

# Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children

SYDNEY, N.S.W., AUSTRALIA

Mary C. Puckey, M.D.

**T**WENTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO Dr. Lucy Gullett returned from Melbourne after attending the twenty-fifth annual meeting of the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital (a hospital founded and staffed by women for women and children) full of enthusiasm for their work and a burning ambition to follow in their footsteps. Dr. Gullett and Dr. Biffin, two of Sydney's best known women physicians, forthwith called a meeting, which was attended also by Dame Constance D'Arcy, Dr. Susie O'Reilly, Dr. Margaret Harper, and Dr. Emma Buckley.

At that meeting plans were formulated for the founding of Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children, Redfern, New South Wales. Funds were non-existent. Women doctors still had to fight prejudice and were still finding it difficult to get hospital appointments. The new hospital was to overcome these difficulties. It would afford medical women an opportunity to practice their profession and would provide medical, surgical and obstetric treatment for women and children by qualified women medical practitioners.

A sum of £1,000 was raised by the women doctors and their friends. A house, sadly in need of repair, was bought in Surry Hills—the center of Sydney's poorest area—and there The New Hospital for Women opened in January, 1922. The house was so old and dilapidated and funds were so low that the women doctors themselves had to do the cleaning, painting, and many repairs; the building was so shaky that weightier patients, for reasons of safety, were attended to on the ground floor. There was no provision for beds and the work was confined to out-patients. In a few urgent cases, patients were visited in their own homes. In the early years the medical women undertook all the management as well as the medical work, Dr. Lucy Gullett acting as Honorary Secretary.

The first day one patient attended. History does not relate how many doctors were available

for that patient, but that first year 2,421 individual patients had attended, including 773 children, showing the need for such a hospital. At the outset a venereal disease clinic was established; this same clinic still functions and has developed into the largest of its type in Australia.

The New Hospital opened as a general medical and surgical hospital and has remained so up to the present, training women in all branches of medicine and surgery. The Directors hope later to build a separate maternity block.

At the first annual general meeting Lady Forster, wife of the Governor General, presided and the first committee was appointed with Lady Anderson as President. This committee undertook the entire management of the hospital and its financial affairs, releasing the medical women to concentrate on the clinical work.

From the outset the hospital managed to balance its budget and to expand. Two years later a thirteen-room house in George Street, Redfern, was purchased for £3,500 and the hospital was renamed the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children, in honour of Her Excellency Lady Forster, who has always taken a great interest in the institution.

In 1925 the first Resident Medical Officer, Dr. Leonie Amphlett, and the first resident Matron, Miss Livingstone, were appointed. The need for accommodation for in-patients was becoming more urgent and, in 1926, Lady Denison opened a new wing free of debt, which would accommodate six patients and the necessary nursing and domestic staff. Additions were made to the out-patient department to cope with the rapidly growing yearly attendances, now 19,086.

By 1931 the hospital was recognized as a public hospital under the Hospitals Act of 1929, a big step forward.

Keeping in mind the necessity for further expansion the hospital's first Secretary, Miss Kate Ogilvie, M.B.E., in 1930 undertook a tour of investigation of hospitals and hospital methods in England and America. Following this visit a ward unit of 20 beds, an operating theater and

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Rachel Forster Hospital.*

an out-patient department to handle a daily average of 200 attendances were added.

In pursuance of its policy to increase the scope of the hospital's activities, the Board now decided to establish a social service department, and through the generosity of Miss F. M. Gillespie, the Board sent Miss Ogilvie to London to take the almoner's course in training at St. Thomas's Hospital. Subsequently, in 1934, the Almoner Department was opened, the second to be established in New South Wales.

