

# Working conditions for nurses at KLGH 1893-1950

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the following decades of the next, women seeking professions primarily had two choices: nursing or teaching.

The first public nurse was Mrs. Gilbert who was hired at the inception of the Kootenay Lake General Hospital in 1893. At that time the hospital served mainly miners. There were no maternity facilities and private patients were nursed in their homes.

Under regular circumstances nurses in Nelson were assigned 12 patients. They worked 12 hour shifts five or six days a week. Women in the medical profession had little to no decision-making power, and wages were very low. In 1922, Nelson nurses were paid \$60 per month, head nurses \$75 and matrons \$100. In contrast, the janitor made \$110 per month. Nurses received no sick leave until 1945 when the grueling 12 hour shifts were reduced to 8 hours. The Hospital Employees Union was established in 1948.