



Hannah Jessie Hankin-Hardy, in medical and humanitarian mission in Serbia during the Great War

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SUMMARY

Arch Oncol 2010;18(4):136-9. *The Studenica Monastery, built in 1186 A.D., the royal mausoleum of the Nemanjić Dynasty, is considered the forerunner of the Serbian statehood and conscience because in it the first school and hospital were established. It is also where the first book was written in Serbian language. Studenica, as the cradle of the Serbian medicine, produced – and through the following eight centuries, nurtured many educators and iconic figures of the Serbian cultural tradition. Among them was St. Sava, the first Serbian Archbishop, whose name is also borne by one of the highest Serbian civilian orders, which is awarded for extreme dedication and philanthropy in Serbia and worldwide. This here is an attempt to preserve the memory of the philanthropist Hannah Henkin Hardy, who was also personally awarded one of these Serbian orders. Hannah Henkin Hardy (1886-1944) was born in Worchester, U.K., completed a medical school in Melbourne, Australia, and arrived in Serbia in January 1915 together with the first Scottish Women's Hospitals. In Kragujevac, together with the Serbian physicians, and the "Kolo srpskih sestara," Mrs. Hardy established the League of Serbian Women to jointly fight the great typhus epidemic. She also founded the out-patients ambulances for the poor in Kragujevac, as well as the soup kitchens, and took part in various humanitarian activities. Mrs. Hardy and her husband Samuel Hardy, together with some other philanthropists, repaired the war-damaged Church of St. George in Topola. She joined the Serbian refugees in their escape from the invading enemy forces to the Adriatic Coast through the dangerous snow-bound mountains of Albania and Montenegro. She remembered the suffering of the Serbian people and the dedicated humanitarian activities of the Serbian medical corps and foreign medical missions for the rest of her life. Mrs. and Mr. Hardy dedicated their lives to philanthropy and humanitarian work, helping small and suffering peoples and nations.*

KEY WORDS: Famous Persons; History of Medicine; History, 20th Century; World War I; Physicians; Medical Missions, Official; Serbia Non MeSH Hannah Hankin-Hardy

Numerous medical missions from the Allied and friendly nations arrived from the world to the Serbian people at the time of the Great Typhus Epidemic during the World War I. HANNAH JESSIE HANKIN-HARDY (1886-1944), maiden name: Hannah Gordon was born in 1886, in Worchester, in England. Hannah Gordon completed a three-year medical school in Melbourne, so she spent a part of her youth in Australia. Later on, as a missionary and a nurse, she often returned to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. When she was still young, Mrs. Hannah Hardy founded the first English Hospital in the Portuguese Colony of Mozambique, in January 1901, in the place called Bajiru, where she spent seven months.

At that time, the medical corps was exclusively a male domain. But Hannah followed the lead and the example of Florence Nightingale. During the Boer Wars, Mrs. Hardy was working in the frontline medical unit, practically surrounded by the enemy lines, but she managed to single-handedly organize a field hospital with 50 beds. Completely exhausted by her heavy workload, she returned sick to England. During the Spanish-Cuban War, Hannah went to the aid of the small Cuban nation, working for five months in the hospital which she founded herself.

In the peacetime, Mrs. Hardy became a member of the Temperance Youth League, which fought against alcohol consumption. As her organizational skills became noticed, she was soon chosen to be a delegate at the International Congress of Anti-alcoholism in London in 1909, and in Havre, Holland. The apex of her activities was her visit to the US and Canada in 1915, where she conducted numerous lectures to the gatherings of the Temperance Campaign. At the start of the Great War, Mrs.

Hardy returned to her hospital rounds in France, where she stayed for six weeks. Upon hearing about the glorious victories of the Serbian Armies, and the great hardships of the little Serbian nation, she rushed back to England, where she awoke the public opinion to organize the medical supplies and volunteers for Serbia.

