

# WWI Fort Caswell Nurse Profile Hazel F. Sweetland, 1892-1982

By NORMA ECKARD  
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GUEST COLUMNISTS

*Hazel Frances Sweetland Alexander  
Cambridge, Mass.  
Army Nurse Corps  
Served: Oct. 11, 1918 –  
March 5, 1919, Fort Caswell  
U.S. Army Post Hospital.  
Served: Oct. 11, 1918 –  
March 5, 1919, no additional  
assignment announcements.*

Hazel Sweetland was born and raised in Derry, N.H., a town 41 miles north of Boston. A family tree is located in Family Search.

In 1900, the family had four children, all are living. Hazel, age 8, was the youngest daughter. Her father was a shoe finisher.

In 1910, they lived in Danvers, Mass., 20 miles northeast of Boston. Another daughter had been born since the last census. She is listed as born in New Hampshire and is seven years old, which helps to narrow down the date of their move.

Their father is listed as a life insurance agent. Hazel's two older sisters were employed. One was an order clerk at a leather company and the other was a stenographer at an electric supply company. Hazel was 18 years old.

The 1911 City Directory lists the employed Sweetland family. Hazel is listed as a clerk, working in Salem. Her sisters were working in the

towns of Peabody and Boston. Her father, James M., was working in Danvers.

The 1912 City Directory shows the only son, Louis, listed as a clerk in Salem, while Hazel was listed as a student.

In the 1914 City Directory, Hazel is listed in the "Nurse" listing. There are approximately 300 nurses listed in the directory, which includes Salem and the surrounding towns. She is also listed as a nurse in the Cambridge City Directory, years 1913 and 1914, with the address as 305 Charles River Rd. That was the address of Charlesgate Hospital in Cambridge.

Nurse Sweetland enlisted in the Army Nursing Corps in 1918. She served at Fort Caswell Post Hospital. (The American Journal of Nursing, Vol. 19, No. 3, December 1918).

The only official record found that shows the date she enlisted and was discharged is her listing in the VA Master Index. Those dates are shown in the header of this profile: Enlisted on Oct. 11, 1918, and discharged on March 5, 1919. There are no additional assignment announcements in the nursing journals, so she probably remained at Fort Caswell during the length of her service.

Hazel's brother Louis served in WWI in the newly formed Aero Squadron. (findagrave.com/memorial/133225396). Another interesting fact

about Hazel is that she registered to vote in 1920, immediately after women won the right.

On Sept. 25, 1922, Hazel married Louis Marden Alexander, a widowed 46-year-old in sales for Tetley Tea. He had a child from his previous marriage. The 1930 and 1940 Census shows that they remained in Massachusetts.

Her husband passed away in 1953 and was laid to rest beside his first wife, Helen Dawson Alexander, in a cemetery in Massachusetts.

There are few records available online detailing Hazel's life: No WWI Service Record, obituary, death certificate, findagrave entry, nor headstone photo was found. However, this delightful feature article was discovered in The Los Angeles Times from 1972:

## Musical Interlude for Senior Citizens

When Hazel Alexander was in her 20s in Marblehead, Mass., she listened to Saturday afternoon opera on the radio. When she was married, she went to Arthur Fiedler concerts at the esplanade in Boston.

Now almost 80, widowed and alone, she says, "What's the sense of staying in?"

Mrs. Alexander dresses to Cole Porter music from the radio in her Wilshire District apartment, occasionally yelling "Shut up!" at noisy commercials, and busses to

a matinee of the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Music Center.

There, half an hour before the box office opens at 10 a.m., she joins the crowd that has gathered. The appeal is twofold: beautiful music and the lure of an irresistible bargain – special \$1 tickets for senior citizens.

The story continues with details about the concerts, then resumes below:

She's alive and full of fun without being a character. She winks when you ask about widowhood, "Going to find me a husband?"

In her checkered wool suit and green and blue striped blouse and a dashing gold-knit hat, Mrs. Alexander is a standout in the audience.

She settles down in Row G and explains she comes to every concert in this series. "I sat in the balcony last time but like it better down here. I like to see the musicians."

She remembers music from other times, but isn't one to wallow in memories nor worry about the future. "I don't have any plans for tomorrow. I'm living today."

"I've always loved music," she goes on, her blue eyes shining behind rimless glasses, "but I have no talent. We always had a piano at home."

She and her husband Louis, who worked for Tetley Tea, used to drive from Newton to Boston for opera. "My husband loved the opera," she says.

Her taste encompasses any music that's happy. "It does something for me."

When the concert begins, she folds her hands in her lap and listens to Mozart's Symphony No. 33. "Oh, isn't that nice?" she says about the symphony one critic called sunny. It's her kind of music.

When a piano is wheeled out for soloist John Browning for Prokofieff's Second Piano Concerto, she sighs, "Oh, I love that." But the concerto, in a minor key and full of percussion, is not entirely to her liking.

"It's a cultivated taste.



Photos contributed

Hazel Alexander pictured from an article in The Los Angeles Times, Feb. 16, 1972.

The more you hear, the more you like it. Imagine being able to write music like that!" But today's wasn't the uplifting kind she prefers.

"This wasn't harmonious," she says about the program, including Dvorak's Sixth Symphony. "I was thrilled to bits with last time's Mozart."

Still, this has been a good afternoon. Mrs. Alexander talks about her life, her career as an Army nurse, her first trip to Los Angeles in 1919.

She keeps on the go, swimming every warm day at the Ambassador Hotel or attending public meetings there. She rides the bus on her RTD pass to Santa Monica to a favorite restaurant for scallops. She says she enjoys life, but has no relatives here and worries about becoming ill alone.

Joining the crush of people streaming out into the sun, she reflects, "Nothing keeps me here but the music and the Music Center." And she's off, walking up Grand Ave., to her bus stop.

Betty Liddick, "Musical Interlude for Senior

Citizens," (The Los Angeles Times, Feb. 16, 1972).

Hazel Alexander enjoyed over 10 more years of life, hopefully full of music. She passed away on Nov. 16, 1982, at age 90.

If you would like to help us honor Hazel Frances Sweetland Alexander or another Brunswick County WWI veteran, email the Friends of Ft. Caswell Rifle Range at ftcaswellrifle@gmail.com or go to caswellrifle.com.

Donations continue to be sent supporting the historical preservation of the 1918 World War I Fort Caswell Rifle Range Memorial and the book featuring all the men and women that served in the Great War from Brunswick County. Send donations to Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range, 5 Foxfire Trace, Caswell Beach, NC 28465.

On Saturday, April 4, at 11 a.m., another Roll Call will be held beside the 1918 rifle range in Caswell Beach. The public is welcome. Bring a folding chair. Please park in

condo parking lots.

**Sweetland Ethel M. order clerk (Pea.)  
b. 12 Beacon  
Eva M. stenog. (B.), b. 12 Beacon  
Hazel F. student, b. 12 Beacon  
James M. shoe cutter, h. 12 Beacon  
Louis R. clerk (S.), b. 12 Beacon**

The 1912 City Directory shows the Sweetland family.

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 Codu, Demina, N. M.: Mary M. Scheltz, Nellie Fort Caswell assignment. (The American Journal of Nursing, Vol. 19, No. 3, December 1918).