In 1936 the Board placed before the Hospitals Commission of New South Wales the ambitious project of building immediately a 100-bed hospital with appropriate staff quarters. After many setbacks and much discussion as to advisability of undertaking large scale building in such troublous times the foundation stone of the new building was laid in Pitt Street, Redfern, in August, 1940. Finance was supplied by a Government Guaranteed Loan of £140,000. Lady Wakehurst performed the opening ceremony on December 13, 1941. Patients, however, were not admitted until February, 1942. The delay in admitting patients



DR. LUCY GULLETT

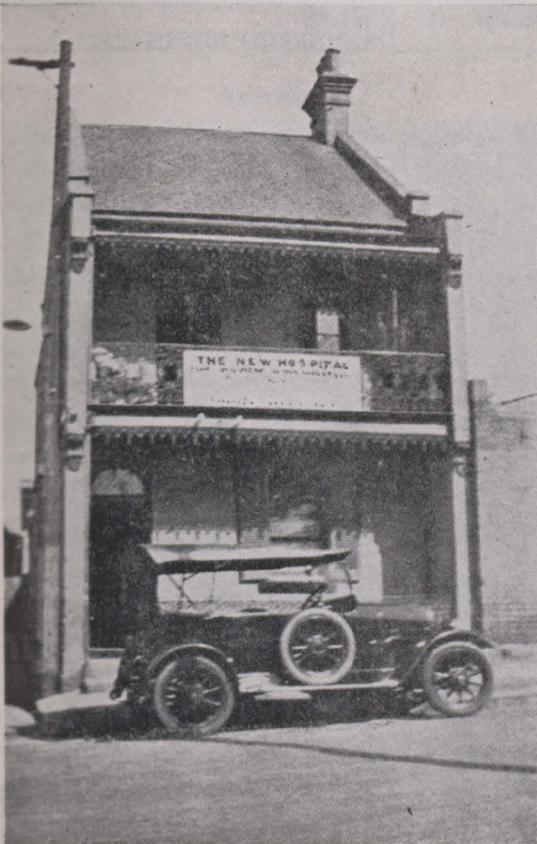
was necessitated by unavoidable delay in completing certain sections of the building, owing to war-time conditions and the necessity of providing accommodation in the event of air raids. This was accomplished by providing an emergency theater, wards, and treatment bays in the basement, none of which fortunately were ever needed.

Rachel Forster Hospital was now a hospital of 120 beds provided with all ancillary services and appropriate staff quarters.

Largely due to the Honourable W. J. McKell, at that time Premier of New South Wales and now Governor General of Australia, sufficient funds were made available to build eighteen additional nurses' bedrooms and a large modern cafeteria at a cost of £75,000; this was completed and in use in February, 1949, and work was commenced on an out-patient department to cost £140,000 in July of the same year.

Such has been the outward and visible sign of the growth of Rachel Forster Hospital.

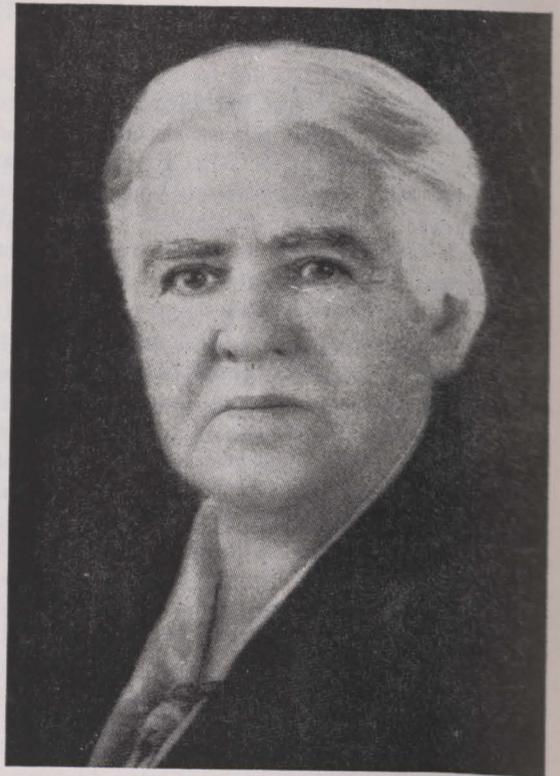
At the opening of the new building, Dr. Lucy Gullett mentioned the need for a convalescent home which would provide much needed rest for patients awaiting admission to the hospital, for those after discharge, and for out-patients not needing hospitalization. The Honorary Medical



The First Hospital in 1922

Staff of the hospital wishing to honour a founder of the hospital and a very great lady, presented Dr. Gullett with a cheque on her retirement in 1943 from her position as Chairman of the Medical Board, this money to form the nucleus of a fund to establish the Lucy Gullett Convalescent Home. This fund was added to by subscribers and supporters of the hospital and in 1947 a large house set in beautiful grounds in an outer suburb was purchased. The Lucy Gullett Convalescent Home was opened by Dr. Kathleen Cuningham, Chairman of the Medical Board, in November, 1947. This home, accommodating twenty-three patients and staff, and supported entirely by patients' payments and voluntary subscriptions and donations, is operating free of debt.