HANNAH HANKIN-HARDY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF SERBIAN WOMEN IN KRAGUJEVAC

Hannah Gordon was married to Samuel Hankin-Hardy in 1901, bore two children, and continued her mission together with her husband **Samuel Hankin-Hardy** (1871-1948), who served as a chaplain in the British Medical Corps at the start of the Great War. Following the appeal by the Serbian Red Cross Society, Hannah Hardy arrived in Serbia with her husband and the first hospital of the Scottish Women's Hospital on the 4th of January 1915 was established. In Kragujevac, during the Great Typhus Epidemic, there were operating, in addition to the Serbian Medical Corps Hospitals, headed by Dr. Roman Sondermayer and Dr. Nikola Vučenić, also the allied medical missions: the Scottish Women's Hospitals, headed by Dr. Eleonor Solto, and the Hospital of the Serbian Relief Fund, headed by Mrs. St. Clair (Stobart), The Russian Medical Mission, The British Army Field Hospital, headed by Dr. William Hunter, Dr. Elisabeth Ross, and many others.

In January 1915, Hannah Hardy got involved in the organized struggle against the *great typhus epidemic*. From Day one, she worked as a nurse in the Second Reserve Medical Hospital, which was located in the police

barracks. The Hospital treated about 450 wounded and the sick, and there was a great shortage of the skilled medical personnel.

In 1915, during the *great typhus epidemic* Mrs. Hardy, together with other women, decided to help in fighting the epidemic. The War Chronicle of 12th of February 1915 published an announcement from Hannah about the founding assembly to all women in Serbia, and not just those in Kragujevac. It was a general appeal to all women to come and help to establish the *National League of Serbian Women*.

*"The Committee of the League of Serbian Women for Mutual Assistance invites all Serbian women to come to the gathering to be held in the Officers' Club on the 17th of this month, at 3 p.m. The main topics of discussion will be how to reduce the epidemic and to present the work programme of the League of Serbian Women."*¹

The *National League of Serbian Women* received a great support from *The Circle of Serbian Women*, *The Kragujevac Sub-Committee of the Belgrade Women's Society*, *The Princess Ljubica Society*, and individual philanthropic women. At the founding assembly in Kragujevac, on 19th of February 1915, Mrs. Hannah Hankin Hardy was elected the President of the League. In her acceptance speech, she said: „It gives me a great pleasure to conduct this great gathering of Serbian citizens. We are gathered here for one great and common cause, and that is the common battle against a great enemy of an epidemic, which is now among us. It is a duty of every citizen to use all one's strength for the public good by giving top priority to the cleanliness of the town where one lives. We are asking you to do all you can in this regard. We hope that we here in Kragujevac will be leading other towns, and even villages all across Serbia, by our example. It must not be forgotten that the health of a nation is also its strength.”

As a mother, wife, and a fighter for women's rights, Hannah emphasized with the Serbian women. So, her message carries deep emotions: „The Serbian woman has so far, in these turbulent times in which we live, given everything she could, as a mother, sister, and spouse – everything that is closest and dearest to her. She has brought to the sacrificial altar her greatest treasures: her children, brothers, husbands, and own fathers... But the Serbian mother, the Serbian woman, has not given enough. She has not given everything that is needed for our dear, small, tormented homeland.”

Mrs. Hannah Hardy, the President, Draga Arandelović, the Secretary, and Dr. Angelina Jakšić, the Treasurer, demonstrated the guidelines for the sustained fight against the typhus epidemic. It was concluded, above all, that it was important to keep better personal hygiene, cleanliness at home, and cleanliness of the outbuildings and home yards. In particular, it was needed to concentrate on keeping the hygiene of the laundry, and to open soup kitchens for the poor, with the aim of improving the general national health. *The National League of Serbian Women*, in its struggle against the epidemic, realized the importance of a greater number of public hospitals and day clinics. This was supported by the speech of President Hannah Hankin Hardy: „The soldiers have their hospitals where they are treated. But the epidemic has spread into the general civilian population, where it is decimating the old and the young, both men and women, without mercy. Let us form new, private hospitals for

free treatment of these sick civilians, who are not soldiers. We must ensure that every patient with typhus is immediately isolated and moved to a hospital. Because there were cases when they were hidden by their families, either due to ignorance, or out of fear for it to become known. Thus themselves becoming infected, and some have paid the ultimate price for that ignorance and disdain. We must isolate and take to hospital every suspected case, no matter how close or dear that person may be to us. Because that is the only sure way to save ourselves and our other close and dear ones.”²

