



Boston Children's Hospital

BETTY E. LANK, 1904-2001

Papers, 1920-1987 [with gaps]

Manuscript Collection – MC 14

Boston Children's Hospital Archives

Contact Information:
300 Longwood Avenue
Hospital Library
Boston, MA 02135
Phone: 617-355-5286
Fax: 617-730-0983
Email: bch.history@childrens.harvard.edu

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3 manuscript boxes

Processed: November 2011
By: Eli Zoller, Intern

LANGUAGES: Primarily English. Some newspaper articles are in French and Dutch.

PHYSICAL CONDITION: Items in the ephemera and correspondence series of this collection are in poor physical condition. See Archivist.

ACQUISITION: A gift from Kathryn Donahue of the Blake Library Special Collections at University of Maine at Fort Ken in September 2011. Items not retained by Children's Hospital Boston were discarded. Items were not received in original order.

ACCESS: Unrestricted

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SUBJECT TERMS:

Betty Lank (aka Bess, Bessie)
Nurse anesthetist
Nurse anesthesia history
Pediatric anesthesia

Associated with:

Dr. Robert E. Gross
Marie Dresser, RN
Princess Lilian of Belgium (Mary Lilian Baels)

CROSS REFERENCES:

The Oral History Collection- Interview with Betty Lank, 1999, Dr. Mark Rockoff
Video- Dinner Honoring Dr. Robert Gross, 1957 ([Dinner Honoring Dr. Robert Gross](#))

APPRAISAL NOTE: News clippings and an empty manila envelope which read “Betty Lank Welshpool” were discarded. Welshpool is cited as the location in which Dr. Mark Rockoff conducted the oral history with Betty Lank (see cross-references). All news clippings were photocopied.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Betty E. Lank made many contributions to pediatric anesthesiology, both scientifically and in patient care. Lank was born on January 4, 1904 on Campobello Island, New Brunswick. By the end of the Second World War, at the age of fourteen, Lank decided she wanted to be a nurse anesthetist. She attended Newton Hospital School of Nursing at the age of nineteen. During her coursework at Newton, she was given the option of public health or anesthesia. She chose anesthesia and studied there for three years, where she gained experience in the operating room. Lank went into private nursing in order to make enough money to get her certificate from Newton.

During the Great Depression, jobs were scarce, so Lank worked summer relief in Brooklyn, New York. Following her summer in Brooklyn, in 1935, Lank returned to the Boston area when Children's Hospital needed summer relief. That summer relief turned into thirty-four years of service. Once at Children's Hospital, she quickly became Chief Nurse Anesthetist of a division that had five nurse anesthetists and one gas machine to share throughout the hospital. Lank was sent to Yale Hospital for a week in 1939 to study cyclopropane, which up until that point had only been used on adults. Returning to Children's, Lank, had a small mask and canister suitable for children constructed, which she used to administer cyclopropane during a trachea-esophageal surgery. Thus, began the monumental use of cyclopropane as an anesthetic for children.

Lank assisted with many important surgeries throughout her career, including several with Dr. Robert Gross, a well-known cardiac surgeon. Among the surgeries, Lank assisted with that of Prince Alexander, son of Princess Lilian and King Leopold of Belgium, on September 17th, 1957. Lank continued a relationship with Princess Lilian throughout her life.

Lank was devoted to patient care. She is noted as taking extensive measures in caring for her patients, pre- and post-surgery in an era before recovery rooms. She is known for humming and singing to the children to soothe them. Lank retired in 1969 and has been recognized in several notable articles by Dr. Robert Smith and Dr. W. Hardy Hendren III. There is also a plaque dedicated to Betty Lank in the Department of Anesthesiology, Perioperative and Pain Medicine at Children's Hospital Boston. Lank died at her home in Campobello Island at the age of 97 on March 10, 2001.

Sources:

- Galvin S, Dewan J, Rockoff MA. "Imagining in Time. Betty Lank: A Kind and Gentle Anesthetist Devoted to Children." *American Association of Nurse Anesthetists Journal*. 2009; 76(3): 176-180.
- Rockoff MA. Interview with Betty E. Lank, Children's Hospital Boston Oral History Collection 25. Boston, MA: Archives of Children's Hospital Boston. September 16, 1999.
- Smith CA. *The Children's Hospital of Boston: "Built Better Than They Knew."* Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co; 1983:196-200.
- Suy R. Surgical History, a History of Cardiac Surgery in Belgium. *Acta Chir Belg*. 2009; 109: 136-146. http://www.belsurg.org/uploaded_pdfs/109/109_136_146.pdf

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:

This collection includes photographs and ephemera from Betty Lank's family and life. The collection includes relevant items to her nursing career including an autograph book from fellow colleagues and her nurse anesthetist certificate. A collection of photographs from Betty Lank's relatives is also included. There is little information with the images to help understand their association with Lank herself. There

are a few photographs of Lank, as well as correspondence written to her from colleagues. Also included, are her notes from a presentation she gave about pediatric anesthesiology.

The collection focuses largely on Princess Lilian of Belgium (see biographical note). Items relating to this include photographs from Lilian's life as well as newspaper clippings. The photographs depict travels (including a trip to the Congo and hunting expeditions) of Princess Lilian and her family (especially her husband King Leopold, but also including her three children: Prince Alexander, Marie-Christine, and Marie-Esmeralda). The images display Lilian's devotion to cardiac research.

The collection also highlights Betty's close relationship with fellow nurse and roommate, Marie Dresser. Correspondences from Princess Lilian to Marie Dresser and Betty Lank (simultaneously) address the relationship between the three women.

FOLDER LIST:

<i>Box</i>	<i>Series</i>	<i>Folder Title</i>	<i>Date(s)</i>
1	Correspondence	Incoming Letters from Princess Lilian	1958-1960
		Incoming Letters to Marie Dresser	1959
		Incoming Letters to Betty Lank	May 1969
		Incoming Letters from Dr. Robert M. Smith	1974-1976
		Theodora Lank's Yearbook	1920
	Ephemera	Autograph Book	1924-1926
		Nurse Anesthetist Certificate	October 13, 1945
		Dinner Honoring Dr. Robert Gross Program	November 17, 1959
		Memorials and Postcards	Circa 1959-1987
		Presentation Notes	Circa 1970s
		Princess Lilian News Clippings	1959-1963
	News Clippings	Princess Lilian News Clippings: Non-English	1958-1963
		News of the Children's Hospital	Feb-March, 1969
		Newton Hospital School of Nursing Class Photos	1925, circa 1970s
2	Photographs-Lank and Family	Muriel Nolan's Scrapbook	1938-1944
		Muriel Nolan's Scrapbook Photos	1938-1944
		Derby House Party Photograph	Circa 1970s
		Travel Expeditions	1952-1953
	Photographs-Princess Lilian and Family	Lunch at St. Michael	Circa 1950s

		With her daughters	Circa 1956-1959
		Dinner Honoring Dr. Robert Gross	November, 17, 1957
		Visit to Boston	Sept.-Dec., 1957
		Hunting Expeditions	Circa 1958-1959
		Visit Aboard U.S.S. Northampton	February 4, 1959
		Return from New York	February 4, 1959
		King Leopold's Return from South America	March 3, 1959
		Visit to the Congo- First Day	March 12, 1959
		Visit to the Congo	March, 1959
		Return from the Congo	April 9 1959
		Visit with Family	April 13, 1959
		Visit to University Hospital, Leuven	Circa 1958-1960
3	Ephemera	Nursing Cap	Circa 1925-1930