

M.E. Reade : The Pioneering Educator of Nurses in Meiji Japan

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ABSTRACT

M.E. Reade, an unmarried female missionary of the Presbyterian Church's Woman's Board of Foreign Mission, arrived in Japan in October 1881. After working at 2 mission schools for girls in Tokyo, in October 1884 she began to teach sanitation and nursing to Japanese nurses at Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital, a charity hospital established by the Japanese physician Takaki Kanehiro. In January 1885, the Tokyo Presbyterian Mission entered into a contract with Takaki which permitted Reade to work at the hospital for 2 years. During this period Reade began to offer a modern nurse training program, the first of its kind in Japan. Financial support from various individuals and philanthropic organizations permitted Takaki to open a formal nursing school in October 1885 and send Japanese nurses to England for education. Even after Reade's departure in 1887, the hospital continued to train nurses, and the students enjoyed the full confidence of the patients. The goal of this article is to examine the roles Reade played in establishing Japan's modern nursing program. In so doing, we hope to stimulate further inquiry into the origin of nursing education in modern Japan. (Jikeikai Med J 2010 ; 57 : 113-9)

Key words : history of nursing, history of nursing education, M.E. Reade

INTRODUCTION

M.E. Reade, an unmarried female missionary of the American Presbyterian Church's Woman's Board of Foreign Mission (WBFM), arrived in Japan in 1881, worked mainly in Tokyo for 7 years, and abruptly left the mission field in 1888. During her tenure, she began to train nurses in the modern sense of the word. In this article, we will explore her activities by drawing on missionary letters, photographs, reports carried in women's missionary magazines, and annual reports of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. By doing so, we hope to rescue her from obscurity.

BACKGROUND

In 1881, M.E. Reade received an appointment as an unmarried female missionary from the WBFM in New York. She then moved with James B. Porter, another Presbyterian missionary, from New York to San Francisco, from where they embarked on the British steamer *Oceanic*, arriving at the port of Yokohama on October 29 (*The Japan Gazette*, November 8, 1881). Reade immediately began to teach at Graham Seminary in the Tsukiji concession, Tokyo, a mission school for girls founded by Kate Youngman, another single woman missionary of the WBFM in New York, in 1874. In 1876 the school purchased a new building with funds from the WBFM and named it for Julia Graham, the chairwoman of the WBFM in New York.

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The school's name was later changed to *Shinsakae Jogakko* (Shinsakae Girls' School). Initially, the school was jointly operated by 3 women's Presbyterian foreign missionary societies in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, but in 1881, the missionaries from Philadelphia moved to *Sakurai Jogakko*, another girls' school in Tokyo operated under the auspices of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society in Philadelphia. Once again, the school was placed under the sole control of the New York WBFM^{1,2}.

The evidence suggests that Reade was sent to Japan upon the request of Kate Youngman, who wanted to have a woman missionary to teach English and music to Japanese girls³. In addition, it is important for us to remember here, for the later discussion of the background of Reade, that her work in Japan was supported by the Brooklyn Presbyterian Society in New York⁴. At *Shinsakae Jogakko*, Reade, with other women missionaries, I.A. Leete, Lena Leete, and Sarah Smith, taught 2 hours a day on weekdays, serving as an assistant at a Sunday school, which she energetically promoted^{5,6}.

In 1883, Reade left *Shinsakae Jogakko* to work at *Sakurai Jogakko*, the other girls' school operated by the Tokyo Presbyterian Mission. There she served as an assistant to Anna Davis, a missionary teacher from Philadelphia, while Maria True, the guiding

spirit of *Sakurai Jogakko*, was on a 1-year furlough in the United States⁷. (Fig. 1)

YUSHI KYORITSU TOKYO HOSPITAL AND THE TOKYO MISSION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

In 1882, the Japanese physician Takaki Kanehiro (1849–1920), in cooperation with other doctors, established a charity hospital in Shiba ward in Tokyo. It was named Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital and modeled on St. Thomas' Hospital in England, where Takaki had studied for 5 years⁸.

Beginning in 1883, students at an elementary school in Tsukiji, another institution established by Kate Youngman, visited the Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital every Saturday and brought fruits and flowers for patients. Then, in 1884, wives of Presbyterian missionaries in Tokyo joined the practice. Through these friendly visits, the Presbyterian Tokyo Mission established a connection with the charity hospital. On October 17, 1884, Reade began to teach sanitation and nursing to Japanese nurses at the hospital 2 days a week. Reade probably got this teaching opportunity through Samuel Hepburn, a Presbyterian medical missionary who had a close connection with Takaki. Reade and Hepburn belonged to the same Presbyterian mission: therefore, it



Fig. 1. Members of the Presbyterian Church in Tokyo, cited in Kohiyama, 1990. p. 179. M.E. Reade is on the far right in the back row.

seems likely that Reade was also regularly visiting the hospital with other missionaries^{6,9}.

