



A Century of Rural Community Health Care

**The History of the
Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre**



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The History of the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre

Dedicated to the many individuals who have contributed
to the success and on-going viability of the
Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre

Edited by Damian Crozier
(with assistance from Pauline Canfield & Daryl Millard)

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Title

A Century of Rural Community Health Care - The History of the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre

Description

In 2018 the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre celebrated 100 years of service. We invite you to journey back in time over the century and delve into history of the health care service provided by the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre to its rural community.

This publication details the history of the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre using a range of historical artefacts. You will explore the history of the service from 1914 to present day. The formal establishment of a Bush Nursing Service came about in 1918. You are invited to explore the historical memoirs of Bush Nurse Manager Pauline Fox, delve into the official records for a narrative of challenges, progress and achievements over the 100 years of service and explore the historical media releases connected to the establishment and work of the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre.

We look back over a century of rural community health care the 100 years and look forward to continuing to innovate and adapt to provide the best quality service to the community. We acknowledge the contributions of many in making this vital service so successful and ensuring it remains viable in our community now and into the future.



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President's Foreword



Traditionally healthcare in the Swifts Creek area has been managed by sole practice since the mining boom and gold rush of the nineteenth century.

Rose Carter was the founding trained nurse at Swifts Creek in 1914 and a formal establishment of a Bush Nursing Service from community funds came about in 1918. The Bush Nursing Centre continues to meet the primary healthcare needs of our small remote community by the service of a sole practising Bush Nurse. The role of the Centre is expanding and evolutionary, responding to consumer needs and to the demands and expectations of contemporary healthcare and practice.

The Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre Inc. is an incorporated, community-based, non-profit association governed by a voluntary Committee of Management that is elected by its contributing members.

Today the Swifts Creek community is similar in population to what it was in 1918. A total of 278 people were recorded on census night in 2016 of which 54% were male and 46% female, with 69 families represented. In 1918 Swifts Creek was described as a “small service town for the surrounding agricultural district”, much like it is today. Luckily for us we still have a community that is resolute in keeping the Bush Nursing Centre accessible 24 hours every day of the week.

In 1918 the Swifts Creek community was still heavily involved in the final stages of World War I. The Australian Imperial Forces had a casualty rate of more than 64%, leaving few families untouched by the loss or injury of a loved one. Events were still being held to raise funds for the Bush Nursing Centre and the Red Cross during that time, showing how committed the community was to ensuring that it continued to support the health of the community.

Newspaper articles from the time talk about the benefits of the Bush Nursing Centre as “incalculable” and the “blessing that it had proved to the district”. This has not changed at all. The reason that the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre is so robust and has thrived for over 100 years is that it provides safe, affordable and accessible healthcare for all. Community donations and memberships have continued to help make the service financially viable. It still has a highly skilled and proud workforce supported by a determined and motivated volunteer committee of management.

In 1918 the committee continually sought funding support from local and State government and 100 years later we still do the same. Today, just as important as post World War I, mental health and wellbeing support is the hidden health crisis. The Swifts Creeks Bush Nursing Centre performs a vital role in preventative healthcare. It also provides timely support to the community in an emergency as the nurses are at most times the first to arrive on the scene. The Bush Nurse fills gaps that would otherwise exist in healthcare for isolated farming communities.

Kath Smith

Introduction

In 1908 the Countess of Dudley, the wife of the then Governor-General of Australia, noticed in her journeys through the vast country of Australia that there were no trained nurses in country districts. Lord Carmichael, Governor of the State of Victoria, and his wife Lady Carmichael, reached the same conclusion and were in support of her efforts to remedy this issue. They agreed that there was much suffering which was avoidable if proper steps were taken.

Lady Dudley had previous experience in this sort of effort in Ireland and on investigation was quite a remarkable woman. Her husband had previously been the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. In that posting Lady Rachel Dudley had become acutely aware of poverty in Dublin city. 'People there had some access to the many city hospitals, and charitable institutions; but during her visits to Inver Lodge in Connemara she was shocked at the destitution of the poor. Most of them only just survived by subsistence farming on poor land. But if a member of the household was ill, or had an accident, especially in the area of maternity care, the only help available was the advice of neighbours. District doctors were few and far between. Bad weather made many of the small cottages inaccessible from the main roads; rough seas delayed, often for days, access to the populated islands. Lady Dudley's plan was to establish trained and committed nurses who would live in specially built houses within the community and be on call for the sick.

