

WWI Fort Caswell Nurse Profile: Elizabeth F. Bachman, 1892-1952

BY NORMA ECKARD
AND AMY ECKARD

Elizabeth Florence Bachman Williams
Allentown, Pa.
Army Nurse Corps
Served: Oct. 7, 1918 –
March 14, 1919
Fort Caswell, U.S. Army
Post Hospital: Oct. 7, 1918
– March 14, 1919

Elizabeth “Bessie” Florence Bachman was born and raised in Allentown, Pa.

The 1900 Census, when Bessie was 7 years old, listed her father as a produce salesman. The census indicates her mother had given birth to five children. Four were still living, all daughters. Bessie was the oldest. She and her younger siblings were attending school.

Her mother, Caroline, passed away suddenly from a heart ailment in 1907 when Bessie was 15. Her father remarried about seven months later; they would have no children together but a stepdaughter a few years younger than Bessie joined the family.

In 1910, Bessie was still living at home and was reported to be age 16, although likely 18. She and her younger sister were “tailoresses” at a manufacturing company. The younger sisters and stepmother were attending school.

By 1912, the Allentown City Directory shows Bessie living alone, no longer working as a tailoress. [Source: Ancestry.com. U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995, database on-line. Provo, UT, USA]

Given the newspaper articles from 1915 shown below, she was likely training or preparing to train as a nurse at that time.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles D. Grim, of No. 1304 Hamilton street, have as their guests Mr. and Mrs. George Brady, of Reading; Mr. and Mrs. B. Connor, of Philadelphia; and Miss Grace Gangwer, of Weatherly, who came on to attend the Hospital Day exercises at St. Luke’s Hospital, South Bethlehem. Mr. and Mrs. Grim’s niece, Miss Elizabeth Bachman, is a member of the graduating class of nurses.

The Morning Call (Allentown, PA), 20 Oct. 1915, p. 7.

St. Luke’s Hospital is located in Bethlehem, about nine miles from Allentown. It established a nursing school in 1884, the fourth in the nation and currently the oldest nursing school in the nation. The effect of the industrial revolution on Allentown meant that injured workers could no longer only depend on medical facilities in Philadelphia, needing a closer source. [Source: The History of St. Luke’s Hospital.]

A photo, courtesy of St. Luke’s School of Nursing, shows the graduating class of 1917, two years following Nurse Bachman’s.

Nurse Bachman completed post-graduate work in New York City at the Manhattan Maternity Hospital and Long Island Medical College [Source: Marriage announcement, below]. This may have been why her residence at the time of enlistment into the Army Nursing Corps was New York City. [See NY WWI Service Card]

On Oct. 4, 1918, Nurse

Bachman enlisted in the Army Nursing Corps as Elizabeth F. Bachman. She served at Fort Caswell Post Hospital and was discharged on March 4, 1919.

[Sources: NY WWI Service Card and The American Journal of Nursing, Vol. 19 No. 3 (Dec., 1918), pp. 220, excerpt shown below]

After the war, she returned home to Allentown. In September, she became the first woman to be elected as a member of her local American Legion. The published story is printed below.

“First lady to join H.P. Lentz post”

Miss Elizabeth F. Bachman was a Red Cross Nurse During the War

Setting the initiative for the ladies who were regularly enlisted in the military or naval forces of the United States during the World War, Miss Elizabeth F. Bachman, of No. 1304 Hamilton Street, yesterday made application for enrollment as a full fledged member of Herbert Paul Lentz Post No. 29, The American Legion, and at the meeting last night in the court house she was duly elected, thus giving her the distinction of being the first enlisted female of Lehigh county and this community of becoming affiliated with the recognized veterans’ organization of the late war.

