

Moree Mob

Volume Two

# BURRUL WALLAAY (Big Camp)

*Researched by Noeline Briggs - Smith*

**Northern Regional Library and Information Service  
Moree N.S.W.**

2003

E. CONNOR



*The McMaster Ward, a ward for Aboriginal people only, was situated behind the new hospital kitchen and staff dining room, situated at the back of the Moree District Hospital. The new nurses quarters, a brick building, can be seen on the left of the McMaster Ward.*

*The McMaster Ward, situated to the right of the new nurses quarters, can be identified with the rainwater tank at the back. By the early 1960's there were no overhead hot water pipes that ran from the boiler room, which linked this ward to the general part of the hospital.*

*A stone for the new nurses building was set by the Hon. W. F. Sheahan Q.C. L.L.B. M.L.A. Minister for Health, November 1st, 1958.*

*No records of the McMaster Ward, especially those of the Aboriginal staff and patients, are known to have survived. The State Records Act replaced the Archive Act of the 1960's in 1998. Until the 1960's departments were not compelled by law to keep records and unfortunately floods and fire played a major part in the loss of past records at the hospital.*

*The McMaster Ward closed in April 1965, two months after the 'Freedom Ride' and it later became a geriatric ward.*

### McMaster Ward

*The following section is dedicated to the many Aboriginal people from the community of Moree who accepted their share of responsibility in caring for their own people. This dedicated group, mainly consisted of united Aboriginal women and during a span of over thirty years, set out to train, educate and inspire, with their sisterhood and loyalty to administer a hospital service from a ward, especially founded for their people at the back of the Moree District Hospital, named the McMaster Ward. Although this ward segregated them, Aboriginal people were employed to care for their own. It is believed the ward was the private residence of, and named after Mr. C. J. McMaster, who designed the Moree District Hospital and was also the first Chairman of the Board in 1889.*

*Aboriginal health was a great problem in Moree due to the lack of fresh water and sanitation service in the camps. The first seven houses built on the Moree Aboriginal Reserve Station in 1935 were built without bathrooms or connected water and sanitation was still a problem because when it rained the Councils sanitary truck could not access the reserve by the gravel road. Minutes taken from meetings held at the Council, under Mr. Hovenden, the Health Inspector's report, shows the failure of the collection of sanitary pans left over seven days.*

*Minutes of the duly convened meeting held on Monday the 18th June, 1934.*

*Recommending that the penalty for neglect of sanitary services be enforced in the case of Aboriginal Public School, 7 days, J. Frost, 7 days J. Acton, 2 days, C.C. Wilson.  
Adopted.*

*Disease was prevalent and cases of scarlet fever and diphtheria were recorded.*

*Meeting of the Council of the Municipality of Moree, Monday 26 March 1934.*

*(3) Directing the attention of Council to the diphtheria cases at Moree Hospital; of the same staff nursing both infectious and ordinary patients and suggesting that representations be made for a separate staff and for the erection of a marquee at the hospital. Moved Alderman Ezzy, seconded Alderman Daniel.*

*This is the first known type of segregated accommodation for Aboriginal patients in 1934 as the marquee (or army tent) then became available for their use. With the hospitals intent on moving them out of the marquee into the vacant McMasters residence, saw the Aboriginal community in 1937, raise monies to equip the Ward at their first Ball, held in the only hall they were allowed into, the Parish Hall at the rear of the Anglican Church in Albert Street. Soon after the Ball, Aboriginal patients were moved into the McMaster Ward but it was not officially opened until 1942.*

*An inauguration of a Hospital Auxiliary at a ceremony on the Moree Aboriginal Reserve took place about this time before World War II, where generous praise and appreciation was given for the efforts of what the dark people were doing to help themselves, by the non- Aboriginal people of Moree.*

*At first, non-Aboriginal people operated and staffed the McMaster Ward from the main hospital. Because of the wards location at the back of the hospital being a distance away, non-Aboriginals were very reluctant to work there, especially at night, therefore, Aboriginal women, and much later, a few Aboriginal men were employed to care for their own people.*

*The Sister-in-Charge was non-Aboriginal and the Doctors who attended the ward visited their patients most every day. During the time the McMaster Ward was in operation the other doctors in staff were Dr. Hollingsworth, Doctor's Geoffrey and Ronald Hunter, Dr Gall, Dr. Egan, Dr. Champion and Dr. Lorna Williams who married the Welfare Officer, Mr. Burless.*

*In Moree, there were very limited employment opportunities for women, but during the time of its existence, the McMaster Ward was the largest place of employment for Aboriginal women. It was the only establishment where young Aboriginal girls could gain a career outside of working in hotels or as domestics in private homes and out on homesteads. Aboriginal men were employed in the boiler room, as gardeners, laundry attendants, handymen, and later, wardsmen.*

*The McMaster Ward was also a major meeting place and communication centre for the Aboriginal community. Messages from other Aboriginal communities in the districts of Boomi, Mungindi, Toomelah and Boggabilla could be sent to the McMaster Ward via the hospital. Aboriginal people who lived in the outer districts were also hospitalised in the McMaster Ward. Some family members camped along the banks of the Mehi River near the hospital for many weeks waiting until their relative was well enough to travel the long distance home. Nurse Alma Tighe also housed many of the Aboriginal people from out of town who camped along the riverbanks, accommodating them in her own home for many weeks. Dr. Geoffrey Hunter was the Government doctor, and all patients from Boggabilla were his.*

*It was soon realised there was a need for accommodation closer to the hospital in Moree for the women from the outer Aboriginal communities to move to before they were due to give birth. A house was built on the Moree Aboriginal Reserve to accommodate the women whose confinement was close and Mr Ben Wright and his wife Maude were employed as caretakers of this pre-natal type hostel for the women who lived out of town. Mrs Maude Wright later became a domestic at the McMaster Ward where she worked for over twenty years.*

*The McMaster Ward was built along the lines of a private house with the frontage facing east. Rooms ran of a main hall that ran straight down the middle of the building to a back verandah. The kitchen was centrally located and verandahs also ran across the front and down one side. The side verandah later became an out-patients section with the front verandah for a waiting room. Three large rooms had open fireplaces fuelled by wood in the winter months, as was the large stove in the kitchen. One of the two rooms in front was for female patients and the other for males.*

