Lavinia L. Dock : Nurse and Internationalist at the Turn of Nineteenth-Century America

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Nursing at the turn of nineteenth-century America was not simply the field of caring, nor was its practice confined to the hospital ward. Nursing was a field committed to protecting the nation's health in times of both peace and war. Nursing even sought to define the nation's identity. It was the field in which for the first time a woman, albeit mostly women from privileged families, could establish her own identity as a woman, as a nurse, and as a citizen relatively independently of traditional roles. The search of these women for their own identities and eventually for the nation's resulted in their emergence not only from their households, but also from their localities, to the national and on to international spheres of activities.(1)

Activism was a key word. Activism and enthusiasm are keys to understanding Lavinia L. Dock, a pioneer in promoting the profession of nursing at home and abroad at the turn of the century. In 1899 with Ethel Gordon Fenwick, she founded the International Council of Nurses - - - the ICN. The two women took this significant step immediately following the historic conference of the international Council of Women in London that same year. As a secretary of the ICN Dock traveled unsalaried back and forth between the United Stated and Europe for almost a quarter of a century, from 1900 through 1922.

This paper examined the articles and reports by Lavinia L. Dock in

her ICN years. They were published in *The American Journal of Nursing* in the Foreign Department section. By focusing on Dock, we see the struggle of a nurse trying to define her own roles as an American citizen at the turn of the century. Dock came to feel that that goal could be reached only by putting herself outside of the United States. As an observer overseas, she would be open to European practices and could view her own country from a constructive international perspective. However, her initial eagerness and enthusiasm to professionalize nursing at home by reporting European progress were succeeded, in the end, by her profound disillusion and even anger. In the first years, she had written, "I will make our home people open their eyes," (2) she had then reassured her readers that the excellence of American heritage gave it advantages over Europe, writing, "We stood free and independent." (3) Later, when she criticized the Red Cross for idealizing and glorifying the war, and when she accused nations at war, saying "Which one can say 'I am holier than you ? Can we say who exterminated the Indians ?" (4), she took a long step to ending her career as a secretary of the ICN, the very organization she had cofounded.

Dock was an aberration when most members of international organizations were content in their missionary righteousness and were trapped in wartime nationalism. Furthermore, her undaunted activism was a burden to most of the nurses who were in a sensitive position vis-à-vis doctors. By reviewing her articles, I will seek the meaning of her itinerary as a nurse and the meaning of "internationalist" in turn of the century America.

To the United Stated, at the end of the 19th century, Europe was not a fitting model to emulate. For middle class Americans at the turn of the century, comparing themselves with Europe reassured them of the uniqueness and supremacy. They had an enormous appetite, so to

speak, for discovering new ideas and for consuming them. Take, for example, Dock's own family members. Her brother, George Dock, was a professor of medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School and the School of Medicine of Washington University. George Dock was one of the earliest advocates of experimental medicine. Through his introduction to laboratory work in Germany, he recognized early on that a new era of laboratory science was approaching. But he did not confine himself to the laboratory. He was instrumental in revolutionizing medical education by introducing clinical teaching methods and emphasizing that medical students be active experimenters, standing side by side with doctors. His methods foresaw the age of American Progressive education of John Dewey,(5) with its credo of "learning by doing."

Dock's sister, Mira Dock, paved a similar road in the field of horticulture. Her admiration for the British gardens and parks that she visited led her to a career in the city beautiful movement at home. Yet she not only transplanted ideas from Europe but in the end her principal contribution was to conserve Pennsylvania forestlands and to protect the Niagara Falls from exploitation. Another uniquely American outcome : a forerunner of the environmental protection movement of the mid-twentieth century.(6)

For Lavinia too, European travel broadened her knowledge and heightened her concern for own activist role in the United States and for the position of nurses in the larger society. In 1900 Dock started writing her letters from London for the new publication, *The American Journal of Nursing*. The publisher, Sophia Palmer, was another prominent figure in nursing, who sought to promote professionalizaiton of the field through the new journal. Dock, having already established a prominent career, was a respected voice to its readers.

