

## Notable Nurses from Plainville's Past

Over the past year, our appreciation of health care workers has certainly grown. In recognition of their important role throughout history, we thought it quite appropriate to highlight health care workers as we celebrate Women's History Month this year.

Our special focus is on some notable nurses from Plainville's past. These include an Army nurse, industrial nurse, school nurse, and the women of the Plainville Public Health Nursing Association which served the town for approximately 50 years.

We also invite readers to visit Plainville Historical Society on Facebook to share names of other local nurses from the past whom they would like to commemorate.

### Monica Brock

Our first nurse is Monica Brock who grew up with her five sisters and one brother on South Washington Street. Since there was no high school in Plainville at the time, Monica attended New Britain High School and graduated in 1903. She ultimately went on to nursing school at a New York City hospital and continued to work in the city after her training was completed. At Morgan Memorial Hospital in New York, Monica was superintendent of nurses for several years.

After the United States entered World War I in 1917, Monica began active duty as a U.S. Army Nurse. In February 1918, she was sent overseas to France where she was assigned to Military Hospital No. 1 in Neuilly to which injured soldiers were brought in from the front.

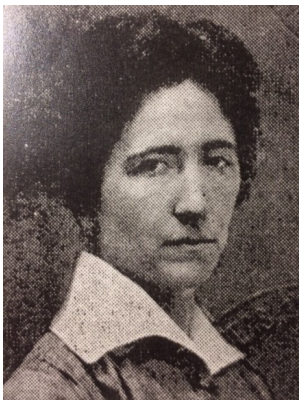


Photo is from our files.

Sheet No. _____	UNITED STATES ARMY TRANSPORT SERVICE				HQ. PORT OF EMBARK HOBOKEN, N. J.	
Class _____	PASSENGER LIST					
	OF					
	ORGANIZATIONS AND CASUALS					
Organization <sup>(1)</sup> _____	Transport <sup>(2)</sup> _____	Commercial Str. _____	527	Sailing Date <sup>(3)</sup> _____	Port <sup>(4)</sup> NEW YORK	
NO.	NAME <sup>(1)</sup>	RANK <sup>(1)</sup>	ORGN. OR DEPT. <sup>(1)</sup>	NOTIFY IN EMERGENCY <sup>(1)</sup>	RE- LATION- SHIP <sup>(1)</sup>	ADDRESS STREET, NUMBER, CITY, ST.
	<u>American Red Cross Military Hospital No 1-Third Section.</u>					
1	Brock, Monica	Nurse	ANC	Mr. Peter Brock	Father	Plainville, Conn.
2	Hankins, Harriet P.	Nurse	ANC	George A. Hankins M.D.	Father	Williamsburg, Va.
3	Ireland, <sup>Anna</sup> Elizabeth	Nurse	ANC	Mrs. George Leaver	Sister	Media, Pa.

Transport List showing Monica's departure from New York.  
From Ancestry.com per copyright guidelines on content.

Monica was put in charge of several wards in the hospital. She was commended for her work in the treating of the wounded from the Battle of Chateau Thierry in Spring 1918 (and in which many New England soldiers from the "Yankee Division" fought). A Major Powers is quoted as saying "She carried a floor of three hundred and fifty wounded men at the crisis activity. Her sterling worth endeared her to all who knew her." Newspaper accounts tell us that Monica was known for her unceasing work in caring for the wounded.



Photo of hospital in Neuilly. From the National Archives.

Monica returned to the United States in late 1918. Unfortunately, her own health had suffered and she passed away in a Washington D.C. hospital. She was given a military funeral at Our Lady of Mercy Church here in December 1918.

The *New Britain Herald* called Monica the ““heroine which this town had in the great war.” In 1919, the Plainville Post of the American Legion adopted the name “Brock-Barnes” in honor of Monica and also Francis Barnes who had died of war injuries. Monica Brock is the only Plainville woman who has lost her life while in military service.

However, we do know of at least one other military nurse from Plainville. First Lieutenant **Margaret Cassidy** of Loomis Avenue served during World War II in Germany. After the war, Margaret married and worked at Bradley Hospital in Southington for many years. Please let us know if you are aware of other Plainville nurses who served in the military.

## Edith Marcham

Another notable nurse from Plainville’s past was Edith Marcham. Edith was the long-time nurse at Trumbull Electric/GE.

Edith was originally from Meriden, Connecticut. She was a 1908 graduate of the Meriden Hospital School of Nursing. Edith did post graduate work at Bellevue Hospital School of Nursing in New York City. Early in her career, she worked as a visiting nurse.

Edith married Nelson Marcham in 1914. The couple lived on a farm and had two children. Tragically, Nelson became very ill and died during the Flu Epidemic of 1918. Edith was left a young widow with a two-year-old son and baby daughter.

In late 1919, Edith accepted a job at Trumbull’s as an industrial nurse making \$25 per week. She initially commuted from Meriden using both train and trolley. However, Edith ultimately purchased her own family home on East Street.

In 1920, Trumbull’s completed work on what they called the company hospital with Edith Marcham in charge. An article in the *New Britain Herald* called it “one of the finest and best equipped of its kind in the vicinity as far as factory hospitals are concerned” and further noted that it had “every possible accessory for first aid work.” The company also brought in Dr. John Bull once each week to hold a clinic at which employees “ailing from sickness or injuries may call on him for treatment and advice.” Sources indicate that Edith Marcham and Dr. Bull worked in close partnership to meet employee needs.

The job as Chief Nurse at Trumbull’s/GE obviously addressed injuries and other medical issues. When necessary, Edith was also called in during the night shift.

