

Peel's first VON recalls early days

By DIANNE RINEHART

Peel's first nurse from the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON), turned 94 recently.

Frederica Sarah Patterson was the only VON in the Brampton area — an area that is now served by eight nurses. At that time South Peel wasn't covered at all.

This elegant, fine-boned woman, began her career in 1908 when she left the family farm near Kitchener to enter training at the Toronto Sick Children's Hospital. Mrs. Patterson described her training as a time when "you couldn't speak to senior nurses and you had to be careful about how you spoke to doctors."

She brightened, however, when she recalled outings with the young patients during the summer months at which time lucky children were transferred to the Lakeshore branch of the hospital.

WANTED OBSTETRICS

After her three years in training, Mrs. Patterson said she almost went to New York to continue training in obstetrics.

However, before she left she was invited to be among five nurses to participate in opening a private hospital in Vancouver. Mrs. Patterson, as it happened, was assigned to the maternity ward.

She worked in the private hospital, which is no longer in existence, from 1911 until 1918 when she returned to Ontario. Shortly after she decided to train with the VON.

TRAINED BY VON

The course in Toronto normally lasted

three months, however Mrs. Patterson said they kept her for five months because she "looked so young." The training consisted mainly of going out with the head nurse at night to confinement cases to deliver babies, she said.

"I used to try and walk to save my transit tickets," she added.

In 1919 the young nurse began her VON career in Brampton. She stayed at the local hotel but the town doctor, David Heggie, informed her that it was "not proper to live in a hotel."

He promptly sent her to live with his father, a retired doctor, who was ill. Dr. Heggie Sr., however, told her he wanted nothing to do with her. "I'll have no starched aprons around this place," she was told.

Mrs. Patterson says she was not so easily put off and she stayed.

\$90. A MONTH

For a starting wage of \$90 a month, Mrs. Patterson visited the sick and delivered babies. She said she knew more about the delivery than "some of those young doctors from Toronto."

In 1922 Frederica Steele married John Patterson and retired from nursing. However she didn't give up her interest in the VON and has continued to sit on the board of directors from that time.

She is described in the history of the Brampton branch of the VON as a "most valued board member."



Photo by JENNY GALDER

Frederica Sarah Patterson, age 94, recalls her early life as Peel's first VON nurse.