Dock was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1858. She died in

1956. She was one of six children in a comfortable landowning family. Both of her grandfathers were American-born, of German descent. One was said to have worked with Dorothea Dix, a pioneer reformer of mental institutions. Her grandmothers also were born in America, with one coming from a family of Quakers and the other descended from French immigrants, presumably Huguenots. "My parents," said Dock, "were well taught for their day . . . and were both of liberal views." Her proficiency in languages and her choice of career were both the product of education in private schools and family influence.(7)

Dock graduated from the Bellevue Training School of Nurses in New York City. It was one of three pioneering schools in the United States modeled on Nightingale's principles. Dock was night supervisor at Bellevue when Isabel Hampton, another prominent pioneering nurse, invited her to become her assistant in the new school at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Three years after she came to Hopkins, she and Hampton were speakers at an international conference on hospital organization arranged by Johns Hopkins doctors in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair. Dock spoke on the separation of medical and nursing spheres of autonomy. Hampton organized the nurse administrators into the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools.(8) From then on, World's Fairs and related international meetings played crucial roles for Dock and other nurses to meet, publicize and cooperate to enhance their ideas and visions. In 1896, she moved to New York City and joined the nurses at the Henry Street Settlement, founded by Lillian Wald. These nurses were the first to practice visiting nursing, which would later be called public health nursing. As Dock recalled later, this new experiment offered nurses autonomy to practice without doctors' strict supervision. The nurses were virtually independent practitioners in sick and preventive care and health, education, and their network of

visiting nursing spread along and beyond the eastern shore.[9]

So in 1900, inspired by the domestic vision of a nurse's network, Dock was ready to move on with full of hope for her mission to professionalize nursing through an international network. ICN gave her a perfect opportunity to enlarge her sphere of activities. It declared political neutrality and espoused cooperation among nurses from all nations.[10] The fact that the first meeting of the ICN was held in Buffalo, New York reflected the eagerness of the American members for success and for leadership. Early writings of Dock show the mixture of confidence, enthusiasm and enjoyment of reporting and sharing experiences with European counterparts, especially, with representatives of the British movement for registration of nurses. The first issue of *The American Journal of Nursing* included her article, "What We May Expect form the Law." She thoroughly explained the American system of law-making processes and its profound effects on nursing. By doing so, she reassured the audience of the soundness of the American system.[11] This theme was in line with an earlier article, "A National Association for Nurses and its Legal Organization"(1896) [12], in which she examined other national organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the international Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the American Medical Associations and to suggest how they could build a nation-wide network of organization. Seen from abroad, nurses in the United Stated were unorganized and clustered in patches, badly in need of stronger organizations. In her "States Registration for Nurses" (1902)[13], Dock encouraged her colleagues to organize and to work for registration. At the same time she called for the rejection of the stereotyped character of nurses that was imposed by outsiders. "Shed off submissiveness and tender-heartedness !" [14] - - -This cry predicted her later career of suffragist and then of feminist.

This early period was characterized also by Dock's positive reports from all over Europe, from places like Denmark, Germany, Greece and Italy.[15] "International" in Dock's sense was strongly biased toward "Europe." As in "Hospital Organization"(1903),[16] her interest was mainly the relationship between doctors and nurses in terms of hospital management in those countries. She targeted control by doctors and criticized it severely. She seemed to enjoy reporting shortcomings and malpractices taking place at some of these hospitals. In these critiques, she was warning her American audience that the United States must not take the same road. She always emphasized that nurses could make independent decisions.

