

GOWER REMEMBERS

Jane Louise Kendall
(1886-1988)



Jane never got over the death of Hal Chaplin, and when she was very old, and much of her life had faded from her memory, she still remembered and talked of Hal. (from “Jane Louise [Kendall] Fischer” by Marion Peters Scott, n.d.)

Jane Louise Kendall was born in Carbonear on December 7, 1886, the third of ten children and second of seven daughters of Susanna Sarah Beaumont Campbell and the Rev. William Kendall. Her father, a native of Cornwall, England, came out to Newfoundland as a Methodist missionary in 1875, at the age of 27. After serving probationary duties in Grand Bank (1876-1877) and at Gower Street (1877-1879), he was ordained in 1879 to full ministry within the Methodist Church. Over the next 23 years he served congregations in Pouch Cove, Burin, Carbonear, Lower Island Cove, Green's Harbour, Western Bay, Hant's Harbour and Moreton's Harbour. In 1902 he moved to St. John's, where he acted as a supply minister for the St. John's churches. He died in St. John's in 1910 at age 62.

Jane's mother, Susanna, was of Scottish-Newfoundland descent. She had a very full life: not only did she have to keep house and raise ten children, she had duties as the minister's wife, everything from leading the women's groups and teaching Sunday School to playing the organ and singing in the choir. She was also constantly on the move, having to uproot her family and home every two or three years, when her husband was assigned to a new pastoral charge. She became ill early in the new century and died in 1905, at age 48.

Jane attended school in the various communities in which her father served, relocating to St. John's towards the end of the 19th century to attend the Methodist College, the premier school operated by the Methodist Church in Newfoundland at that time. The school's magazine, *The Collegian*, lists her as being a member of Miss Jardine's class in 1898, where she ranked second in both English and Mathematics.

Shortly before her mother's death, Jane became governess *cum* nanny to the four children of Alfred and Alice Peters of Curling. The Peters were originally from St. John's and had probably been friends

with the Kendalls at Gower; Jane's older sister, Gertrude, married Alfred Peters' youngest brother, George, in 1906. After her mother died in 1905, Jane returned to St. John's to assist in raising her younger siblings, the youngest three of whom were eight, ten and twelve. At the time she was only nineteen years old.

In the late fall of 1908, Jane travelled to New York City, aboard the *SS Rosalind*, arriving there on November 12. She had probably just been home for a visit, as the 1910 United States Census lists her as having immigrated to the United States in 1907. At the time that census was taken, she was in residence at St. John's Hospital, Brooklyn, where she was training to be a nurse. Two other Newfoundlanders, Maud Scott and Mary Roberts, were also undergoing nurse's training at St. John's Hospital at that time.

Jane kept in touch with home during her time in New York, including at least two other visits, one in the summer of 1911 and another in the fall of 1914. It is unclear when she completed her nursing studies, but the New York State Census for 1915 records that she is a Registered Nurse and assistant superintendent to the head of Nursing, Mabel MacKinlay, at the Samaritan Hospital, 608 Fourth Avenue, in New York City. She also had the company of two of her younger sisters, Katharine and Marion, who were training to be nurses in New York City at that time.

Kendall was working at King's County Hospital in New York City when the United States Army Medical Service Base Hospital # 37 was organized there in July 1917, some four months after the United States entered the fighting in World War I. Base Hospital # 37 was mobilized at the 23rd Regiment Armory in Brooklyn on January 4, 1918, but was later transferred to the 14th Regiment Armory, also in Brooklyn. Kendall was called into active service as a nurse in the United States Army Medical Service on April 13, 1918, and spent the next two months at the Mobilization Station in New York City.

On May 19, 1918, Base Hospital # 37, a mobile unit, left New York City on board the *SS Lapland*, a former Cunard passenger liner that had been converted into a troopship in June 1917. They arrived in Liverpool, England, on the 31st. She spent much of her time with Base Hospital # 37 nursing at a large British convalescent hospital in Dartford, Kent. That hospital closed on January 21, 1919. The following month, on February 15, she was transferred to Base Hospital # 113, in Savenay, France, where she served until July 9, 1919.

The personnel of Base Hospital # 37 had returned to the United States in February 1919, while those of Base Hospital # 113 sailed from St. Nazaire, France, on July 15. Kendall did not sail with either of these units, remaining in France at CH # 27 (possibly a Convalescent Hospital), until August 30, 1919. She returned to New York, where she was demobilized on September 9.

Shortly after her arrival back in New York in September 1919, Kendall became a naturalized United States citizen at the Federal Courthouse in New York City. She does not appear in the United States Census for 1920: she was visiting family in St. John's in the spring of 1920, which would have been around the time the Census was taken and she may have missed being recorded. Adding credence to this assumption is the fact that the passenger manifest for the *SS Rosalind*, the ship that Kendall sailed on from St. John's to New York, lists Kendall as a nurse who resided at 811 59th Street, Brooklyn. She was travelling with her was her older sister, Gertrude Peters.

It is unclear what Kendall was doing in the period between 1920 and 1924, but it would be fairly safe to assume that she was nursing in one of the many New York City hospitals. After all, she would have needed an income to support herself and nursing was what she was qualified to do. That all changed in January of 1925, when she married Henry C. Fischer of Brooklyn.