*The children's room was centrally situated across the hall from the kitchen. This was ideally positioned for the night nurse for she could sit at the kitchen table to write her report whilst having a view of the children's room.*

*The four bed maternity room, with a small delivery room, was straight across the hall from the infectious room. Infectious patients, who suffered mainly from tuberculosis, were also cared for at the back end of the side verandah. This area had a toilet and bathroom used mainly by male patients.*

*Across the back of the building was a verandah that had been sectioned into a bathroom, treatment room, toilet, and pan room and sterilising room. Sometimes the steriliser was placed at the foot of the bed in the delivery room and many an Aboriginal mother viewed the birth of her child from the reflection of the shiny equipment.*

*Meals were prepared in the main kitchen of the hospital and a domestic from the McMaster Ward would pick up the food. Patients meals were served on a tray in bed and those who could get up and about took their meals at the kitchen table, and after meals, helped with the washing and wiping up.*

*A long covered walkway joined the McMaster Ward to the main hospital. It reached to where the Sisters dining room and kitchen was in the original part of the hospital. Pipes carrying hot water ran under the cover of the long walkway and conveyed hot water to the ward.*

*Aboriginal patients were prepared for an operation in the ward then pushed across to the operating theatre via this walkway. Many Aboriginal patients can remember being pushed across to the operating theatre under the walkway with the hot water pipes overhead, but cannot remember coming back the same way, the reason being they would still be under the effects of chloroform.*

*In the Ward it was a long wait for pain relief because the Aboriginal nurses had to run across to the main hospital building for drugs that were dispensed only from there by the Matron or Sister-in Charge. By the time the nurse arrived back one's threshold of pain was so severe that you didn't know whether to lay on the bed or crawl up the wall.*

*The diagram shows how close the rooms were in the ward but there were no known cases of cross infection to have occurred during the thirty years and over the ward had been operating.*

*A hall divided the kitchen and infectious room, and it led onto the side verandah giving access to the morgue when needed.*

*There was no transport for Aboriginal people who needed to receive help in a hurry. There was no access to a phone in an emergency. Someone who was young and could run fast or ride a bicycle, was sent to get help from either Ma Smith at the Top Camp or Aunty Fanny Pitt at the reserve. It was not unusual to see someone from the Aboriginal community running, carrying the injured person, and Ma Smith peddling on her bike following him or her to the Ward. You walked, rode or were doubled on a pushbike, also pushed in a pram to the outpatients to receive attention. Many of the men walked and carried their children on top of their shoulders or piggy backed them. In earlier year's horse and cart carried those from out of town to Moree.*



Senior Nurse Alma Tighe

**“Aunty Alma”**

*On the 15th June 1971, in the Wiradjuri Hall at the Moree Aboriginal Reserve, Mrs Alma Tighe, whom some admirers have called “the aristocrat of the Aborigines”, died as she lived - helping others. Alma Tighe, nee Duncan was the wife of Edward Henry Tighe and they married in Moree in 1932.*

*An accomplished dancer, she had been teaching youngsters ballroom dancing in preparation for the forthcoming Moree National Aboriginal Day Celebrations, just two and a half weeks away. Suffering from a heart condition and knowing that she should take it easy, she nevertheless danced a couple of rounds of a muzurka to encourage the learners. Soon after she collapsed and died in the hall surrounded by her people.*

*Alma Tighe’s death came as a blow to her Moree people. Charming, cultured and dependable, she had long been an inspiration to the group trained in nursing in the McMaster Ward at the Moree District Hospital, where she became Senior Nurse. She continued to use her skills privately after she had retired from her job.*

*Alma Tighe solved problems with commonsense, plain talk and practical help. For example, if a family had no clothes for a special occasion and were too poor to buy them, Mrs Tighe would help make the suits and frocks that were needed. Similarly, if sickness came to any family, she would be there to nurse them better. Families from out of town would be taken into her own home and accommodated until their relative was well enough to leave the McMaster Ward and travel the long distance home. Alma Tighe did not recognize the strong class distinction observed amongst so many Moree Aboriginal people. She never looked down on anyone or classed anyone out.*

*Alma Tighe was proud of her Aboriginality and whenever Aboriginal people were in trouble, “Aunty Alma” would be there.*

*The manager at the reserve would send for an ambulance only in an extreme emergency. Women who were due to give birth always seemed to go into labour in the early hours of the morning, and rather than disturb the manager, they would send someone to fetch a taxi which was owned by Mr. Dave Weir to take them to hospital.*

*The late Rolly Williams was an ambulance driver and his late brother William "Billy", drove a taxi. Billy was known to always comment on how he was an "ambulance driver too", because he transported so many of the mothers-to-be in his taxi.*

*There were very few Aboriginal people admitted to the main hospital before the McMaster Ward came into being because Aboriginal people looked to their own for care. Being hospitalised in a ward of their own, they trusted and felt more at ease because they knew the nurses with familiar faces, especially children and babies who as young as they were, could tell the difference between a black or white face.*

*Memories of the Ward are recalled with a mixture of emotions that were happy and humorous, rewarding and sometimes sad. The nurses remember "Uncle Tom" Brennan who worked in the Boiler Room. When they were rostered for night duty, his welcome face about four o'clock every morning, would bring them over a billycan of hot black tea and thick slices of hot buttered toast, that tasted like no other because it was made Uncle Toms way.*

*There was a child patient aged six or seven who had a fear of frogs as well as the ailment that he was hospitalised for. One of the nurses caught a large green frog from under the rainwater tank at the back of the building. She carefully taped the frog's back legs to the side of the bathtub with sticking plaster to hold it. She then coaxed the child to the bathroom and slowly pushed open the door. The child could not stop laughing at the sight of the frog sitting on the edge of the bathtub with a lit cigarette in its mouth. Without intention, the nurse helped the child overcome some of his fear of frogs. He looked back over his shoulder still laughing as nurse led him back to his room. As they were walking away the cigarette grew smaller as the frog took in the smoke and became bigger, bigger and bigger.*