THE CONTRACT BETWEEN THE PRESBYTERIAN TOKYO MISSION AND THE YUSHI KYORITSU TOKYO HOSPITAL

On January 7, 1885, Takaki signed a contract with the Tokyo Presbyterian Mission which allowed Reade to work for the charity hospital for 2 years from January 1885 through January 1887. The terms of contract included that: 1) Reade was to work for the hospital 4 hours a day free of charge for 2 years; 2) she would have access to any department of the hospital; 3) she would be provided with 2 rooms and 2 servants as well as allowances for living expenses; and 4) she could propagate the Gospel in the hospital¹⁰. Reade moved from *Sakurai Jogakko* to the charity hospital and began to live with Japanese nurses in one of the buildings on the premises. In addition to working in the hospital, in March 1885, Reade began to teach English to medical students at *Seikai Koshu Jo*, a medical school established by Takaki¹¹.

In April 1885, *Fujin Jizen Kai*, a charity society established by 6 upper-class women, began to support Takaki's project to train nurses. Ohyama Sutematsu, a member of the charity society, was 1 of the 5 women sent by the Japanese government to the United States for education in 1871. After her graduation from Vassar, Ohyama took a special 10-week course at the Connecticut Training School of Nurses¹². Upon returning to Japan in 1882, she married Ohyama Iwao, the Minister of the Army, in 1883, and the marriage permitted her to participate in philanthropic activities among upper-class women. Sutematsu and other members of *Fujin Jizen Kai* published statements entitled "The Importance of Establishing a School to Train Nurses" and "A Plan to Establish a School to Train Nurses." In July 1885, the society held a bazaar and sent the proceeds to Takaki for setting up a formal school to train nurses. In October 1885, the Training School of Nurses tentatively opened with 13 students. A new school building was completed on January 20, 1886, and 5 of the 13 original students were allowed to remain as formal students

and occupy the new building¹³. For a long time, it has been believed that Linda Richards, the first professionally trained nurse in the United States, founded the first nursing school in Japan in 1887¹⁴. The evidence we have seriously challenges that belief. The first school to train nurses in Japan was established on the premises of the Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital in 1885.

M.E. READE AT THE TRAINING SCHOOL OF NURSES

In 1886, in her report¹⁵ to the Presbyterian Church, Reade wrote: "We have now about thirty nurses.... They are now proud to be called nurse.... They are greatly attached to the hospital, always willing to go out when I send them, and glad to come home again.... There is not half the amount of quarreling and jealousy among the nurses there used to be, and stealing is becoming exceedingly unfashionable.... Notwithstanding the great improvement made, there is an untellable amount of little and big trials connected with training nurses. They will forget, they will be slow. Sometimes I get nearly wild with their excuses"¹⁶. In the same year, Reade also sent a sketch of the Japanese nurses to the American Presbyterian Church's periodical, *Woman's Work for Woman and Our Mission Field*¹⁷. (Fig. 2)

During her 2-year tenure at the hospital, Reade donated 8 nursing caps, 26 nursing aprons, 26 fans, a nursing bottle, and a wide comforter¹⁸. As a missionary, she also invited the nurses to Shinsakae Church in



Fig. 2. M.E. Reade's sketch of nursing students at the Charity Hospital, *Woman's Work for Woman and Our Mission Field*, vol. 1 (1886), p. 205.



Fig. 3. M.E. Reade and nurses at Tokyo Jikei Hospital, date unknown, probably, 1887, when she left the school, *Jikei Kango Kyoiku Hyakunen-Shi Hensan Inkkai.*, 1984, p. 24.

the Tsukiji concession, many of whom became Christians¹⁹. Reade optimistically reported: "Japan is waking up to the importance of training women for the work of nursing. Since our school opened, we have had many visits from medical officers of many hospitals, and a general interest is beginning to be taken by all classes in this kind of work"¹⁵.

Reade continued to work for the hospital for some time after the contract expired in January 1887. The first class of 5 nurses that Reade directly trained were Suzuki Kiku, Ohishi Teru, Kondo Katsu, Yoshioka You, and Itatani Koto, who graduated from the training school on February 1, 1888²⁰. Many of the early graduates were daughters of former samurai families. There remains a picture of Reade with Japanese nurses (Fig. 3).

NURSE TRAINING AT YUSHI KYORITSU TOKYO HOSPITAL AFTER READE

Beginning in April 1887, Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital obtained financial support from the Empress of Japan and changed its name to Tokyo Jikei Hospital. Linda Richards, another educator of nurses who was working at *Kyoto Kanbyofu Gakko* (Kyoto School for Nurses) during this period, took notice of the incident, reporting in her essay written for the *American Journal of Nursing* in 1902^{14,21} that a new, more

important school for nurses was opened in Tokyo under the direct care of the Empress. In fact, the training school in Tokyo was not new but was the outgrowth of the training school that M.E. Reade had helped establish in 1885. In July 1887, on solid financial ground, Kanehiro Takaki was able to send 2 Japanese nurses to England for study at St. Thomas' Hospital²².

