

# SPASM MUSE

Newsletter November 2018

*Spasm HealthCare Museum Building 6 Victoria Rd Gladesville  
Situated at the Crown Street bus stop on Victoria Road Gladesville*



One of the rooms in the Museum is dedicated to the Gladesville hospital site.

In that room are **6 photographs** of the **early Medical Superintendents** of the Tarban Creek / Gladesville Hospital

Alas we have no photographs (to date) of the very first Superintendent, or of the Matrons who worked at the hospital. **Tarban Creek Asylum opened in 1838.**

**Joseph Digby** (Superintendent 1838 -1848) and his wife **Susannah** were brought out from England at the request of Governor Bourke to manage the new Asylum. Joseph was not a medical man but came highly recommended for his Asylum work in England. He practiced the "Moral treatment" for the insane and the rules he set out for his staff demonstrates his philosophy. He and his treatment of patients were maligned in the press because he was not a doctor.

**Dr. Francis Campbell.** Superintendent 1848-1867. For 2 further difficult years Digby stayed in an inferior role under Campbell but he was eventually dismissed, he and his wife returned to England in 1850. Campbell wrote long verbose and self-congratulatory reports about the care given to patients under his control. In reality the conditions did not match his rhetoric. It was a difficult period during the gold rush era; attendants were difficult to obtain and to keep. The conditions of overcrowding in the asylum were acute. The facilities were inadequate.

**Dr. Frederick Norton Manning** Superintendent 1868 -1878. Manning greatly improved the conditions in the Asylum for both patients and staff. He changed the name of Tarban Creek to **Hospital for the Insane Gladesville** He was also Inspector General of the Insane 1876-1898

**Dr. Eric Sinclair** Superintendent 1883-1898. Lectures were being given to Attendants and Nurses by Drs. Williamson, Sinclair and Chisholm Ross. Dr. Eric Sinclair was also appointed (after Dr. Frederick Manning) Inspector General of Mental Hospitals 1898-1925

**Dr. Herbert Blaxland** 1900-1901, **Dr. Herbert McDouall** 1904-1925 & **Dr. Horace Nowland** 1925-1950 are the other three Medical Superintendents in the Photographs on display at the Museum. Turn over the page to learn a little about the first five Matrons at Gladesville.

## November 2018

Attendance at a Health Care Museum such as SPASM allows visitors to reflect on the past, to contrast with the present and contemplate the future.



The SPASM's recently rearranged room of Gladesville Memorabilia.

The Gladesville Administrative Building



On the next page - The first five Matrons at Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum & Gladesville Hospital for the Insane.

## Visiting the HealthCare Museum in real time or online.

Opening hours for the Museum is 11 am – 3pm On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of each month - February to November. Prior arrangements for Group visits may also be arranged on these days, or other days - depending on volunteer availability.

### Executive Members

President Sandra Solarz

Secretary /Treasurer Ros Berryman

Committee Members Val Corcoran, Kate Paton, Margaret Warby, Gary Klopfer & Peter Hartigen

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SPASM web sites at [www.spasmmuseum.org.au](http://www.spasmmuseum.org.au)

<https://ehive.com/account/5547>

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# Entry to the Museum takes you to another era:

Entry to Room 1 takes us to a 1911 Consulting room: "**The consulting room of Dr. John Sand Smyth**" who practiced in Warwick Queensland at that time.

Room 2. The surgical "pick room" contains instrument cupboards with a large display of surgical instruments, blood collecting apparatus and other items. A **war cabinet** displays medical and surgical equipment from WW I & II

The corridor to the library area takes you past a display of hearing trumpets, tracheostomy tubes and other historical equipment.

The pharmacy room shows **beautiful jars**, household remedies and also have some early dispensing records.

The diathermy collection area is also home to: a collection of knives with ebony handles, a collection of laryngoscopes of various designs. A display of **early syringes** - some glass, some metal. There is an impressive display of diathermy units from the very early **spark gap machines** to ones used in more recent times. Then there is of course the operating table, which was loaned for the filming of "*Wolverine*"

The St Thomas Hospital Operating Theatre Room hosts an evolutionary display of receptacles used in the operating theatres: enamelware, Monel-metal, plastic bowls & disposable receptacles. An **early operating table** as well as an **early Boyles anaesthetic machine** can be viewed, both previously loaned to Channel 9 for the TV Series "*Love Child*"

A sterilizing area also awaits your viewing pleasure.. There are small formaldehyde cupboards and dental equipment on display. There is also a display of small sterilizing water baths - One of which was taken on an early expedition to the Antarctic by Dr. Sydney Evan Jones.