*One of the long-term patients loved to creep up on the nurses and other patients and grab them from behind, laughing as he near frightened the life out of them. One evening, after he had played his joke on yet another victim, and was walking back down the poorly lit hallway of the ward, a nurse who had put a white hospital sheet over her head to resemble a ghost, crept up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder. They caught up with him before he reached Bates Store, running for his life as he headed for the old wooden bridge.*

*An incident, although not considered funny at the time, was when a patient - "Uncle Abby" - went missing. The Aboriginal staff that went looking for him began to panic when they could not find him anywhere. He was not down on the riverbank or cadging a smoke from the man in the boiler room. The patients even looked everywhere for him. In desperation they all began to call out his name. They all near turned white when Uncle walked out of the morgue. Uncle Abby was a tall man and short tempered with the children. He went to have a nap on the long cool slab in the morgue "to get away from the crying kids" he said.*



*Thelma Waters, nee Roberts.  
Nurses Aide - McMaster Ward 1949.*



*Delma Riley, nee Wright (deceased)  
Nurses Aide - McMaster Ward 1949.*



*Muriel May Tighe, born 2nd July 1929, daughter of Claude Tighe and Sarah nee Griffith. May, as she was known, was a nurse for many years at the McMaster Ward, and she was mainly rostered for night duty. She would walk to work at night and carried over her arm, her well-laundered uniform that she preferred to do herself, to begin work at 10pm. Many of the Aboriginal patients would wait up for her to bring them the news of the day and what was happening within the Aboriginal community. May often stopped at Bassos Cafe, one of the cafes where Aboriginal people were served in east Moree, and purchased special treats for some of the patients in her ward.*

*I remember well the night that my first child was born in the McMaster Ward when May was on duty. She kept hurrying me to give birth for she wished my child to be born on her birthday. My daughter Jo Ann arrived with only five minutes to spare at five to twelve on the 2nd July 1958.*

*May's union with Bruce Cutmore gave her one son only, Trevor, better known as "Drifter". May passed away 31st July 1999, aged 70.*

*I gave birth to all three of my children in the McMaster Ward. The birth of my last child was long and difficult. Aunty Alma had a day off but came to see how things were with me and immediately summonsed the doctor. My daughter lived only because she was forcibly removed with instruments. I was exhausted and drifted in and out of sleep. I could hear my baby crying in the bassinette at the foot of my bed but I was too weak to help her and my breasts had no milk to nourish her with. What seemed like days after, I opened my eyes and could not see my baby or hear her crying. In the next bed sat a very large Aboriginal woman with her baby on one of her breasts and my daughter on the other. Being mothers, no words were needed; we just smiled at each other as I slipped back into sleep.*

*Some of the Aboriginal women lost their babies. It was heartbreaking to see a mother sitting on the back steps of the Ward, with a face wet with tears, looking towards the morgue, watching her husband place a small coffin on the back seat of a taxi to be taken to the cemetery for burial.*

*The nurses were emotionally drained when they had to prepare children for burial that had drowned or fell into a copper of hot water. They had to -at one time- remove with tweezers, a man's nylon shirt that had been burned into his skin after he was struck and killed by lightning whilst riding a bicycle on the mission road.*

*Not knowing a child only had one lung (there was no x-ray unit here then) she was given chloroform to enable the doctors to stitch her badly cut foot, caused by stepping down into the gutter onto a shattered bottle that was concealed in a brown paper bag. She died aged 9.*

*A boy died from injuries he received, after he put his arm into machinery to retrieve his arrow when playing cowboys and Indian's.*

*Many cases of poisoning eventuated from children drinking kerosene out of cordial bottles. Kerosene was the same colour as water and lemonade. Over the years its colour was finally changed to blue, as it is today.*

*Water was life and meant survival for those who lived in the camps. Gastroenteritis in the summer time claimed many children's lives. The colour bar extended through to death, for as many as 70 children are buried in the Aboriginal Section of the Moree Cemetery. This number was in the Church of England section alone, and does not include the numbers that were buried in the other denominational parts of the cemetery. In the 1950's in one row there are 21 children buried with one adult. I call Mrs. Vera Whitfield the 'Mother of them all' as she is layed to rest among them in the same row. Burials in the Aboriginal section began with Mr. Charles Whiteman in May 1940 and ceased with Mr. Leonard Law in July 1968.*

*Whatever the motive was (with Reverend Border conducting the first burial) there are 217 Aboriginal people layed to rest in the Aboriginal Section of the Moree Cemetery. The area was researched, graves identified, beautified and a tranquillity area was dedicated to the Kamilaroi / Gamilaroi people, by the Gwydir Family History Society, a group of non-Aboriginal members who considered that even Aboriginal people were "families".*

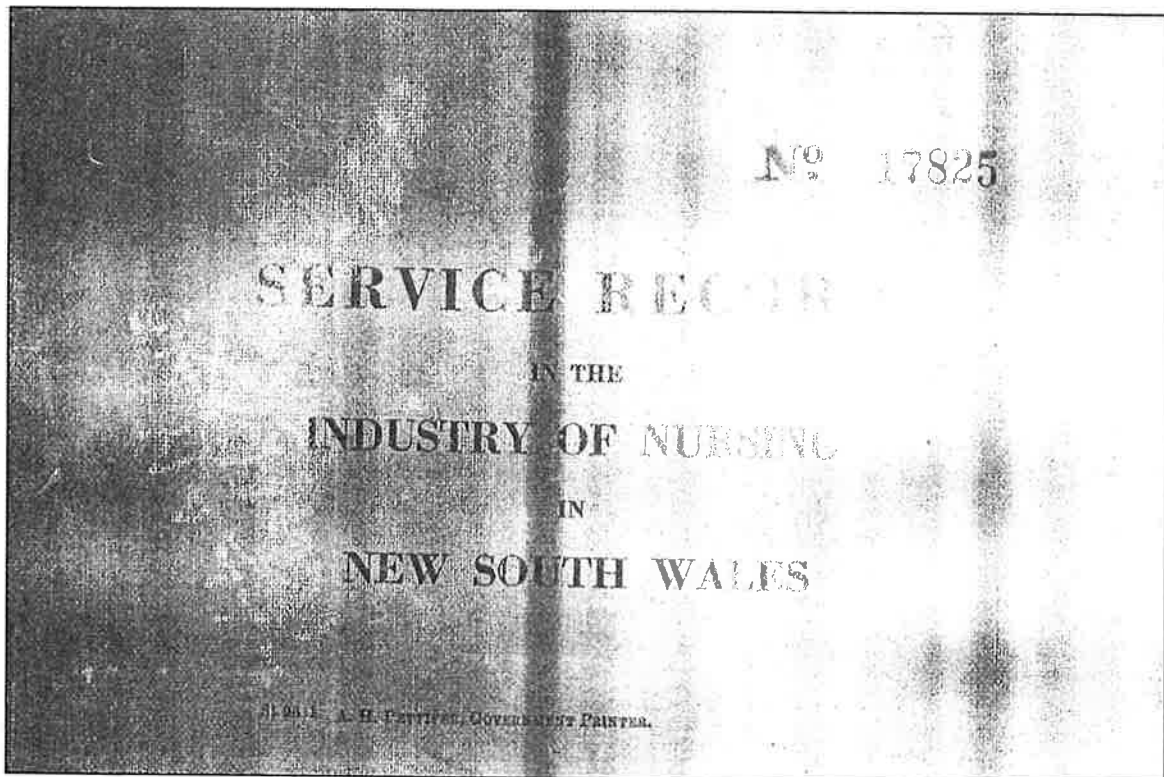
*The ward itself was not as regimental as the main hospital and the Aboriginal staff understood and communicated better with patients, for they knew their ways.*