Miss Bachman left this city during the early period of the war, as a member of the Red Cross. She had some years ago been graduated as a registered nurse, and it was in this capacity that she served the United States. She was sent to some camp in South Carolina [North Carolina], along the Atlantic coast, and soon after her arrival her worth was easily established, and she was duly enlisted in the military service as a nurse in the Army Nurses’ Corps of the United States Army. She served continuously in this camp, which was a convalescent center, until the latter part of February, when she was honorably discharged from the service.

For a number of years, also, Miss Bachman had been the attending nurse to W.J. Grim, aged about eighty-five years, of 1304 Hamilton Street, as he was most generally known to his associates. He is the father of the late Charles D. Grim of the same address. Her untiring efforts as nurse to Mr. Grim, Sr., she has endeared herself to the family, so that she is considered as one of the family.

The fact that the application for membership from Miss Bachman came unsolicited and purely from her own motives, brought a delightful surprise to the members of the Legion, at its meeting last evening. When the application was handed to a Legion member, she expressed the hope that her example would be a forerunner for all eligible ladies in the city and community to become affiliated with the organization.

The constitution of the American Legion states that any person, male or female, who was regularly enlisted or commissioned in the force of the United States between the period of April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1918, and who has

been honorably discharged, may become enrolled as a member in any Post in the country. Ladies who are eligible under this head and who wish to become affiliated with the local Post, should communicate with the membership drive headquarters at the Chamber of Commerce rooms during this week, or with one of the officers of the organization.

On January 14, 1929, Elizabeth was married to Benjamin W. Williams from NYC. The wedding announcement mentions her service at Fort Caswell.

“Elizabeth F. Bachman to wed N.Y. attorney”

Mrs. Charles D. Grim, of 1304 Hamilton Street, announces the engagement of her niece, Elizabeth F. Bachman, to Benjamin W. Williams, prominent New York attorney and banker. The wedding is to take place in the First Presbyterian Church, this city, some time in January.

Miss Bachman, a native of this city, is industrial nurse for the General Cigar Company in this city. For several years she conducted work in the settlements of Henry Street in New York City and during the World War served as a nurse in the base hospital at Ft. Caswell, N.C.

She is a graduate of St. Luke’s hospital, Bethlehem, a post-graduate of the Medical College of New York and the Manhattan Maternity hospital and dispensary, of New York City.

“Elizabeth F. Bachman to Wed N.Y. Attorney.” The Morning Call (Allentown, PA), 23 Oct. 1928, p. 16.

“Elizabeth F. Bachman weds Benj. Williams at pretty ceremony at the home of her aunt, Mrs. Charles D. Grim”

Miss Elizabeth F. Bachman, 1304 Hamilton Street, and Benjamin Williams, Tottenville, N.Y., were united in marriage at a quiet home wedding on Tuesday night at 6 o’clock. Since the death of Miss Bachman’s mother several years ago she has been residing with her aunt, Mrs. Charles D. Grim, widow of Charles Grim, former chief of the Allentown fire department and well known coal dealer.

The Rev. S.K. Piercy, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, performed the ceremony, which was witnessed only by relatives of the couple. Yellow tulips and canelidians were used as decorations and made an attractive setting for the bride who wore a wedding gown of gold imported lace, draped at the hip, with slippers to harmonize. Her bouquet was of orchids and fuchsia.

Mrs. Charles Grim, aunt of the bride, was the matron of honor and wore a dress of beige crepe. Her bouquet was of sweet peas and fuchsia. An uncle of Miss Bachman, Marshall Gagewere, Bethlehem, served as best man.

Following the ceremony the bridal party enjoyed a reception and dinner at the Hotel Bethlehem, after which the happy young couple left for their honeymoon trip. Palm Beach and other points of interest in Florida, as well as North Carolina, will be included in their trip,



Victoria White - School Director

School of Nursing Graduates
1917

To U. S. Army Post Hospital, Fort Caswell, N. C.: Anna M. Setley, Faye E. White, Hazel F. Sweetland, Elizabeth F. Bachman. To U. S. Army Post Hospital, Chanute Field, Rantoul, Ill.: Gertrude Nordland, Grace K. Robertson. To U. S. Army Base Hospital, Camp Cadiz, Deming, N. M.: Marv M. Scheltz, Nellie

Photos contributed by St. Luke’s School of Nursing

The graduating class of 1917 and listing of graduates.

which will extend into May. Upon their return North Mr. and Mrs. Williams will receive their friends in their newly furnished home in Tottenville.

Mrs. Williams graduated from St. Luke’s Hospital, Bethlehem; Manhattan Maternity Hospital, New York; and the Long Island Medical College, Brooklyn. During the World War she did commendable work at the Gulf of Mexico, and since her return to Allentown has been filling the position of industrial nurse and welfare worker at the General Cigar Company, this city. Mrs. Williams was also a settlement worker in New York, and is a member of the American National State Organization of Nurses.

Mr. Williams is a prominent banker, realtor and lawyer of Tottenville. He is a graduate of Rutgers College and studies at Princeton. Popular in both business and fraternal circles, he is an active member of the Colonial Country Club of New Jersey. Mr. Williams is the son of the late Colonel W.L. Williams, of Kentucky.

[“Elizabeth F. Bachman Weds Benj. Williams.” The Morning Call (Allentown, PA), 24 Jan. 1929, p. 7.]

The 1930 and 1940 Census records indicate they remained in the same house at 73 Hopping Ave, Tottenville, NY, until her death.

Elizabeth Florence Bachman Williams passed away on Nov. 15, 1952. She was 59 years old. The cause of death was liver cancer.

The following obituary was published.

“Graduate nurse dies in hospital”

Mrs. Elizabeth Williams, 59, of 73 Hopping Avenue, Tottenville, N.Y., a graduate nurse of St. Luke’s Hospital, died at 6:15 p.m. Saturday in St. Luke’s Hospital.

Wife of Benjamin Williams, Mrs. Williams also donated a room to the hospital. She was born in Allentown July 11, 1893, a daughter of Erwin and Caroline Gangawer Bachman.

A member of Beauvais Hudson Post 126, American Legion Auxiliary of Tottenville, and Richmond County Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, she is survived by her husband; three sisters, Mrs. W.P. Uhler, Tottenville; Mrs. Bernard Mahoney, Scarsdale, N.Y., and Mrs. Margaret Clauser, Allentown.

[“Graduate Nurse Dies in Hospital.” The Morning Call (Allentown, PA), 17 Nov. 1952, p. 8.]

She was laid to rest on Staten Island.

Her husband Benjamin requested a military flat marker, which was presumably installed. No photo is available.

Curiosity about Tottenville led to a 2008 Landmark Preservation report that mentioned Benjamin and Elizabeth. Tottenville is on the Southern end of Staten Island and was quite isolated at the time. Many historic buildings are

Bachman, Elizabeth F.		255	OFFICER—ORC
(Surname) c/o Dr. Floyd Cristman, Allentown		White	
Residence	8th St., Nicholas Place	New York	NEW YORK
(Street and house number)		(Town or city)	(County) (State)
* Born in	Allentown, Pa	July 11, 1892	
† Called into active service as	Nurse	Oct 4, 1918	fr CL
Promotions:	None		
Organizations and staff assignments:	Ft Caswell NC to disch		
Principal stations:			
Engagements:	None		
Wounds received in action:	None.		
‡ Served overseas:	None		
Hon. disch.	Mar 4, 1919		
Was reported	XX	per cent disabled on date of discharge, in view of occupation.	
Remarks:	RESERVE NURSE BELIEVED FROM ACTIVE DUTY: NOT DISCHARGED.		
* Give place and date. † Insert (a) grade; (b) arm or staff corps or department; (c) date; (d) source, civil life (CL), RA, NG, ORC, NA; and (e) designation of training camp attended, if any. ‡ Strike out if he did not attend a training camp. § Give dates of departure from and return to the United States. Give date and cause.			

Photos contributed