In terms of decision-making, Dock concluded that the United States fared better than its European counterparts. In "Who are [sic] Representative ?"(1904), [17] she said that Americans enjoyed much more personal freedom than Europeans did. She reminded her American audience that they had won an eight to ten hour working day, in contrast to the European norm of 15 hours. Based on her travels and researches, she came to conclude in her article, "International Relationships" (1905), that "whereas we in America have only an educational problem, that is a single-faced problem, the pioneers of modern nursing in Europe have a four-fold opposition to overcome."[18] The "four lions", she named them were "religion, social, masculine and industrial prejudice." [19]

Dock also highlighted to the atmosphere of the Henry Street Settlement, located in New York City's Lower East Side. Called the Nurses Settlement, its nurses enjoyed their own sphere of autonomy marked by decision-making performed relatively independently of the medical establishment of physicians. A few years earlier, Dock had sounded a similar note in "Directories for Nurses" (1897) [20], in which she had praised the principle of self-government. In that article she also had

pursued the further and logical conclusion to a demand for a minimum wage and for equal pay with men. Indeed, her trips to Europe made her realize that her primary concern was for America, for sound practices in her own country.

Thus, at this same time, we notice her irritation with the slow pace of movement for nurses' professionalization in the United States. From Dock's somewhat removed position, she observed that nurses at home were under great pressure from medical and lay managers of hospitals to carry out their roles according to the very limiting traditional expectations of those managers. In "The Duty of this Society in Public Work" (1904) [21], she deplored that even in her position as an ICN secretary, she was unable to exert effective influence to counter these practices.

Dock came to realize that the source of her frustration would be overcome through suffrage. She became increasingly disillusioned by the indifference of elected state legislators. She realized that a woman's occupation such as nursing could not exert influence nor expect support until women had bargaining power to wield. From then on she became extremely militant. Again, that was possible because she was in part distanced from American nurses. She also developed close friendships with several British suffragists. Her position on suffrage was first declared in *The American Journal of Nursing* in the article, "Some Urgent Social Claims" (1907) .[22] Two years later she traced the history of the suffrage movement in Europe in her article, "The Relation of the Nursing Profession and the Women's Movement." This article appeared in the publication, *The Nurses' Journal of the Pacific Coast* (1909). [23] Her hopes that knowledge of the European experience might influenced the profession in the United States were dashed when she learned that a majority of participants in a meeting of nurses in San Francisco had expressed opposition to suffrage. Just one year before, in her 1908 article,

"The Suffrage Question," [24] Dock had cried out for the need for suffrage for "Patriotic reasons" as a "citizen" to "actualize democracy." Her identifying women as "housekeepers of the nation" and "overseers of the poor" appealed firmly to the leadership among both women reformers and in the nursing profession. However, not only did she strongly advocate suffrage in this article, she went on to describe connections between the profession and trade unionism.

Her position on this connection was stated more clearly five years later in "The Status of the Nurse in the Working World." (1913) [25] Nurses were no longer a privileged class of women, she wrote. Dock called for supporting other hospital workers' efforts to limit working hours and she suggested that underpaid nurses had a bond with underpaid "toilers" of the working class. She equated nurses with workers of the world and a nursing organization with a trade union. I must note here that trade unionism in the United States put more emphasis on education than on revolution, on legislation rather than unionization.[26] Nevertheless, there was a strong public and governmental hostility against unions and their immigrant membership.

Although there was not much class-consciousness on Dock's part, there was enough to threaten her position in her own profession. Biographers of Dock recognized her contribution as a pioneer in nursing. Yet, until the resurgence feminism, they were surprisingly reluctant to treat the suffragist aspect of her thinking, and they were almost silent about her embrace of trade unionism. This reluctance is still evident.[27] Dock's concern for workers' rights and her sensitivity to the injustices of their working conditions included those for immigrant laborers[28] and black nurses in the United States.[29] At the same time, this sensitivity coexisted with the seeming ethnocentric stance of never questioning either the need for exclusively Anglo-American leadership in organizing

the ICN or their assumption of a "natural" superiority to the new membership from Asian countries.(30)

Suffrage was finally granted in the United States. For Dock, however, nurses had been facing the more difficult challenge of war. She wrote that war was "the monster twin of poverty, spawned by men's greed and competitiveness."(31) She refused to even mention the WWI during her last days in the ICN's foreign Department. She wrote, "This war will get no advertising, no 'write-ups' from the secretary of the ICN." (32) And, "What great nation has a clean record ? Which one can say : 'I am holier than you ?' Can you say it, [we] who exterminated the Indians ? Therefore, in this column there will be no lines that sound like criticism of this or that nation." (33)