*Doctors would liaise with the Aboriginal nurses seeking information in regards to their patients living conditions, and if those relatives could be trusted to carry out his instructions. This information was vital to the doctor and in this way the Aboriginal staff played a great roll in the healing of the patients. Communication about their people's ways and attitudes to non-Aboriginal staff of the Moree Hospital saw Aboriginal staff become the bridge between two cultures.*

*On cold winter nights the nurses sat in front of the open fires and gave the babies their bottles, whilst rocking them to sleep in their laps. Patients sat with them and could have a hot cup of tea. Toast was made from the hot coals in the open fires. On hot summer nights they would sit outdoors and listen to the sounds coming across the river from the open-air cinema. Many would sit up to greet the night nurse who came on duty at 10 oclock, for she would bring the news of the day to them.*

*When an Aboriginal person was admitted to the hospital everyone in the community knew straight away through the "Aboriginal grapevine". If a death occurred everyone would arrive to support the relatives and "pass around the hat" to help with the financial burden of the burial. Aboriginal communities from other towns used the Ward as a message centre, this way they all knew what was happening in other towns as well.*

*In 1949, Mrs. Alma Tighe, Thelma Roberts and Delma Wright were the first three Aboriginals to be trained as Nurses Aides. Nurses were issued with a "Blue Book" when they completed their training. The Blue book kept records of their career.*





*Mrs Jeanette Kinchella nee Jenkins nursed at the McMaster ward for over 10 years. Thankfully she kept her blue Service Record book and the many photographs of her friends, whom she worked with, which she so kindly loaned for inclusion in this section of "Burrul Wallaay".*

*To write of Aboriginal health and those people associated, the person held in the highest esteem in the Aboriginal community was Mrs. Cora Smith, affectionately known as "Ma Smith. Ma Smith cared for the Aboriginal community, riding her bicycle at any hour to give help when called upon. With midwifery skills she helped the women in the camps with the delivery of their babies.*

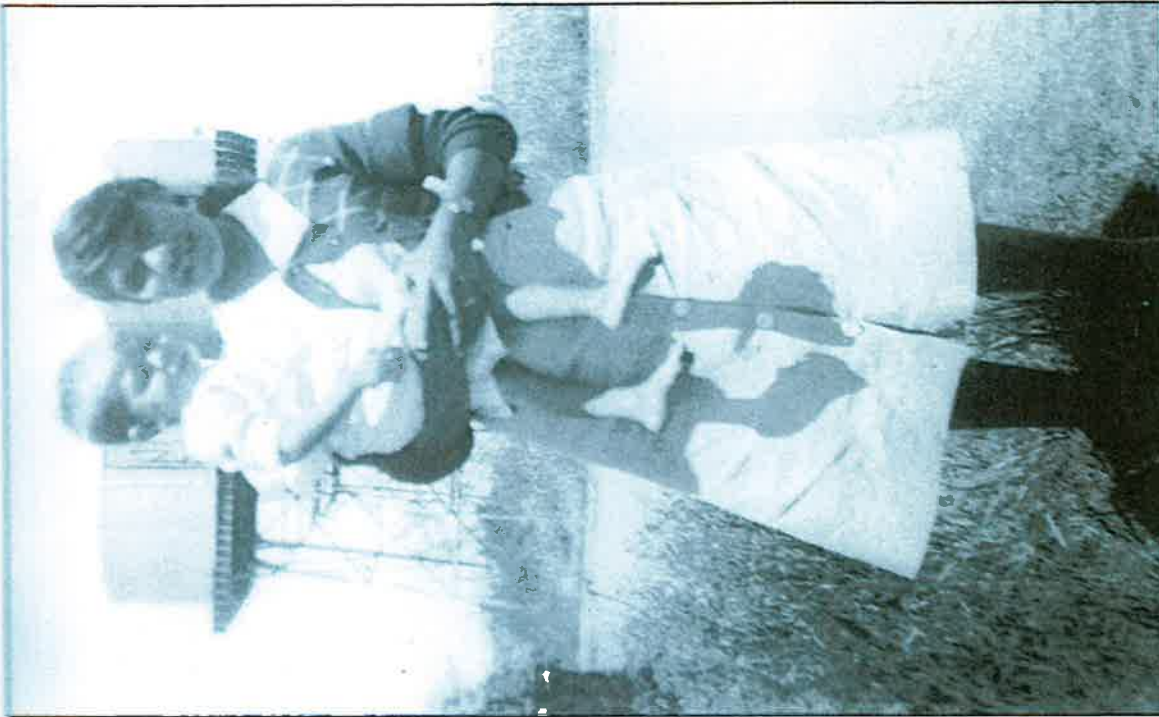
*Ma Smith would have delivered many of the babies born in the Aboriginal camps during the 1920's and 1940's, including myself, born at the Top Camp. She received no payment for her services and no payment was asked of those who went to her home on Bingara Road to get fresh water. Ma and Pop Smith understood the need for fresh drinking water in the camps and gave it away to all that wished it from a windmill that was theirs, the closest in the area. The people from the Top Camp carried this water in kerosene cans, one on each end of a yoke that fitted across the back of their shoulders, Chinese style. This water was placed in a special place in their hut and was used for drinking and cooking only. The people had to bathe in the river and wash their clothes in river water which were then layed out to dry over bushes, and later, on wire tied from one tree to another. The women boiled clothes in kerosene cans that sat on stones over an open fire. Babies were bathed by holding them over the top of a kerosene can and sponging warm water over them.*

