



# Museum Matters

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IPSWICH HOSPITAL MUSEUM Inc.

Committee :

Chairman: M. Parcell  
Secretary: J. Kingston  
Treasurer: C. Marre

## Chairman's Chatterings

In this addition we read about determination and dedication to a cause to helping and assisting people as embodied in the life of Mary McCracken. This spirit continues to be alive and well at Ipswich Hospital Musuem. With a group of very active and energetic volunteers helping to transform a portion of the Archival Shed into an archive for the Museum Collection. With the arrival of the electronic medical record and digital records for most other things it has meant less reliance on physical paper storage. The volunteers have worked hard with various departments (Oral Health, Finance, HR, HIMS and BEMS) to sort the archival shed which has been transformed now for a space to permanently house the museum collection. The Archival Sheds goes a long way to meeting the archival standards which are set to identify the best environment to store and secure artifacts for the community to enjoy both now and into the future. As this is the last newsletter for 2021 I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the Museum Committee members, active volunteers and friends of the museum who meet each week to ensure the rich history of Ipswich Hospital can be enjoyed by the entire community. I would also like to do an end of year 'shout out' to both James Sturgess and Coco from the Ipswich Hospital Foundation for their continuing support. Merry Christmas and Blessings to all for 2022.

## Inside this issue:

Scarlet Fever Epidemic	2
Letter from a Nurse	3
Mary McCracken story ctd	3
Little Tidbits	3
Christmas Photos	4
Hospital Rules	4

## Ipswich Connection to Sister Elizabeth Kenny Mary McCracken Story

*Extracted from Obituary Courier Mail February 2012*

Much has been said about Sister Elizabeth Kenny, Australian nurse with an indomitable personality and revered throughout the world for her work in alleviating the plight of polio victims, but her adoring public knew little - or nothing - about the invaluable help she received from her adopted daughter Mary McCracken, who worked at **Ipswich Hospital from 1965-1973.**

Polio therapist Mary McCracken OAM was born on October 31, 1916, in Brisbane and died on November 1, 2011, in Caloundra. Her life is a remarkable tale. She was born Lucy Lilly Stewart to Robert Laurence and May Stewart. Her mother remarried and moved to Pittsworth, on the Darling Downs in 1925 when Lucy was nine. Times were tough, and her mother finally made the traumatic decision to give her daughter a better opportunity for a decent upbringing and placed an advertisement in the Toowoomba Chronicle pleading for someone to adopt her daughter. At that time Sr Kenny was looking for a companion for her mother

The only thing little Lucy (who became known as Mary Stewart Kenny after her adoption) could remember about the incident was the day when a woman arrived at their Pittsworth home and her mother packed her bag and said goodbye. She was told was that she was going for a holiday in the country but she did not see her mother for another 10 years. Later, she recalled sitting on the lap of Sister Kenny in the sidecar of a motorbike and, over the coming months and years, receiving hugs and kisses from the person she would call "Gran" - Sister Kenny's mother.

Young Mary remained a faithful and loving companion until Gran died in 1937. As a single woman, it was remarkable Sr Kenny was ever allowed to adopt, although likely her famously indomitable will caused the relevant government bureaucrats to bow to her wishes. With her iron character as a shield, she would have instructed them on what would be done and they no doubt would have obeyed with

some trepidation.

Mary attended Nobby State School, close to Sister Kenny's home base south of Toowoomba, but later was privately tutored.

Encouraged by Gran, she watched Sister Kenny carry out her work, learning at the footsteps of the master how to treat victims of paralysis by polio. In those pre-vaccination days, Sr Kenny's techniques were scorned by the medical establishment but had powerful backers including Joh Bjelke-Petersen, later to become premier. Mary would later travel the world spreading those techniques, giving victims hope, confidence and a renewed will to live. She managed the Kenny Clinic in Minneapolis, in the US, established the first Kenny Clinic in Winnipeg, Canada, as well as visiting Argentina and Costa Rica, where she practised in and established Kenny clinics funded by Reader's Digest. In 1945 she set up rehabilitation centres for paralysed victims of disease and war in Belgium.

After Sr Kenny's death in 1952, Mary carried on her work, becoming a public champion for the Kenny method - which, unlike the mainstream medical treatment of immobilisation using splints, relied on hot poultices and mobilising limbs. She was given many honours for her efforts, including the Gold Medal of the government of Argentina and the Gold Medal of the Club De Leones De Cartago Costa Rica.

*Story continues on page 3*



## Scarlet Fever Epidemic

We all hope for the successful resolution of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the return of health and prosperity to our community.

Researching the hospital history, an article in *The Queensland Times* concerning a threatening epidemic of scarlet fever in 1891, presages many of the issues that have again arisen 130 years later.