Dock was for more critical of Red Cross nursing during the war. "Does it not make war more tolerable," she wrote, "more possible, and, by mitigating, keeping it bolstered up and alive, just as organized charity helps to bolster up poverty and keep it from appearing as the needless, preventable useless survival that it is ?" (34) This declaration would seem to flow from her long-held goal for a fully professionalized field of nursing that would contribute significantly to improving living conditions in all societies. Her intense disgust for "amateur," "untrained," "snobbish," "ladylike" women performing in the nursing "profession," can be understood in context of that goal.(35)

Looking back, we see that this long-held view of Dock's activated her during the Spanish-American War of 1898. During that war a group of nonprofessional women organized themselves and worked as "nurses." That event motivated Hampton and Dock to launch their campaign for nurses' registration. Now editorials in *The American Journal of Nursing* emphasized the nurse as a citizen and encouraged her as her duty to join the Red Cross.(36) Red Cross nurses were praised by both the public

and by members of Dock's own dear profession. For Dock, what she had fought for years seemed almost in ruins. In Dock's mind, the "Red Cross helped to keep alive the glorification of war."[37] The nursing profession was not contributing as Dock had envisioned, to maintaining the health of the nation in either peace or war. And it was clear that Dock's was a minority point of view.

The ICN network was not working either. Most of European members were engaged in Red Cross or other war-related activities. The apolitical ideology of the ICN was shattered. Hostility toward Germany was rampant. Chagrined that German nurses were ostracized, without help, after the war, she issued a plea to help German nurses. (FD 1922) [38] (Her concern was strikingly similar to that she expressed 30 years later. Then she wrote to secretaries of states and nurses' groups commenting on unfair treatment of Russian nurses during the Cold War period.) [39] Dock was now ready to withdraw from the ICN. Contrary to the attention she received when she gave birth to the organization, her retirement notice and later, her obituary in 1956, were small and largely ignored.[40]

When we look back, Dock's life represents a nurse's active search for the meaning of America and what the country should be. Her confidence in the nurse as protector of the nation's health in times of peace and war was the root of her activism. In the beginning she was optimistically apolitical in focusing on an international network of nurses, albeit Anglo- and American-centered. But in the end she was awakened by larger questions concerning economic, gender, and political problems. Then, being left alone in the international field, she stood like a lightning rod, absorbing signals and then forming policies on multiple domestic and international problems. Subsequently, she became alienated from both nurses at home and colleagues in the ICN. Her pacifist vision,

to be fulfilled through international organizations, and her vision of the nurse as an independent practitioner, is still to be realized.

Dock was surely ahead of her time. She was the product of the turn of the century America, when America was young and optimistic, eager to learn from the outside and incessantly searching for its place in the world.

Notes

(1) I found Daniel T. Rodgers. *Atlantic Crossings : Social Politics in a Progressive Age.* Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1998, "Introduction : A Transatlantic Dialogue" in *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany.* Ed. By Kathryn Kish Sklar et als. Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1998, pp. 1–75, and Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London : Verso, 1991, and Michael Peter Smith, *Transnational Urbanism : Locating Globalization.* Malden : Blackwell Publishers, 2001 helpful in exploring nurses' search for international networks and the role of activists in the context of the emergence of the nation-state.

(2) Lavinia Dock. "The Progress of German Nurses", Foreign Department (FD), *American Journal of Nursing* (AJN), 1906, p. 179.

(3) Dock. "Who are [sic] Representative ? " (FD), AJN, 1904, p. 995.

(4) Dock. "About the War," (FD), AJN, 1915, p. 848.

(5) Kenneth M. Ludmerer. *Learning to Heal : The Development of American Medical Education.* Baltimore : The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, pp. 155–160.

(6) William H. Wilson. *The City Beautiful Movement*. Baltimore : The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 126–146.

