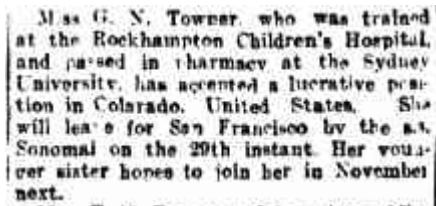


Discovering Greta – Sister Towner, the university student and emigrant

Sister Greta Towner returns from nursing in the First World War to take up new opportunities. A very short article provides much for researchers to make historical enquiries about.

Source: 1921 'PERSONAL NEWS.', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld.: 1878 - 1954), 2 June, p. 6, viewed 15 September 2015, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article53953904>



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Miss G. N. Towner, who was trained at the Rockhampton Children's Hospital, and passed in pharmacy at the Sydney University, has accepted a lucrative position in Colorado, United States. She will leave for San Francisco by the S.S. Sonomai on the 29th instant. Her younger sister hopes to join her in November

Comment:

This article reveals Sister Towner's life taking new directions. She has returned from the First World War and she has decisions to make.

University of Sydney archives confirm Greta Towner completed practical pharmacy subjects offered at the university, there exists no record of her sitting or passing theory subjects.

The University of Sydney's official History – *Australia's First* ed by Turney et al (1991, Sydney) shows that at the time of Greta studying pharmacy, the Pharmacy Board of NSW administered the qualifications of pharmacists. There was a Board of Studies in Pharmacy established by the university but it did not introduce a Diploma in Pharmaceutical Science until 1933, and a degree in Pharmacy was not awarded until 1964.

This line of enquiry revealed a record of a *Mary E Towner* passing Chemistry exams in 1918 and 1919, as a pharmacy student. An enquiry into the Towner family tree is a possible line of enquiry that may reveal further information on Greta Norman Towner's time at the University of Sydney if a familial link exists.

Greta Towner's university attendance in 1920 indicates a woman with a sense of independence and willingness to break new ground. The 1921 Australian Census showed that only 29% of university enrolments were women. She was a woman who was willing to step outside the bounds of the more traditional role expected of women in Australia of the time. Kirsty Harris in her book *More than Bombs and Bandages* describes how some AANS members took the role of sister dispensers in Egypt and on transport ships (against the wishes of pharmacists in Australia.) Perhaps Greta had witnessed or taken on this new role as her war record shows her service in both Egypt and on transport ships. Perhaps this why she took the step to take on studies in pharmacy – we do not know for sure.

As the article progresses, it reveals Greta Towner's ability to take on new challenges and forge a new life after service with her taking on a lucrative position in the United States. What was this position and did her younger sister join her? And if so, which younger sister – Carrie Glenora, Christianna Margaret or Clara Walker? How and why did Greta make this decision?

Through enquiries with the University of Sydney, who confirmed Greta's studies, the university has included Sister Towner on their website commemorating those who had attended the university and served in the First World War. See her entry here:

<http://beyond1914.sydney.edu.au/profile/39473/greta-norman-towner>

By Avril Fazel