

Discovering Greta – Research on Greta Towner by Margaret Doherty

Research Question: Examine the lives of a group of central Queensland trained nurses who joined the Australian Army Nursing Service and saw active service in the First World War. Discuss in terms of social expectations of the time; class, with reference to education, father's occupation and religion; their war experiences; and life after the war, with reference to the effects of their war experiences.

In 2013, Margaret Doherty examined the lives of a group of central Queensland trained nurses who served in the First World War. Included in her research was Sister Greta Norman Towner, from Blackall, who emigrated to the USA in 1921.

Doherty writes:

“While there Greta married an Australian dentist but the couple separated and Greta continued to work for the Veteran’s Administration indicating a strong link to First World War veterans. Greta was a strong woman who worked hard to create opportunities for an independent life.”

Doherty goes on to say of Greta Towner:

“The war had shown Greta that women and nurses could expand their roles and use initiative to achieve financial and personal independence and mobility. She had seen Egypt and Europe and now she was working in the United States. Prior to the war, single women were constrained by convention in travelling but now Greta was more experienced and had a greater sense of personal identity and she pushed the boundaries. Her brief unsuccessful marriage indicates that her independence and identity were at a level where she could again recreate a successful single life.”

Doherty’s research refers to Greta’s marriage to Harold Pascoe, a separation and went on to reference a second marriage in 1945 to Harry Maloney, a university coach from Stanford University, California, United States of America.

Why did Greta Towner go to America? What did exactly did she do in America? Did she ever come back to Australia?