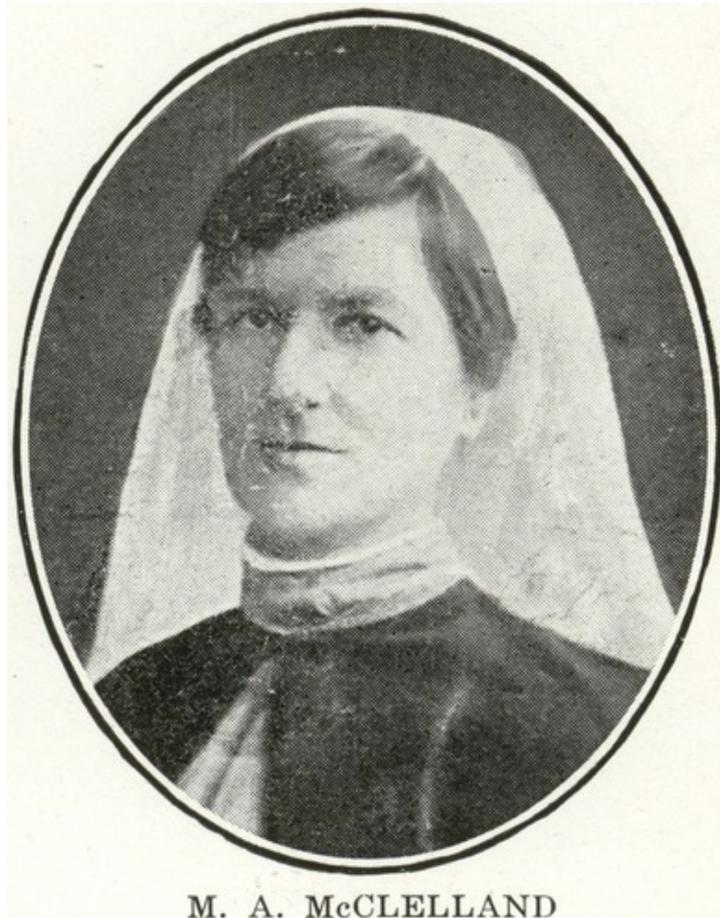


Stories from the Honour Boards

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 205

MYRA ALEXANDRA McCLELLAND 1881 - 1962



M. A. McCLELLAND

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
2018

Sister Myra “Maria” Alexandra “Lexie” McClelland

Sister Myra Alexandra “Lexie” McClelland was born in Central Queensland and educated in Rockhampton. She enlisted in Brisbane in 1915 with the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) for overseas service at the age of 33.

Myra was a Registered Nurse and served at the 1st AGH (Australian General Hospital) in Heliopolis until 1916 when she returned to Australia by troop transport ship. She later embarked again for overseas service finding herself in France, England and Italy.

After the war Myra told somewhat frightening stories of her time at a hospital in France where every night for a week the Germans bombed the area in the hope of destroying a fuel supply which was stored close to the hospital.

Myra’s link to Saint Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Brisbane (resulting in her name appearing on the honour board) has not as yet been established. This could possibly be attributed to her strong Presbyterian roots and close working relationship with others on the boards.

Family history and early life

Myra Alexandra McClelland was born at Stanwell, 23km south west of Rockhampton, on 22 April 1881, the eldest daughter of Lowry and Frances “Fanny” (née Ferguson) McClelland. While her close family called her “Lexie” she is also recorded in most formal documents as Maria rarely using her given name of Myra. (To avoid confusion, however, she will be referred to as Myra throughout this story.)

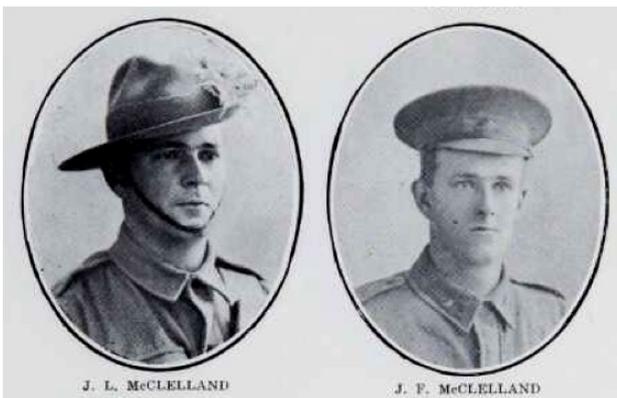
Myra's parents, Lowry and Fanny McClelland were both born in Northern Ireland. Lowry was born on 4 June 1856 in Antrim; Fanny Ferguson was born in Cookstown, Tyrone on 23 June 1861. Lowry sailed to Australia on board the *Saraca* departing from Greenock, Scotland in 1877 and arriving in Maryborough on 14 December 1877. Lowry McClelland was 22 years of age.

