RUTH PAGE JONES

Pioneer Nurse Jean Todd

A Woman Professional on the Dakota Frontier

Wearing only light coats and shivering in the frigid air, the woman and child gazed in wonder at the small, rugged town on the prairie where piles of snow lined the streets. Three weeks after boarding an emigrant ship in their native Scotland, Jean Todd and her daughter Ella had completed their journey, arriving in Dakota Territory on a bitterly cold day in December of 1887. A summons for help had decided the future for that small family, bringing them to the train station at a young town called Mitchell. While waiting to be met, Todd must have worried about her sister Isabella Diehl, a recent widow with a farm to work and three small children to raise after tragedy struck the family that summer. First, lightning killed her husband Martin during a terrible storm. Next, hail destroyed the entire crop on their homestead, and Martin's relatives back East demanded immediate payment of a three-hundred-dollar loan. Surely, reasoned Todd, the newly settled territory would welcome her skills as a trained nurse and midwife, allowing her to practice her profession and help to ease her sister's burdens. As she followed Isabella through "narrow shoveled paths, down wooden sidewalks, past scattered wooden houses," Todd felt that she "had come to a world of new things and strange experiences."[1]

1. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], enclosed in Ella Todd Wilson to Adeline Van Genderen, 16 Jan. 1956, p. 1 (quotation), and ["Ella's Story"] enclosed in Ella Todd Wilson to Adeline Van Genderen, 13 Feb. 1959, p. 1, Ella Todd Wilson Papers, Adeline Van Genderen Collection, Plankinton, S.Dak. (hereafter cited as Wilson Papers); Ella Todd Wilson, "Mrs. Martin H. Diehl (Isabella [Elizabeth] Todd)," 1942, pp. 3–5, Folder Aurora County, Box 6828, Pioneer Daughters Collection, State Archives, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre (hereafter cited as Pioneer Daughters Collection). Jean Todd's daughter Ella Todd Wilson sent several letters between 1956 and 1959 to her great-niece, Adeline Van Genderen, editor of the weekly *South Dakota Mail* (Plankinton, S.Dak.). Enclosed with the correspondence were the untitled autobiography of Wilson's mother, Jean

Jean Todd can be described as a "pioneer nurse" not because she had moved to a region that had been recently homesteaded, but because she was one of the first trained professionals in the new career field of nursing.[2] Moreover, she entered the profession as a working-class woman in an era when training in medicine was rare for all women, regardless of class. The documented history of the early years of modern nursing tends to celebrate the upper- and middle-class leaders in the field, usually unmarried, who worked in urban areas. The story of Jean Todd gives witness to the early years of nursing from a different perspective, that of a woman from a working-class background who pursued an independent practice on the Northern Great Plains even after motherhood and marriage. Her life story illuminates some of the challenges she faced as she developed her practice and served her community for thirty years with courage, confidence, and persistence.

The profession of modern nursing began with Protestant middle-class women working to reform nursing care following the Crimean War of the 1850s and the American Civil War of the 1860s. Associated with Florence Nightingale, a popular Crimean War nurse, the Nightingale system of educating nurses originated at Saint Thomas' Hospital in London in 1860 and quickly spread throughout the world. Although other secular and religious systems of nursing education emerged in Europe at that time, Nightingale's popularity and the system's method of training nurses to educate other nurses helped to promote the system. Those who signed up included both educated women of the

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Todd Saville, dictated to Wilson in the early 1930s, as well as Wilson's own autobiography and other descriptions of life in the Plankinton/Mitchell area. Much of the contents were published in the *South Dakota Mail* soon after the letters were received, and the collection now belongs to the current publisher, Van Genderen's daughter Gayle Van Genderen. To distinguish the various writings, the author has assigned titles in brackets. Sightly different versions of the women's autobiographies, along with the biography of Wilson's aunt, Isabella Todd Diehl, are part of the Pioneer Daughters Collection in the South Dakota State Archives. Edited versions appear in Sally Roesch Wagner, ed., *Daughters of Dakota: Stories from the Attic; The South Dakota Pioneer Daughters Collection,* vol. 2 (Yankton, S.Dak.: Daughters of Dakota, 1990), pp. 115–35.

2. Todd asserted in her autobiography, "Without a doubt, I was the first trained nurse in the Territory" (["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 1), but her statement cannot be verified.

This 1901 view shows the scene surrounding the train depot in Mitchell where Jean Todd and her daughter arrived in 1887.

upper class and ambitious working-class women who met requirements that pupils be able to read and write and provide references of good character. The model called for schools that would operate independently from hospitals, have women in charge, provide housing, and sometimes require tuition. They would also train nurses to be administrators and teachers, and they would teach the profession as an occupation rather than as a job.[3]

Educated women from good families found in nursing a path to economic independence—a socially prestigious choice beyond "governessing" or needlework. These elite women provided leadership, serving as superintendents or head nurses in hospitals where student nurses staffed the wards.[4] In an effort to encourage a stronger vocational commitment and convey a professional vision, the first histories celebrated

3. Richard H. Shryock, *The History of Nursing: An Interpretation of the Social and Medical Factors Involved* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1959), pp. 272–84; Minnie Goodnow, *Nursing History*, 9th ed. (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1953), pp. 85–90, 96–97.

4. Lavinia L. Dock, *A Short History of Nursing*, 2d ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), pp. 9–10; Victoria L. Holder, "From Handmaiden to Right Hand—The Infancy of Nursing," *AORN Journal* 79 (Feb. 2004): 380–82.

the individual achievements of such nurses, perhaps as "an inspirational text for the ordinary nurse in her studies and, for the elite, a model to follow."[5] Recent works confirm this tendency. For example, a 2003 study showed how advantages of higher education, social status, and family connections helped Jane Elizabeth Hitchcock obtain her first position as head nurse in a Massachusetts hospital in 1891 and later become a pioneer leader in public-health nurse training through her work in New York City. Most graduates of nurse-training programs, however, came from the working class and worked not in hospitals but as private-duty nurses.[6]

As hospitals expanded to conduct research and provide new treatments related to the discovery of germ theory and antiseptic procedures, the demand for nurses grew quickly. By 1890, nursing school alumni had begun "to work toward standardized training, examinations, and other professional credentials." In general, single women became nursing professionals. Those who left their profession to marry seldom returned to work.[7]

Necessity as much as career choice likely drew Todd into the field of nursing. Born to Thomas Todd and Jean Arklie Todd in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 31 January 1846, Todd was seventeen years old when her father died and she became responsible for supporting her mother and three younger siblings. She worked first as a linen weaver and then, at the age of twenty-two, as a warder of the Women's Division of Fife County Prison. Her older sister Isabella worked in Springfield, Scotland, also as a linen weaver, but later emigrated to Iowa to marry a man she had never met. Family accounts indicate that Todd, too, was married at some point but provide no husband's name or marriage date, creating a mystery about this stage in her life. Todd's daughter Ella was born in 1878 and would have been about three years old when Todd

5. Sioban Nelson, "Reading Nursing History," *Nursing Inquiry* 4 (1997): 229–30.

6. Joellen W. Hawkins and John Charles Watson, "Public Health Nursing Pioneer: Jane Elizabeth Hitchcock, 1863–1939," *Public Health Nursing* 20 (May 2003): 168–69; Holder, "From Handmaiden to Right Hand," pp. 380–82.

7. Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989), pp. 141–42. For background on early nurses, *see* Nelson, "Reading Nursing History," p. 230; Holder, "From Handmaiden to Right Hand," p. 386; and Evans, *Born for Liberty*, p. 142.

began her medical studies. Todd studied nursing at Dundee Royal Infirmary, in Dundee, Scotland, from 1881 to 1884, completing her course of study at the age of thirty-eight.[8]

The modern nursing schools of Todd's day delivered a systematic course of instruction that included some lectures and examinations as well as hands-on work in hospital wards. The Nightingale system emphasized sanitation and cleanliness. No standards existed regarding length of study, and nursing schools offered programs lasting one, two, and three years. Although she graduated with highest honors in her class, Todd refused a position as a superintendent of nurses, believing her spelling skills inadequate for the job.[9] Her class rank and the subsequent job offer confirm that Todd took her studies seriously, performed at an advanced level, and impressed her instructors.

Todd studied during an era in which advancements in science transformed medical practices, leading to improved outcomes by the end of the nineteenth century. Physicians were starting to understand how specific organisms caused a particular disease, but they still lacked knowledge of how to prevent or cure those diseases. Between 1875 and 1900, medical researchers found bacterial causes of typhoid, cholera, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and diphtheria. Viruses that caused diseases such as smallpox, yellow fever, and influenza were not discovered until the twentieth century. Two lines of defense were developed to control diseases: sanitary controls and isolation combined with vaccinations.[10]

As an Edinburgh-trained nurse, Todd benefited from pioneering work by two Scottish physicians that had greatly advanced the medical knowledge of that time. James Simpson had introduced the use

8. Ella Todd Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," [ca. 1955], p. 1, Folder Aurora County, Box 6828, Pioneer Daughters Collection; Wilson, "Mrs. Martin H. Diehl (Isabella [Elizabeth] Todd)," p. 1; ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 1.

9. Shryock, *History of Nursing*, pp. 280, 283; Rosemary White, *Social Change and the Development of the Nursing Profession: A Study of the Poor Law Nursing Service, 1848–1948* (London: Henry Kimpton, 1978), p. 60; Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," p. 1. Wilson does not specify where Todd was offered the position, but the hospital may have been the Dundee Royal Infirmary, built with stone from a quarry managed by Todd's father.

10. Shryock, *History of Nursing*, pp. 253–66; J. M. Mellish, *A Basic History of Nursing* (Durban, South Africa: Butterworth, 1984), pp. 62–69.

Jean Todd posed for her formal portrait shortly after completing her training as a nurse in Scotland.

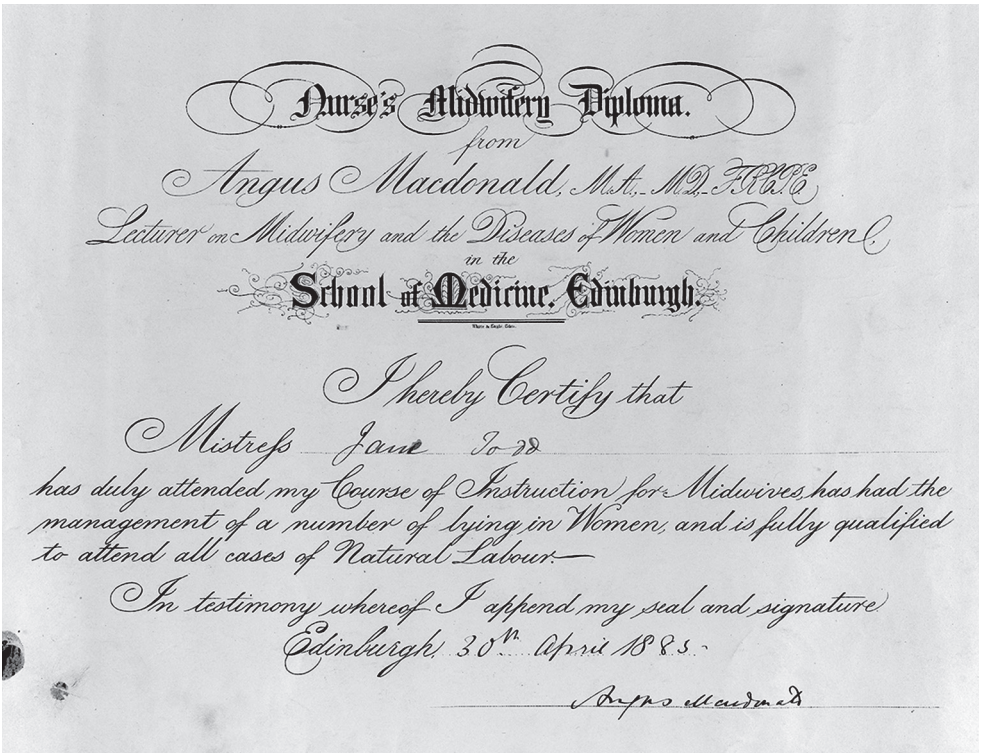
of chloroform as an anesthetic in his obstetrical and surgical practice in the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh in 1847. Considered the father of antiseptic principles, Joseph Lister had reduced wound infection and significantly changed the world of surgery through his original work in antiseptic and aseptic techniques in the 1860s. Antisepsis involves killing microorganisms, while asepsis is the process of excluding them from the operating room and from wound dressings. Lister and Simpson served as professors at the University of Edinburgh seven to fifteen years before Todd studied midwifery at the teaching hospital of the university's medical school.[11] A Mrs. Strong, matron of the nursing school from 1874 to 1879, described the application of antiseptic procedures in the nurse's course of study, saying, "The days of Lister had so far advanced that we were enveloped in carbolic steam as an antiseptic at operations and the dressings that followed, but the day of aseptic work had scarcely dawned."[12]

After completing her training as a nurse, Todd went on to study midwifery at the teaching hospital of the medical school at the University of Edinburgh, where Lister and Simpson had both served as professors. She also claimed to be the first nurse to take a course in obstetrics "with the young doctors" at Simpson Maternity Hospital of Edinburgh.[13] For a little more than two years after obtaining her midwifery diploma in 1885, Todd nursed in private homes of wealthy fami-

11. Mellish, *Basic History of Nursing*, pp. 63–65; University of Edinburgh, "Commemorative Plaques: Sir James Young Simpson and Lord Joseph Lister," http://www.ed.ac.uk/about/people/millennial/1800-1899.

12. "A Page of Nursing History, Opening of Prain Preliminary Training School, Dundee Royal Infirmary," *British Journal of Nursing* (Jan. 1930): 19.

13. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 1. Again, it is not possible to verify Todd's statement. Todd's papers in the archives of the Simpson Memorial Maternity Hospital include a form "certifying that Jane [Jean] Todd acted as a nurse there from 1 Feb 1885 to 30 Apr 1885" and a "Nurses Midwifery Diploma" from the Edinburgh School of Medicine dated 30 April 1885. Lothian Health Services Archive, GD1/35, "Jane Todd, nurse, 1885," University of Edinburgh, http://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk. Other sources also refer to Jean Todd as "Jane." *See* "Jane Todd," in *1881 Scotland Census*, Dundee parish, ED 9A, p. 51, line 17, roll cssct1881_82, Ancestry.com, and "Jane Todd," in Passenger Lists, New York, 1820–1957, Records of the U.S. Customs Service, Record Group 36, National Archives Microfilm Publication M237, roll 514, line 11, list number 1599B.



Nurse's Midwifery Diploma.
from
Angus Macdonald, M.B., M.R.F.P.S.G.
Lecturer on Midwifery and the Diseases of Women and Children
in the
School of Medicine, Edinburgh.

I hereby Certify that
Mistress Jane Todd
has duly attended my Course of Instruction for Midwives has had the management of a number of lying in Women, and is fully qualified to attend all cases of Natural Labour.

In testimony whereof I append my seal and signature
Edinburgh 30th April 1885.
Angus Macdonald

Jean Todd, whose name also appears as Jane Todd in official documents, received her diploma in midwifery from the University of Edinburgh on 30 April 1885.

lies in Scotland and London. When her youngest sister, Elizabeth Todd Phillips, married and moved to Melbourne, Australia, Todd made arrangements to follow. However, circumstances soon forced a change in plans. Isabella, the sister who had emigrated to Iowa, had moved on to Dakota Territory, where she and her husband, Martin H. Diehl, were among the first to settle in Hopper Township of Aurora County in the spring of 1881. Isabella wrote to Todd after the lightning strike that killed her husband in August 1887.[14] Todd later noted, "Her husband's

14. Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," pp. 1–2. Elizabeth Todd Phillips appears as "Eliza" in census data. *See 1881 Scotland Census*, Cupar, Fife Co., in ED 6, p. 4, line 8, roll cssct1881, Ancestry.com, and "Elizabeth Todd," in "Public Member Trees," Mellick and Allen Family Tree and Gray Family Tree, Ancestry.com.

death left my sister a stranger in what was still a new land to her, with three children, and an uncertain future, so I felt that duty decided that I should share its uncertainties."[15]

Todd would have been one of a relatively small number of trained, experienced nurses practicing in the United States when she arrived in December of 1887. Although the first Nightingale school of nursing had opened in England in 1860, the nursing profession did not begin in the United States until about twelve years later, when five schools opened in New England in 1872 and 1873. The first school for nurses in the Midwest opened with eight pupils in 1881. By the time Todd received her nursing certificate in Scotland in 1884, schools throughout the United States had graduated only about six hundred nurses total. The graduate count increased to ten thousand by 1900.[16]

In South Dakota, a few trained nurses, some educated overseas, were practicing their profession by the mid-1890s. However, those nurses were not trained in the state or licensed. The first nursing school in the state opened in Sioux Falls in 1899, and the first nurses association in South Dakota organized in 1916. The first state legislation requiring a nursing license became law in 1917, at which time forty-eight nurses registered. The first printed training curriculum for nurses in South Dakota was issued in 1920.[17]

Many of those developments lay far in the future when Todd arrived in Mitchell as a forty-one-year-old immigrant from Scotland with a nine-year-old daughter at her side. A town with 2,217 residents, Mitchell lay near the James River in Davison County in the middle of the southeastern quadrant of present-day South Dakota. To her disappointment, Todd found little demand for her nursing skills among the mostly young settlers, many of whom had already spent their savings building homes and starting farms and businesses and could not af-

15. Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," p. 2.

16. Goodnow, *Nursing History*, pp. 152–53, 194–95.

17. R. Esther Erickson, *Nursing History in South Dakota* (Sioux Falls: South Dakota Nurses' Association, 1973), pp. 14–17, 23–24. For the names of nurses who arrived to practice their profession in the mid-1890s, *see* ibid., pp. 127–33, and Paula M. Nelson, "'In the Midst of Life We Are in Death': Medical Care and Mortality in Early Canton," *South Dakota History* 33 (Fall 2003): 204.

ford professional medical care.[18] The few cases she did find involved nursing sick children, delivering babies, and providing care for new mothers. One medical situation she encountered early on involved sick animals, not sick humans. While attending her first case on a farm near Letcher, Todd learned that the farmer, often absent on business, had a problem with his cattle dying. As Todd remembered later, "The snow was in great drifts everywhere and the cattle were confined to a low shed thatched with flax straw. I finally persuaded him to make an autopsy on one of them, and we found death resulted from eating flax straw from the roof and getting insufficient water."[19] Todd's knowledge of anatomy gave her the confidence to diagnose the problem successfully.

After the snow melted in the spring of 1888, Todd and her daughter Ella moved to the Diehl family farm near Plankinton, situated in Aurora County about twenty miles west of Mitchell. Ella remained on her aunt's farm while Todd—more familiar with working in urban settings such as Edinburgh and London at that point—moved to Chicago to try to find work as a nurse there. Todd later recalled the discouraging search, writing, "Nurse's training was fairly new at that time and Chicago hospitals had just begun graduating their own. Chicago doctors had agreed to use none but their Chicago graduates, so for three weeks I went from doctor's office to doctor's office, without success."[20]

Fortunately, while riding the streetcar one day, Todd met some shipmates from her voyage from Scotland who helped her to find work with a family that, coincidentally, had relatives living near Plankinton. Given her difficulty in finding employment with doctors and her experience nursing in affluent homes in London, Todd likely earned her living as a duty-nurse in private homes, rather than as a hospital nurse. In that era, obstetrics, surgery, and medical illnesses were often treated in the home, with family members or a hired nurse, for those who could pay, providing round-the-clock care. Diseases such as typhoid

18. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 1; U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Population*, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), p. 312; ["Ella's Story"], p. 2.

19. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 1.

20. Ibid., p. 2.

fever could require nursing attention for a month or longer, while obstetrical cases might require only two weeks.[21]

After working for eleven months in Chicago, Todd returned to Dakota Territory for a visit. Discovering that there was enough work in Plankinton to enable her to earn a living, she chose to stay and build a life in that rural community starting in 1889, the year in which South Dakota and North Dakota achieved statehood. She soon met with resistance from the local medical establishment. Unhappy that Todd practiced medicine in their community without registering a diploma—presenting it to county officials so that her medical qualifications would be noted for the public record—the local physicians complained to state authorities.[22]

Aurora County physicians may have worried that, coming from a prestigious medical school and bringing a level of training possibly greater than their own, Todd posed a threat to their practices. The three doctors working in Plankinton at that time were Richard Brown, James Rigg, and Hiram Shouse. Fortunately for Todd, another physician soon arrived who clearly understood the scope and value of her training. As Todd related, "In 1891, a new doctor located in town, Dr. J. W. C. White, an Edinburgh trained Englishman, with some Scotch in his ancestry. We soon became good friends, as we worked together professionally."[23]

Todd eventually overcame the opposition from the local doctors, but not without difficulty. She recalled later:

> Trained nurses were so new at that time that many doctors, especially in the small towns, felt that a nurse was encroaching on their profession. Shortly after the coming of Dr. White, several local doctors took steps about it and sent a complaint to Pierre. I received a letter telling me to either stop practicing medicine or register a doctor's diploma. After a sec-

21. Ibid.; Goodnow, *Nursing History*, p. 197; Erickson, *Nursing History in South Dakota*, p. 138. Erickson writes about Gena Stevens, the first nurse to graduate from formal nurses training in South Dakota in 1900. During training, Stevens was sent out as a private-duty nurse for several obstetric cases, each lasting two weeks, at a rate of fifteen dollars per week.

22. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 2.

23. Ibid.

> ond summer, I registered my diploma for nursing and midwifery and had no further trouble. My good friend, Dr. White, also interceded for me, explaining that I was only practicing my new profession and working with and not against the doctors.[24]

Nine doctors had already registered their diplomas with the Aurora County Register of Deeds when Todd filed her nurse's midwifery diploma in the county's Record of Licenses to Practicing Physicians in 1892. All those who registered, with the exception of Todd, had been certified by the Board of Public Health.[25] Her diploma was signed by Dr. Angus McDonald, a lecturer "on midwifery and the diseases of women and children in the School for Medicine Edinburgh."[26] Todd's entry appears on the same page as the Physician's Certificate for Dr. White. By the mid-1890s, only two physicians, Drs. Shouse and White, still practiced in the Plankinton area.[27]

Part of what may have been troubling to some doctors of the era is that nursing in Todd's day really was, as White suggested in his remarks when vouching for Todd's proficiency, virtually a new profession. Prior to 1860, nurses provided specialized domestic care, focusing on the room, the bed, and the physical needs of the patient. Medical care was limited to giving regular doses of medicine. The introduction of physical examinations, administration of prescribed treatments, and the use of instruments to measure pulse, temperature, and blood pressure increased the responsibility and need for trained nurses. Advances in surgery also required well-educated nurses to handle dressings carefully and provide postoperative care. Untrained servants no longer were suitable for new procedures that required judgment and reliability.[28]

Nevertheless, despite the increased complexity of medicine, those providing medical care in the last decades of the nineteenth century faced few regulations, and the unqualified continued to practice med-

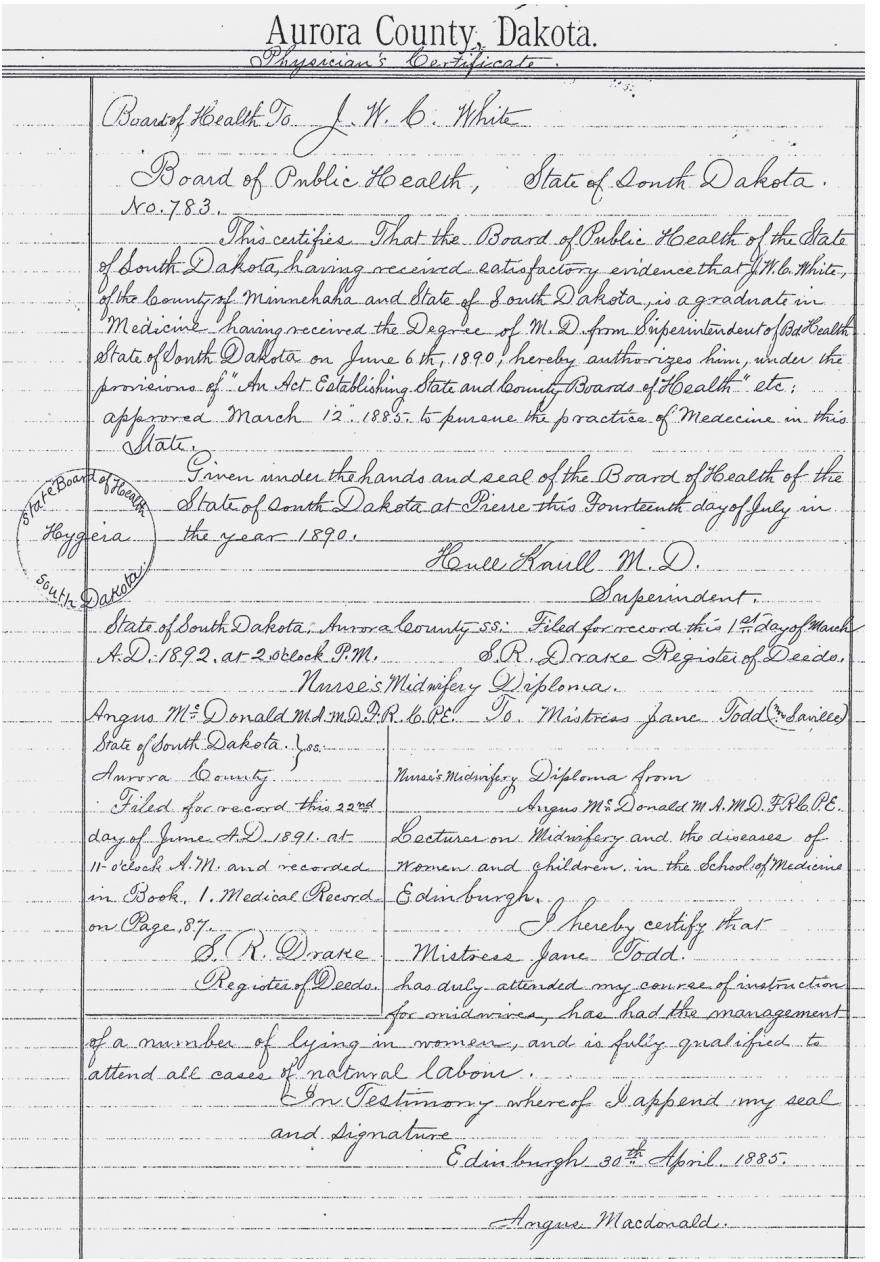
24. Ibid., p. 3. As the capital of South Dakota, Pierre in this context meant state government.

25. Record of Licenses to Physicians, 1885–1947, pp. 82–89, Aurora County Register of Deeds, Plankinton, S.Dak.

26. Ibid., p. 87.

27. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], pp. 2–3.

28. Shryock, *History of Nursing*, pp. 266–68; White, *Social Change and the Development of the Nursing Profession*, pp. 60–61.



Aurora County, Dakota.

Physician's Certificate.

Board of Health To J. W. C. White

Board of Public Health, State of South Dakota.

No. 783.

This certifies That the Board of Public Health of the State of South Dakota, having received satisfactory evidence that J.W.C. White, of the County of Minnehaha and State of South Dakota, is a graduate in Medicine having received the Degree of M. D. from Superintendent of Bd Health State of South Dakota on June 6th, 1890, hereby authorizes him, under the provisions of "An Act Establishing State and County Boards of Health" etc; approved March 12, 1885. to pursue the practice of Medecine in this State.

Given under the hands and seal of the Board of Health of the State of South Dakota at Pierre this Fourteenth day of July in the year 1890.

State Board of Health Hygeia South Dakota

Hull Knull M. D.

Superintendent.

State of South Dakota, Aurora County ss: Filed for record this 1st Day of March A.D. 1892. at 2 o'clock P.M. S.R. Drake Register of Deeds.

Nurse's Midwifery Diploma.

Angus Mc Donald M.A. M.D. F.R.C.P.E. To Mistress Jane Todd (Mrs Sarlee)

State of South Dakota } ss.
Aurora County }
Filed for record this 22nd day of June A.D. 1891. at 11 o'clock A.M. and recorded in Book 1. Medical Record on Page 87.
S. R. Drake
Register of Deeds.

Nurse's Midwifery Diploma from Angus Mc Donald M.A. M.D. F.R.C.P.E. Lecturer on Midwifery and the diseases of Women and Children in the School of Medicine Edinburgh.

I hereby certify that Mistress Jane Todd has duly attended my course of instruction for midwives, has had the management of a number of lying in women, and is fully qualified to attend all cases of natural labour.

In Testimony whereof I append my seal and Signature

Edinburgh 30th April 1885.

Angus Macdonald.

Todd's registration appears in the lower portion of this page from Aurora County's record of licensed physicians.

icine. The territorial legislature passed its first law regulating medical care in 1868, making it "unlawful for anyone to practice medicine or surgery, for pay, without first having taken at least two full courses of lectures and instruction and have graduated from a medical college." Anyone violating the law would be fined one hundred dollars for the first offense and fined and imprisoned for the second offense. The law exempted those who had practiced for ten years or more. While the law required diplomas, nothing actually required physicians to register their diplomas with state or local officials so that proof of their qualifications would be on record. In 1885, legislation created a territorial board of health and required that every physician graduate from a medical school or pass an examination.[29]

Two years after South Dakota became a state, the 1891 legislature enacted a law providing for the licensing of physicians by the new state board of health. None of these early laws required the physician to demonstrate competency, however. For example, Father William Kroeger, a Catholic priest, moved to South Dakota in 1893 and set up an extremely popular medical practice in Epiphany. Providing conflicting and false information about his medical degree, Kroeger advertised miracle cures and treated as many as three hundred to four hundred patients per week with his own patent medicine remedies and the recently developed X-ray machine. The state had no authority to determine whether he, or anyone else practicing medicine at that time, cured disease or caused death with their own brands of treatment.[30]

With such loose regulations about who could practice medicine, it is fortunate that the population of the territory was, as Todd later recalled, young and healthy.[31] Todd had followed her sister to the area

29. Doane Robinson, *History of South Dakota*, 2 vols. (n.p.: B. F. Bowen & Co., 1904), 1:479.

30. Ibid., pp. 479–80; James Marten, "A Medical Entrepreneur Goes West: Father William Kroeger in South Dakota, 1893–1904," *South Dakota History* 21 (Winter 1991): 333–34, 340–41.

31. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 1. The 1900 census reported that those aged nineteen and younger represented almost half of South Dakota residents (49 percent). U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Population*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 90; ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 1.

at the end of the Great Dakota Boom, the period between 1878 and 1887 when homesteaders filed on more than twenty-four million acres, settling virtually all the country east of the Missouri River in what is now South Dakota. The first settler in what would become Aurora County had arrived in 1879. By October of 1880, early settlers and speculators had laid out the new town of Plankinton, designated as the county seat. Soon after, the Chicago, Milwaukee & Saint Paul Railway opened the rail line through the county and started bringing a rush of land-seekers, both native-born and immigrant.[32] Diehl became the second European American woman to take up residence in her township and one of the first to give birth in Aurora County.[33]

The influx of homesteaders and flurry of town building that characterized the first years of settlement were followed by a bust, caused by depression and drought. Two years before Todd's arrival, the county, with two towns, Plankinton and White Lake, boasted five banks, six newspapers, seventy-two schools, many churches, and numerous business establishments. The euphoria was over within ten years. By 1895, the county population had declined 35 percent from a decade earlier, falling from 5,950 to 3,854, with an average density of five people per square mile.[34] Ella Todd Wilson later described the after-effects of the exodus on that area: "By the time Mother and I came, the first tide of immigration was over. Little claim shacks dotted the landscape, many of them empty, as the owners had 'proved up' & left & their patch of broken land was growing up to fireseed, a weed."[35]

32. Herbert S. Schell, *History of South Dakota*, 4th ed., rev. John E. Miller (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2004), pp. 158–59; *Aurora County History* (Plankinton, S.Dak.: Aurora County Historical Society, 1983), pp. 4, 14, 164; A. T. Andreas, *Andreas' Historical Atlas of Dakota* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1884), p. 183.

33. Wilson, "Mrs. Martin H. Diehl (Isabella [Elizabeth] Todd)," pp. 1–2.

34. Dakota Territory, Department of Immigration and Statistics, *Resources of Dakota: The Vacant Public Lands and How to Obtain Them* (1887), pp. 315–17; South Dakota, Department of History, *Third Census of the State of South Dakota, Taken in the Year 1915* (1916), p. 22. Density was calculated based on the 1895 population of 3,854 and the area of 719 square miles.

35. ["Ella's Story"], p. 3. The phrase "proved up" meant that the owner had provided proof of having met homesteading requirements and obtained private title to what had been public land.

Plankinton bustled with activity during its prosperous early years.

Todd had similar recollections of that decade. She noted, "It was a sifting time for people, only those who had faith and backbone (and those who couldn't leave) stayed. Prairie schooners, with a few thin horses and cows following, were a common sight. . . . Food was a must but clothing was worn to the last patchable shred, and undergarments were often made of flour sacks and the useable parts of worn garments were often pieced together for their children."[36]

For this immigrant woman and her daughter, becoming part of the rural South Dakota farming community was as important as Todd's acceptance into the state's young medical community. For those who stayed, life meant hard work and primitive living conditions. Acquiring sufficient water challenged families who attempted to build lives on a treeless prairie with few lakes or streams. Methods for acquiring water for both household and livestock use included melting snow, placing

36. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 8.

barrels under the eaves to catch rain, and hauling water for miles from the closest stream. Later, artesian wells improved the water supply.[37]

Without trees for fuel, twisted hay or hard coal heaters took the chill from the rooms, while cross breezes from open windows provided the only relief from hot, dry summer days. Families produced most of their own food, planting gardens, raising chickens, milking cows, churning butter, and butchering cows and pigs. In that rural area, the lack of roads and remoteness of many farms made it difficult to interact with others or obtain emergency help. Innovative neighbors of the Todd women addressed that problem by interconnecting the houses of several family members with a homemade telegraph system using barbed wire fences for the carrier.[38]

Life on the prairie proved especially difficult for widows. Although Isabella Todd Diehl owned land and tried farming herself, lack of rain and poor crops forced her to move to Plankinton in 1891. There, Todd tried to be of help to her sister. "She taught Isabella the rudiments of nursing care, and she [Isabella] did well at that," Wilson recalled. Her aunt "also did washings, ironings, mended and baby sat to support her family. The farm under renters never more than paid the taxes, and some years taxes had to come out of her earnings."[39] Diehl's young sons, Henry and Fred, herded cattle and later, still in their teens, worked for the railroad. The family then moved back to Mitchell, and Diehl rented rooms to railroad men. In 1905, with her sons working in western South Dakota, Diehl and her daughter Florence both took homestead claims near Cottonwood. Eventually, the women moved back to Mitchell, where Florence worked as a telephone operator. The resourceful widow Diehl lived to the age of ninety-two.[40]

Meanwhile, Todd completed her transition to rural nurse. When she started practicing her profession in Plankinton, local physicians operated primarily as general practitioners, hitching their horses to their buggies at all hours of the day and night to attend to their patients in their homes. Few options existed for hospital care. Only four

37. ["Ella's Story"], pp. 3–6.
38. Ibid.; Wilson, "Mrs. Martin H. Diehl (Isabella [Elizabeth] Todd)," pp. 4, 7.
39. Wilson, "Mrs. Martin H. Diehl (Isabella [Elizabeth] Todd)," p. 5.
40. Ibid., pp. 5–6.

South Dakota hospitals appeared in a medical and surgical register of physicians and hospitals in the United States published in 1896. All four institutions indicated establishment dates before 1890, with one of those being the state insane asylum.[41] In the largest city, Sioux Falls, a Protestant hospital opened in 1894, and Catholic religious orders did not start opening hospitals until three years later. In some of the smaller towns such as Britton, Webster, and Volga, doctors operated small hospitals in their homes or in remodeled houses, often training their own help.[42] Other physicians performed operations in rented rooms. In the spring of 1888, Dr. Hiram Shouse performed an operation in a Plankinton boarding home to repair the cleft lip of a weeks-old infant. In her memoirs, Edith Davis Rowe, the baby's older sister, wrote about the event: "The day of the operation Father carried Ratio into another room at the boarding house and stayed with him while Dr. Shouse performed the operation. Mother and I both cried. When they brought him out his little face was covered with tape and bindings and his pitiful little weak cry as he regained consciousness tore my heart."[43]

Todd continued to practice her profession, even after marriage and the birth of a son. In November 1890, two months before her forty-fifth birthday, Todd married George Saville, a widower with six children. One year later, she gave birth to their son, also named George. Still responding to her neighbors' medical needs, she often took the infant with her on those nursing calls.[44] Two years later, the family moved to her husband's farm eight miles northeast of Plankinton. Todd still did some nursing in town, attended most of the births, and cared for the sick for miles around her new home. She recounted a few stories of harrowing trips made in the cold and dark, of riding in unstable con-

41. *Medical and Surgical Register of the United States*, 4th ed., rev. (Detroit, Mich.: R. L. Polk & Co., 1896), p. 1,368. This volume listed the following hospitals and establishment dates: Brown County Hospital, Aberdeen, 1884; Homestake Hospital, Lead, 1881; Lawrence County Hospital, Deadwood, 1888; and South Dakota Hospital for the Insane, Yankton, 1879.

42. Erickson, *Nursing History in South Dakota*, pp. 12–13; Nelson, "In the Midst of Life We Are in Death," p. 209.

43. Edith Davis Rowe, "A Child of the Prairie," pp. 51–52, Folder 1, Box 3750B, Edith Davis Rowe Papers, State Archives, South Dakota State Historical Society.

44. ["Ella's Story"], p. 6; ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 10; Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," pp. 6–7, 10.

veyances, driving over icy, dangerous fields, and crossing treacherous bridges in a time of rudimentary roads. When summoned, Todd rode to her destination, sometimes four or more miles away, in whatever wagon or buggy the family member or neighbor of the person needing care drove. "I left home at all times of day and night," she later recalled,

> [and] in all kinds of weather. It was tough to turn out in heavy rain or blizzard sometimes, to go miles in an open rig, for covered vehicles were scarce in those days. I usually had to go in a lumber wagon, at times sitting on the bottom, huddled in blankets to try to keep warm enough to be of use when I arrived.
>
> I often think of the time now. William O'Neal, my husband's son-in-law, came for me when one of his children was very ill. It was winter and the snow had thawed and frozen and there was ice everywhere. The horses kept sliding and in many places broke through ice that cut their legs till they bled. We slid down a hill to the creek near the John Hinty place and how the horses managed to scramble up the ice covered hill out to the other side, I'll never know, but my heart beat in my throat as I expected them to begin to slide backwards, every step they took. That was the worst ten miles I ever experienced.[45]

Todd would have addressed a variety of health care needs on her nursing calls. The 1900 census data on mortality for Aurora County and thirty other South Dakota counties show that the largest number of deaths resulted from consumption, pneumonia, heart disease, cholera, and typhoid fever. While those diseases caused 34 percent of the 1,694 recorded deaths in those counties, only twelve deaths were attributed to childbirth. Deaths may have been underreported, however, as South Dakota did not implement a vital records system until 1905.[46]

Todd's skills must have won her the respect of prominent families, for she lists several in whose homes she provided care and delivered babies, including that of Olivia La Follette, sister-in-law to Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin. Todd also nursed in the homes

45. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], pp. 6–7.

46. U.S., Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900, Vital Statistics*, vol. 3, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. cccxi, and vol. 4, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), pp. 212–16; South Dakota, Department of Health, "Genealogy Resources," https://doh.sd.gov/records/genealogy.aspx?.

of two bankers, Hart and Stevens, before their institutions failed. She mentioned hardware store owners T. C. De Jean, A. H. Dunn, and A. D. Dougan, grocer Griswald, lumberyard owners George Hatten and Seth Nobles, grain dealer Terwilinger, men's clothing store proprietor Sam Marks, lawyer Fellows, and Martha Lalley Bakewell, the first school principal in Plankinton and wife of local lawyer Samuel Bakewell.[47] While Todd identified some of the children she brought into the world, she did not elaborate on any other specific nursing cases. Todd attended many births, evidenced by Ella Todd Wilson's comment that "one graduation class at Plankinton were all 'her' babies but one."[48]

Todd performed another valued service without charging a fee—that of laying out the dead. Because no one else had that type of expertise, she performed the work as a friendly service, meeting many people for the first time when grieving families called upon her after the death of a loved one. She stopped doing that charity work when undertaker William Grove opened a business in Plankinton in 1910.[49]

On one occasion, Todd's medical practice came into conflict with local temperance advocates. Wilson's story about her mother highlights the medical beliefs of that era and speaks to Todd's character as a woman willing to take a stand even if it meant falling out with powerful individuals in the community:

> The WCTU [Woman's Christian Temperance Union] had a very strong and militant organization whose motto could have been, "Who isn't with us is against us." My mother got into their bad graces soon after she came to town. She told them she could not sign a pledge [to abstain from liquor]

47. Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," pp. 4–6; ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], pp. 3–5. The following sources were used to determine a first name for Olivia La Follette, who appears as Mrs. William La Follette in Todd's account: Chamberlain, Brule Co., S.Dak., in U.S., Department of the Interior, Office of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 1547, sheet 3B, and "Olivia C. La Follette" in "public member trees," Eastman Family Tree, Ancestry.com.

48. ["Ella's Story"], p. 6, Wilson Papers. Class sizes at that time varied from ten to twenty-four students. *See* Lennis J. Long, "A History of the Plankinton School, Plankinton, South Dakota: 1882–1954" (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1954), pp. 70–72.

49. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 5.

This illustration from an 1891 medical guide depicts the important role of the nurse, who typically cared for patients in their homes.

as she found it quite necessary to use brandy occasionally in her nurse's profession, as she had been taught. There were none of the medical aids of today. So the word was passed around that Mrs. Saville liked her drink, all right.

The climax came when Mother was caring for the none-too-robust wife of the M.E. [Methodist Episcopal] minister who had sinking spells. She was having a particularly prolonged one and Mother told her husband she would have to have some brandy, at once. The poor distracted man almost

> ran down town & bolted into the saloon, followed by all the loafers on Main St., who evidently thought he had come in a frenzy of zeal and was going into a Carrie Nation act. He gasped, "I have to have a bottle of the best brandy for my wife. Mrs. Saville says so."
>
> There were no phones but the news was all over the stunned town in an hour. It was a ten-day sensation. Next day, a delegation of the WCTU knocked on the door and filed in solemnly to sympathize and commiserate [with the minister's wife] over this terrible thing. Mother was folding baby clothes and getting angrier by the minute, but the high point was reached when one of them leaned over and asked the rest, "Do you suppose this will make the baby a drunkard when it grows up?"
>
> That did it. Mother walked out and sat on the back steps till they filed dolorously out of the front door. She went back to the bedroom, expecting anything but what she found—her patient convulsed with laughter. From that day her reputation was low indeed in WCTU circles. She could take a glass of beer or wine, if offered, but that was all, but what she had to do she did and no nonsense about it.[50]

Todd's prescription of spirits, evidently part of her nursing education, alarmed the local WCTU women, who believed that even one drink could cause alcoholism. Her response showed Todd to be a strong-minded woman who did not conform to society's expectations when they conflicted with her medical training.

In addition to physicians, those providing medical care in early Dakota included neighbors, midwives who often had little formal training, quacks who sold medicinal tonics, and families who used home remedies. Neighbors often became midwives out of necessity. Louise Gardner, Isabella Todd Diehl's only female neighbor for two years, attended the birth of Diehl's three children. Diehl returned the service when Gardner's last two boys were born.[51] Some pioneer women applied nursing skills acquired earlier in their lives, such as Sarah Morrison Guindon, who had worked in a doctor's office in Detroit before her

50. ["Plankinton, As I Saw It First"], enclosed in Ella Todd Wilson to Adeline Van Genderen, 13 Aug. 1959, pp. 9–10, Wilson Papers. "Sinking spell" is a vernacular term referring to a temporary decline in health.

51. Wilson, "Mrs. Martin H. Diehl (Isabella [Elizabeth] Todd)," pp. 1–2. Diehl's biographical account identifies Louise Gardner only as "Mrs. Henry C. Gardner," but her first name appears in Hopper, Aurora Co., S.Dak., Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, roll 1546, sheet 1B.

marriage. After she and her new husband, Francis, moved to Aurora County in 1883, Guindon used that knowledge to provide nursing care in her rural neighborhood, often assisting the attending physician. At the end of a long life, Guindon's obituary documented her impact on the community: "Her kindly ministrations eased many a bed of pain or softened the harshness of death."[52]

Todd's medical treatments competed with popular patent medicines, which often contained high concentrations of alcohol.[53] Those miracle cures, peddled by entertainers with traveling shows, promised to treat all kinds of illnesses. Ella Todd Wilson explained how the Kickapoo Indian Medicine Show, for example, enticed people to purchase remedies by featuring entertaining performances with frequent breaks to sell medicinal cures: "The spieler harangued the audience about the virtues of Kickapoo Indian tonics, salves, corn remedies, guaranteed to be of Indian origin, to cure all the ills of man. And buy they did, in such quantities that there should have been no illness in town for a long, long time."[54]

Many families did their own doctoring, following the advice of books such as *The Doctor at Home. Illustrated. Treating the Diseases of Man and the Horse*, published in 1884. The book listed all known diseases and conditions alphabetically, describing both causes and treatments. The entry on boils, for instance, reflected the level of understanding of medical conditions in the mid-1880s, when experts of the day believed that "impure atmosphere" caused medical conditions and, therefore, the goal of treatment should be "purifying the blood." Boils, stated the guide, "are so familiar to every one that they need little or no description. The most common causes are, a residence in an impure atmosphere, improper or insufficient food, sexual excesses, mental anxiety, overwork, or anything which causes deterioration of the blood."[55]

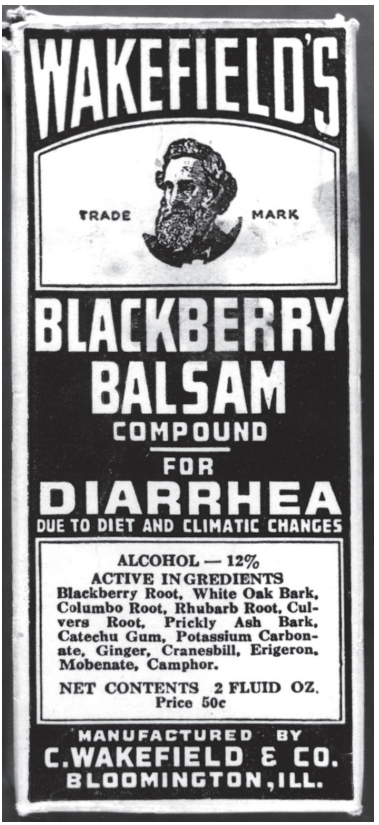
Home remedies depended upon common household items and

52. "Early Belford Settler Dies in Plankinton," [ca. 1946], in scrapbook of newspaper obituaries from 1930s and 1940s, compiled by Ella Todd Wilson, Wilson Papers. *See also Aurora County History*, p. 226.

53. Marten, "Medical Entrepreneur Goes West," pp. 345–46.

54. ["Plankinton, As I Saw It First"], pp. 4–5.

55. Dr. B. J. Kendall & Co., *The Doctor at Home: Illustrated. Treating the Diseases of Man and the Horse* (Enosburgh Falls, Vt.: B. J. Kendall & Co., 1884), p. 9.



Patent medicines often contained high concentrations of alcohol, such as this potion made of roots and bark, which registered 12 percent.

compounds purchased from a druggist. Edith Davis Rowe, who moved with her family to their Aurora County homestead in 1884 when she was six years old, described some of these cures:[56]

> For colds a chopped raw onion compress, or a mustard plaster, was put on the chest, and cooked onion syrup, or a mixture of vinegar, molasses and butter cooked together was given us for a cough. If one's throat was sore, a piece of fat salt pork was put over it and a strip of flannel tied around the neck, sometimes kept on for days. For severe sore throat, a rag wet with kerosene was wrapped around the throat and taken off in an hour or two before it might blister the skin. Quinine for fever, arnica for bruises, cam-

56. Rowe, "Child of the Prairie," pp. 1, 10.

> phor for headache, golden seal for canker sores, laudanum for toothache, and flaxseed or bread and milk poultices for a boil or a felon, with perhaps "Allen's Lung Balsam" for colds and "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup" for babies constituted our medical supplies.[57]

Todd likely employed many of the same remedies and carried many of the items in her medical bag. Nursing duties, whether performed by a trained nurse such as Todd, a family member, or a helpful neighbor, focused on ensuring a healthful environment, caring for personal needs, and monitoring the patient's condition. While a doctor diagnosed and subscribed treatments, the nurse attended patients for hours or days at a time. A healthful environment meant attention to cleanliness, warmth, ventilation, and keeping the patient from becoming agitated by visitors, noise, and smells. Personal care involved dispensing medicine on schedule, feeding appropriate foods, bathing, and changing sheets, possibly cleaning them in a carbolic acid solution. Trained or experienced nurses provided the most critical care when monitoring patients, especially if trained to use instruments to measure pulse, blood pressure, and other physical conditions. Those skilled enough to recognize and respond quickly and appropriately to changes in a patient's condition may have made the difference between life and death. The effort to provide constant attention often stressed family members; especially those who still had household and childcare responsibilities. To ease that burden, those with the ability to pay could hire a trained nurse like Todd, paying an average of fifteen dollars per week for live-in nursing care.[58]

In 1893, Todd and her husband moved to his farm, and she added the challenges of becoming a farmer's wife to her career as a nurse. She later wrote, "I soon had a big garden, and as many chickens as the average farmer's wife. The young animals on the farm were of great interest to me and I often found use for my nursing skill among them." During the drought and depression of the 1890s, when money was scarce, Todd "mastered the art of butter making and for several years sold my

57. Ibid., p. 16. Arnica and goldenseal are plant-based remedies. A felon denotes a fingertip abscess.

58. Nelson, "In the Midst of Life We Are in Death," pp. 200–206, 211–13; Holder, "From Handmaiden to Right Hand," p. 382.

butter to the state Reform School [in Plankinton] . . . I also tried cheese making with very good success and taught the art to a number of other farm wives."[59]

After eight years on the farm, Todd and her husband moved back to Plankinton shortly before twenty-two-year-old Ella, a local schoolteacher, married William H. Wilson. In 1905, the Wilsons rented the farm that belonged to Ella's aunt, Isabella Todd Diehl. After six years on the farm, the family moved to Minnesota, returning to Aurora County three years later. They remained there until moving to California in the early 1940s. One of their six children died in a school accident at a young age. Todd and Saville's son George enlisted in the armed forces and served overseas during World War I and afterward served as Aurora County sheriff from 1922 to 1926. In October 1935, three months after being appointed a police captain in the Sioux Falls Police Department, Saville was killed in the line of duty, leaving behind a widow and two children.[60]

After moving to town, Todd nursed occasionally until she retired fully in 1918. Then seventy-two years old, she devoted her time to caring for her ailing and aging husband. Six years later, George Saville, a Civil War veteran who had barely survived several months as a Union prisoner in the Confederacy's notorious Andersonville prison camp, died at the age of ninety-two. Ever industrious, Todd filled her time after retirement creating fancywork and winning many blue ribbons at the South Dakota State Fair for her skill. She lived with her daughter for ten years before her death in 1934 at the age of eighty-eight.[61] "Her mind was clear and she kept her interest in people and world affairs till her death," Ella Todd Wilson later wrote.[62]

59. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], p. 6, Wilson Papers. The territorial legislature identified Plankinton as the location for the juvenile reform school in 1883 but did not appropriate funds until 1887. Dakota Territory, *Laws Passed at the Seventeenth Session of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Dakota, 1887*, chaps. 135–36.

60. Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," p. 10; ["Ella's Story"], pp. 1, 10; ["Anyone Who Has Lived in the Dakotas"], enclosed in Ella Todd Wilson to Adeline Van Genderen, 24 Apr. 1959, p. 11, Wilson Papers; *Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader*, 7 Oct. 1935; ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], pp. 9–10.

61. ["Jean Todd Saville Story"], pp. 9–11.

62. Wilson, "Mrs. George Saville (Jean Todd)," p. 11.

The story of Jean Todd's life is an illuminating example of how an immigrant and single mother, trained as a nurse in the pioneer era of nursing schools, met the challenge of practicing medicine as a nurse and midwife on the Dakota frontier. Todd's transition from a working-class linen weaver to educated nurse to female student in an obstetrics program for doctors signifies a remarkable accomplishment for a woman of her era, when nursing had only recently emerged as a new profession and few women received formal training. By serving the people of her community, both the living and the dead, she significantly impacted the health and happiness of the early residents of Aurora County, South Dakota. Jean Todd's story enriches the history of the early years of nursing and of professional women on the Northern Great Plains at the end of the nineteenth century.

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On the covers: (Front) Before her death in 1906, philanthropist Helen Gale McKennan (bottom right) envisioned a hospital that would care for the needy in Sioux Falls. Her resources, combined with the business acumen of the Presentation Sisters, helped to make both McKennan Hospital and today's Avera Health system a reality. In this issue, Margaret Preston details the efforts of Mother John Hughes (top right), Mother Joseph Butler (bottom left), and Mother Raphael McCarthy (top left) in building a health care system on the Northern Great Plains. (Back) A group of Presentation Sisters gathers on the steps of McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls.