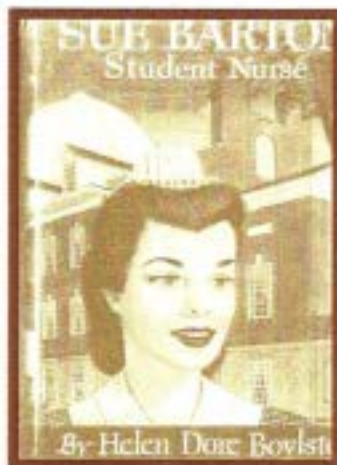


# HELEN DORE BOYLSTON

## NURSE, WRITER, & WOMAN OF ADVENTURE

"The train began to move at last. Sue leaned forward, her red curls crushed against the windowpane, and looked back to where her father and mother and Ted stood on the station platform. Their faces were growing smaller. Sue's resolute young mouth quivered suddenly, and her eyes misted."



These were the words of Sue Barton Student Nurse, written by Helen Dore Boylston. This was the first book in a series of seven chronicling the life of Sue Barton from her days as a nurse, published between 1936 and 1953. They have become classics for young adult readers and reveal an amazing portrait of the feelings, hopes, ambitions, sadness, and learnings of a young girl.

The books were based on the life of Helen Dore Boylston who lived right here in Weston for a good many years. She was born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire on April 4, 1895 and spent a happy childhood there. She attended Simmons College in Boston and after one year at Simmons she

attended Massachusetts General Hospital School of Nursing. She graduated in 1915, promptly enlisted in the Harvard Medical Unit, and served as an anesthesiologist with the British Expeditionary Force in France During World War I, achieving the rank of captain. Her first book "Sister; the War Diary of a Nurse," published in 1927, detailed her wartime experiences.

After the Armistice of November 11, 1918, Miss Boylston joined the Red Cross and spent several years in Europe, living and working in Albania, Germany, and Italy. During this time she met Rose Wilder Lane, daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder (author of the Little House books). Ms. Lane was a reporter covering the postwar reconstruction, and the two women became fast friends.

Upon her return to the states, Ms. Boylston served as the head of an

outpatient department and an instructor in anesthesiology back at Massachusetts General, and also worked as a psychiatric nurse in New York City. She was also a head nurse in a Connecticut hospital. In the late 1920s she began writing and publishing some of her wartime memoirs, as well as stories and magazine articles.

Drawing on her experiences as a nurse, her portrayal of Sue Barton is extremely realistic and poignant. In discussing the most important thing a nurse can do with her fellow students, Sue exclaimed: "The



patient's attitude." "When people are sick they need something to steady them – some – some idea. It depends on the person. Maybe it is just being a good sport, or a noble martyr, or – or thinking they will

get well twice as quickly if they put their mind to it. You can help them think the way they want to. Nobody likes being frightened, or



## Helen Dore Boylston Continued

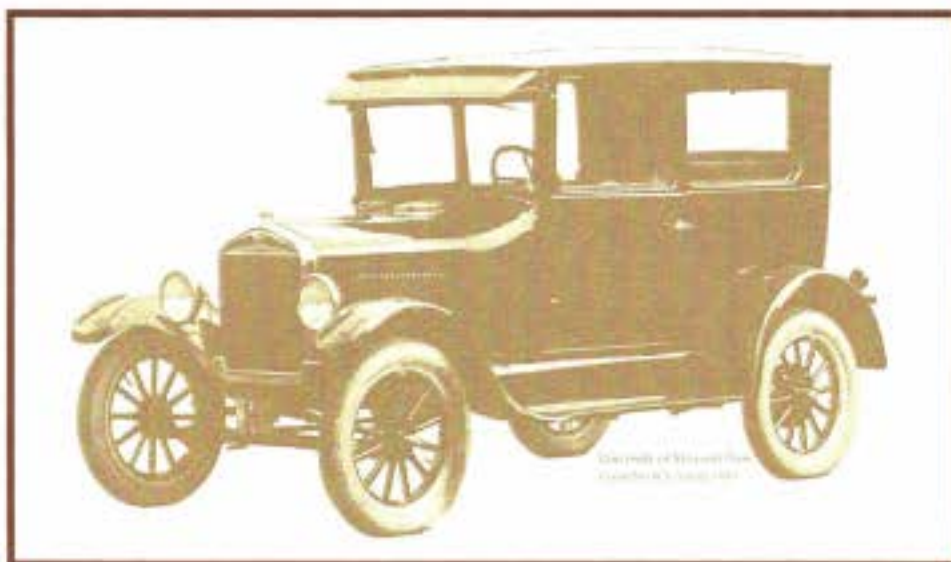
bored, or terribly nervous. They (the patient) always try to hang on to something, and if you pay attention and find out what it is you can encourage them along that line. If they haven't anything to steady them they're miserable, no matter how good a bath you can give, or how many stories you tell them. If they have something to steady them, then the other things just make being sick that much easier." Ms Boylston's true feelings of how things should be and her unwavering belief in people's goodness comes across the pages as if she were speaking directly to you.