*Both Doctor Hunters' (Geoffrey and Ronald) were very seldom called in by Ma, but were known to have been when Les Duncan nearly died from rheumatic fever, aged nine in 1926. Both doctors and Ma Smith assisted with his treatment in the tin hut the Duncan family lived in at the Top Camp. Ma Smith helped wrap Les in hot blankets to relieve his pain. Les survived and went on to marry and have a family of nine boys and three girls (one set of twins).*

*As Ma Smith cared for those in the camps, Mrs. Fanny Pitt cared for those at the Moree Aboriginal Reserve ("The Mission"). Mrs. Pitt also came at any hour sometimes accompanied by her husband Tommy. Many breathed a sigh of relief when at night on the "Mission" they could see a kerosene lantern and knew Aunty Fanny and Uncle Tommy were coming to help.*

*Identities from the past are still remembered by their character. Old Billy Jordon, (alias Swan) was born with crooked feet. He entered this world by breech birth and was pulled from his mother by the feet, causing them to be turned inwards. When Aboriginal children put their shoes on the wrong feet they are reminded to put them on the right way because they resemble "Old Billy Jordon". Old Billy was a patient in the McMaster Ward for many years before his demise and I can still picture him now sitting in a wheelchair with his checked slippers looking like they were on the wrong feet.*

*When we remember the McMaster Ward it would be disrespectful not to remember Mrs. Tighe, known to all as "Aunty Alma". Doctors sought her advice many times concerning the customs and culture of their patients. She became Senior Nurse in the Ward because of her knowledge and compassion towards her people. If an Aboriginal family experienced trouble it was always understood, and excepted that "Aunty Alma" would be there. That is why she leaves a memory not only of being an "Aristocrat of the Aborigines" but the "Florence Nightingale of the McMaster Ward" as well.*



*Patricia Clarke (deceased) with unknown patient.*



*L/R Pictured above are Beverley Kibbles and Eleanor Duncan nee Smith with unknown baby. Eleanor received her nurses training at the McMaster Ward, later married and moved to the Central Coast. The Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Centre was opened in September 1995 and named in her honour because "Ellen" was a well respected person in the local Aboriginal community of Wyong and also a registered nurse.*



*L/R Mary Lou Haines, Margaret Wells nee Johnson, Shirley Roberts nee Carr, Mary Lou nee French and Coral Joy Duncan nee Binge.  
Mary Lou and Coral Joy left nursing and became domestics.  
Mary Lou, Coral Joy, Margaret and Shirley are now deceased.*



*Nursing staff of the McMaster Ward*

*L/R Eleanor Duncan nee Smith, Margaret Wells nee Johnson, Jeanette Kinchella nee Jenkins, Muriel May Cutmore-Graham nee Tighe and Beverley Kibbles standing in front of Muriel May.*

*Eleanor Duncan, Margaret Wells and Muriel May Cutmore-Graham are deceased.*

*Her skills in giving an injection were known by all and if the doctor ordered an injection his patient immediately asked if "Aunty Alma could give it"? Her technique she had down to a fine art. She would throw the needle end in just like a dart and then join the other part of the syringe and as she slowly administered the drug there was no discomfort felt.*

*The first Community Health Worker in Aboriginal Health was Nurse Elizabeth Doolan. In 1964 Elizabeth (better known as Lizzie) applied for a job as a domestic in the McMaster Ward. Matron Cruickshank spotted her and persuaded her to take a job as Assistant Nurse. Elizabeth began training for her nurses aide course and graduated in 1966. In 1971 she became the first Aboriginal Health worker in the New South Wales Department of Health and worked with Sister Pat Lifonti for the North West Health District.*

