Book Review -- A Special Place: St. Mary's Hospital School Of Nursing, Clarksburg, West Virginia, 1905-1969, A History (Compiled And Edited By Barbara W. Flewellyn)

By: **Phoebe Pollitt**

Abstract

A book review by **Phoebe Pollitt** of *A Special Place: St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing, Clarksburg, West Virginia, 1905-1969, A History* (compiled and edited by Barbara W. Flewellyn).

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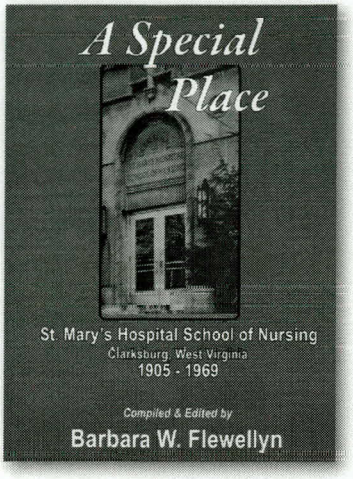

A Special Place: St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing, Clarksburg, West Virginia, 1905-1969, A History

Edited by Barbara W. Flewellyn (with research funding support from West Virginia University's WV & Regional History Center, 2020) $34.95, cloth. ISBN 9780578237466, 155 pp.

Some residents of Clarksburg, West Virginia, have cherished memories of nurses in crisp white uniforms and starched white caps entering St. Mary's Hospital to help new mothers and babies and care for the sick and injured. From 1905 to 1969, some of those nurses managed and taught students attending the St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing (SMHSON). Barbara W. Flewellyn, one of the earliest African American graduates of SMHSON has compiled and edited a book documenting this history, *A Special Place: St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing, Clarksburg, West Virginia, 1905-1969*.

Flewellyn, a 1957 graduate of SMHSON, continued her education, earning a bachelor of science and master of science in nursing, then a master's degree in business administration. After decades of service in health care, Flewellyn retired and is focusing her efforts on documenting histories of African American communities in West Virginia, as well as histories of various branches of her family. This book tells the story of her first alma mater through photographs, reprinted documents, oral histories, and other texts that preserve its history.

Although most of the school's official records are lost, Flewellyn contacted numerous local agencies and other alumna to collect the previously uncollected documents this book contains. She interviewed alumna, recorded and edited oral history transcriptions, and conducted surveys with alumna about their experiences at the school and their subsequent careers.

Each of the eight chapters contains an overview of an historical era or theme important to the school's development, photographs, and images of related documents. The opening chapters focus on the decades around the turn of the 20th century. The background on the early years of the Sisters of Saint Joseph provides context for the founding of the hospital's nursing school. In addition to basic historical information and highlights from different decades, Flewellyn provides chapters on the school's admission of African American students and admission of male students, likely earlier than other nursing schools in West Virginia. Another chapter focuses on specific graduates' contributions to the armed forces in World Wars I and II and the Korean conflict.

The book also contains 46 pages of Appendices with lists of faculty, staff, and graduates; school documents, including graduation pamphlets and alumni newsletters; results of the author's recent alumna survey; and a timeline of important events in the school's history.

While not an academic book arguing a thesis, its purpose is to document the value and contributions of this nursing school. It is helpful in understanding the history of women, health care, education, and race in West Virginia. In particular, histories of nursing and nursing education have received scant attention in the professional literature, and such research illuminates experiences in the lives and work of nurses themselves, as well as those who received their care. Flewellyn's *A Special Place: St. Mary's Hospital School of Nursing, Clarksburg, West Virginia, 1905-1969* provides important information about this sparsely explored area of Appalachian history.

Phoebe Ann Pollitt

Phoebe Pollitt practiced public health nursing in western North Carolina for more than 20 years before she became a founding faculty member in Appalachian State University's Department of Nursing in 2007. She has published three books, including *African American and Cherokee Nurses in Appalachia: A History, 1900-1965* and *The History of Professional Nursing in North Carolina, 1902-2002*, which received the Willie Parker Peace History Book Award from the North Carolina Society of Historians in 2014. She is the author of more than 30 articles about nursing history with a focus on North Carolina, Appalachian, African American and Native American nurses.