In 1926 Helen and her friend Rose Wilder Lane, along with their French maid, decided to take a trip across Europe in a Model T they named Zenobia. The account of their travels is one of optimism and humor. It is hard to believe that two women in that day and age would even take on such a trip alone. They went from Paris to Albania and each wrote about the experience in a book "Travels With Zenobia". The book was written in a diary-like fashion with notes and observations from Rose and then from Troub – Helen's nickname – short for Trouble.

On August 20, 1925, Rose and Helen began their journey from Paris to Albania in a Model T Ford. Along their many stops people took them for German women rather than Americans. Near the end of their trip they learned that the reason for this misjudgment was that only German women would

have ever been driving alone in a car during those years.

Their fond memories of the trip not only included the sights they saw and the people they met along the way, but Troub's memories of



Zenobia, the car. She writes "Today, almost all day, we climbed dreadful mountains, and the faithful Zenobia, struggled and perspired and panted and even shed rusty tears from her radiator." They often stopped to let the car rest and give it oil and water.

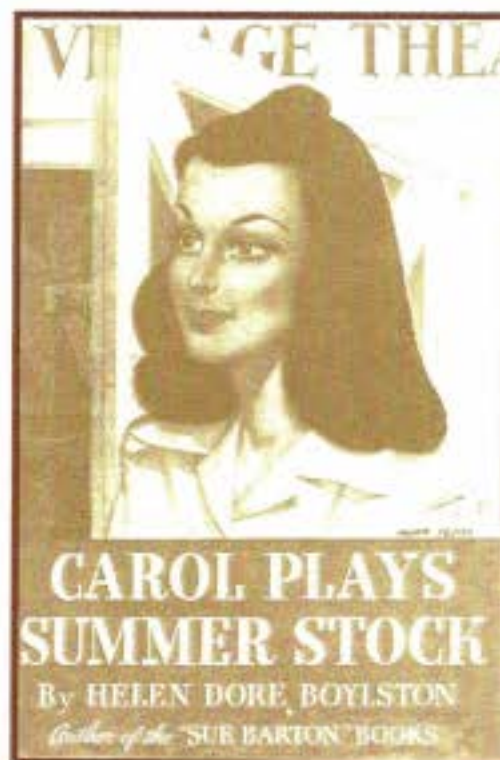
Rose writes a very funny passage about asking directions in Italy. She says that it is better than a vaudeville show. "Troub: Please signore, is this the way to Spezia. Man: Spezia? Troub and I: Si Signore! Spezia! Man: Are you Germans? I: No. Man: You are not Germans? Troub: No, we are Americans. Is this the way to Spezia, please:" After going on about their nationality for another two minutes, the man brightly tells them that this is the road to Spezia. "Si, Si! Sempre dritto, Spezia. They learned that

Sempre Dritto in Italian means straight ahead, but 200 feet down the road turns are left, right none straight ahead so they had to rely on their best instincts. They finally did make it to Albania.

Following Helen's adventures overseas, she sat down to turn her hand to writing books. The Sue Barton books were published with the help of Jane Ayer Cobb (Berry) who lived at the corner of Cobb's Mill Rd. and Rt. 57. Jane was one of the Cobb family who at one time owned Cobb's Mill Inn. Through this friendship, Helen

Boylston came to Weston often and purchased a house on Georgetown Road at the corner of Hillside South.

This move also proved fruitful to Helen in that she became friends with her neighbor Eva Le Gallienne and started a new series of books about an aspiring actress named Carol Page. Miss Le Gallienne allowed Helen backstage access to many



theatrical stage performances so as to lend realism to her books. In her first book about Carol Page, Helen writes "Ever since my first book, I have looked to Jane Cobb for her lively suggestions and her true ear



## *Helen Dore Boylston Cont...*

for dialogue. In this new story of Carol, she has cheerfully assumed the role of collaborator and godmother, and in gratitude I should like to dedicate the story to her.”

In a passage from *Carol Plays Summer Stock*, Helen writes the following: When he returned, half the company was crowded around the steps of the Pullman, where Carol was waiting for the train to pull out. She made a startling picture against its dark grime, for the glow under her skin seemed lighted from an inexhaustible eagerness within her. Her hair was polished in the sunlight, and the smart green hat accentuated the clear greenness of her eyes. She stood straight and light, one hand on the iron guard rail, and she was laughing, though her throat, smooth above the white cascade of her blouse, felt tight with nostalgia for the summer that was gone, with affection for the affection in the faces below her, with a surge of panic for what the future might hold.” How easy it is to remember the excitement of youth and the dreams and hopes of new careers, jobs, friends and adventures.

Helen Boylston spent the last years of her life in a nursing home in Trumbull, Connecticut. She died there on September 30, 1984 at the age of eighty-nine. She was a neighbor, friend, and prolific writer of classic stories for young adults. We are grateful to add her to the list of important and grand citizens of our community.