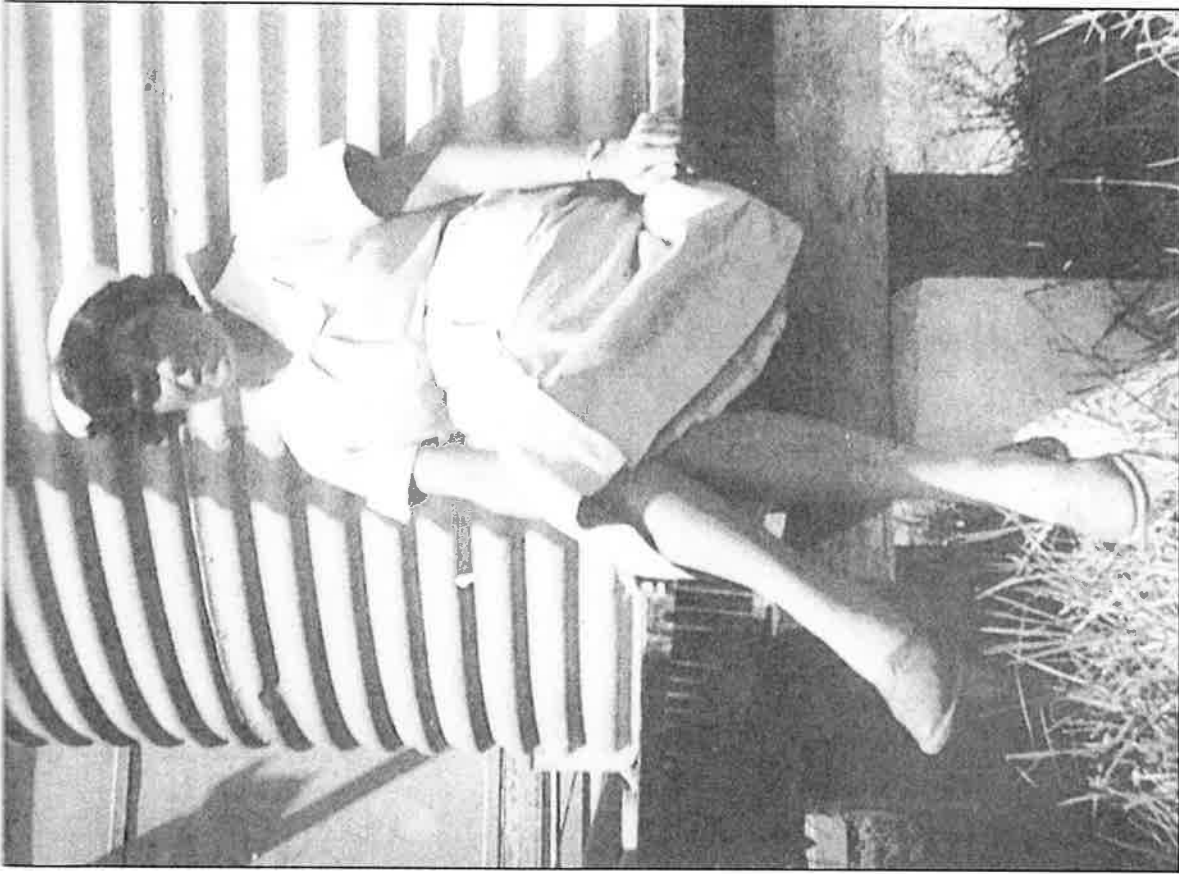
*Mrs. Mona Jenkins, nee Darlington, wife of George Jenkins, worked at the Moree District Hospital for over ten years and cared for those from the Aboriginal community with kindness and giving. Many today who remember "Aunty Mona" agree that 'work' was her middle name and she would not shy away from any type of job. She set an example that both her daughters Lola and Jeanette followed. Many say that she did not walk anywhere, she almost ran. She would cook special treats that the Aboriginal patients liked such as johnnycakes, dampers, fried scones, "hard times" biscuits and soups. Those Elders who are left in our community today remember Mrs. Jenkins with admiration as a hard worker with a kind heart.*

*These five women are now deceased but leave a legacy to Aboriginal Health in Moree. Their legacy lives on in the descendants of those they saved and for that the Aboriginal community of Moree are grateful.*

*The opening and closing dates of the McMaster Ward can only be recorded from the memories of those associated with the Ward, for the records are unattainable.*

*In February 1965, university student Charles Perkins, along with other student supporters, visited Moree on what is now referred to as the "Freedom Ride". This trip was to bring about many changes in the town of Moree concerning Aboriginal people and the way they were treated, mainly because of the existing colour bar. Even though Charles Perkins and the supporters in the group of his 'Freedom Ride' brought about welcomed changes in the town, it is still not known for sure if the McMaster Ward closure eventuated from this historical visit. It is known that the ward suddenly closed in April 1965, two months later. This then closed an historical era of the McMaster Ward.*

*Whatever the motive was in 1965 during the time Mr. W. F. Sheahan was Minister for Health, many in the Aboriginal community today speak of the changes but felt that at the time the Aboriginal community should have been consulted, especially concerning the closure of the McMaster Ward. Some of the Aboriginal staff stayed on and were incorporated into the main part of the Moree District Hospital to work. Many of the Aboriginal nurses left their positions and gave up their careers because most of the non- Aboriginal patients would not allow them to put "their black hands on them". Senior Nurse Alma Tighe worked in the Picone Ward (Maternity) but retired because of ill health.*



*Rita Jamison nee Wright  
Nurses Aide, McMaster Ward 1950's*



*Judith Hancock nee Duke  
Last nurse to leave the McMaster Ward in April 1965.*

*The McMaster Ward was not just a hospital ward to those involved; it was a network within the Aboriginal community, a meeting place where you shared the news and happenings within the community, a place of unity and caring. Many from the Aboriginal community were sad to see it closed for they were born at the Ward and during their childhood attended and grew up with the knowledge of the Ward and miss the unity the Ward gave to their people.*

*Many people today would be horrified if a hospital ward existed for Aboriginal people only. But the difference with the McMaster Ward was that Aboriginal people wanted to care for his or her own and that didn't offend anyone, for they respected the culture of non-Aboriginal people, and they, the non-Aboriginal people respected in turn, Aboriginal culture.*

*The last patient in the Ward was Arthur Porter and the last nurse was Nurse Judith Duke (now Hancock). All those who worked or were involved with the McMaster Ward, which operated for over thirty years, became a part of Moree's history and will remain in our thoughts and hearts forever. The nurses, and others, who worked at the Ward had the respect of all their people.*

*In 1989 a book of the Moree District Hospital centenary was published but there was no mention of the McMaster Ward or its staff of ever existing. Once again documentation of a history of significance to the Aboriginal community of Moree, failed to be included.*

*It is not possible to include a full history of the McMaster Ward in this section. We can only touch on a piece of its history because of insufficient records. This section reflects only a part of the history through memories and photographs.*

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**September 16 1940  
Moree District Hospital - Annual Meeting.  
McMaster Ward**

**This ward is used by the dark people of the district and the estimated loss is 1200 pounds per annum. It caters from cases from Boggabilla to within the vicinity of Collarenebri and Terry Hie Hie and is a great demand on the funds of the institution. The Board is in complete sympathy with these people, and will continue to do their best under the most trying circumstances but consider special Government assistance should be available to cope with this class of work.**

**During the year the Dark Peoples Association donated furniture which was greatly appreciated and demonstrated their interest in this particular ward. The building and equipment requires urgent attention and as funds become available, the requirements will be considered.**

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*Clorine Green nee Cutmore (left) nursed in the Moree District Hospital. She left nursing and years later worked as an Aboriginal Education Co-ordinator with Moree TAFE for 22 years. Clorine retired in 2002.*

*Margaret Packanen nee Kinchella (Deceased) nursed at the Moree District Hospital. She subsequently moved from Moree and nursed in hospitals in Queensland and in Victoria. Margaret also worked with the Aboriginal Medical Service and theatre nurse at Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney.*