(7) Dock. "Self-Portrait", *Nursing Outlook* 25, Jan. 1977, pp. 23–26.

Marry M. Roberts. "Lavinia Lloyd Dock : Nurse, Feminist, Internationalist", AJN, 1956, p. 176. Teresa E. Christy. "Portrait of a Leader : Lavinia Lloyd Dock", *Nursing Outlook,* Jun. 1969, pp. 72–75. Janette Wilson James. "Biographical Introduction" in *A Lavinia Dock Reader*. New York : Garland, 1985, xii–xix.

(8) Janette Wilson James. "Isabel Hampton and the Professionalization of Nursing in the 1890's", in *The Therapeutic Revolution.* Eds. By M. J. Vogel and C. E. Rosenberg. Philadelphia : The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979, pp. 201–244.

(9) Dock. "Self-Portrait", p. 25. Dock. *A History of Nursing* vol. III. New York : G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912, p. 235. Lillian Wald. *The House on Henry Street* (1915). New York : Dover, 1971. Ellen Paul Denker Ed. *Healing At Home : Visiting Nursing Service of New York, 1893–1993*. New York : Visiting Nurse Service of New York, 1993.

(10) Nancy J. Tomes and Geertje Boschma. "Above All Other Things- - - Unity". In Barbara L. Brush and Joan E. Lynaugh. *Nurses of All Nations : A History of the International Council of Nurses, 1889–1999,* Philadelphia : Lippincott, 1999, pp. 1–38.

(11) Dock. "What We May Expect from the Law", *AJN*, 1900. pp. 8–12.

(12) Dock. "A National Association for Nurses and its Legal Organization" (1896), in *First Words : Selected Addresses from the National League for Nursing 1894–1933*. Nettie Birnbach and Sandra Lewenson Ed. New York : National League for Nursing Press, 1991, pp. 298–314.

(13) Dock. "States Registration for Nurses", (FD), *AJN*, 1902, p. 575.

(14) *Ibid.*

(15) Dock. "A Pioneer in Danish Nursing", (FD), *AJN*, 1905, p. 383–384. "Letters", (FD), *AJN*, 1905, pp. 324–326. "Letters", (FD),

AJN, 1905, p. 187–190.

(16) Dock. "Hospital Organization", *AJN*, 1903, p. 418. "The General Hospital in Vienna", (FD), *AJN*, 1905, pp. 320–323.

(17) Dock. "Who are /sic/ Representative ? " (FD), *AJN*, 1904, pp. 995–997.

(18) Dock. "International Relationships", *Eleventh Annual Report of the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses.* Baltimore : J. H. Furst, 1905, New York : Garland, 1985, p. 172.

(19) *Ibid*. P. 173.

(20) Dock. "Directories for Nurses" (1897), In *First Words*, pp. 57–60.

(21) Dock. "The Duty of this Society in Public Work", *AJN*, 1904, pp. 99 –101.

(22) Dock. "Some Urgent Social Claims", *AJN*, 1907, pp. 925–926.

(23) Dock. "The Relation of the Nursing Profession and the Women's Movement", *The Nurse's Journal of the Pacific Coast*, 1909, pp. 197 –201.

(24) Dock. "The Suffrage Question", *AJN*, 1908, pp. 925–926.

(25) Dock. "The Status of the Nurse in the Working World", *AJN*, 1913, p. 971.

(26) Robin Miller Jacoby. *The British and American Women's Trade Union Leagues, 1890–1925* : A Case Study of Feminism and Class. New York : Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994. Mary J. Bularzik. "The Bonds of Belonging : Leonora O'Reilly and Social Reform." *Labor History* 24, 1983, pp. 60–83.

