to keep a patient's feet toasty on chilly nights. The thick crockery helps to keep the hot water inside warm. Although we haven't been able to date it precisely, similar bottles from the 1890s give us a clue. Our collection boasts not just one, but two of these bottles - the other being a slightly smaller version of this one.



Warming Bottle/Hot Water Pig, circa 1890

## Book, Songs by the Wayside 1903

### Dr. W.J. Fischer

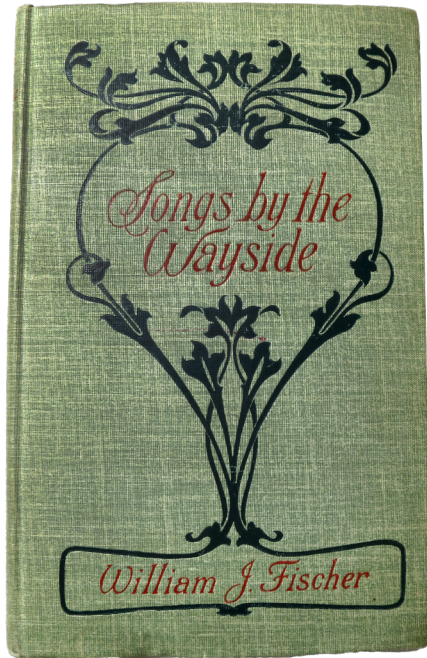


Dr. William J. Fischer, a graduate of Western University's Medical School Class of 1902, left an indelible mark during his time as the House Surgeon at St. Joseph's Hospital in 1903. His passion for the arts and music was as strong as his medical expertise. During his stay in London, Dr. Fischer published a book of poems, "Songs by the Wayside", which we were able to acquire for the collection. The dedication page pays homage to his parents with a mention of London and the date. He went on to publish other volumes of poetry, fiction, and writings for various journals and newspapers. Another book of poems "The Toiler" was dedicated to Drs. McArthur and Wishart—both part of the original four physicians of St. Joseph's Hospital. Dr. Fischer's talent extended beyond literature to the realm of music, where he was

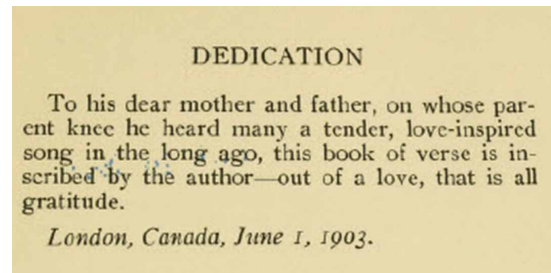
a skilled pianist and composer of several musical pieces. His love for rare songbirds led him to amass one of the largest collections of them in Canada at the time.

After returning to his hometown of Waterloo, he established a successful medical practice. Tragically, Dr. Fischer passed away from cancer in 1920, at the young age of 41.





**Book written by Dr. Fischer  
with dedication page**



### **Baby Slippers & Calling Card, 1914**



**Baby slippers**

These blue slippers were a thoughtful gift from Dr. and Mrs. Meek to Mrs. A. A. Robertson, a patient of Dr. Meek's, who had given birth in 1914. Enclosed within the gift was a calling card from Mrs. Meek, which bears her handwritten addition of "Dr. and" Mrs. Meek, along with the information that she received visitors on Tuesdays at their residence on 330 Queens Street. Dr. Harry Meek was a well-established physician by the time St. Joseph's opened, with a thriving practice that primarily focused on obstetrics and gynecology, though he also performed general surgery.



**Mrs. Meek's calling card and  
Photograph of Dr. H. Meek from Western University Archives**

### **Dr. A. von Petz Gastro-Intestinal Suturing Apparatus The Jetter & Scheerer Co. 1925**

This impressive device is the invention of Dr. Aladár von Petz, a Hungarian physician who sought to solve a grave issue in intestinal surgery. Specifically, Dr. von Petz aimed to prevent fatal peritonitis caused by contamination from bowel contents during bowel resection and other related procedures. His invention, which utilized surgical staples, soon gained him worldwide fame as the inventor of the surgical stapler. Modern surgical staplers are built on the foundation of Dr. von Petz's original design.