The medical and academic work of the hospital has kept pace with this expansion in building projects. With the establishment of the Almoner Department in 1934 the hospital was recognized as a training center for almoners by the New South Wales Institute of Hospital Almoners. When the new hospital was opened in 1942 it was registered as a training school for general nurses. In March, 1949, the University of Sydney recognized the Rachel Forster Hospital as a teaching hospital for the general medical and surgical



DR. HARRIET BIFFIN



The Rachel Forster Hospital Today

training of medical students and sixteen fourth-year women students commenced their clinical instruction at the Hospital. Thus The Rachel Forster Hospital became the first hospital of its kind in Australia to be recognized as a school for the clinical instruction of medical undergraduates.

Many hundreds of women have contributed to the growth and development of the Rachel Forster Hospital in skilled service and with financial support. These women have been unstintingly supported in their work by many generous men. Several senior positions on the Honorary Medical Staff are held by distinguished medical men. Men too have been most generous to the hospital in giving financial support and advice.

Rachel Forster Hospital, once established, has been fortunate in securing the sympathetic cooperation and financial support of the Government of New South Wales and the Hospitals Commission. With the expansion of the hospital's activities the Board recognized that certain changes should be made in the administration. Therefore, when Miss Oglivie resigned to take up her duties as almoner at Sydney Hospital, Dr. Mary C.

Puckey, in January, was appointed Chief Executive Officer.

The Board has plans in mind for still further expansion and looks forward confidently to the future.

During the War the American Medical Women's Association through the American Women's Hospitals made available a sum of money to the Australian Federation of Medical Women to assist any Australian medical women who had suffered through the War. Fortunately only a portion of this money was necessary for its original purpose, and with the consent of the donors the remaining sum was divided equally between the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital, Melbourne, and the Rachel Forster Hospital, Sydney. With this gift the Board of the Rachel Forster Hospital will purchase equipment for the new out-patient department. This equipment will bear a suitably inscribed plaque as a permanent reminder of the generosity and kindly thought of the medical women of the United States of America.

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## NEWS OF WOMEN IN MEDICINE

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### Austria

The fiftieth anniversary of the opening of medical education to women was celebrated in May. One thousand invitations were sent by the Austrian Medical Women's Association to universities, colleagues, officials, and other interested individuals. It was a celebration in which the Austrian Association of University Women and the Austrian Council of Women joined with the women physicians. \* \* \* Dr. Lore Antoine has been elected one of three chairmen of the "Gesellschaft der Aerzte", the first woman to be thus honored.

### Germany

Dr. Gabriele Strecker writes that a German Medical Women's Association was formed in Munich on March 18, and a constitution was adopted by delegates from all the existing groups of medical women in Western Germany. There are 30 women members of the Bonn Parliament, of whom two are physicians, Dr. Victoria Steinbiss, and Dr. Ellinor Hubert.

### India

At the beginning of this year Vellore Christian Medical College was granted permanent affiliation with Madras University as a training college for the M.B., B.S. degree. Vellore is the only Christian medical college in India and Pakistan offering this training. Medical mission work in these countries is dependent for its existence on Vellore College. In Government medical colleges places are allotted on a communal basis, and the small Christian community receives only a few places. The present principal of the college is Dr. Hilda M. Lazarus. The Vellore hospital, with 468 beds, has been built up on the work which Dr. Ida S. Scudder began in 1900. It is a voluntary hospital and receives a small government grant. Forty missionary societies in Britain, U.S.A., Canada, Australia, Sweden, and Denmark are helping to support the College, as are the Friends of Vellore Societies in Great Britain.



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