Using her own persuasive personality, and her husband's considerable influence, she persuaded the Irish government and every person with money to spare, to support her project. It was an outstanding success. The Lady Dudley Nurses eventually spread throughout the western seaboard, supported through fund raising, bazaars, church collections and the Congested District Boards (Galway Advertiser, Thu, Jan 16, 2014).

In 1908 discussion was begun by Lady Dudley about establishing a similar system for Australia. Many meetings and much discussion took place around the practicability of establishing such a service. Initially the medical profession was opposed to the project, as they feared that such nurses would become a sort of inferior practitioner. There was concern from the community about another unsustainable charity. Nonetheless she persisted in her efforts and a movement to establish Bush Nursing in Australia commenced.

After much discussion in 1910 with people of influence at the time, Lady Rachel Dudley published a letter to the Australian people. The letter proposed a Bush Nursing Scheme and the associated constitution. This letter is included later in this publication. She stated that 'I submit it to Australians in the hope that they will help me to make a beginning- that they will support me in my desire to begin for Australia what I believe she needs; a big, unselfish practical scheme for the ultimate provision to every Australian citizen of the advantages of skilled nursing in times of accident or illness.'

The Bush Nursing Association was formed. In 1911, the first nurse was placed in a remote township called Beech Forest. A committee guaranteed the salary and undertook to raise the income require for the nurse.

By the end of 1911 four nurses had commenced working in various towns and practical difficulties became exposed. Nurses needed to possess both General and Midwifery Certificates to meet the demands of the role and there were not many nurses with double certificates. There was no ambulance in the country and the nurses could only act on medical directions given personally or by telephone by a practitioner unless administering first aid in an emergency or treating minor ailments. The committees had great difficulty in raising the money required for the nurse's salary through subscription. People contributed in varying amounts what they could afford. Despite these challenges the movement continued to grow, and by the end of 1914 twenty centres had been

established and a number of changes put in place. Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre was one of these centres proposed in 1914.

On the 5th of October 1918 a small group of Swifts Creek residents realised the importance of preventative and timely healthcare in this remote location. They called a meeting and the twenty people present “moved that 7 gentlemen form a provisional committee of management”. Twelve “gentleman volunteered a guarantee” and seventeen persons present “promised to subscribe £2” ... and thus the “Bush Nursing Association” was formed with “the nurse residing in Swifts Creek”. This decision had seemingly stemmed from four years prior when Rose Carter had been visiting patients in their homes on horseback and proving the benefits to the town of this amazing service.

This publication details the history of the Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre using a range of historical documents and sources.

Contributors

Many people have contributed in a variety of ways to bring about this publication.

We specially thank:

Robyn Sandy

Daryl Millard

Pauline Fox

Pauline Canfield

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Sue Carroll

Kath Smith

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George and Thea Gallagher

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Ron and Joan Grinter

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Val O’Brien

Deb Skelton

Robert and Sue Reid

References to Monetary Currency

Prior to 1966, Australian currency was denoted in pounds, shillings and pence and used the symbol £ for pound. £1 consisted of 20 shillings and 1 shilling consisted of 12 pence (or pennies). Thus, 20 pounds, 12 shillings and threepence was written as £20/12/3.

Explanation of Abbreviations & Place Name Spelling

Cd orC'd	Carried
Mesdames	Plural of Mrs
Messrs	Plural of Mr
Sec'd	Seconded
VBNA	Victorian Bush Nursing Association

Swift's Creek and Doctor's Flat appear in this publication with the apostrophe in some instances and without it elsewhere. The gazetting of place name spellings is now to have no apostrophe. While we have retained the spelling in the original documents we use the current convention in our own text.

Swifts Creek Bush Nursing Centre: An Historical Perspective

Pauline Fox

R.N. R.M., Grad Dip. Community Health, Grad Dip. Rural Health

Bush Nurse Manager 1990-2012



Bush Nurse Pauline Rose and Richard Armit 2002

What follows in this section are the memoirs and historical knowledge of Pauline Fox published in August 2011 before her retirement as Bush Nurse Manager in 2012.