Kendall met Fischer, a native New Yorker, in the late summer of 1918. Fischer, although 43 years old at the time, enlisted in the United States Army on June 8, 1917, but did not go overseas until the following May. He saw action in Dickebusch, Belgium, where he was severely wounded on August 16, 1918 and eventually ended up at the convalescent hospital at Dartford where Kendall was working. Despite being more than twelve years her senior, Fischer fell in love with Kendall and kept in touch with her after their return to New York City. His persistence eventually paid off and Kendall agreed to marry him. Their wedding took place in Brooklyn on January 15, 1925.

Fischer operated a very successful china import business in Brooklyn for many years, while the couple, who had no children, lived in East Setuaket, which the United States Census Bureau considered part of Brookhaven, Suffolk County, Long Island. Henry's death date is uncertain: while he is listed with Jane in the 1940 United States Census, family members believe that he had died by the early 1950s.

After Henry's death Jane made several visits to her youngest sister, Rachel Munn, who lived in England. Rachel, also spent time in New York with Jane. Both moved back to St. John's around 1970, where they lived with their nephew, Dr. David Peters (their sister Katharine's son), for several years. A few years later Jane relocated to Amherst, Nova Scotia, to help care for her ailing brother, Robert, and his wife Lulu. Jane remained with Robert after Lulu died, until he became quite feeble and needed more care than she was able to provide. Then she went to Brampton, Ontario, where her sister, Marion Curtis, was living.

As she entered her 90s Jane's mind began to deteriorate and she, herself, came to need constant care. She died in Brampton on February 11, 1988, having celebrated her 101st birthday the previous December. Her remains were interred in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, where, as a United States citizen who had served in the United States Military

during World War I, the United States government placed an official military grave marker to designate the site.

Long before she ever met Henry Fischer, Jane Kendall had fallen in love with Harold (Hal) Chaplin, whom she had probably met while both were attending Gower Street Methodist Church as teenagers. Even though they were pursuing professional training on opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean – she as a nurse in New York; he as a medical doctor in London – they were eventually engaged. After Hal Chaplin had completed his medical degree, he joined the Royal Navy medical service. In that capacity he was on board HMS *Hampshire*, a British naval ship that was transporting Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, on a diplomatic mission to Russia, in June 1916. On June 5, off the Orkney Islands, on the west coast of Scotland, the *Hampshire* struck a German mine and quickly sank to the bottom of the Atlantic. Of the 662 crew and passengers on board, only twelve survived. One of those who drowned was Hal Chaplin.

At the time the *Hampshire* was sunk, Jane was nursing at a New York City hospital. She learned of Hal's death when she entered one of the wards one morning shortly after the sinking. One of the patients was reading a newspaper. He was holding it in such a way that Jane could clearly read the front page headlines which told of the sinking of the *Hampshire* with all hands. The shock and loss must have been devastating for her. She continued to love and mourn Chaplin for the rest of her life. Family lore tells of her visiting the Orkney Islands, where the *Hampshire* went down, Scapa Flow, the area off the Orkneys where the British fleet would rendezvous, and Chaplin's grave in Royal Lyness Naval Cemetery on the island of Hoy. Chaplin's body was one of those recovered and interred in the cemetery. This pilgrimage probably took place during an extended visit she made to the British Isles between July 1953 and June 1954.

Jane Kendall was directly connected to many other members of the Gower congregation. Through her fiancé, Hal Chaplin, she would also have been friends with his brother, Jack, the Newfoundland regiment's first casualty, who died at Fort George, Scotland, on January 1, 1915. Her brother, Roy, was Gower's organist at the time of his enlistment in the Newfoundland Regiment (# 2921); after the war, her sister, Katharine, married Fred Peters, # 4417 in the Newfoundland Regiment, while her sister Marion married Leslie Curtis, whose brother, Pierson, was a member of the British Borders Regiment. Dr. Charles Peters, her sister, Gertrude's, brother-in-law, was a member of the Canadian Army Medical Corps, while two of Alfred Peters' sons were in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. One of her maternal grandfather's sisters, also named Susannah, married Peter Macpherson. They were the paternal grandparents of Dr. Cluny Macpherson, which made Jane and Cluny second cousins. The degree of separation among these relatives and friends is too miniscule to measure.

Jane Kendall served overseas for a little more than a year (May 19, 1918 to August 30, 1919) but that was more than enough time to expose her to the horrors of war and the senseless loss of life that it caused. The loss of her fiancé was, undoubtedly, the greatest loss of her life but like so many others she was sustained by the memories of their love throughout the rest of her long life, memories that not even dementia could erase.

On Sunday, November 16, 2014, Gower Street United Church initiated a program of commemoration that will last for approximately the next four years. On roughly every second Sunday from now through to the end of 2018, a brief write-up on one of these individuals, similar to this one, will appear as an insert in the Bulletin and there will be a reference to that person in the service. In this way we hope to recognize their contribution to the war effort, the many sacrifices they made, some with their very lives, and the debt of gratitude we owe to each of them.

We also hope to learn more about them from their descendants or other relatives, thereby fostering a link between our past and our present as we begin our 201st year as a faith community.

If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and woman please contact Bert Riggs at briggs@mun.ca or at 726-6169.