

This article is excerpted from the Fall 2012 issue of *Virginia Nurses Today*.

*NANCY VANCE: A TENACIOUS, UNSELFISH, CAPABLE AND COURAGEOUS NURSE*

By

Corinne F. Dorsey, Chairman, VNA Committee on Nursing History

*The following article was written for those considering a nomination to foster a better understanding the characteristics required of nominees: character above reproach, demonstration of unusual qualities of unselfishness in service, accomplishment of outstanding results in practice, demonstration of an unusual ability to work with others. While not specifically stated in the criteria, nominees must also demonstrate courage.*

Nancy Vance was born in North Carolina in 1886. She attended public schools in Mecklenburg County, NC and took courses at the State Normal School in Asheville for two terms. Following her graduation from the State Hospital Training School in Morgantown, NC, in 1908, she worked as a nurse in “Soldier’s Homes” in Virginia, Ohio and Tennessee. Vance joined the staff of the Virginia Department of Health’s Bureau of Child Health as a State School Nurse in 1919.

Perhaps her most important contribution to nursing in Virginia was her implementation of a program focused on improving the health of children throughout Commonwealth. For more than twenty years, she tirelessly traveled the roads of Virginia, meeting with mothers, children and teachers wherever she found them. The focus of her program was the Five-Point Standard of Health. School children who met the standard in the five areas of in weight, vision, hearing, throat and teeth were awarded the Five-Point Certificate.

“The fact that Virginia today has one of the best school health programs in the Union is due in no small degree to the indefatigable zeal and unconquerable devotion of Nancy Vance,” reported the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* just prior to her death in 1942. Vance was selected to be in the Virginia Honor Roll of 1941, one of only two women in the group of 13 to be recognized as a person “who reflected credit upon the state through the display of courage, ability, intelligence, tenacity, generosity or unselfishness.”

Vance’s courageous approach to life continued while she was hospitalized during her battle with terminal cancer at the University of Virginia Hospital in Charlottesville. She established a fund to help cancer patients when she found there was little or no assistance for the “care and treatment of incurable cases.” Before her death in 1942, the fund had grown to over \$2,000 largely through a letter writing campaign she conducted. Today, the Nancy Vance Fund for Cancer Research at the University has a market value in excess of \$250,000.

In 1928, Dr. Ennion G. Williams, Commissioner of Health for Virginia, presented Vance with a gold five-point, star-shaped, pearl studded pin in recognition of her efforts in implementing the Five-Point Standard of Health, improving the lives of Virginia’s children. Prior to her death, Vance gave her pin to her friend, Ellen Smith. Subsequently, Smith donated the pin to Richmond Professional Institute (RPI) of the College of William and Mary, where there was a program in public health nursing. Smith specified that the pin was to be awarded annual to a public health nurse in Virginia doing outstanding work in the field.

The first recipient, in 1942 was Nora Spencer Hamner, best known for her work with patients with tuberculosis and their families. When the public health course at RPI was discontinued, Smith and Hamner were instrumental in transferring the awarding of this recognition to the Graduate Nurses Association of Virginia (now the Virginia Nurses Association). Beginning in 1948, and continuing every two years thereafter, the VNA has presented this coveted award to an outstanding Virginia nurse. In 2011, the VNA decided to make the award an annual event, thus returning to the original plan developed in 1942.

*Much of the information in this article was found in the Virginia Nursing Hall of Fame entry for Nancy Vance and also from resources housed in the Nursing Archives at the Tompkins-McCaw Library of Virginia Commonwealth University.*

*To view the Hall of Fame entry and a list of recipients of the Nancy Vance award, please visit <http://www.library.vcu.edu/tml/speccoll/nursing/>*