

# MILDRED KEATON OBSERVES 50 YRS. OF NURSING

Miss Mildred Keaton, R.N., will commemorate her 50 years of nursing service on March 16.

Miss Keaton is presently a volunteer at Copper Valley School, Glennallen, Alaska. No knowledgeable person would attempt to telescope the 50-years experience of Nurse Keaton into a thumb-nail-sketch-type biography.

Intimate acquaintances of Nurse Keaton would no doubt reserve the space of one volume to record her contributions to the communities of Washington State and Southeastern Alaska during the first fourteen of her fifty-year career as U.S. Public Health Nurse dating back to World War I.

It would be difficult to compress into volume number two a fair accounting of the service and experiences of one who while officially employed by the U.S. Public Health Service to provide medical service to the native people of the coasts of Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean during the transitional years 1932-1941, was called upon by the educational, social and welfare governmental agencies to serve in times of emergency as their ex-office representative.

During the early thirties Federal and Territorial representation in the remote native villages was largely delegated to the teaching personnel of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and often, not always well define.

Social, economic and welfare problems immediately beyond the scope of authority or capability of the teachers became the problems of the traveling nurse.



Miss Mildred Keaton

The qualities of hardiness, compassion, leadership and organizational ability of Nurse Keaton were early recognized in the North country by the local teachers, bush pilots, traders, private and commercial boat operators, by the individual white and native residents, and to the outside world. Tribute was paid to the

many and varied attributes of Nurse Keaton in a feature article appearing in a 1936 issue of the *Colliers Magazine* entitled, "Angel In Furs."

She had by then visited several times the villages of the coast area from the mouth of the Yukon River to Demarcation Point on the Canadian border by native-owned dog team or skin boat, by Coast Guard cutter, bush plane or by Bureau of Indian Affairs boats, "North Star" and "Boxer."

And as pointed out in the *Colliers* story, if Nurse Keaton was not on the scene at the time, she was soon rushed in to assist during the emergency; the fire which largely destroyed the gold mining town of Nome in 1934; the flu epidemic of the coast villages of Wainwright, Barrow, and Pt. Lay in 1935; the temporary assignment as medical-officer-in-charge of Presbyterian hospital in Pt. Barrow in 1936 until a new doctor and staff could be recruited.

Nurse Keaton had completed her grueling third annual round-trip trek by dog team in 1941 covering the Bering Sea coast villages in the fall and winter months and East, from Barrow to Demarcation Point during the spring months when she

was again called upon to head and direct the operation of the Barrow hospital—on-standby for the next emergency.

It would not be difficult to fill the pages of volume three with the mercy assignments of Nurse Keaton during the war years crucial to Western Alaska beginning page one with the part she played in the evacuation of natives from the Japanese-invaded Aleutian Islands in 1942 until their return to their Island homes in 1947 with the intervening pages recording her experiences as nurse of the "North Star" plying the waters from Ketchikan to Barrow serving the varied needs of the coastal villages.

The urge of the North cut short an interlude beginning with Nurse Keaton's resignation from government service in 1947. Her return in 1951 for a trip along the East Arctic coast on the U.S.C.G. Cutter "Northwind" was followed by a two-year assignment to Nome as Welfare Agent for the Lower Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers; a season as nurse for the White Pass and Yukon Railroad and fittingly enough to Copper Valley in 1964 to serve the children of some of the parents she had nurtured one generation earlier.

Who is to write the epilogue to the saga of a nurse of an epical period in the history of the lives of thousands of Alaskans, native and white? To the sick and crippled of that generation went medication and surgical repair; to the orphan, a mother; to the bereaved, compassion; to the lonely, humor and companionship; to the hesitant and doubtful, understanding and encouragement; to the untutored, council and training; to the intemperate, reason and

compromise, all freely given gifts of the "Angel In Furs."