Scarlet fever (scarlatina) is a bacterial infection, spread by coughing or sneezing or touching surfaces with the bacteria on it and transferring the bacteria to the mouth or nose. It is highly infectious and was a major cause of death in children during the 1800s. There is still no vaccine, but the impact of the disease was mitigated by the invention of antibiotics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So contagious was the disease that the Hospital Board refused to accept infected patients in 1890 because of the risk to other patients and staff, until a separate isolation ward was built. A tent with a wooden floor at the western edge of the campus was the solution provided. In 1891 as further cases occurred an isolation ward was partitioned off in the main fever ward so the tent was no longer used; a "hot box" was investigated to use heat to sterilise patients clothing and bedding instead of burning them. Ipswich Council, which was the Public Health authority, was asked for assistance.

The following has been extracted from the scathing press report of the Council's reply.

*"Queensland Times, Ipswich Herald and General Advertiser (Qld. : 1861 - 1908), Thursday 30 April 1891, page 2.*

*"We are the custodians of the public health," said his Worship the Mayor, at Monday's meeting of the Council, "but we are also the custodians of the public wealth." That is a statement which cannot be refuted.*

*Evidently, the Council, however, were of opinion that the public wealth was by far the most important object of the two, and that the other was only at secondary importance - indeed, was hardly worthy of their consideration judging by their decision with reference to the letter from the secretary of the Ipswich Hospital with regard to the outbreak of scarlet fever."*

The writer pointed out that scarlet fever is a most infectious disease, and frequently spread rapidly throughout a whole town and district. The results would be appalling as far as finding accommodation for their treatment at the Hospital is concerned. The medical and nursing staff had already sufficient work to perform, and the expense to the institution would, without doubt, be the means of militating against its efficiency for years. It would be a calamity to not only Ipswich, but the whole of the surrounding district which every individual, private or public, should do his utmost to avert.

*"Already the treatment of the two cases at the hospital is proving rather expensive Proper*

*means have had to be devised for their isolation, and two nurses one for the day and another for the night have to be kept to attend upon them alone. The letter from the secretary of the institution should, therefore, have received far more consideration at the hands of the aldermen, the majority of whom appeared to think that it was presumption on the part of the Hospital authorities to ask that provision should be made so that they would be to some extent recouped for the patients' maintenance. Instead of sneering at the Hospital committee, by hinting that they would soon want all the rates, they would have shown far better taste had they calmly deliberated upon the subject as its importance deserved."*

The reporter emphasised also that as 'custodians of the public health' the council could have considered the fact that town cabs were being used to convey persons suffering from contagious diseases to the institution, and it would be almost impossible to stamp out disease while public vehicles were used for this. If they were that anxious about the health of their constituents, they should ban licensed vehicle proprietors from taking persons so suffering in their conveyances, and provide a vehicle to do so.

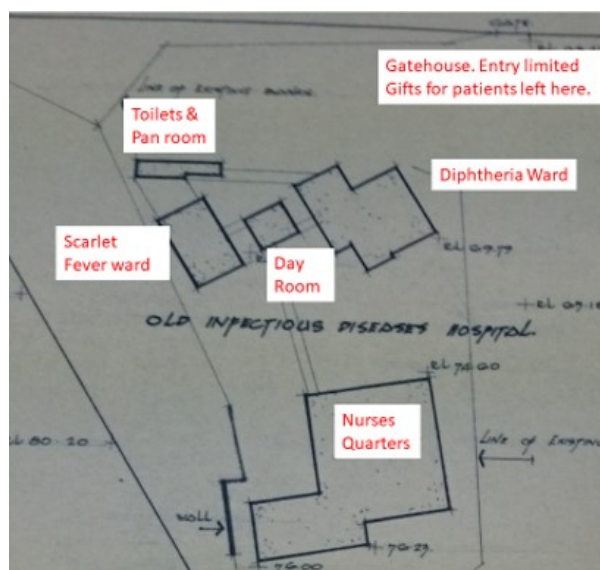
*"But, no; the representatives of the ratepayers*

*are not going to assist the hospital authorities in the least in checking the disease."*

*"In effect they say, "We have assisted you enough already; we have given you a donation; we have a number of Hospital tickets; our Health officer will give the scarlet fever patients a ticket saying whether, in his opinion, their friends are able to pay or not; and then we wash our hands of the affair. They can get to the Hospital as they like, and the disease can spread as it likes."*

The writer said there were questions to be seriously considered by council - how long would those tickets last, if there is an outbreak of scarlatina, and every patient had to be admitted on a ticket from the Health Officer; were those tickets ever intended for such an outbreak; and, if those tickets all run out, on whose tickets are Corporation labourers to be admitted if they are disabled? The council should be ever ready to prevent the spread of disease.