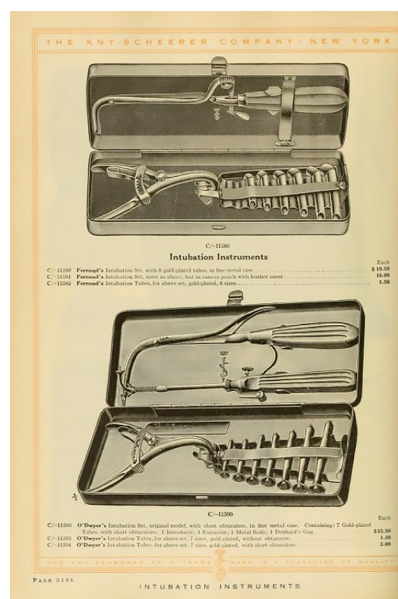
**Dr. A. von Petz Gastro  
Intestinal Suturing Apparatus, 1925.**

## Diphtheria Intubation Set Sharp & Smith, Chicago 1915

One thing we quickly discovered was that consulting a physician or medical professional wouldn't always be the solution when trying to identify a mysterious artifact. The field of medicine was rapidly evolving at the turn of the 20th century, with new instruments being introduced while others became obsolete. This complexity makes it difficult to discern the original purpose of some of the items in our collection, including a mystery object that stumped us for quite some time. Finally, we came across it in a 1915 medical instrument catalogue by KNY Scheerer of New York/Germany. Although not manufactured by them, our set is nearly identical to the one featured in the catalogue. Such sets were commonly used to help children suffering from diphtheria, a bacterial infection that causes the airway to close off and make breathing difficult. Before the development of a diphtheria antitoxin in 1890 and antibiotics in the 1940s, it was a severe health crisis that could result in suffocation and death. To help keep the throat open Dr. Joseph P. O' Dwyer (1841-1898) developed a set of tubes to help keep the patient's airway open and help them breathe. Our set includes six intubation tubes (gold plated), a metal scale to determine the correct tube size, and an introducer or extractor to place or remove the tube from the patient's airway. Despite progress in preventing and treating the disease, diphtheria remains a health concern that still flares up in areas of the world with low vaccination rates.



**(Left) Diphtheria Intubation Set.  
(Right) Surgical Instruments, 20<sup>th</sup> Edition  
The KNY Sheerer Company, 1915**





## **Autopsy Kit Dr. F.W. Luney 1892 – 1961**

This leather case contains various surgical and dissection tools that were likely gathered by Dr. Luney over the years, so we cannot pinpoint an exact date for its creation. The case is made of leather and lined with a copper box, which helps the leather retain its shape and protects the weighty instruments inside. A standout feature of the kit is the bone saw, which looks suspiciously similar to something purchased at a hardware store.



**Autopsy Kit belonging to Dr. F. W. Luney with partial contents displayed.**

In May of 1916, Dr. Luney joined the Canadian military's Army Medical Services division as a Lieutenant. He worked extensively with the local Army training set-up, as they, like other recruiting centers, were experiencing a significant number of cases of meningococcal meningitis among young soldiers. Dr. Luney assisted with accurate diagnosis and treatment protocols for controlling the disease. In the photo, we see Dr. Luney working with a patient in an isolation room.

Dr. Luney joined St. Joseph's Hospital in 1927, after serving as the Chief Pathologist for 10 years at Victoria Hospital. His task at St. Joseph's was to establish the hospital's first Biochemistry Lab. He was a trailblazer in blood transfusion and typing techniques, and later spearheaded the opening of a blood bank at St. Joseph's in 1945.





Upon his retirement, Dr. Luney left us with many artifacts, including his personal papers and medical school notebooks from the early 1900s. Practicum students taking part in the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Archives practicum program undertook the task of preserving, organizing, and cataloging these materials, which are now safely housed at the Congregational Archives. As a founding member of the St. Joseph's Historical Society in 1950, Dr. Luney may have been inspired by the committee's efforts to preserve the hospital's history, leading him to leave us with so many valuable artifacts.



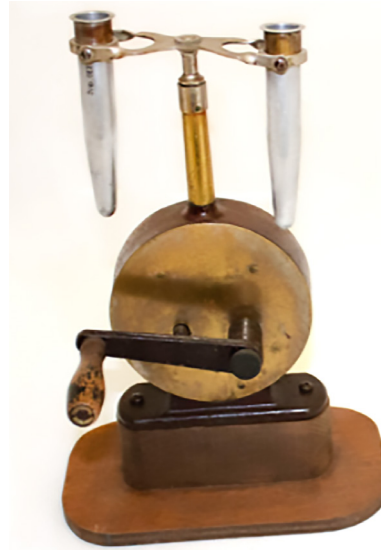
**(Top) Dr. Luney in his WW1 military uniform and  
(Bottom) working on a patient in a military isolation room from  
The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Archives.**

## **Drying Oven, E. H. Sargent & Co. circa 1914** **Manual Centrifuge, circa 1900**

We have an extensive collection of laboratory artifacts, and among them, I have picked two that I find particularly interesting. The first one is a drying oven patented in 1914. This oven utilizes dry heat to sterilize heat-resistant items, chemicals, laboratory glassware, as well as surgical equipment like scalpels, scissors, and blades.



