

**GROVER. ELIZABETH**  
**Nursing sister.**

Accession Number 87 . 01.

Notes from the Battye Library

Noel Steward July 1<sup>st</sup> 1965

*Read at the Historical Society's (Katanning,) Annual meeting held at "Indenup",  
Thursday 8<sup>th</sup>. July. Sister Grover's birthday party.*

This morning I want to tell you a little about a very wonderful woman whom I had the pleasure of meeting recently in Katanning. She is Sister Elizabeth Grover, who had lived a life of 90 colourful years, almost as colourful of those of her forebears. She herself told me quite a lot about her parents and grandparents and I was able to check other details in the Battye Library.

Sister Grover's paternal grandparents came out to western Australia with Thomas Peel's party in 1829 and soon afterward the grandfather died from sunstroke leaving a wife and four young children. One of these, Willie became a police trooper when he grew up and was a member of a police party who camped at the Police Pools near Katanning, then know by the native name of Katenup. William married Bridget Noonan, a daughter of Sargent Noonan, of Kojonup who was a member of a detachment of soldiers sent to Kojonup in the 1850's to protect the Royal Mail on its way from Albany to Perth.

When Bridget Noonan was 12 her mother decided it was time she was sent to school and the nearest suitable one was a convent at Fremantle, but how to get there was the problem.

However, when two police troopers (Gibbs and Toovey) arrived at Kojonup with a mad prisoner names Obadiah Stephens whom they were taking to Perth, Mrs. Noonan decided that she and Bridget would travel with them. Their luggage could be put in the escort cart and by starting much earlier than the police party then would be able to keep pace and then have the protection of the escort at night . It was fortunate they had started out early from the Bannister camp because soon after they left, the prisoner seized a gun and shot Trooper Gibbs dead.

Toovey managed to over power and bind the prisoner and then buried his unfortunate companion by the roadside. His grave is one of many lonely graves in WA.

After leaving Bridget at school Mrs Noonan walked back to Kojonup all alone and when she reached the Bannister she found that wild dogs had partially uncovered the body of Trooper Gibbs, so she carried stone and placed them on the grave to secure it from more desecration.

This was the first of many occasions on which Mrs. Noonan walked from Kojonup to Fremantle and back to leave her children at School. Earlier in he life she had walked from Kojonup to Bunbury to buy a goat, accompanied by an aborigine and two gins. She felt she must have milk for her babies. Although he husband died at the early age in 46, this fine woman lived till she was 75 and then died as the result of an accident, when on her way from "Indenup" to visit her daughter Mrs.Micheal Cronin, at Glencoe. Miss Grover recalled that her brother was driving the grandmother on this sad occasion and she had begged to be allowed to go to, but had been refused.

Bridget and William Grover had pioneered the now well established "Indenup" property where they reared 11 children who, according to Miss Grover, ran about like little wild things when they were small, their constant companions being Aboriginal children who taught them how to find palatable things to eat in the bush, mostly roots and berries which were probable very nutritious additions to their diet of bread, milk and meat.

Education was always a problem for these isolated settlers and the children were taught partly by their mother, by a 16 year old governess and went for a short while to a convent in Albany. Miss Grover herself had a year at the convent and then began, same a local children to teach, often riding as far as Etip to do so. All through her girlhood she wanted to be a nurse, but her mother would say to her "I don't want you getting around in a cap and apron", and it wasn't until 1904 that she managed to achieve her ambition and enroll as a probationer at the Perth hospital. During her first year she was paid one pound a month (twelve pounds a year), which by her third year had arisen to twenty pounds, and then she felt like a millionaire. The nurses worked 12 hours a day with half an hour off for lunch and two hours off every second day. Soon after completing her training Sister Grover and two of her companions, Sister Florence Spaven and Angela Ross, went to Scotland to do a midwifery training and there saw life in the raw in the Glasgow slums. For the privilege of doing this training, which involved cleaning and polishing the ward as there were no maids in those days, and they paid a premium of 28 golden sovereigns.

After a year they went to London to sit for their midwives exam and while there saw the coronation procession of King George V and took part, at the request of Mrs Charles Adam, formerly Miss Jane Leake, of Perth, in a march of suffragettes. They were part of a contingent of six Western Australians and proudly carried black swan banners in a procession that was five miles long, with women from all over the world walking four abreast.

Sister Grover's next big adventure was to volunteer for active service on the outbreak of World War 1 and by 1915 she was sailing for Plymouth where the harbour was strewn with the bodies of men from torpedoed ships. For nine months she nursed at the Harefield Hospital for Anzacs in London. Where she met a pretty young V.A.D. Nancy Birdwood, who was later to become Mrs. Colin Craig of WA.

Later, with about 400 other Australian nurses, Sister Grover spent two very grim years with a British Hospital unit in Salonika. The hospital consisted only of tents and during the summer the men were desperately sick with dysentery and malaria and the winters were ever more trying with frost, snow and blizzards.

All the washing for the hospital had to be done in buckets and tubs and the nurses soon dispensed with their white uniforms and wore men's corduroy trousers, gum boots, and woolen underpants and balaklava caps.

Food was a problem, mainly tinned stuff, and when condensed milk ran out, custards were made with water and custard powder. Nights were made miserable by the howling of dogs, or possible wolves, and it was dangerous to venture far from the camp because of Greek bandits. It was a grim experience after the comparative comfort of Egypt where life had been brightened by the presence of Australians, including many men, some of them her relations, from Kojonup and Katanning who had joined the Light Horse. Many of the patients in Solonika were Turks or Bulgars, and Nurse Grover said she liked Turks, they were simple old things and used to call the Nurses "Mumma". They had no idea what the war was about.

Back in Australia in 1919, Miss Grover found the peace and quiet even more trying than the turmoil of planes and bombs, but she soon took a grip on herself, as she put it, and started to nurse at the Edward Millen Home.

A few years later she went on a war graves pilgrimage to Egypt, Gallipoli, the Holy Land, Turkey, Greece and Europe.

In 1956 Miss Grover was asked by the Katanning Historical Society to unveil a memorial clock which it had erected in Katanning in honour of the district pioneers and I think they could have found no more worthy representative.

It was a great experience to talk to this remarkably bright and alert 90 year old woman who lives alone in a neat house in Katanning, where she looks after her garden, including all necessary weeding and digging, and occasionally goes out to the farm where she was born to give a hand with the cooking, especially when things are busy.

She loves cooking she told me. In fact I think Miss Grover loves everything. She loves her family, she loves young people, she loves Katanning in fact she just loves life. And I loved talking to her, it was a stimulating experience and I couldn't help wondering whether Australia is still producing women like Bridget Noonan and her daughter Elizabeth Grover.

*Original in the collection of the Katanning Historical Society.*

2009,

The property, 'Indenup', 10kms on the Kojonup Road is farmed by the Wilson family, members of the Grover family.

The town clock is still 'ticking' along, in spite of some stops and starts along the way.

Elizabeth Grover died in May 1973, 97 years of age, she is buried in the Katanning cemetery.

Read at the Historical Society's (Katanning) annual meeting held at "Indenup", Thursady 8th. July 1965. Sister Grover's Birthday Party followed meeting.

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