

**NURSE MYRA (GRIMSLEY) BENNETT****- BIO & NOTES**

Myra Bennett was known along the 200 miles of coast that was her responsibility simply as "the nurse". *The Evening Telegram* once dubbed her "The Florence Nightingale of Newfoundland." But whatever she was called, she was the only medical assistance for many people along that isolated stretch of Newfoundland's coast.

Born in London, England, in 1890, Myra Bennett (née Grimsley) served as a nurse in England for 10 years before coming to Newfoundland in 1921. She had applied to go to Saskatchewan, but was persuaded to move to Newfoundland by Lady Harris, the wife of Sir Alexander Harris, Governor of Newfoundland at that time. Told of the dire need of her services, Myra accepted a two-year contract that paid her \$75 per month (\$900 per year).

During her first year there, she met and married local ex-merchant marine Angus Bennett, and in 1922 they moved into the house he had built. The home soon became the place everyone went when they were having medical difficulties.

Her district extended from Sally's Cove to Port aux Choix, 200 miles of rugged coastline with the sea as the only highway.

Bennett's medical career along that stretch of coast became the stuff of legends. Daniel's Harbour was an isolated community at that time. There were no roads or railway connecting the community to the outside world. There was a coastal steamer, but it operated only in good weather. The nearest hospital was the Grenfell Mission, established in St. Anthony, several hundred miles to the north.

During Bennett's tenure she estimated that she delivered 750 babies and extracted 5,000 teeth. Her greatest feat of medical skill came in 1926 when her brother-in-law, Alex, slipped and fell into the teeth of a lumber saw and almost severed his foot. Cleaning up the wound as best she could, Bennett proceeded to stitch the severed foot back onto the leg. She did such a good job that he kept his foot.

Along the way, Bennett managed to find time to raise three of her own children, four foster children, be involved in the church, make her own bread, tend a garden, milk the cows and make clothing. While she officially retired in 1953, she continued to help people whenever she was asked, long into her retirement.

## RECOGNITION

During Bennett's life she received an honorary doctorate from Memorial University;



Myra Bennett was also awarded the King George V Jubilee medal, the King George VI Coronation medal, the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation medal, the Member of the British Empire medal, and the Order of Canada medal.

Nurse Bennett was also the subject of a *Reader's Digest* article, a CBC-TV documentary - *Lady of the Lonely Places*, and a book by H. Gordon Green - *Don't Have Your Baby in the Dory*.

Myra Bennett passed away in 1990 at age 100.

## THE BENNETT HOUSE



Bennett House is one of the most remarkable houses in Daniel's Harbour and along the west coast of Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula. This is not because of the house itself, but because of the remarkable woman who lived there.

The Bennett House is a two-storeyed wood building with four bay windows, two on the first floor and two on the second. One significant change that has been made over the years was the 1942 addition of a separate clinic just off the kitchen for Myra Bennett's work. The house, in which Myra Bennett spent most of her life, was recognized as a Registered Heritage Structure in November 1991.

## THE VOYAGE FROM ENGLAND TO NEWFOUNDLAND, APRIL, 1921

"We left on April 13th, 1921 - Friday the thirteenth", her diary begins. It was a gray day over Liverpool and nobody seemed to be happy. The transport workers were threatening a strike and this had moved the shipping firm to schedule their departure date one day earlier in order to avoid a work stoppage. The men who were stowing the freight were being rushed a bit to get the ship ready for sailing, and they did not like it. One, a doleful Irishman, was even predicting disaster for them. *"It's tempting Providence, it is!"*



But if other passengers listened to him, Nurse Myra Grimsley did not.. She writes: *"Nothing could possibly happen to me to spoil the huge adventure upon which I was embarking. For two years I had lived for this day. And whatever lay ahead of me, it was what I wanted to do."*