A room dedicated to Gladesville memorabilia - **ECT machines, straight jackets, mittens and photographs** assist to tell part of the story of psychiatric treatment for patients in earlier days. Some of this equipment has been used in the Channel 7 TV series "*A place to call home.*" This Newsletter explains more about this room.

**The Early Matrons at Gladesville were: Mrs. Susannah Digby** Matron 1838 -1847. ill health, following a fall from a horse, caused her retirement in 1847

**Mrs. Jane Manson** Matron 1848-1873. held this position for 25 years.. She was called to give evidence in a court case involving embezzlement in 1863. A clerk named Edward Corner, was claimed to have cashed cheques signed by Dr. Campbell and intended for staff. In 1874 Manning wrote: "*At the close of the year, Mrs. Jane Manson, to my exceeding regret, resigned the office of matron, which she had held for a period of twenty-five years. During all this long period no suicide and no fatal accident had taken place in the division of the hospital under her supervision. A fact, I believe, almost unparalleled in the history of an institution of this character. My predecessor, Dr. Campbell, has borne testimony to her services by writing of her as "one of the most faithful, constant, and useful officers that ever served a Government." His testimony I most cordially endorse.*"

**Miss Mary Bland** Matron 1873-1881 was Lucy Osburn's First Australian Sister Probationer, trained at Sydney Hospital. She remained 8 years at Tarban Creek until 1881 then went to Tasmania.

**Mrs. Bessie Simpson** Matron 1881 – 1907 was born Bessie Anne Barthorpe. Her first husband, Edward Sharp Chant, was a Chemist and Druggist in Lincolnshire England. He died four years after their marriage in 1864. Bessie began training at St Thomas's Hospital London. She finished her training on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1867. Mrs. Wardroper considered her an attentive and obliging practical nurse. When she completed her training, Bessie became a head nurse at the Derbyshire County Infirmary. Bessie later told a reporter that she had always wanted to travel and originally wanted to go to India, but a doctor advised her to go instead to Australia as it had a fine climate that would "*better suit her constitution*". She emigrated to Australia as one of the 5 Nurses who accompanied **Lucy Osburn** to Sydney sailing on the "*Dunbar Castle*" on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1868. They landed in Sydney on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1869. She was recorded to be the only nurse to accompany Lucy Osburn who was without "*a major personality flaw*" or "peculiarities of temper". She was "*amiable, kind to her patients, and gave complete satisfaction in her posts*". The medical staff considered her "*a clever nurse*". She nursed for 2 ½ years living at the Sydney Infirmary. Bessie "*took surgical work*" and remembers "*my first operation was taking off a poor fellows leg*" She also stated "*Sister Mary (Barker) and I did the first ovarian operation in the colony with Sir Alfred Roberts*". She also worked with Sir Philip Sydney Jones. It was Jones who was reported as performing the first successful Ovariectomy in 1870. Fond of animals, Bessie kept a ringtail possum and a pet koala bear during her "hospital days". (*it is not clear if this was during her Sydney Hospital or her Gladesville Asylum days – but most likely at Gladesville, as a number of animals were kept as therapy for the patients.*) Later, when living at Petersham Road Marrickville (an inner suburb of Sydney) she had a Yorkshire terrier called "Ben Johnston". In Bessie's first 6 months of working at Gladesville, she and Dr. Eric Sinclair were 2 of 67 witnesses being questioned in relation to a Royal commission investigating charges against the Bay View Mental Asylum. She remained Matron at Gladesville for 26 years until 1907. She later lived with her daughter, Lucy Osbourne Simpson and her granddaughter Lucci Hazel Barthorpe Johns (a mental nurse). Bessie's son George Barthorpe Simpson, left Australia for Britain, studied medicine in Scotland and remained in Birmingham Warwickshire as a Surgeon and Physician with his wife and 2 daughters. Bessie Barthorpe /Chant /Simpson contracted dysentery in April 1920 and after a week of suffering, died at home of "exhaustion" at Marrickville on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1920 at the age of 83 years. She was buried at Rookwood Cemetery. (References available on request)

In 1907 **Mrs. Newton** a former Matron of the Newcastle Asylum, replaced Bessie Simpson as Matron of Gladesville Hospital.



*Spasms Care Museum*  
**SPASM**

The female Ward Gladesville Hospital in 1895 when Bessie Simpson was the Matron.

Reference:  
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/71225550/5241708>



Mrs. Simpson

SPASM Founded by Professor Ross Holland AM 1928 -2017