

Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 207

MARIAN WINIFRED CROLL 1886-1954



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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Sister Marian Winifred Croll

Marian Winifred [Winnie] Croll, wife of Colonel Dr David Gifford Croll (booklet number 90) was born in Brisbane in 1886 and, enlisting on 11 November 1914, joined the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) No. 1 Australian General Hospital. She was 28. Her service record reveals that her husband was her attesting officer, and her enlistment medical certificate was signed by Dr Lilian Cooper.¹ Winnie had a dark complexion, dark hair and brown eyes.

Winnie embarked for Egypt on 21 November 1914 on the S.S. *Kyarra*. This ship contained a vast medical contingent – the staff and equipment of the 1st Australian General Hospital, the 2nd Australian General Hospital, Nos 1 and 2 Australian Stationary Hospitals and No. 1 Australian Casualty Clearing Station.

The *Kyarra* arrived in Egypt on 14 January 1915, and the 1st Australian General Hospital was quickly established in the palatial Heliopolis Palace Hotel a grand building on the north-eastern edge of Cairo with rooms of marble and alabaster.



Heliopolis Palace Hotel, Cairo

On 24 January 1915 the hospital opened, and began to receive patients of every rank, ailment and injury. Planned as a 520 bed hospital, by June 1915 it held nearly 2500 patients. Sister Croll and her nursing colleagues settled quickly into the routine and challenges of caring for wartime wounded.



Heliopolis, Egypt, c.1915. The interior of the auxiliary hospital which formed part of the No.1 Australian General Hospital located in the former Palace Hotel.

Australian War Memorial, H18510



Heliopolis, Egypt, c.1915. An exterior view of the Heliopolis Palace Hotel with army tentage and ambulance wagons in the foreground,

Australian War Memorial, H02266



*Cairo, Egypt. Australian Army Medical Corps ambulance vehicles
in line outside No. 1 Australian Army General Hospital
in the Heliopolis Palace Hotel.*

Australian War Memorial, H18487

As casualties began to flood in, the hospital expanded, taking over some additional premises for the treatment of different classes of cases. These premises included Aerodrome, the Luna Park, the Atelier, the Heliopolis Sporting Club buildings and grounds, and the Artillery Barracks at Abbassia Depots. Eventually these premises became separate units – the Australian Auxiliary Hospitals.

As part of her duties, Sister Croll attended to A.I.F. soldiers wounded in the various desert operations of the Sinai Campaign, and along with her colleagues, she braced herself in the face of horrific wounds and debilitating illnesses suffered by those shipped back to Egypt from the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Despite these grim realities however, there was still time for leisure. While in Egypt Sr Croll took many photos, 180 of which are now located in the State Library of Queensland. Winnie Croll's photographs are a delightful window into a different time and place. Most of the images show scenes of Egyptian life, as Winnie and her husband and various friends and colleagues, toured around Cairo and surrounds on leave. Photos of building, street scenes and gardens reveal the Crolls as tourists in a foreign land, enjoying precious time together away from the demands of their medical duties.



Winnie Croll with her husband David.
Tourists in Egypt

*Heliopolis, Egypt. C1915.
A group photograph of nurses of the
No. 1 Australian General Hospital.*

Australian War Memorial. H16959



Some more of the photographs that Winnie took while in Egypt.
The originals are in the State Library of Queensland.



Camels crossing a bridge



Winnie "Self portrait"



"Time out in Egypt"

Some of the photos are captioned and Winnie identified the Aboukir Rest Home for Nurses, and some of her nursing colleagues – Gertrude Jessie Andrews, Louisa Snelling, and Constance Mabel Keys – all Queensland nurses appointed to the 1st Australian General Hospital. Other photos include candid snapshots of the 2nd Light Horse Field Ambulance around Ma’adi, and a few unmistakable images of her husband David.



Winnie Croll (far right) with nurses at the rest home.

State Library of Queensland

Unfortunately, Winnie developed pleurisy in Egypt and on 21 January 1916 a medical Board at Heliopolis found that Winnie had *'extensive dry pleurisy on both sides of the chest due to infection and strain'*...and noted that *'since arriving in Egypt 12 months ago she has been almost continuously on duty.'*

The Board recommended that she *'be sent to Australia as permanently unfit for active military service.'* and was invalided back to Australia, embarking at Suez on 28 January 1916. She arrived home on 10 March 1916 on the *Kanowna*, and was discharged as medically unfit on 6 June 1916.

After her return, Winnie became the first secretary of the Queensland War Nurses' Fund, which provided assistance to First World War nurses. Colonel Croll also finally arrived home in August 1919, and established his medical practice at Sherwood in Brisbane. Both became staunch supporters of the RSL, and Colonel Croll served again in World War 2, as commander of both the 112th Australian General Hospital and the 101st Australian Convalescent Depot. They had no children, and Mrs Croll involved herself in community work, and became a dedicated Queensland Guides Commissioner and Red Cross Society member.

Dr. David Croll died in 1948, and in a tragic ending, Winnie Croll was killed aged 67 in the BOAC Lockheed Constellation plane crash at Kallang Airport, Singapore on 13 March 1954. She was on her way to Japan to join her sister for a six-week tour.



A memorial plaque beside the one commemorating the life of her husband at Mt Thompson

Winnie was awarded the British War Medal, the Victory Medal, and the 1914-1915 Star.

Dr and Mrs Croll bequeathed their Sherwood home and surgery to the Sherwood sub-branch of the RSL in 1954. The house became the sub-branch headquarters, and was dedicated as The Croll Memorial Centre. When the sub-branch moved to new premises at Corinda in 1967 this name was transferred. On 6 August 2006, after various property alterations, the sub-branch designated the site in front of The Harry Dalziel VC Centre as The Croll Memorial Precinct.



Footnote

1 When World War 1 broke out Dr Lilian Cooper offered her services to the Australian Army. She was told female doctors were not wanted at the front and she should stay home and knit for the soldiers. Angry that her offer to help was rejected, Lilian volunteered to help the Scottish Women's Hospital Service, helping people on the frontline in France and Serbia. Lilian was in charge of the ambulance division, with all female drivers. She operated in tents very close to the fighting and received the Order of St Sava from the Serbian King for her wartime efforts.

A tall, angular, brusque, energetic woman, prone to bad language, she travelled first by bicycle and then became one of the first women in Queensland to drive a motor car. She was capable of performing her own repairs and was one of the eighteen original founders of the RACQ, the state's motoring body.

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Lest we forget