*Nurse Elizabeth Doolan  
"Lizzie"*

*Nurse Elizabeth Doolan, born on the 8th March 1939, the daughter of Ernest Doolan and Margaret Isobell Daley. Her father was from Pilliga and her mother from Tingha. In 1964, Elizabeth known as "Lizzie" applied for a position for domestic work at the Moree District Hospital. Matron Cruickshank took an interest in Lizzie and persuaded her take up the position of Assistant Nurse in the McMaster Ward , a ward for Aboriginal people only, situated at the back of the Moree Hospital.*

*Lizzie was recommended by Matron Cruickshank to do a course for Nurses Aids. In 1965 Elizabeth Doolan began her course at the Moree District Hospital and she graduated successfully in December 1966. Early in 1971, Dr. P.A.M. Van De Linde, the Medical Officer for Health for the North Western District, was looking for Aboriginal girls to train in nurses aid and then to be employed in community health work. In April 1971 Elizabeth Doolan became the first Aboriginal Community Health Worker in the Department of Health, NSW.*

*Elizabeth's union with Michael "Mickey John" Johnson gave a daughter, Kylie. Elizabeth suffered from renal failure, having to travel for treatment on a dialysis machine, died in Sydney in 1995 and brought back to Moree to be layed to rest. Lizzie is well remembered for her interest in her Aboriginal community and the time she gave, although unwell, to serve on the different committees of the Aboriginal organization's in Moree.*



*Mary Swan nee French is the daughter of James Allen French and Violet Pearl nee Groves. Mary's working life began at age 15 in the McMaster Ward at the Moree District Hospital as an Assistant in Nursing. Finding her own way through life after the McMaster Ward closed in April 1965, she married Gordon Swan and they had five children - Deborah, Gordon Jnr, Jennifer, Eleanor and Leonard John.*

*Her career in health continued when she took up employment in 1974 in a position with the Daughters of Charity at St. Pius X. Mary put herself through a two-year course at Cumberland College, graduating with a Diploma in Health in 1998. She retired from St. Pius X after 20 years service.*

*Mary is a roll model to all those who work in Aboriginal Health as she has always held the best interests of Aboriginal people at heart.*



*Margaret Wells  
"Minnie"*

*Margaret Wells, nee Johnson, born in 1938 to Hartley Norman "Cobra" Johnson and Mary Ann "Pearl" nee Duke. Margaret worked in the McMaster Ward as a Nurses Aide for many years and finished up when the Ward closed in 1965.*

*Margaret, better known as "Minnie" died tragically on a Monday afternoon, 4th January 1982 from injuries she received when her car overturned several times on the Dongelly Bore Road, 15 kilometres from Moree at 1.50 pm. She was travelling from work in the cotton fields to her home in Moree. Margaret was thrown from the vehicle. She was conveyed to the Moree District Hospital but died shortly after arrival.*

*Margaret was 44 years old and left behind her partner Colin 'Peter' and a family of seven children.*

*Both these women kept an eye on the nurses and other staff to see that they were carrying out their duties and both were well known for spoiling the Aboriginal children while they were patients in the hospital.*



*Florence Tighe nee Duncan (deceased)  
Long serving domestic at the McMaster Ward.*



*Maude Wright nee Dunn (deceased)  
Long serving domestic at the McMaster Ward.*

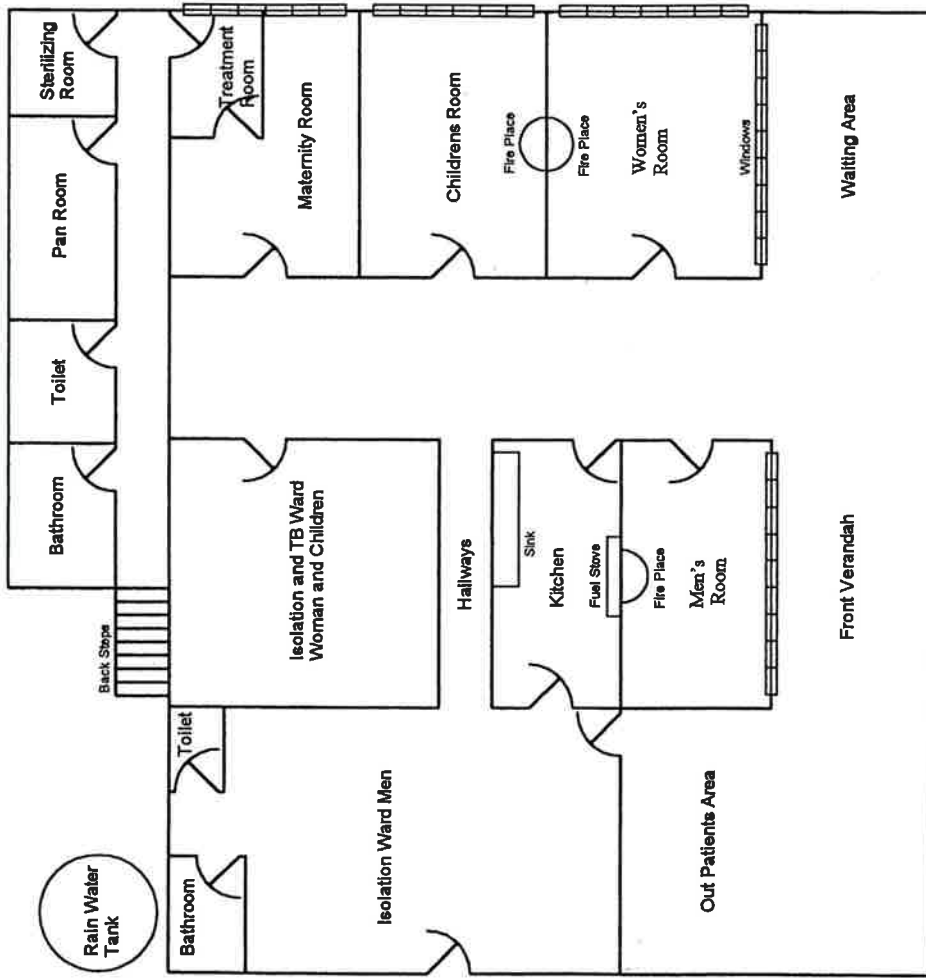


*Mrs. Mona Jenkins, nee Darlington (deceased) is well remembered for her kindness to everyone.*



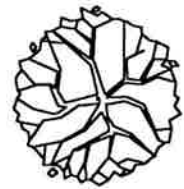
*Dorothy Raveneau nee Briggs (deceased) who lived in the Aboriginal community of Moree at the Top Camp, was a Laundress for many years at the Moree District Hospital.*

# McMaster Ward 1937 - 1965



Waiting Area  
Chairs for those who wished to sit outside

Covered Walkway to main part of Hospital



Large Oleander Shrub



Map by Stuart Reynolds  
Senior Design Assistant  
Moree Plains Shire Council

is well remembered for her kindness to everyone.