*"In the present instance they have failed to do their duty as the custodians of the public health, and we hope that they will, as soon as possible, amend their recent decision by resolving to, at least, devise some means other than a licensed vehicle for conveying persons suffering from contagious diseases to the Hospital."*



1917—the Infectious Disease Hospital on the site of the now Renal Unit. Nurses' Quarters is now Cribb House.



Nurse Margaret Fox sitting on the wall with the Infectious Disease Hospital behind. This wall is still in place near Cribb House. Nr Fox was the mother of Sr Marge Bulmer, Ipswich trained and a senior nurse of many years.



To allow air to circulate the epidemic wards were open pavilions with roll-up blinds as walls. Cases of infectious disease declined with immunisation and public health improvements.

## Letters from a Nurse

Continuing our insight into a new nurse's experiences at Ipswich Hospital in her first year. After extensive research of 1890 records, one of our museum volunteers has composed fictional letters from a nurse to a friend relating her view of hospital life at that time. The information is based on historically recorded facts.

The letters are addressed from the Ipswich Hospital, Denmark Hill, Ipswich.

1st June 1890

My Dear Friend,

Hello again. It is a month since my last letter, and I am now quite used to the hospital routine and have a better understanding of the workings of this place.

About 20 people are employees of the hospital. Doctor Thornton, the Medical Superintendent, is responsible for all the medical matters, the treatment and well-being of all the patients; and the direction of all the medical staff. The medical staff includes Mr J.B. Thornton, the dispenser, who makes many of the medicines and administers the medical treatments ordered by the Doctors. The senior nurses who rule my life are Edith Loader, the head nurse, and Eliza Hussey, the night superintendent (she has been on night duty for more than two years!), and then half a dozen nurses, of which I am still the most junior.

The honorary consulting staff - Drs. Lightoller, Dunlop and Chaucing-Neill, from the town, and Dr Owens an eye specialist from Brisbane - are consulted and assist in the difficult cases. A young man, Mr John Flynn, also "walks the

wards" with Dr. Thornton. He has studied in Melbourne, and after a year at our hospital for experience, he will sail to England to complete his medical training.

The matron has charge of the household: the cook and a kitchen maid make meals for 60 to 70 people (patients and staff, except for Dr Thornton who lives outside the hospital); two laundresses do all the washing and ironing; and a housemaid.

Outside is the Gatekeeper, who lives in the lodge by the front gate. He records the coming and going of everyone, and directs visitors and trades deliveries. When I have leave to go to town for a few hours or to church on Sunday my departure and return are recorded. There are also two gardeners. They maintain the formal gardens in front of the hospital, the vegetable garden and the grounds in general, as well as any heavy labour required about the building and grounds. A young lad, about 12, is the messenger. He runs errands, carries letters or notes around the hospital or to the shops and businesses in the town.

Overseeing the hospital is a Board of

Management, elected by the subscribers to the hospital... A committee of the board meets every fortnight to direct the business of the hospital. The Secretary to the Board, Mr Field, who has offices in Brisbane Street, manages the commercial side of the hospital (correspondence, finances, purchases, and contracts) as directed by the committee. Doctor Thornton submits a medical report, and before every committee meeting the House Committee does an inspection of the hospital to see it is running properly and to report on anything that needs attention. Mr Stephenson, whom you may remember was chairman at our school break up last year, is on the committee, as are Mr Shillito and Mr. Hancock, also fathers of our school friends

Since last I wrote I have received my first pay, £2 10s for the month. I felt quite rich, but after a few items of warm clothing, for it is bitterly cold up on this hill, and some presents for the family it was soon expended,

Your friend,  
Nurse Ella Banks

## Mary McCracken Story continued

In England, Mary met returned soldier Stewart McCracken and the pair married in Brisbane in 1946. In 1954 Mary planted a time capsule at the Sister Kenny School, Minneapolis, USA and went on to teach Kenny



Mary in later life

therapists in California from 1955 – 1957. The McCracken family returned to Brisbane and she worked at the Seven Oaks Spastic Centre from 1964-1965 and at Ipswich Hospital from 1965-1973.

She helped her husband in his gift shop until they retired to Caloundra.

In 1997 Mary was invested with the Order of Australia Medal by the Queensland Governor, Peter Arnison, for her service to nursing by assisting with the rehabilitation of poliomyelitis victims. During her retirement in Caloundra she kept busy fishing and was a member of the Country Women's Association and continued her 53-year involvement with the Mother's Union of the Anglican Church.

Mrs McCracken had two daughters, Mary and Heather. Her husband Stewart died in 2004.



