

Westman Oral History collection

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Narrator (interviewee): Janet Seward
Interviewer: Phyllis Long
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Question: [00:00:06]

Subject, healthcare. Thursday the 23rd of April 1981. Phyllis Long, interviewer. I am speaking today with Mrs. Janet Seward, S-E-W-A-R-D, who now lives in Fairview senior citizen's residence, 1351 13th Street Brandon. Mrs. Seward graduated from the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie, Ontario in 1918, came to Brandon in 1927. She had been doing private duty in Barrie Ontario and Dr. Barager, a cousin of Mrs. Seward, was anxious to have general graduates interested in mental nursing um he had a number of applications and one from a graduate from Glasgow, Scotland and one from Vancouver General. So those three were the first postgrads to attend a three-month course in psychiatric nursing. Can you tell me a little bit about the psychiatric course that you had in those days?

Answer: [00:01:19]

Well we had lectures on the psychiatric patient and treatment. There wasn't too much medication given, they used warm baths, tube baths, and isolation and they sometimes put patients in hot packs. The nurse was not allowed to go into a disturbed patient's room alone. Patients were sometimes restrained and talked to, to try and convince the patient that we were trying to help them. Dr. Barager gave us lectures on psychiatry. Dr. Davidson was in charge of the East and West unit where the patients were admitted. Dr. Goulden had the female patients in the main building of Brandon Hospital for mental diseases and Dr. Shultz had the male patients in the main building. The doctors took

it in turns visiting the patients at the colony building about a mile north of the main building. Sometimes patients were given paraldehyde, now I don't know whether that I spelt that word right or not but um there wasn't much medication. Patients were reviewed by all of the doctors on staff every week, well they didn't review all the patients in the hospital you know but they would have to estimate what their progress was you know, if they were better.

Q: [00:02:54]

[rustling of papers] [coughing] Mrs. Seward how did paraldehyde work with the patients?

A: [00:02:58]

Well they went off to sleep pretty quickly.

Q: [00:03:01]

[audio inaudible]

A: [00:03:01]

[Yeah, yes, uh huh.]

Q: [00:03:06]

Did you receive a salary at this time?

A: [00:03:08]

Not for the postgraduate, not for the three months. And at the end of the three months if there was an opening um we were given a chance, well Miss Stewart, she was a girl from Glasgow she trained in Glasgow and she wanted to see more of the country and all. She didn't want to be tied down and she

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went down through the states and then she was in Ontario for a while and worked her way back to Scotland and Miss Cansfield, she was from the Vancouver General and uh when she finished her course. Um Dr. Barager had [unclear] uh phone call from the doctor in Vancouver and they were opening a psychiatric ward there, the general, and they wanted to know if she would be able to come back and help start set it up so. . . and I didn't hear from [unclear] either those girls too much just a couple times after we were separated but I work, I was on the female hospital.

Q: [00:04:20]

You were head nurse?

A: [00:04:21]

Yeah.

Q: [00:04:24]

Very good. Um Mrs. Barager was connected to uh with the hospital in some way . . .

A: [00:04:33]

Well just with the alumni, she was the graduate of St. Boniface Hospital. Yeah she didn't do anything, just with the alumni.

Q: [00:04:46]

[rustling of papers] Well when did you begin at Brandon General?

A: [00:04:50]

[rustling of papers] Oh. . . '49 I think it was.

Q: [00:04:57]

[rustling of papers] You were head nurse on 300?

A: [00:05:00]

Yeah. I worked with Miss Lummont[?]. She was on, no it was . . . was she on three or four?

Q: [00:05:07]

Three I think.

A: [00:05:08]

Three? I thought it was four.

Q: [00:05:10]

What medical treatments were most common in those days, in 1949?

A: [00:05:18]

Well... they never gave too much uh at least they, not too much sedation and that sort of thing
yeah know but if well I was on the medical ward, and it was just treatment for people if they had
pneumonia or mustard plasters[?] [and whatever.]

Q: [00:05:40]

[Linseed poultices?]

A: [00:05:41]

Yes, well we didn't have too many linseed poultices[?] in my time. We did have some yeah
know.

Q: [00:05:51]

You were there during the polio epidemic?

A: [00:05:54]

What year was that?

Q: [00:05:55]

1953.

A: [00:05:57]

Oh yes I guess I was there then.

Q: [00:06:03]

Had conditions changed a great deal when you retired to uh the period when you began?

A: [00:06:13]

Well in some ways yeah.