Soon after the founding gathering, under the leadership of Hannah Hardy, the *National League of Serbian Women* established the out-patient ambulance in Kragujevac, which included a women's ward, a male ward and a children's ward. During the period from 1st April 1915 to 12th May 1915, the out-patient clinic admitted and treated without charge 787 patients from Kragujevac and the surrounding areas, of whom 26 patients were referred to the hospital, while 18 children were evacuated. The medical examination and health care at the clinic was carried out by Dr. Angelina Jakšić (1871-1950), who was granted the title of a Doctor of Medical Science in Geneva in 1899. Thus she was among the first women physicians with this distinguished title in Serbia. Dr. Toma Jovanović, Dr. Jurinac, and Dr. Jaroslav Kuzelj (1846-1928), of Czech origin, came to work in Serbia from 1875, enticed by freedom-loving and humane ideas. The medics worked in shifts from 8 am until midnight. The members of the subcommittee of the League of Serbian Women assisted those working in the outpatient clinic by doing the rounds in the town of Kragujevac searching for the typhoid cases and reporting this to the local authorities, who - with the aid of medical panels - referred those patients to appropriate hospital, while they cared for the others at their homes.

At the same time, The League of Serbian Women established several soup kitchens for the poor, tea stands at the Railway Stations in Kragujevac and Lapovo, that assisted the sick and the wounded, and moved them by the special medical trains. After their admission and examinations, orphans were admitted and sent to the orphanage *Milosrđe* in Kragujevac. The members of *The League of Serbian Women* took care of the food and lodgings for the orphans. The committee of *The League of Serbian Women* coordinated all the activities and it comprised of the Honorary President, Mrs. Hannah Henkin Hardy, the Secretary, Draga Arandelović, the Treasurer Dr. Angelina A. Jakšić, members: Draga Pavlović Bojadžić, Draga Stojanović, Lena Bošković, and Kosara Ivanović.

The Kragujevac Branch of the *Šumadija Kolo srpskih sestara* extended a great support and assistance to the *National League of Serbian Women*. Members of the Serbian circle of *Kolo srpskih sestara*, who did philanthropic work in Kragujevac since 1903, became the members of the Management Committee of the *National League of Serbian Women*. Among the first was Draga Pavlović Bojadžić (1870-1938), the President of *Kolo srpskih sestara*, who had the support of the extensive Bojadžić family. Also participating were other humane women from distinguished families in Kragujevac: Arsenijević, Stojanović, Lontkijević, Paligorić, as well as the financial contributions from the following families: Krstić, Zečević, Gušić, and Živković.

¹ Invitation of the League of Serbian Women, War Dيارز, No. 208, February 18, 1915

² Ditto

The philanthropic mission of these brave and dedicated women was supported by some people with big hearts, who assisted financially the work of the *National League of Serbian Women* in Kragujevac. That help arrived from: military officers, clerks, workers, and women workers in the Military technical industrial complex in Kragujevac, from the XI reserve corps of the national army at the frontlines, the Russian imperial military attaché – colonel Artomonov, the military attaché of the French Republic – colonel Furnier, the Head of the medical corps of the High Command of the Serbian army – Dr. Lazar Genčić, the Head of the war press centre – Prof. Slobodan Jovanović, the combined telegraphic division, the Royal music band, the High Command – the proceeds of the sale of 400 copies of the *War Chronicle*, that was published from March 23 to April 29, 1915; the proceeds from the sale of the badges and voluntary donations from the general public and the members of the *League of Serbian Women*, during the period February 15th to April 29th, 1915, when 8175.54 dinars was collected and 2231.35 dinars was spent on the maintenance of the outpatient clinic, free treatments and medical examinations of the poor population.

HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES OF HANNAH HARDY AND SAMUEL HARDY IN TOPOLA

King Petar I (1844-1921) opened the St. George Hospital at Oplenac – within the complex of the St. George Church, which was the first hospital in or near the town of Topola in Serbia. The St. George Hospital looked after a huge number of the wounded soldiers from the battles of Cer and Kolubara in the Great War. The Hardies brought in significant medical supplies for the St. George Hospital. Damaged in various wartime situations, the hospital was rebuilt for the second time in 1920, thanks to many voluntary contributions which were started by Hannah and Samuel Hardy. His Royal Highness King Petar I and the Serbian Red Cross Society were among the first to support the work of the *League of Serbian Women* in Topola. That was followed by financial contributions from around the world – from numerous philanthropists, including: from Scotland, Sir Thomas Lipton (1850-1931), the famous tea baron; from Russia, Her Royal Highness Princess Helen Petrovna (1884-1962), a daughter of King Petar I, and the wife of Russian Prince Ivan Konstantinovich Romanov; from England, The Serbian Relief Fund; and other contributors from Serbia. Thanks to the *War Chronicles*, the official reports of the War Press Centre, which were published during the World War I, the activities of the *National League of Serbian Women* in Kragujevac and Topola, and its founder Hannah Henkin Hardy, were recorded and preserved for posterity. In 1915, in occupied Serbia, Mrs. Hardy supplied a great quantity of medications and medical supplies to the Car Lazar Hospital in Kruševac. On her way back to England, in April 1915, Mrs. Hardy passed through Niš, visited the hospitals, held talks with the representatives of the Serbian Red Cross Society, and met Dr. Sima Karanović, the Head of the Serbian medical corps. On the road to Thessaloniki, she stopped to inspect the disinfection station of the medical corps in Pirot. She complemented their work. When she arrived in England, Mrs. Hardy gave a series of public lectures, and she promoted the struggle and heroism of the small Serbian nation. In August 1915, Mrs. Hardy returned to Serbia with a huge quantity of hospital beds, field hospital tents, various medical supplies,

clothing, and medications. The National League of Serbian Women held its meetings at the Officers' Club, while the Committee was located in the Viteška ulica. The mission of the *National League of Serbian Women* continued until the evacuation of the Serbian Government and Army, and the occupation of the country by the enemy.

Hannah Hardy and other members of the foreign medical missions followed the withdrawal of the Serbian people, government, army, and medical corps on the difficult and hazardous route through the Albanian mountains to the Adriatic Sea at the end of 1915. She was accompanied by a Serbian youth, with a donkey laden with belongings, and she had to walk in deep snow over the treacherous mountain paths in Albania and Montenegro. The memory recollections of the endless columns of hungry, destitute, and frozen refugees – the exodus and suffering of the Serbian people would always remain with her to the end of her life. Mrs. Hardy witnessed and survived the Spanish-Cuban War, the Boer War, the Western Front (France) in the Great War. But, according to her own words, nothing compared to the suffering of the Serbian people, which she personally witnessed.

HUMANITY IS NEVER FORGOTTEN

Hannah Henkin Hardy spent the last years of her life with her husband in the place called Raunds in England (Northamptonshire). Samuel Hardy served as a head chaplain of the Methodist Church in that small town from 1927 until 1937, when he retired. Hannah Henkin Hardy passed away in Raunds on 28th of June, 1944. She was buried in the grounds of the Methodist Church in Raunds, next to her husband Samuel and son Herald. The philanthropic lives of Hannah Henkin Hardy and Samuel Henkin Hardy were filled with ordinary times, as much as significant times, times of happiness and times of war ravages, but always on the endless path of belief and hope, love and empathy for human suffering.

Serbia awarded both Hannah Henkin Hardy and Samuel Henkin Hardy with the Order of St Sava, for their dedication, sacrifice and humanity towards the Serbian people during the decisive times of the Great War (when Serbia and the Great Britain were Allies). Despite the passing of time, the memorial plaque with the names of Hannah Henkin Hardy and Samuel Henkin Hardy at the St. George Hospital in Topola, remain as a permanent reminder of their humane and philanthropic activities, as well as those past times of great deeds for the future generations.

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of interest

We declare no conflicts of interest.

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