Two years later, Myra's mother to be, Fanny Ferguson then aged 17 years, sailed with her family from London on board the *Scottish Hero*. This ship arrived in Maryborough on 5 April 1879.

Myra's parents, Lowry (23) and Fanny (18) married in Rockhampton on 28 April 1880. Myra was their first-born child in 1881 followed by her eight siblings Elizabeth Jane (1882-1968), Frances May (1883-1980), Annie Amelia (1885-1970), John Lowry (1887-1969), Beatrice Victoria (1888-1969), Florence Isabella May (1891-1891), James Ferguson (1894-1960) and Hester Maud (1896-1933).

After his marriage, and ten years after arriving in Australia, Lowry applied for an agricultural farm through the Lands Court and on 15 October 1887 it was announced that he had been granted 160 acres at Stanwell.

Myra's brothers, John Lowry McClelland and James Ferguson McClelland, both served with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF)



during WW1. John Lowry served with the 11th Australian Light Horse and James Ferguson with the 1st Australian General Hospital and then 1st Field Ambulance.

Education, Training and Occupation

Myra was educated in Rockhampton and trained as a nurse at the Mount Morgan District Hospital.



She is mentioned in the Minutes of the Mount Morgan Hospital Meetings in 1903 and in 1904 when she is described as helping to decorate the wards for

Christmas. She completed four years training, attaining her Medical and Surgery Certificate and later her Midwifery Certificate. She was a member of the Australian Trained Nurses Association (ATNA).

Myra was statuesque, being 172.7cm tall. This can be seen in this 1907 family portrait taken at her sister's wedding (Annie Amelia to Hans Christian Duus) which includes Myra with her parents, the bride and groom and attendants.





The township of Mount Morgan in 1902

MOUNT MORGAN'S FIRST HOSPITAL



1904 / Medical and nursing staff / Mount Morgan Hospital / Mount Morgan Qld.
 Back row (l-r): Nurse Clivell, Dr. Bernardy, Nurse Perrier, Nurse McClelland, George Howard (dispenser), Nurse Hughes, Nurse Lord.
 Middle row (l-r): Nurse Small, Dr. Richards, Matron Dunn, Dr. Cameron, Nurse Blythman.
 Front row (l-r): Nurse Minnie Christmas, Nurse Hanna, unidentified nurse.
 Photograph from the Mount Morgan Historical Museum.

*Mount Morgan medical and nursing staff in 1904.
 Myra McClelland is arrowed*

Matron of the Rockhampton Children's Hospital

After her training, Myra commenced duty on 14 April 1908 as Head Nurse at the Rockhampton Children's Hospital. Her appointment is recorded in the Hospital Meeting Minutes. In September 1908 she was Acting Matron and a subsequent entry in the Hospital Minutes of 14 November 1911 records her as being Matron. In the Electoral Rolls of 1909 she is also recorded as working as a Nurse at the O.K. Mines at Chillagoe, North Queensland.



Rockhampton Children's Hospital

Myra tendered her resignation from the Rockhampton Children's Hospital on 12 November 1912 and asked to be relieved of duties as soon as possible. While Myra was working there, her mother, Fanny, died at Mount Morgan on 14 June 1912.

Matron Myra McClelland's retirement was recorded in the Rockhampton paper *The Capricornian* on Saturday 23 November 1912 and the article read as follows:

"Miss M. A. McClelland, retiring Matron of the Rockhampton Children's Hospital, was on Saturday night the recipient of a silver-mounted double inkstand and a beautifully bound copy of Wordsworth's poetical works from the nursing staff and a very useful and suitable present from the kitchen staff in token of the esteem in which she was held. All joined in best wishes for her welfare. Miss McClelland will leave early next month to take up private nursing in the south."

A further article in *The Capricornian* on Saturday, 30 November 1912, refers to her taking up private nursing in Newcastle, New South Wales. Another nurse, Miss Campbell, referred to in the same article, is Miss Beryl Campbell, also listed on the Saint Andrew's honour boards.

After working in private nursing for a period prior to the outbreak of the war, Myra moved to New Farm, Brisbane. She joined the Australian Army Nursing Service¹ on 1 May 1915 giving her home address at New Farm.

Enlistment

(Note: There are conflicting records for Myra's date of enlistment and service overseas. The Nominal Roll lists it as the 5 May 1915 with embarkation to Egypt aboard the HMAT *Mooltan* on 15 May 1915. However, other records report her embarking on RMS *Morea* from Sydney on 21 August 1915.

