Helen Vail Stephens

Helen Stephens was born in Lacrosse, Wisconsin on August 28, 1882 to Henry Crawford Stephens (1851-1934) a farmer and Annie Susan Reynolds Stevens (1858-1923). Henry was born in Connecticut and Annie in Illinois. The family would move to Hastings, Minnesota. On April 6, 1917 the United States declared war on Germany and entered the World War that had been raging in Europe since 1914. Nurses would be needed, with only 403 nurses in the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) when the war began, the Surgeon General called for volunteers. Women in hospitals and private duty as well as many in training responded. Those already staffing hospitals could join the ANC through the Army's newly established base hospital system and through the Red Cross. By the end of the war, 21,480 women would serve at a time when women were not even allowed to vote.

Having volunteered, Helen was called to active service with the US Army Nurse Corps in June of 1918 as Base Hospital #56 was being trained in Georgia. The group was moved to Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina and entrained for Camp Merritt, New Jersey on August 22, 1918. They sailed for Brest, France on the SS Kroonland, arriving on September 12, 1918. She arrived in Allerey, France September 20, 1918 at Base Hospital #56 and immediately began to function as part of the hospital center that treated both wounds and contagious diseases. This hospital, with 1,800 beds treated 7,766 patients before it ceased to function on February 1, 1919. The war was over and Helen and the rest of the medical staff returned to the United States. They left from St Nazaire, France on the SS Mercury arriving at Newport News, Virginia on April 30, 1919. They were mustered out of service from Camp Dix, New Jersery on May 3, 1919.

Helen returned to her parent's farm in Hastings, Minnesota where she worked as a County Nurse for a while. She ended her career as Director of Public Nursing in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in 1948. She would retire in Ashville, North Carolina, where she would also pass away. Helen died on August 4, 1973 at the age of 90. She is buried there at the Cathedral of All Souls Cemetery.