Although short-lived, Reade's contribution to Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital was highly valued. The hospital recognized the need to train nurses and appointed Sato Matsuura, a Japanese woman, to succeed Reade. The program that Reade established thus continued at the hospital. Takaki appreciated Reade's contribution to the hospital, especially the Christian principles with which she inculcated the nurses. In 1903 Takaki observed that the nurses mentored by Reade were morally and socially superior to other nurses and enjoyed the full confidence of the patients. Certainly, they inherited the legacy of Reade's efforts⁶.

READE AT *SHINSAKAE JOGAKKO* AND HER RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

After her 2-year contract with Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital was terminated, Reade taught music to female students at *Shinsakae Jogakko*. According



Fig. 4. M.E. Reade and mission school students, Tamura, Joshigakuin 50-nenishi, 1928, frontispiece. M.E. Reade is on the far left in the front row.

to *Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (1888), *Shinsakae Jogakko* was under the care of 3 women missionaries, Lina Leete, Gertrude S. Bigelow, and M.E. Reade²³. In a picture taken around 1888, Reade is standing beside Bigelow, who was then head of the school. Thus, in the 1880s, Reade taught at 2 Presbyterian mission schools, *Shinsakae Jogakko* and *Sakurai Jogakko*. In 1890 the 2 schools were merged into *Joshigakuin*, which still operates in the center of Tokyo today. Reade served at the 2 schools for 4 years 6 months, longer than she did at Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital. Curiously, however, there is no mentioning of Reade in published histories of these schools.

In 1887, *Sakurai Jogakko* opened a nursing school. Maria True, the leader of the school, and other Presbyterian missionaries agreed that Reade would be a suitable teacher for nurses and should be placed in the position. However, Reade, after resigning from Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital, became a teacher for general students at *Shinsakae Jogakko*²⁴. She probably did not have the proper qualifications for the position according to American standards; or she was in some trouble with other women missionaries at *Sakurai Jogakko*; or perhaps she was in poor health and unable to assume the position²⁵.

The Tokyo Presbyterian Mission did not renew its contract with Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital while continuing to oppose Maria True's plan to train nurses at *Sakurai Jogakko*. Back at *Shinsakae Jogakko*, Reade made some trouble and left Japan, rather abruptly, for Vancouver on the British steamer *Zambesi* on May 19, 1888 (*Japan Weekly Mail*, May 26, 1888). The trouble was discussed among people, including Reade's father, who were involved in the incident. According to a letter written by John M. Gillespie, the secretary of the WBFM, Reade was not satisfied with the new arrangement and tried to do what she wanted²⁶. Although we do not know exactly why she left Japan, she was obviously dissatisfied with the decision of the Tokyo Presbyterian Mission not to continue its contract with Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital, which removed her from her position at the hospital (Fig. 4).

CONCLUSION

All in all, both written and photographic evidence demonstrate that Reade's attempt to train nurses at Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital was the first of its kind in Japan. Reade began to offer a program to train nurses in Japan 2 year earlier than Linda Richards did at the Kyoto Nursing School in 1887. The

generally accepted view that Richards started the first nursing program in Japan, therefore, needs to be corrected. Moreover, Reade's program, which lasted 2 years, was intended not only to provide the students with knowledge of nursing but also to build their character, and her program had reached the level of nursing education practiced in the modern world from its beginning. These findings permit us to call her the pioneer in modern nursing education in Japan. Furthermore, in the introduction of modern nursing education to Japan, we cannot ignore the role of Takaki Kanehiro, the founder of the Yushi Kyoritsu Tokyo Hospital, who studied modern medicine at St. Thomas' Hospital in England, explored the nursing education program organized by Florence Nightingale in the hospital, and recognized the need of a similar program in Japan. The programs started by Richards or Maria True ended shortly due to various administrative problems, but Miss Reade's efforts led directly to The Jikei Training School for Nurses and later to The Jikei University School of Nursing. Unfortunately, there is very little information about Reade herself. We do not know where she was born, what kind of education she had, and when she died. Her name was spelled out in various ways: "Miss M.E. Reade" in *Woman's Work for Woman and Mission Field*; "Miss Reade" in hand-written reports sent from missionaries in Tokyo to the Presbyterian Mission Board in the U.S.; "Miss Reade" in the Annual Report of the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church from 1881 to 1887; "Miss Reed" in the 1886 issue of the report; "Mary L. Reede" in the Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America from 1882 to 1887; and "Mary L. Reade" in the 1888 and 1889 issues of the same report. Therefore, her full name was probably Mary E. Reade.

Given that she taught music and English at the 2 mission schools in Tokyo, Reade must have finished at least secondary education in the United States. However, what kind of professional training she had as a nurse, we do not know. In her days, there were a small number of nursing schools in the United States offering nurse training courses of about 10 weeks.

Reade might have taken such course²⁷. Considering that she belonged to the WBFM in New York and received support from the Brooklyn Presbyterian Society, she might have lived in or near Brooklyn. We will continue to look for more information about Reade and wish to have American collaborators on this project.

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