A second enlistment date for Myra is shown on her Attestation Papers held at the National Archives of Australia (NAA). They show her enlistment date as 14 June 1915, but her embarkation on the *Mooltan* for Egypt in these records is shown as May 1915. It appears that some of these documents are incomplete and were possibly completed at a later date "for the record". Some side notes on her record state: "*Not certain these 3 entries are for M. A. McLelland or M. A. McClelland. No papers for McLelland*". A later entry on 26 March 1917 states "*Identity established*" some three weeks after her admission to hospital in London on 2 March 1917.

The 5 May 1915 enlistment may be correct as Owen Wildman also reports it in the book called *Queenslanders who fought in the Great War* and it appears that the information for the book may have come from subject interviews.)

Thus, Myra Alexandra McClelland, as best as can be established, enlisted with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) as a staff nurse at Brisbane on 5 May 1915.

¹ The Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) was inaugurated in 1903 at a time when war was not dreamt of. Hundreds of applications were received and a privileged few selected to hold themselves in readiness to be called out in any national emergency. An allowance of one pound per annum was paid to each member of the service. Members provided their own uniforms. Four parades were held annually and attendance was compulsory. The years passed and, when war was declared on 4 August 1914, Australia had a permanent Military Nursing Service on which to call.

She is recorded on her Attestation Papers as being 33 years of age, living at Kangaroo Point and with her father (Lowry McClelland, Crown Street, Mount Morgan) as her next of kin (NOK).

In her enlistment papers, Myra was described as being 5' 8" tall (172.7cm), quite tall as described earlier, with medium complexion, brown eyes and dark brown hair. Her religion was given as Presbyterian.



Service

Myra McClelland embarked as one of the Special Reinforcements for the 1st Australian General Hospital (AGH) on 15 May 1915 onboard the HMAT *Mooltan*. The information provided in the book *Queenslanders who fought in the Great War* by Owen Wildman shows that Sister McClelland was part of the Special Reinforcements which arrived in Egypt on 10th June 1915, reporting to the 1AGH at Heliopolis where she worked until 26 March 1916.

1st Australian General Hospital (1AGH)

The 1AGH was formed in Queensland in August 1914 with the first staff departing from Brisbane aboard the Kyarra 21 November 1914. The branches of this hospital for the duration of the war were:

1 AGH Heliopolis, Egypt.

This hospital expanded rapidly during the Gallipoli campaign and its auxiliary branches were located in various buildings in Cairo including Luna Park, The Atelier and the Sporting Club. It dealt with all war cases – physical injuries, diseases such as dysentery and shell shock.



First Australian General Hospital Heliopolis with Myra McClelland (arrowed)

1 AGH in Rouen, France.

This hospital was a large tented hospital, and most of the patients were battle casualties. It came to specialise in the treatment of fractures. This hospital experienced many air raids. Towards the end of the war there were outbreaks of influenza. When the armistice was signed, the staff barely found time to celebrate. They were too busy treating the influenza victims who continued to arrive through November

1 AGH Sutton Veny, England

There wasn't a specific role for the 1AGH at Sutton Veny. It was the last Australian hospital open in Europe and became a holding place for any remaining patients and staff in 1919 while they were waiting to return to Australia.

There is a gap in Myra's service records from the time she arrived in Egypt on 10 June 1915 until the next entry of 19 March 1916 when she was on hospital transport duty to Australia per *Demosthenes* by authority of Matron in charge, of Administration Headquarters, London. (A Defence Memo #32660 of 7 April 1916 of Medical Board Proceedings may shed light on this but at this time is unavailable for perusal.)

Second enlistment and service overseas

After Myra's return to Australia, she served with the No. 6 Australian General Hospital (6AGH) at Kangaroo Point, Brisbane. It appears that she re-enlisted although there are no known records of her being deregistered. This record, held with the National Archives of Australia (NAA) and shown in the Nominal Roll (P10590618), is dated 16 August 1916 in Brisbane. Myra was then 35 years of age and living at Kangaroo Point. She embarked on the hospital ship HMAT *Karoola* attached to the 14th Australian General Hospital (14 AGH) at Abbassia. She departed from Melbourne on 19 August 1916, disembarking at Suez on 20 September 1916. (The 14 AGH also had locations at Abbassia, Cairo and Port Said, in Egypt.)

On 16 January 1917, Myra was "struck off strength" and transferred to the Hospital Ship *Essequibo* arriving in England on 27 January ex Alexandria.

It seems that Myra was "lent" to the British in 1917. Throughout this year and into 1918 Myra was plagued by illness.