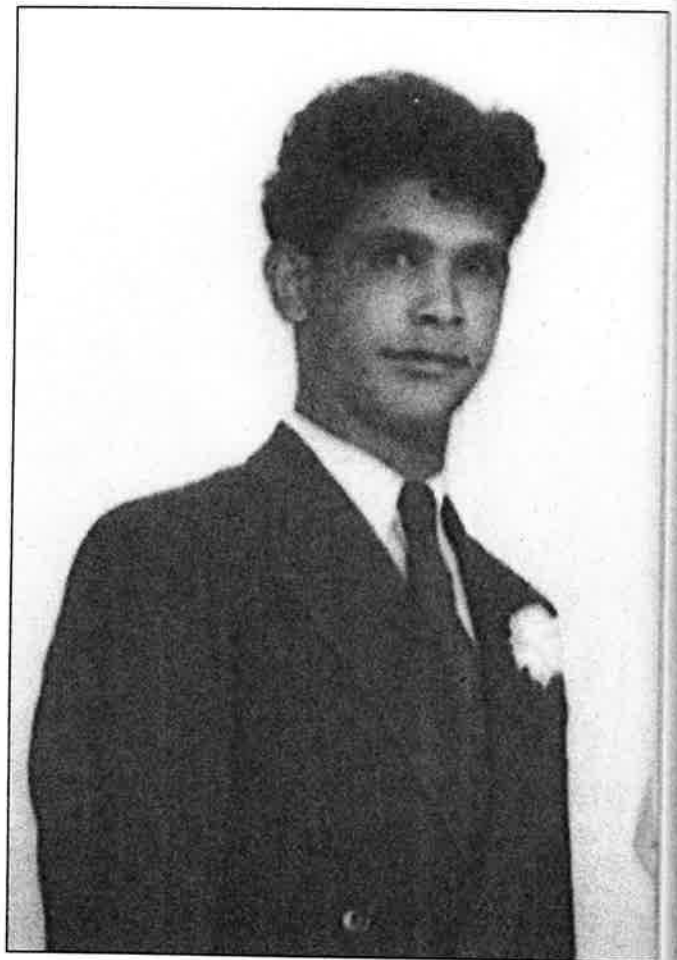
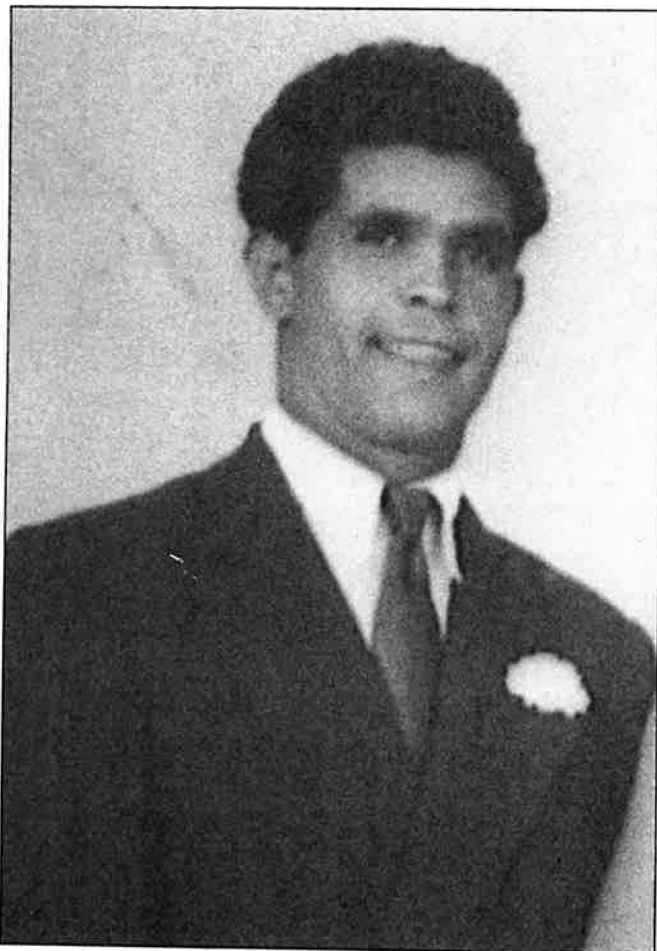
*In 1988, the end of an era came with the graduation of the last group of hospital trained enrolled nurses at the Moree District Hospital. More than 500 nurses have trained since it opened its doors to nurse training in 1965.*

*Among the last 15 nurses to receive their hospital based training were Brett Draper, Tanya Duncan, Denise Raveneau, Shirley Duncan and Audrey Duncan from the Aboriginal community of Moree.*

*Audrey Duncan is the current Home and Community Care Nurse, Evelyn Tighe is the Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Janet Lenz is the Aboriginal Welfare Officer.*

*Denise Raveneau holds a certificate of Maternal Health that she achieved through the James Cook University, Townsville, in Queensland, 2000.*

*To date there are no Aboriginal nurses employed at the Moree District Hospital.*



*L/R: Brother Lyall and Bruce Munro, the first Aborigines on the Board of Directors at the Moree District Hospital, 1989. This was the same year the hospital celebrated its centenary.*

*Bruce now deceased.*



*L/R: Audrey Duncan, Tanya Duncan, Denise Raveneau and Shirley Duncan.*



*Some of the current Aboriginal Health Workers of the North West Region of New South Wales.  
Back Row L/R: Bill Toomey, Faye Riley, Ello Mackie, Martin Nean, Judith Hancock and Leona Quinnell  
with her sister Janice Cutmore.  
Front Row L/R: Annette Taylor, Valda Dahlstrom, Lee Reid and Albert Dennison.*