During a recent cleanup museum volunteers found a copy of this timely article and photograph from magazine 'History Extra'. The article is superimposed on a background photograph.

## Little Tidbits

### Notice posted by Matron MacFarlane on January 22 1970

Members of the nursing staff who possess the disgusting habit of chewing gum, please refrain from "parking" your gum on crockery and cutlery in the dining room. Gum is not to be chewed on duty, in the School of Nursing, or the library. This notice should not be necessary.

### Memorandum to Sisters from Acting Matron Miss Elvery on October 23 1970

Would the ward sisters please see that the practice of placing a roll of toilet paper in each locker continues. Complaints have reached this office that the bed linen is being used instead of toilet paper and the laundry problem is therefore increased. Nursing staff must ensure that all pans on return to the

pan room are immediately emptied, cleaned and sterilised. The wardsmen cannot attend to the cleaning of pans, urinals and pan rooms if the nursing staff fail in their tasks.

### Notice posted by Matron MacFarlane on January 28 1972

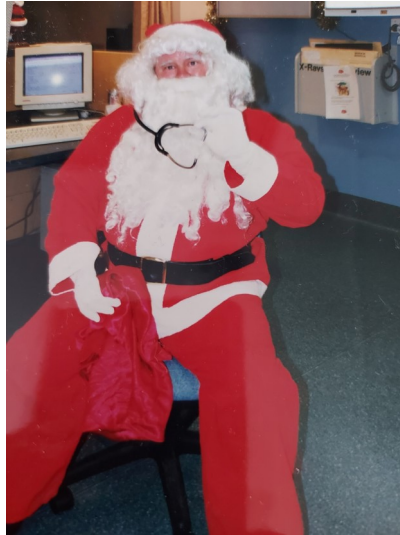
The following are the new charges for meals— Registered Nurses—30cents each. General Student Nurses—23 cents each. Assistant Nurses—23 cents each.

## Christmas Cheer

Museum volunteers recently discovered a photo album of Casualty Department (now Emergency) activities, probably in the late 1980s/early 1990s. The photos were taken by and included many of the department's staff members and hospital buildings. However, no names or dates were attached to the photos.



*Who are these jolly secret Santas?  
Casualty (Emergency) staff enjoying  
the festive season.*



## Merry Christmas

As 2020 draws to a close we reflect that once again we have lived through another unusual and difficult year.


Although the Ipswich Hospital Museum crew (volunteers) have access to the museum in Jubilee Building again it is still closed to the public. Recently the crew has been busy organising a storage area on the hospital campus to enable the museum's artifacts to be brought back from The Park—Centre for Mental Health. It is hoped that in the New Year the museum will open to the public once again. Thank you to Building and Maintenance staff and others who have helped in this endeavour.

We wish you all a safe and happy Christmas and New Year

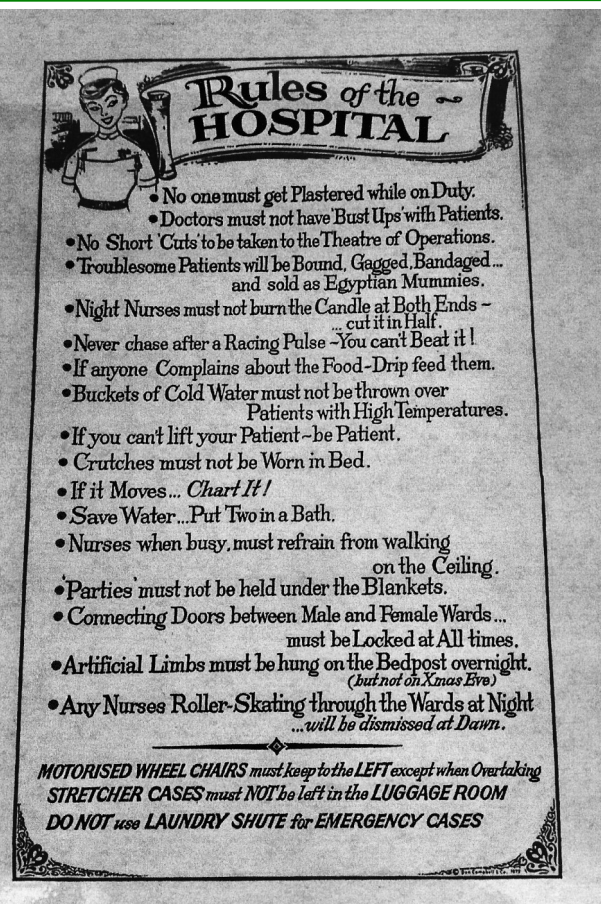
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Source unknown