

Archival Collection Inc. Profile Tribute:



ALFRED BARNETT, RPN

Founding President of the Registered psychiatric Nurses Association of Manitoba

Alf was born in Merthyr Tidfyl, Wales, on March 1, 1908. He first came to Canada alone, at the age of 16 in 1924, under the auspices of the Salvation Army. He worked his way across Ontario and Manitoba doing a great variety of jobs, including positions with the Merchant Marine and at Kingston Mental Hospital - an experience that would change his life forever. After his active service with the Royal Canadian Navy, he resumed his psychiatric nursing career at the Selkirk Mental Health Centre, a position he held from 1935 until his retirement in 1973.

His one big concern was to see the field of psychiatric nursing given its proper place. Alf pushed for lectures and training for men as well as women and was one of the five men who graduated in 1952; their first class of males in Selkirk.

The story goes like this. Following the war Alf had met a man who was a member of the British Columbia Psychiatric Nurses Association sp "Why not Manitoba?" became his theme song for years as he promoted interest in Manitoba's three psychiatric hospitals, making motorcycle trips to Portage La Prairie and Brandon. In the final stages, in a borrowed car, he took others from Selkirk, including the late Henriette Fedorchuk, who acted as secretary, to meet with delegates from Portage and Brandon in Portage La Prairie. He did this for 27 Sundays in a row, when Sunday was his only day off and during the long cold winter.

In 1998, for Alf's 90th birthday, the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Foundation Inc. Established the "Alf Barnett Scholarship" which provides funding for a RPN pursuing graduate or post-graduate education.

In the 14 years following his retirement, he became the first permanent superintendent of St. Clements Anglican Churchyard. Alf married Myrtle (Goldstone) on September 23, 1939, at Old St. Andrews Church, and they lived in Selkirk. He was a founding member of the Cambrian Credit Union (Selkirk), a founder, planner and director of Tudor House Personal Care Home, founding president of the Registered Psychiatric Nursing Association of Manitoba, and one of the founders of the Selkirk Row-A-Lung.

He was also involved in many other community organizations including Christ Church Anglican, the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation Board, the Association for Community Living, Male Voice Choir, Selkirk Glee Club and Selkirk Seniors Harmonicats Band.

In his years of good health, Alf enjoyed bowling, playing the harmonica, square dancing, and was a Blue Bomber season ticket holder. Alf was a kind, hard working, dedicated and understanding man. It came naturally to Alf to anticipate whatever was needed to be done and he was never afraid of the hard work required to get it done. He did not like receiving anything unless he had worked for it. He gave of himself, and his service was always above and beyond the call of duty. He was a devoted family man, who took great pride in his family and his home. Alf always felt a sense of obligation to this country that had given him so much. ***"There is no other country like Canada. It is number one as far as I am concerned."***

In 1999, Myrtle wrote the following: ***"Through Alf's six years of a gradual dementia, I have entertained a lot because of his love of people. He loved to tell and repeat so many of his favourite experiences but gradually the number he remember were fewer, and then suddenly, all gone."***

The profession of Psychiatric Nursing in Manitoba owes much to the vision and courage which Alf had and to the ongoing support and encourage which Myrtle gave him and his colleagues. Alf saw the Psychiatric Nurses Association of Manitoba receive royal assent in 1960 to become the Registered Psychiatric Nurses Association. Alf was a leader and all of us have benefited from his legacy.

On November 27th, 2009, The Selkirk Psychiatric Institute became the "Alf Barnett Building" as a tribute to his memory.