**Drying Oven, circa 1914.**



**Manual Centrifuge, circa 1900**

The second item is a manual centrifuge that operates by spinning test tubes with a hand crank. We also have an electric centrifuge that dates back to between 1906 and 1915. Centrifuges are commonly used to separate red blood cells and other blood components from whole blood using gravitational force generated by the rapid spinning of the test tubes.

## **Wooden Mortar and Pestle 1961**

I wanted to highlight this item because it has a personal connection to one of the Sisters that worked at St. Joseph's Hospital. Sister Marie Louise (Giovannia) Miles was the first Sister Pharmacist. She served both at St. Joseph's Hospital and later at Mount St. Joseph, the Sisters' Motherhouse. This wooden mortar and pestle would have been used to prepare medications and is one of several pharmacy related tools we have that belonged to Sister Marie Miles. Many Sisters had professional training as clinicians, nurses, and scientists. They worked in different areas of the hospital, such as Sister Angela (Leonarda) Kelly, who graduated as a Registered Laboratory Technician in 1945,

and established the blood bank and clinic at the hospital, serving as a member of the Canadian Society of Laboratory Technologists.



**(left) Wooden Mortar and Pestle. (right) Photo of Sister Marie Louise Miles from The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Archives.**

### **Wheelchair, circa 1920s Used by Mother Ignatia Campbell**



This oak wheelchair is a truly special piece in our collection as it belonged to the founder of St. Joseph's Hospital, Mother Ignatia Campbell. It was her personal wheelchair, used by her throughout the 1920s until her passing in 1929. Made of sturdy oak and iron, this wheelchair has been lovingly cared for over the years, including recaning of the seat, back and leg rests by Sister Mary Leo Kirwin.

**(left) Wooden Wheelchair, circa 1920s. (right) Photo of Mother Ignatia Campbell from The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Archives.**

## **Anesthetic Machine, 1941 British Oxygen Engineering, Ltd.**



With its striking Art Deco design, this machine is a true reflection of its era. Patented in 1941 and further improved in 1943, it was specifically created to administer a blend of gases, such as oxygen and nitrous oxide. Our collection also includes all of the accessories to go with it, such as goggles, masks, and mouthpieces.

**Anesthetic Machine, 1941**

## **Mothers and Babies at St. Joseph's**

On June 5, 2011 St. Joseph's Health Care transferred the perinatal care program to a new facility at London Health Science's Victoria Hospital as part of the Health Restructuring Commission mandates in 1997. It was an emotional day for everyone involved, marking the end of an era. The transfer was the result of years of collaboration, planning, and hard work, and it was a significant milestone for both organizations.

In spring 2019, we curated an exhibit on the history of birthing at St. Joseph's spanning from 1901 to 2011. Although our collection is lacking in perinatal and obstetric artifacts, we were fortunate to borrow some from London Health Sciences and Western's medical artifact collection. The exhibit brought attention to our collection and led to the donation of several artifacts related to obstetrics and perinatal care at St. Joseph's Hospital.



## Metal Bassinet, 1951



Metal Bassinet, 1951

One such item is this metal bassinet which came with an interesting history. It was originally donated in 1951 to St. Joseph's Hospital by a women's group, but was later replaced by modern bassinets. After being sold to a salvage dealer, it ended up with local artist and prop maker Leigh Maulson, who used it in various scenarios, including as a prop in a haunted walk and as an outdoor plant stand. Maulson donated the bassinet to our collection after seeing an advertisement for our birthing exhibit on social media. Now, this artifact is back where it began, with some interesting tales to tell.

In addition to clinical artifacts, our collection also includes non-clinical items such as those associated with building maintenance, office administration, and even patient memorabilia.

## Framed Print 1936

### An illustrated verse from "A Child's Garden of Verses"



Framed Print from  
"A Child's Garden of Verses" 1936

This item tells the story of a 10-year-old child, treated at St. Joseph's during 1936-1937. Her physician was Dr. Hubert Loughlin, a well respected Pediatrician who was Chief of Pediatrics from 1948 – 1963. The child received this print as a gift while she was ill. It not only reflects her time in the hospital, but also serves as a reminder of the devastating flood that occurred in London in April of 1937.

**On the back of the print is written:** "Year spent in bed August 1936 to May 1937 (year of the flood). Dr. Hubert Loughlin, child specialist. Strep Throat and Rheumatic Fever. A terrible experience for a 10-year-old. Missed a year at school, which I loved. Perhaps made me a special person as I came through it all!"

