

The Nightingale Society

Email: contact@nightingalesociety.com
Homepage: www.nightingalesociety.com

Florence Nightingale: Did You Know?

- That Nightingale wanted nursing to be an independent profession; nurses would take medical instructions from doctors? (No doctor would hire, fire, discipline or promote a nurse; those decisions would be made by senior nurses.)
- That her vision for the profession included a career path, with increases in salary and responsibility, through the ward sister to the superintendent or matron, which was a high paying job? That giving superintendents power to hire, discipline, etc., was to remove it from doctors, then 100% male when nurses were 100% female—it was an unspoken measure to prevent sexual harassment of vulnerable women nurses.
- That throughout her life she argued for good salaries and working conditions for nurses, holidays of at least a month per year, decent pensions, good living conditions during training, and hospital design to save nurses' energy for patient care?
- That she worked mightily to make patient care the nurse's function, instead of hospital cleaning? Hospitals should hire cleaners, she said, and nurses ensure that the job was done.
- That "nurses," before Nightingale's time, were not what we would recognize as nurses? In the army they were recruited from among the wives and widows of privates and non-commissioned officers (doctors were always officers), were paid less than cooks and laundresses, and reported to a sergeant. Before her time they did not even speak to a doctor, but were subordinate to a sergeant!
- That when her nursing school opened in 1860, when doctors had university/medical qualifications, women lacked access even to a secondary school education, let alone university? (The Nightingale School started with apprenticeship type training.)
- Did you know that Nightingale succeeded in improving the status of nurses, from being a "domestic" service occupation in the 1861 Census, to being grouped with "medicine" in 1901? In the army they became "officers," like doctors.
- That she did pioneering work on occupational health and safety for nurses, as early as 1858?
- That she did the pioneering study of mortality and morbidity in colonial and aboriginal hospitals and schools, in 1863?
- That she did a pioneering study of maternal mortality post-childbirth, comparing death rates in hospitals, workhouses and home births (Introductory Notes on Lying-in Institutions)?
- That her work on hospital design was geared both to safety—keeping mortality rates down—and efficiency—saving nurses' steps so that they could give patient care?
- Did you know that Nightingale worked to turn the terrible workhouse infirmaries into real hospitals? That she called for the same quality of care for the well-off to be available to the poor? Is this not a message still needed today?
- That Nightingale worked on healthcare reforms with other professionals? doctors, statisticians, engineers and architects?
- That as well as working on health care and other social reforms in Britain, Nightingale researched and wrote on India for 40 years plus? Including famine prevention and relief, land tenure, credit, scientific agriculture and irrigation.
- That as well as working for the well-being of ordinary soldiers, Nightingale considered the socio-political conditions that led to war? She not only said "I hate war," but warned about how militaristic institutions led to it.

Nightingale's writing is now available in a 16-volume **Collected Works of Florence Nightingale**, much of it from previously unpublished materials, collected from more than 200 archives world wide.

For short articles on what Nightingale actually said and wrote see: www.uoguelph.ca/~cwfn. A short book on Nightingale, with highlights from the Collected Works, is available in paperback: Lynn McDonald, *Florence Nightingale at First Hand*, Continuum Press 2010.

by Lynn McDonald, PhD, LLD (hon.), director of the Collected Works of Florence Nightingale and university professor emerita at the University of Guelph, Ontario. She is a former M.P. and environment spokesperson for the New Democratic Party, and currently sits on the board of directors of the Climate Action Network of Canada.