On 8 February 1917, Myra embarked in London for service with the “RAMC Section of 3rd Echelon, General Headquarters” at Rouen, France. She fell ill and was transferred to the 2nd British General Hospital (2BGH) in Le Havre, France with measles on 2 March 1917. She rejoined the 2BGH on 9 March but was admitted to 1st British General Hospital (1BGH) in Etretat, France on 14 March being discharged back to duty on 19 March. On 14 April, Myra was once again admitted to hospital, this time with debility.

Myra took 14 days leave in the UK from the 24 June 1917 following which she returned to France, joining the British 38th Stationary Hospital (38BSH) in Calais, France. On 24 July 1917, she was admitted to the 14 AGH in Egypt this time with gastroenteritis but she returned to duty the next day.

Promoted to Sister

On 1 September 1917, Myra was promoted to Sister by AIF Orders (List No 225) enabling her to return to France and “to complete establishment of 38th Stationary Hospital” in France. The British 38th Stationary Hospital (38BSH) was a smaller hospital generally based in forward areas which changed locations on the Western Front. From July 1917 until November 1917 it was situated in Calais, France. The 38BSH situated at Chateau-Boursot, Calais was also used as a Sick Sisters’ Hospital and was attached to the British 35th General Hospital (35BGH)

From November 1917 until February 1918, Myra was posted back and forward between the 38BSH in France and the 25BSH (which had been moved to Genoa, Italy). Then 9 February 1918 saw Myra back in 2GH in Boulogne, France, again admitted due to illness.

She returned to the 38th BSH and in April was posted for duty to the British 24th Casual Clearing Station (24CCS) in Italy, returning to the 38BSH on 22 June until 6 July 1919 when she reported for duty at the British 9CCS at Lillers, France. She again returned to the 38BSH in Italy on 22 August 1918.

In early 1919 Myra proceeded from 38BSH, Italy to the UK disembarking in Southampton on 21 January and reporting to the (HQ AIF) Australian Headquarters, London. From 23 January Myra reported for duty at the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital (3AAH), Dartford, London and was detached from duty on 24 February 1919.

Myra embarked for Australia on 25 February 1919 aboard the *Balmoral Castle*. The ship departed from Liverpool and Myra disembarked in Brisbane, Australia on 13 April 1919.

Discharge

Myra was discharged from duty on 26 May 1919. She was awarded the 1914-18 Star (#33337), the British War Medal (#3645) and the Victory Medal (#3578).

Post War and marriage

The 1919 Queensland Electoral Rolls show Myra McClelland living and working as a nurse at the No. 17 AGH at Enoggera.

The engagement announcement of Myra McClelland and James 'Dundee' Aitken of Mount Morgan was published in the *Brisbane Courier* of 5 February 1921. In the announcement, Myra is referred to as "Lexie", the name her family used. Dundee and Myra were married a month later on the 7 March 1921 in Rockhampton.

Myra's husband, James Dundee Aitken (who was called Dundee) was born in Dundee, Forfarshire, Scotland. He arrived in Brisbane aboard the *Chyebassa* at the age of 12 years with his parents on 14 October 1887. He was listed as a "blacksmith" in 1903 electoral rolls and was living at the Mount Morgan Presbyterian Manse. From 1913-1919 his address was recorded as Darcy Street, Mount Morgan.

Myra and Dundee lived at Darcy Street for all their lives. Dundee died on 16 February 1949 at the age of 74 years.

J. Dundee Aitken's obituary tells of a very popular man, a very old resident of Mount Morgan whose father, Allan Aitken, was the foreman engineer of the crusher of the Mount Morgan Gold Mining Company. Dundee was apprenticed to his father's trade with the Mine but, after it closed, around 1925, he moved with his mates to the Rockhampton railway workshops.

Dundee later returned to Mount Morgan where he was a great lover of sports. A footballer and referee, honorary secretary of the Mount Morgan Football Union for 21 years, an auditor of the Mount Morgan Hospital for 23 years and a keen member of the Masonic Lodge for 21 years. He was exempted from serving during the war but assisted in all public functions to raise funds for the Red Cross and other patriotic bodies.

Myra was involved in many activities in Mount Morgan and was Secretary of the Presbyterian Women's Guild in 1938. During the Second World War she was a member of the Mount Morgan Branch of the Comforts Fund.

Myra continued to live at Darcy Street, Mount Morgan until 1958 when she died on 31 August 1962 aged 81 years. She is buried in the Presbyterian Section of the Mount Morgan Cemetery. Myra and James did not have children.

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Lest we forget