(27) Joan I. Roberts and Thetis M. Group. *Feminism and Nursing : A Historical Perspective on Power, Status and Political Activism in the Nursing Profession.* Westport : Praeger, 1995. Sandra Lewenson. *Taking Charge : Nursing, Suffrage, and Feminism in America*,

1873–1920. New York : Garland, 1993. Susan M. Poslusny. "Feminist Friendship : Isabel Hampton Robb, Lavinia Dock and Mary Adelaide Nutting", *Image : Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, summer 1989, pp. 64–68. and Diane Hamilton. "Constructing the Mind of Nursing", *Nursing History Review*, 1994, pp. 3–28 explore Dock from feminist perspective. One exception is Carole A. Estabrooks. "Lavinia Lloyd Dock : The Henry Street Years", *Nursing History Review*, 1995, p. 143–172 which refers to the relationship between Dock and O'Reilly, Pp. 152–154. O'Reilly was one of the most important members of the Women's Trade Union League. Dock met her during her stay at the Henry Street Settlement and worked together at a local unit of the United Garment Workers.

(28) Dock. "An Experiment in Contagious Nursing", *Charities*, July 1903, pp. 19–23.

(29) Dock. "Report of the Thirteenth Annual Convention". *AJN*, 1910, p. 902. in which she said, "I used to say other people, 'There is one association that has never drawn the color line, and that is the nurses.' Now as we get bigger and are spreading all over the country I have seen evidences that made me think cruel and unchristian and unethical prejudice might creep in here in our association. . . . I do hope that in this one human problem, in dealing with the question of the Negro race in America, we nurses will exercise and simply practice that one simple rule, to treat them as we would like to be treated ourselves." See also Dock on African Americans, *A History of Nursing*. pp. 195–198. and on Native Americans, *A History of Nursing* p. 193.

(30) Barbara L. Brush and Meryn Stuart, "Unity Amidst Difference : The ICN Project and Writing International Nursing History," *Nursing History Review* 2, pp. 191–203.

(31) Dock. "The War", (FD), *AJN*, 1915. p. 47.

(32) Dock. "About the War", (FD), *AJN*, 1915, p. 848.

(33) *Ibid*.

(34) Dock. "War Nursing Abroad", (FD), *AJN*, 1915, pp. 211–212. "Items", (FD), *AJN*, 1915, p. 497.

(35) Dock. "War Nursing Abroad", (FD), *AJN*, 1915, p. 211.

(36) "Editorial Comment : The Nurse as A Citizen", *AJN*, 1917, p. 673.

(37) Dock. "Items", (FD), *AJN*, 1915, p. 497.

(38) Dock. (FD), *AJN*, 1922, p. 209, p. 493.

(39) Lois A. Monterio. "Lavinia L. Dock (1947) on Nurses and the Cold War", *Nursing Forum*. 1978, pp. 46–54. One of two letters sent to General Marshal reads : "... We should have had the Russian Nurses at our meeting in Atlantic City. ... It was an important event. There were several hundred nurses form Europe, Asia and Africa as well as at home and in the Pacific. ... The Russian Nurses should have been here. Some time ago Dr. Lebedenko was in this country and promised us to try to have some Russian members join our I. C. N. Our Secretary wrote to the Embassy in Washington and also to Moscow but with no result. This is your fault. How could we expect the Russians to overlook the daily insults, the malice, the ingratitude, the cold blooded threats of unfriendliness that are daily to be read in our papers, over the radio, and in book after book, that to say the least, are not written in the manner of gentlemen. We nurses have no enemies. We do not recognize national jealousies. We care nothing for men's quarrels. We consider it an undeserved grievance that our Russian sisters have been alienated by our American Government's attitude. I beg you to answer this note. Although I do not now hold office in the I. C. N., I was one of its founders and early secretaries. I can only sign

my name." Dock was also disappointed with the reticence of the I. C. N. Council members who were "unwilling to touch upon the political hysteria." Despite the personal risk, she refused to be silent as she had been in the face of an injustice.

(40) Daisy Caroline Bridges. *A History of the International Council of Nurses, 1899–1964 : The First Sixty-Five Years*. Philadelphia : J. B. Lippincott Co., 1967, p. 56. "Thanks of the I. C. N. to Miss Dock." *AJN*, 1926, p. 188. Obituary, "Lavinia Dock", *AJN*, 1956, p. 712.