## **The St. Joseph's Training School of Nursing 1901 - 1977**

The school opened in 1901 with Sister Justina Podlewski as Superintendent. Student nurses resided in the original hospital building (Judge Street's former home) until a new four-story building was built for the school and nurses' residence in 1927. This building still stands today—running along Richmond Street north to Cromwell Street. The school offered a three-year diploma program and its graduates were eligible to become registered in 1923. Affiliation with Western started in 1929 which gave students the ability to earn a Bachelor of Science Nursing degree. In 1970, the school became part of the Fanshawe College Nursing Program and was renamed the St. Joseph's Campus of Fanshawe College. By 1977, the St. Joseph's Campus closed.

We have several artifacts related to the nursing school and its students in our collection, such as a student uniform and wool cape from the 1940s, graduation medals, cap pins, textbooks, and graduation memorabilia. These items were mostly donated by former students or their families.

## **Fever Thermometer with Case, circa 1915**

This is a mercury thermometer in a twist metal case with a chain. It belonged to Helen Woolson, who graduated from St. Joseph's School of Nursing in 1908. She would have worn this pinned to her uniform. The picture next to it is from a 1915 medical instrument catalogue.

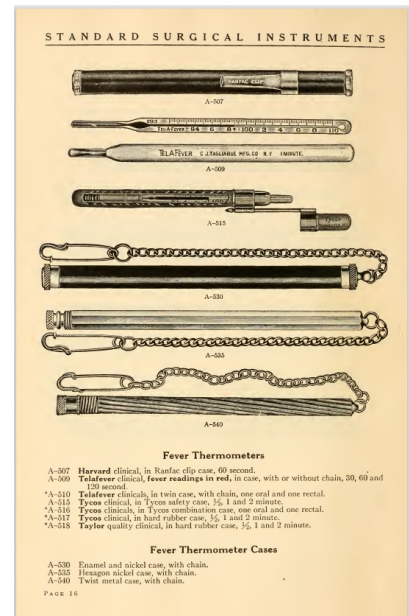
In May of 1916, Woolson joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force and was initially assigned to No. 10 Canadian Stationary Hospital, a medical unit established by Western University and overseen by Dr. Edwin Seaborn. Along with other nursing sisters, she journeyed to England in June of the same year.

However, her posting changed in July, and she was reassigned to No. 1 Canadian General Hospital in France, where she served for the rest of the war.

In recognition of her exceptional service in military nursing, Woolson was awarded the Royal Red Cross, second class, a prestigious military decoration presented in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth. In 1919, H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, later King Edward, officially presented her with the medal at Wolseley Barracks in London, Ontario.



**(Left) Fever Thermometer with Case  
(Right) Standard Surgical Instruments and Allied Lines,  
4th Ed., 1915, Hudson Surgical Co., Inc.**



**Helen Woolson receiving the Royal Red Cross medal in 1919 at Wolseley Barracks  
from The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada Archives.**

Following the war, Woolson nursed at Byron Sanatorium and at Speedwell Hospital in Guelph; served as an investigator with the Canadian Pension Commission for Military District No. 1, London; and was night supervisor at St. Joseph's Hospital School of Nursing from the 1940s until 1957.



## Lamp for Capping Ceremony Parke, Davis and Company 1920-1940

An interesting artifact is this symbolic lamp that was used at one time during capping or pinning ceremonies at St. Joseph's Training School of Nursing. These lamps, with a small candle inserted,



Lamp for Capping Ceremony 1920-1940

were carried by each probationary nurse during their capping ceremony when they received their white nurses' caps to be worn as part of their uniforms. This ceremony took place upon the completion of their educational training when beginning their clinical training at the hospital. The light would be passed to new nurses signifying knowledge and the continuum of care. The lamp symbol was derived from Florence Nightingale, who was referred to as "the Lady with the Lamp" during her work at Scutari. It was said that she would walk among the beds at night, carrying her lamp, and checking on the wounded men.

## Class Quilt 1932 Made by Bernice Farr, Class of 1932

At the St. Joseph's School of Nursing, living in residence cultivated a strong sense of familial closeness among both students and faculty. This is exemplified by artifacts like Bernice Farr's meticulously handmade quilt, which showcases the embroidered signatures of her classmates and instructors around the school crest.



(Left) Photo of nursing graduate Bernice Farr, class of 1932 and the quilt she made (right).

Photo: Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada. Archives



The Artifact Collection of St. Joseph's Hospital and Nursing School serves as a testament to the hospital's extensive history and its contribution to the healthcare community in London. Thanks to generous artifact donations, this collection has grown and flourished over the years. As we continue to preserve and showcase these treasured relics, we invite everyone to explore and appreciate the remarkable legacy of St. Joseph's Hospital by visiting the exhibit space near the main entrance on Grosvenor Street.

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