

Federal State Budget Educational Establishment
Of Higher education “Penza state university”

Penza state university
Medical institute

Department of History
Course Paper
in History of Medicine

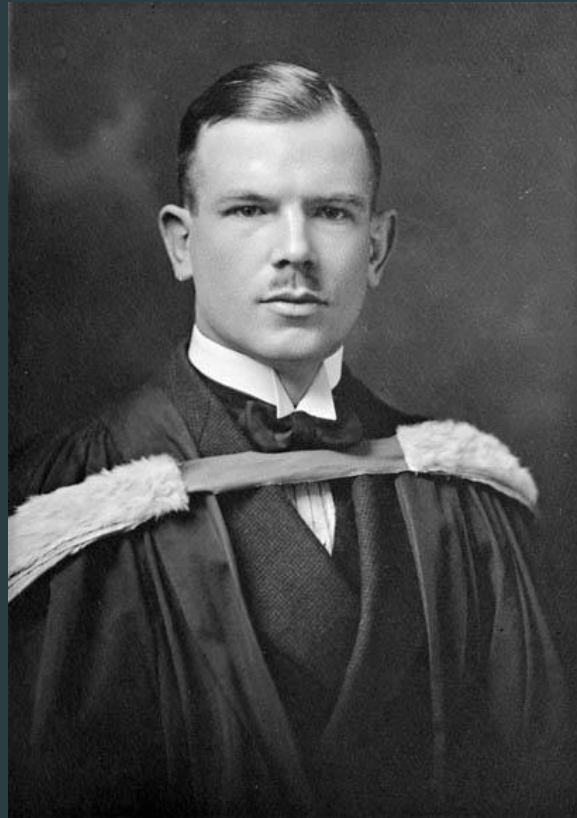
Norman Bethune

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Norman Bethune



Norman Bethune

- ▶ Henry Norman Bethune was a Canadian thoracic surgeon, early advocate of socialized medicine and member of the Communist Party of Canada, who came to international prominence first for his service as a frontline trauma surgeon supporting the Republican faction during the Spanish Civil War.
- ▶ Bethune helped bring modern medicine to rural China and often treated sick villagers as much as wounded soldiers.
- ▶ His service to the CPC earned him the respect of Mao Zedong, who wrote a eulogy dedicated to Bethune when he died in 1939.

Family History

- ▶ Bethune came from a prominent Scottish Canadian family, whose origins can be traced back to the Bethune/Beaton medical kindred who practiced medicine in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era.
- ▶ His great-great-grandfather, the Reverend Doctor John Bethune (1751–1815), the family patriarch, established the first Presbyterian congregation in Montreal, the first five Presbyterian churches in Ontario and was one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church of Canada.
- ▶ Bethune's great-grandfather, Angus Bethune (1783–1858), joined the North West Company (NWC) at an early age and travelled extensively throughout what was the North West of Canada at that time, exploring and trading for furs.

Early History

- ▶ Bethune was born in Gravenhurst, Ontario, on March 4, 1890. His birth certificate erroneously stated March 3. His siblings were his sister Janet and brother Malcolm.
- ▶ As a youth, Bethune attended Owen Sound Collegiate Institute, graduating in 1907. After a brief period as a primary school teacher Edgeley, in 1909, he enrolled at the University of Toronto to study physiology and biochemistry.
- ▶ He interrupted his studies for one year in 1911 to be a volunteer labourer-teacher with the Reading Camp Association (later Frontier College) at a remote lumber camp near Whitefish, Sudbury.
- ▶ He returned to the University of Toronto in the fall of 1912, this time in the faculty of medicine.

Contribution to medicine

- ▶ In 1917, with the war still in progress, Bethune joined the Royal Navy as a Surgeon-Lieutenant at the Chatham Hospital in England. In 1919, he began an internship specializing in children's diseases at The Hospital for Sick Children at Great Ormond Street, London. Later he went to Edinburgh, where he earned the FRCS qualification at the Royal College of Surgeons.
- ▶ In 1926 Bethune contracted tuberculosis. He sought treatment at the Trudeau Sanatorium in Saranac Lake, New York. At this time, Frances divorced Bethune and returned to her home in Scotland.
- ▶ In the 1920s the established treatment for TB was total bed rest in a sanatorium. While convalescing Bethune read about a radical new treatment for tuberculosis called pneumothorax. This involved artificially collapsing the tubercular (diseased) lung, thus allowing it to rest and heal itself.

Contribution to medicine

- ▶ In 1929 Bethune remarried Frances; the best man at the wedding was his friend and colleague, Dr. Graham Ross. They divorced again, for the final time, in 1933.
- ▶ In 1928 Bethune joined the thoracic surgical pioneer, Dr. Edward William Archibald, surgeon-in-chief of the McGill University's Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. From 1928 to 1936 Bethune perfected his skills in thoracic surgery and developed or modified more than a dozen new surgical tools.
- ▶ His most famous instrument was the Bethune Rib Shears, which remain in use today. He published 14 articles describing his innovations in thoracic technique. He started his career in surgery at the Toronto General Hospital in 1921.

Statue of Bethune at Wanping Fortress, Beijing

