

5 Nurses Who Helped Shape the Nursing History Other Than Florence Nightingale

Written by Lem Enrile

The nursing history has undergone a lot of speculations and theories on when it actually began. Some say that it started as early as the 5th century where Hippocrates was considered as the father of nursing. And then came along the explosion of wars during the Middle Ages where most women (and even men) played the role of nurses by tending to the sick and wounded despite the lack of formal education and training.

But this soon changed when the “Lady of the Lamp” known as Florence Nightingale stepped into the field during the 19th century. Having the right education and training, Florence Nightingale revolutionized the nursing field and was hailed as the founder of modern nursing. Though everyone in the modern nursing industry knows her name, there are still other notable nurses who helped shape the rich context of the nursing history.

Dorothea Dix (1802-1887)

Back in the old times, people with mental disabilities were treated as lunatics and they were locked away. Even the great philosopher Aristotle proclaimed this—“Let there be law that no deformed children shall live.” Despite how inhumane the society treated the mentally challenged individuals, Dorothea Dix stood up for them. She spent more than 20 years of service in the mental asylums of the US improving the health condition of the patients. She’s also a known nurse activist during the chaotic period of the Civil War.

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

Avid literature lovers know Walt Whitman as a poet, the author of the controversial poetry collection entitled “Leaves of Grass.” This poetry collection stirred up several opinions of the public because of its overt sexuality. Even

Whitman's sexuality formed a heated debate. Nevertheless, let's leave it at that and set our eyes to his other great achievements as a volunteer nurse during the Civil War. He tended to the wounded soldiers, listened to their stories, and did them a favor of sending letters to their loved ones.

Clara Barton (1821-1912)

From a teacher to a recording clerk and to a nurse, Clara Barton was able to make a name in the nursing history because of her efforts to solve medical supply shortage during the Civil War. If not for her, no one could fully help the sick and the wounded since medical supplies were very much necessary. She was then known as the "Angel of the Battlefield." And the American Red Cross? She's the founder of this today's large health relief organization.

Mary Eliza Mahoney (1845-1926)

Mary Mahoney made the breakthrough for being the first Registered African-American Nurse. Perhaps you are mostly aware that racism was very strong especially during the Civil War period. However, Mahoney did not budge an inch against this discrimination issue. She persevered in her studies in a nursing school; and out of 42 candidates, only four students graduated—and she was among the few students who gracefully finished nursing school. She was also the co-founder of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses which is now known as the American Nurses Association.

Margaret Sanger (1879-1976)

She's the pioneer of introducing reproductive health or planned parenthood. She helped educate the public, especially women, on how to use contraceptives for birth control. She had created this movement because of the increasing toll of unwanted pregnancies. She then opened the first birth control clinic in America. However, her clinic was forced to close after a few days of opening because it's illegal. Though some viewed her legacy as immoral, more and more families today are positively accepting the use of contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies.