

## **GEORGINA POPE**

### **FIRST NURSING MATRON OF THE CANADIAN ARMY MEDICAL CORPS**

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**Introduction:** Georgina Pope (1862 - 1938) was a Canadian nurse who served with distinction in the Second Boer War and the First World War.

**Early Life:** The Pope household in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island was a hotbed of journalism, legal issues, and political strategies in the late 1800s. Well-heeled and comfortable, William H. Pope, a Father of Confederation, and his wife welcomed their newborn daughter on 1 January 1862, naming her Cecily Jane Georgina Fane Pope.



She grew up on a lovely estate with servants and a governess. It therefore came as a shock when Georgina announced she was going to New York to train as a nurse at Bellevue Hospital Training School, for nurses were considered servants

at the time. Bellevue had been established by Florence Nightingale, a nursing legend who had revolutionized army medical care. Georgina was destined to follow in Nightingale's footsteps.

After graduation from Bellevue, she served in various administrative positions at hospitals in the US until 1899 when she came back to Canada to volunteer to go overseas with the troops at the beginning of the Second Boer War.

**Second Boer War:** On November 30, 1899, Georgina Fane Pope and the first Canadian contingent of nurses arrived in Cape Town to work in hospitals during the South African War. Known as "the Island's

Florence Nightingale," Pope is remembered for her strong leadership and selfless devotion to her patients.

The Canadian Army demonstrated its respect for nursing by assigning Canadian nurses full lieutenant status during their time in South Africa. Pope was head of all nursing services at Kroonstadt. The nurses endured long hours in crowded wards while under threat of attack, dealt with bug infestations and extreme temperatures, and subsisted on small food rations.

At the end of 1900, she returned to Canada and was put on reserve status. In 1901, the Canadian Army Nursing Service was made official, and Georgina Fane Pope was one of its seven members.

In 1902, she went back to South Africa and served in a hospital in Natal until the end of the Second Boer War.

In 1903, after returning to Canada at the end of the war, she was awarded the Royal Red Cross by Queen Victoria for conspicuous service in the field. She was the first Canadian to receive the award.



**Later Life:** In 1906, Georgina Fane Pope became a member of the new, permanent Canadian Army Medical Corps and worked at the Garrison military hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She was responsible for a handful of permanent staff and up to 80 reservists.

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In 1908, Pope was the first person to be assigned to the position of Nursing Matron in the Canadian Army Medical Corps, which made her responsible for the permanent nursing sisters, as well as the reserve nursing service. She played an essential role in the development of military nursing in Canada.

From 1911 onwards, Pope's unwavering devotion to nursing took its toll on her health. She decided she was well enough to be sent overseas to England and France to work in Canadian military hospitals from September 1917 to August 1918. When her health problems, including shell shock, returned, she was sent back to Canada.



Pope retired to Prince Edward Island, where she spent the rest of her life. To commemorate her service to the army, Georgina Fane Pope was laid to rest in Charlottetown with full military honours on 9 June 1938.

A person of national historic significance<sup>1</sup>, she is recognized by a plaque in Summerside, Prince Edward Island.

Georgina Pope is one of fourteen figures from Canada's military history commemorated at the Valiants Memorial<sup>2</sup> in Ottawa.

<sup>1</sup> "Persons of National Historic Significance" are people designated by the Canadian government as being nationally significant in the history of the country.

<sup>2</sup> The Valiants Memorial is a collection of nine busts and five statues and a large bronze wall inscription that reads, "No day will ever erase you from the memory of time", from *The Aeneid* by Virgil. The

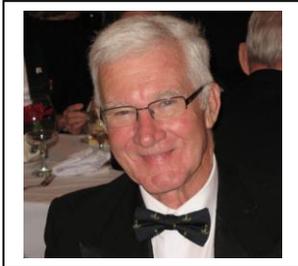
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fourteen individuals featured in the memorial are celebrated for their personal contributions, but they also represent critical moments in our military history.

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