

HISTORY OF VON PICTOU COUNTY, NS

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For over 100 years, VON has pioneered health services in Canada. We have a proud tradition of identifying emerging health and social needs and then providing innovative services that meet those needs. That's the way it's been since the founding of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada.

In the Canada of the late 1890's, nurses, doctors and hospitals were desperately needed in remote areas and in rapidly growing towns and cities.

Lady Isobel Aberdeen, wife of Canada's then current governor General, visited Vancouver in 1896. During this visit, she heard vivid accounts of the hardships and illness-affecting women and children in isolated areas of our young country.

Later that same year, Lady Aberdeen was a participant at the annual meeting in Halifax of the National Council of Women, where similar horror stories were exchanged by the women in attendance. Lady Aberdeen responded with determination to a resolution passed at this meeting, asking her to found an order of visiting nurses in Canada. The order was to be a memorial to the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria's ascent to the throne of the British Empire. At a meeting at Rideau Hall (government house) on February 19, 1897, Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier offered the motion inaugurating the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada. So this is where the name Victorian Order of Nurses comes from. In 1897, Lady Aberdeen was chosen VON's first president, just 30 years after confederation.

The first VON branches were quickly organized in the cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Halifax, Vancouver and Kingston. In 1898, a VON "Cottage hospital" was opened in Regina to provide care to pioneers and early settlers on the prairies. Through the successful funding efforts of VON's second honorary president, Lady Minto, 43 more hospitals were soon established in local communities and within isolated areas throughout Canada. Responsibility for running these institutions was gradually assumed by community groups, with the last VON 'run-hospital' being placed in the hands of local citizens in 1924. VON was first introduced to Pictou County in 1901 when a section of the Marine hospital in Pictou was converted to a Cottage hospital and three VON nurses from Montreal served consecutively as Superintendents at the hospital. Then in 1909 the first mention of a VON service for the town of New Glasgow was made at a meeting of the New Glasgow local council of women. In 1920, VON New Glasgow Branch was established in affiliation with the local council Women. Then, in July 1923, at a meeting of the local council of women in Pictou, it was decided to establish a VON Branch in Pictou. The programs and services provided in the early years in the two VON branches in Pictou County included: Well Baby clinics, School Health, Immunization clinics, along with visiting nursing in the home. Then in 1981, a Pilot Project for Coordinated Home Care

started in the Pictou Town and district branch. In 1989, all VON branches signed a Home Care contract with the Province of Nova Scotia.

Foot Care clinics became a part of the services offered by the VON in 1984 in the Pictou branch and in 1986 in the New Glasgow branch. In 1987, the New Glasgow branch partnered with the Retired Teacher's Association to hold the first VON Annual Spellathon as a fund raiser activity. This was very successful for a number of years and raised significant funds for the two VON branches. There were two VON braches in Pictou County until May 12, 1997 when New Glasgow and Pictou joined to host a Celebration Party for all Nova Scotia Branches for VON Canada's Centennial "100Years of Caring for Canadians". At this time the two VON branches in Pictou County merged to become VON Pictou County. In 1999, VON Pictou County and Pictou County Visiting Homemakers merged to be able to provide three levels of care provider to the residents of Pictou County. Predicted for 2014 , is 72000 in-home nursing visits and 110,000 home support visits

From the beginning, improving the health of our citizens has been the prime objective of the Order. Nursing care in the home, health instruction, school health, well baby clinics, and immunization clinics for babies and pre-school children, have always been carried out by the local VON nurses. Over the years the role has changed to meet the needs pf the residents in each individual community. Today in Pictou County there are still a number of these programs and some new ones as well such as Visiting Nursing programs, Home Support Programs, Foot Care clinics, school health, Meals on Wheels and volunteer Transportation.

VON remains committed to 'Caring for Life' in the communities across this country.

Thanks to by Faye Blenkhorne, Nursing History NS member who spent 10 years on the Board of Directors, VON Pictou County.