Q: [00:06:17]

Can you tell me a little bit about [coughs] what uh the working conditions were like when you began?

A: [00:06:28]

Well I think we had more nursing care yeah know? Looking after the patient, they soon got that they took a basin if a patient was able to do anything and left it with them yeah know? You do what you can do and I'll finish when I come back [laughs] but uh as well in some cases that was good for the patient but when patients in a hospital you expect them to get treatment don't yeah?

Q: [00:06:59]

Yes. And the um length of time they remained in bed changed so remarkably. I think the war changed many things [in that line didn't they?]

A: [00:07:07]

[Yeah.]

A: [00:07:09]

Oh yes I think so.

Q: [00:07:11]

Mhmm. [rustling of papers] The days before socialized medicine were probably very difficult for people?

A: [00:07:25]

Yeah well, just what do you mean by socialized?

Q: [00:07:27]

The the um medicare so uh [hospitalizations paid for.]

A: [00:07:30]

[Oh yeah.]

A: [00:07:33]

Mhmm. Oh yes it, it made quite a difference.

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Q: [00:07:41]

Particularly I think with the um length of time they spent in hospital.

A: [00:07:48]

Yeah.

Q: [00:07:50]

Not only were they anxious to get out but they um. . . in having to meet the medical bills [it was very difficult.]

A: [00:07:59]

[Yeah.]

Q: [00:08:01]

Have you some interesting stories about people in the medical field you can tell me?

A: [00:08:08]

Not too much.

Q: [00:08:09]

Do you remember some of the doctors who were practicing?

A: [00:08:14]

Well Dr. Davidson, did you know him? George Davidson?

Q: [00:08:18]

He was at the mental hospital.

A: [00:08:20]

Yeah.

Q: [00:08:20]

Yes no, I didn't.

A: [00:08:21]

And Dr. Shultz was at the mental hospital. And um. . . then they had during the summer usually they had some interns that were studying medicine that came in for um the summer holidays they were worked and as well gained some experience in mental patients you see. And um . . .

Q: [00:08:50]

Dr. Bigelow, of course, was practicing then?

A: [00:08:52]

Well he was in general.

Q: [00:08:55]

Yes.

A: [00:08:55]

Yeah.

Q: [00:08:56]

Yes.

A: [00:08:57]

Oh and Dr. Cromarty.

Q: [00:08:59]

Cromarty.

A: [00:00:06]

And um...

Q: [00:09:02]

[audio inaudible]

A: [00:09:02]

Dr. Peters.

Q: [00:09:03]

[audio inaudible]

A: [00:09:04]

Yes, yes it was very much . . . and then there was the Evans Clinic came in, Dr. Evans and Dr. Purdie. And there was the two Dr. Purdies, Dr. Senior and Dr. Frank. And the other pretty boy was a dentist. And uh . . . so there was quite a group of them.

Q: [00:09:37]

Yes indeed. And then the operating room, recovering room started about that time?

A: [00:09:43]

Yes mhmm. Well I didn't have too much I wasn't working in the operating room and there was usually a nurse for the recovering room before the patient came to the ward you see. And um seven was more medical ward. Five was surgery.

Q: [00:10:06]

Yes.

A: [00:10:06]

And uh . . .

Q: [00:10:12]

It seems we've heard of Dr. and Mrs. Barager um for very long time in connection to the history of Brandon Mental Hospital. When and where from um did they come to Brandon?

A: [00:10:27]

Well Dr. Barager home was at Elm Creek and um Mrs. Barager her home was up up near Dauphin. And they met overseas, they both were overseas doing the war. And they were married in England and came, well he was England, he had letter from Manitoba Government asking him if he was interested in mental nursing and [audio inaudible] mental patient because there was going to be a vacancy at Brandon. So when they came back from overseas they came right to Brandon and their children were born [audio inaudible] at Brandon Mental Hospital. They had Mowry and Bruce and Bob. So . . . and then Dr. Barager got appointed as Provincial Psychiatrist for Alberta and he left Brandon. They

moved out there and of course Mrs. Barager, they weren't, she was never in her home, she had uh mastectomy and she passed away shortly after.

Q: [00:11:40]

So they came in 1918 and how long were they here?

A: [00:11:46]

Well they um. . . oh they were here for a little a while after I went there so I don't know whether, what did I say I went to?

Q: [00:12:03]

1927.

A: [00:12:04]

Yeah '27 well it was in the thirties they went out to Alberta.

Q: [00:12:12]

Very good.

End of Interview

[Talking stops at 00:12:13]

[Recording ends at 00:12:20]