

Massachusetts General Hospital Archives and Special Collections
MC 29
Linda Richards Papers, 1921-1929 [and 1941, 1962, 1948]

0.25 c.f. in 1 container
(1 half-manuscript box)
Accession number: 2004-8
Processed: 2016 by Jeffrey Mifflin

Acquisition: Donated in 2004 by Florence Wright

Access: There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

Copyright: Requests to publish materials from the collection should be directed to the MGH Archivist.

Scope and Content:

This collection consists of a small number of handwritten letters penned by Linda Richards and sent to her friend, Annette Gaudette (whose married name was Mrs. Harold Blackie); also include is one letter pertaining to Richards but not written by her. The letters penned by Richards date from 1921 to 1929. Sundry other ephemeral items date from 1941, 1962, and 1948.

Biographical Note:

Linda Richards is generally recognized as the first trained nurse in the United States. Born on July 27, 1841, near Potsdam, New York, Melinda Richards was the youngest daughter of Sanford and Betsy Sinclair Richards. Her childhood was spent moving around from New York to Wisconsin and Vermont and by the age of 13, both of her parents had died of tuberculosis. Living with her devout maternal grandfather, her dying mother and then the family physician all influenced her career path. She also nursed her fiancé, who had been injured during the Civil War.

After several years working in a factory and taking care of sick neighbors, she went to Boston to work as an "assistant nurse", which entailed the work of a charwoman. Shortly thereafter the New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston began a training school for nurses. She was accepted as a member of the first class of five students in September 1872 and completed the program in September of 1873.

Richards accepted a position as night superintendent at the newly established Bellevue Training School (New York City) which was the first Nightingale model training school in the United States. In 1874 she returned to Boston as superintendent of the Boston Training School (which became the MGH Training School for Nurses in 1896). At times she encountered physician

opposition to the training of nurses. She provided strong leadership, developing a program of regular classroom instruction, instead of occasional lectures by physicians.

Richards left the Boston Training School after three successful years and with the support and mentoring of Florence Nightingale, visited London's St. Thomas's Hospital Training Program as well as other programs in the United Kingdom. Despite this exposure to the Nightingale system, Richards returned to Boston in 1877 and integrated the Boston City Hospital training school into the hospital.

Richards served as a missionary to Japan in from 1886 to 1891. During this time she opened Japan's first nurses' training school in Kyoto.

On her return to the United States she continued in nursing leadership roles but curtailed some activities because of declining health. For a short time in 1891 she was head of the Philadelphia Visiting Nurse Society. She established a training school at Philadelphia's Methodist Episcopal Hospital in 1892. She then returned to Boston and reorganized nursing program at the New England Hospital for Women and Children (1893-94).

Richards is revered as one of the movers and shakers of the young profession. She served as the first president of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools in 1894, which was the first professional organization for nurses. She retired in 1911 and died on April 16, 1930.

Processing Note:

Artifacts related to Linda Richards accessioned in 2004 (2004-8) were separated from the letters and transferred to the custody of the Russell Museum. The letters were flattened, reorganized, and re-folded in acid-neutral folders and Mylar sleeves.

Related Collections Note:

Researchers may also be interested in the following items contained in the MGH's historical collections: Museum Cat.# 1566 (oil portrait of Linda Richards); #424 (pendant); and # 589 (toy rickshaw). Books of interest in the MGH Archives and Special Collections include: Linda Richards, *Reminiscences of Linda Richards* (Boston: Whitcomb & Barrows, 1911); and Sara E. Parsons, *History of the Massachusetts General Hospital Training School for Nurses* (Boston: Whitcomb & Barrows, 1922).

Box and Folder List:**Box 1**

Letter, handwritten, Cynthia Fradd to Mrs. Harold Blackie, 1948

Ephemera relating to celebrations of Linda Richards (poem, copy of LR's diploma, etc., commemorating 100th anniversary of LR's birth)

Japanese ephemera (postcards and drawings) collected by Linda Richards [ca. 1886-1891?]

Letter, handwritten, Linda Richards to Annette Gaudette, 1921

Letter, handwritten, Linda Richards to Annette Gaudette, 1922

Letters, handwritten, Linda Richards to Annette Gaudette, 1921-1929