She somehow also found time to be active professionally. In 1935, Edith was elected to the Board of Directors of the New England Industrial Nurses Association. Another activity of Edith’s was her authoring of frequent articles about different health topics in the company newsletter.



Nursing School photo of Edith. From Plainville’s 1969 Centennial book.

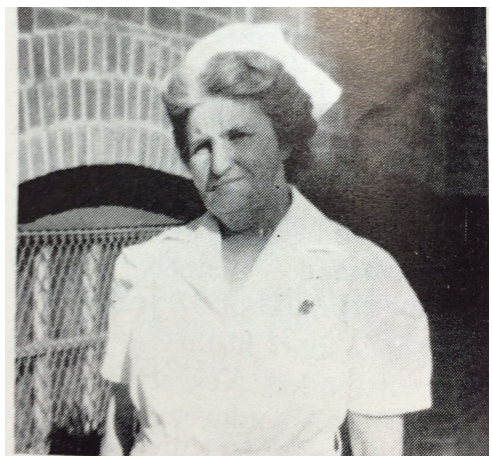


Photo from the company newsletter which called Edith Marcham our “popular fixer-upper.”

Edith also continued to show that “pioneer” streak for which she was known. In 1928, she bought her first car which was a Whippet. We can assume that not only was she likely one of the early women drivers in town but also among the first to actually purchase her own automobile!

Edith Marcham retired after almost 30 years on the job at Trumbull’s/GE. She continued to live in town for many years and was a member of the Plainville Historical Society. At the time of her passing, our Historical Society President Ruth Hummel wrote that “Mrs. Marcham was a person of rare spirit and quality” who “independently set forth to make a life for herself.”

## **Lucy Sullivan**

Plainville’s first school nurse Lucy Sullivan was hired by Superintendent of Schools Leon Staples in 1928. *The Herald* reported that the town’s School Board believed that “healthy children are the town’s greatest asset” and felt that keeping students well would help them do better in school.

Lucy Sullivan had been born in Waterbury. At some point, she had moved to Plainville with her family living first on East Main Street and then on New Britain Avenue. She had gone to St. Francis Hospital School of Nursing.

At various times in her career, Lucy worked at the three elementary schools and Plainville High School. She took care of multiple generations of local families. During the Depression, this also meant assisting people with food and clothing. Lucy also transported children to different clinics for special treatment. She took on extra responsibilities during World War II when she was a member of the town’s Ration Board.

Lucy Sullivan worked as a school nurse here for a full 42 years. She retired in 1970 and was honored as the “Woman of the Year” by the Plainville Business and Professional Women’s Club.

In an article about her retirement, the *Plainville News* stated that “Miss Sullivan is remembered well by former students. She is the bustling one who walks with quick steps in her white uniform and spotless shoes...the one with the quick words and ready smile.” Lucy herself expressed how she felt so fortunate to have had such a “wonderful experience.”



Photo is from a Plainville High School Yearbook.

## **Plainville Public Health Nursing Association**

At a town meeting in 1923, the Plainville Public Health Nursing Association was formed to help meet the health needs of the community. This agency existed for about 50 years and provided a remarkable number of services to the people of Plainville.

The PPHNA was originally staffed by just one nurse but the number of nurses grew over the years. A Board of Directors was elected to oversee the operations of the group. A majority of Board officers elected in 1923 consisted of men. However, within just a few years, women of the town held most of the leadership positions on the Board.

The nurses were supported by both town government and many local fundraising drives and events. These included an annual “Christmas Seal” sale. There were also some fees based on ability to pay but services were never denied. The PPHNA was originally located in a Whiting Street apartment but soon moved to town-owned buildings.



The first PPHNA nurse was **Elizabeth Heineman** who served for 6 years. In just the first year, the annual report stated that she handled 340 cases, made 976 nursing visits, and did both school and social service visits. An example of the latter was use of a Christmas fund to buy needed items for families. One instance in 1925 was the purchase of eyeglasses, coat, and shoes in order to make it possible for one student to attend school. Elizabeth also assisted Doctors Bull and Frost in vaccinating students and school staff against smallpox.

The *Herald* reported that Elizabeth Heineman received a high rating from the state health department as well as receiving a commendation for running a Well Baby Clinic which saw 69 children. The *Herald* summarized her accomplishments by saying that "the work accomplished by Miss Elizabeth Heineman has rendered her almost invaluable to the health of the town."

**Katherine Daly**, a graduate of St. Francis Hospital School of Nursing, was one of the next nurses. She continued the work as did the nurses who followed.



Photo is from Plainville's 1969 Centennial book.

The range of services provided over the years by the PPHNA were remarkable. In addition to hundreds of home visits each month, nurses educated residents about different diseases (especially tuberculosis), advocated for providing pasteurized milk to schoolchildren, assisted in diabetic detection, gave Christmas baskets to families, ran hearing/vision clinics and dental clinics for children, ran a glaucoma clinic for adults, taught courses for expectant mothers, gave a nursing scholarship, went door-to-door to make chest X-ray appointments, and assisted with delivery of babies back in the early days. The need for social services was especially important during the 1930's Depression.

The PPHNA continued as a separate agency into the 1950's and 1960's. The Senior Nurse for 25 years was **Frances Litke**. A graduate of the Bristol Hospital School of Nursing, Mrs. Litke was a well-known person in town. Another nurse from this era was **Marge Treado**. A graduate of New Britain Hospital School of Nursing, Marge had previously worked with the Red Cross and was also a Plainville Women's Club President.

In 1972, it was decided that the PPHNA would merge with other area agencies. This became official in 1973. However, the amazing legacy of the Plainville Public Health Nursing Association will always remain a special part of our local history.