

Discovering Greta – Return to Australia after Second World War

First World War nurse, Sister Greta Towner, emigrated from Blackall in Central Western Queensland to the USA in 1921. Newspaper articles announce her return to Australia in 1946, 25 years after leaving Australia.

1946 Greta and her husband visit in the 'west' and travel onto Rockhampton then Brisbane

'PERSONAL ITEMS', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld: 1878 - 1954), 19 August 1946, p. 3, viewed 22 August 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article56403698>

Professor and Mrs Harry Maloney (Stanford University, California) who had been visiting friends in the West, arrived in Rockhampton by Friday's train and left by the evening plane for Brisbane, where Professor Maloney will be the guest speaker at the weekly Rotary Club luncheon. Mrs Maloney served both at Lemnos and in France in the 1914-1918 war as Sister Greta Towner, of Purtora, Yalleroi, and trained at the Rockhampton Children's Hospital. Mrs Challands and Miss Lucy Bertram were entertained by Professor and Mrs Maloney at the Blue Bird cafe at afternoon tea.

Greta Towner Maloney and Harry Maloney visit 'the west',

Rockhampton and Brisbane (Source: *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld: 1878 - 1954), 19 August 1946)

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1946 Greta makes comment on the 'Australian Girl'

'AUSTRALIAN GIRL IS SMART AND PRETTY.', *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane, Qld. : 1933 - 1954), 16 July, 1946 , p. 7, viewed 22 August, 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article49352492>

AUSTRALIAN GIRL IS SMART AND PRETTY

AFTER an absence of 25 years in the United States, Australian-born Mrs. Harry W. Moloney finds Australian girls very smartly dressed and extremely pretty.

"I don't blame the American boys for falling in love with them," she said yesterday. "They have natural beauty, and owe less to artificial aid than the American girls."

Mrs. Moloney has come with her husband, Professor Harry Moloney, of Stanford University, California, to spend some months with her mother, Mrs. E. T. Towner, and family at Morningside.

As Sister Greta Towner, she was in the Australian Army Nursing Service in World War 1, and served in Egypt, France, and Gallipoli, including 12 months duty on a hospital transport.

Mrs. Moloney was wearing nylon stockings yesterday, and she commented that since she had been able to obtain them she had worn no others. Science was making tremendous strides in textiles, she said, and the spun glass fabrics which she had in her home were a delight, though care was needed in laundering them.

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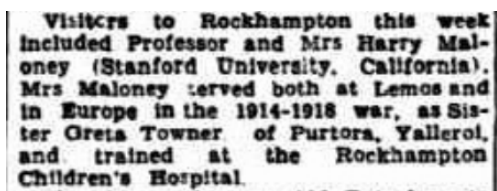
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delight, though care was needed in laundering them.

1946 Greta and her husband are back in Rockhampton (NB Purtora, Yalleroi, is outside Blackall)

'Letter From Home.', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld. : 1878 - 1954), 24 August 1946, p. 5, viewed 22 August, 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article56400390>



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Visitors to Rockhampton this week included Professor and Mrs Harry Maloney (Stanford University, California). Mrs Maloney served both at Lemnos and in Europe in the 1914-1918 war, as Sister Greta Towner, of Purtora, Yalleroi, and trained at the Rockhampton Children's

Hospital.

Greta Towner Maloney and her husband Harry Maloney visit Rockhampton again. (Source: 'Letter From Home.', Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton, 24 August 1946)

Comment

These articles hold Sister Greta Towner in high esteem, she is now Mrs Maloney, her husband's profession is described but, Greta's own story is clear, each of the articles references her maiden name and service in the First World War. Unlike articles about her arrival in Australia in 1919 she is titled as Sister Greta Towner (not Nurse Towner).

The references to her service in the AANS AIF accurately reflect her war record – serving in Egypt, on Lemnos Island during the Gallipoli campaign, on Sea Transport duty and in Europe – England and France.

There are references to journeys to Rockhampton where she and her sister had nursed (another nursed in Brisbane), out west to see family and friends making it very clear Greta's longstanding links with central Queensland. Who did she visit? Did she get back to Blackall or visit her brother Edgar Towner VC MC in the Longreach district? The articles clearly position Greta's family as from the property *Purtora*, Yalleroi (outside of the town of Blackall). This was the property selected by the family after first settling on "Glencoe" station, where Greta was born.

The Courier Mail, a Brisbane newspaper references this as Greta's first trip home in 25 years. It is now 1946, the Second World War had ended in 1945. The website *Australia's War 1939 -45* records of this time:

"From December 1941 and during the next four years American servicemen and women were a continuous presence in Australian life... they were camped or billeted in major cities as they trained or prepared to be sent to the Pacific front... Many were stationed in northern Australia – in Townsville, Cairns, Brisbane, Rockhampton – and others returned from the front for rest and recreation or to convalescence in Australia...More than 12,000 Australian women became American war brides, most of whom returned to the US with their new husbands at the end of the war."

Source: *Australia's War 1939 -45* <http://www.ww2australia.gov.au/allin/yanksdownunder.html> (accessed 16/09/2015)

In this context, the interviewing of Greta Towner Maloney sees her positioned uniquely to comment on what had become a difficult situation for many Australians who had grown to resent the highly paid American serving members. She was an Australian who had seen war service, married an American and had been living in the USA.

Greta Towner Maloney's homecoming coverage in the press in 1946 sees her service as a First World War nurse valued and remembered. It also provides the only opportunity to date for the students of Blackall State School who have been researching her, to hear Greta's voice. She comes across as diplomatic. The visit home raises questions such as: Who did she visit? Did the people she visited keep a record of her visit? Did Greta keep a diary of her visit home? Have letters she might have sent home before her arrival in Australia survived? There is much still to find out about this ANZAC – her actions are understood but not her thoughts, feelings and opinions.

By Avril Fazel