

FAMILY HISTORY – BALLARAT 2018–2021

“Never the twain shall meet”^[1] or why you should never, ever stop looking for your family history!

“Priscilla had waited one hundred years for her words to be read by her family members. Individuals read some of her diary but her scrolling script style handwriting and the faintness of many of the words, made reading a page, let alone all one hundred pages, very difficult. It is done at last my diary pages have been transcribed!

The details of my experiences as a nurse during my trip to Europe and my first year at No 7 General Hospital,^[2] St Omer, France, in the ‘Great War’, ‘the War to end all Wars,’ when leaving Ballarat, Melbourne, Australia in April 1915 until starting leave in London, England in February 1916 can now be read by my family. I wonder where my second diary is?”

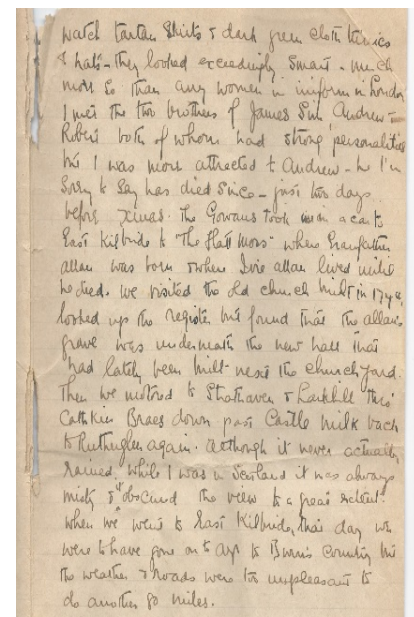
Priscilla’s granddaughters, in late 2018 challenged Bob to transcribe their grandmother’s World War I diary. It has taken him nearly a year to complete the one hundred diary pages. A treasure trove of photographs, documents and letters were also discovered and included in the 300 pages diary transcription.^[3] All family members can now read the diary written one hundred years ago by their grandmother, great grandmother, great-great grandmother and for 92 years old Elspeth, by her aunty.



Trina was delighted. The war diary belonging to one of her Ballarat Base Hospital Trained Nurses from 1908 had been transcribed by her family in late 2019. The transcription detailed her experiences, the people she met and the places in France where she served and it also contained her qualifications, personal letters, service history, war medals and nursing badges. Trina worked patiently enhancing the quality of many of Priscilla’s older photographs and linking them with other photographs in the Ballarat Base Hospital Trained Nurses League’s archive. In late November 2020 Trina placed a group of these photographs^[4] as well as details of Priscilla’s qualifications and medals^[5] on the League’s webpage. She also re-formatted the 300 pages of the original diary transcription into a PDF document and added this to the League’s website.^[6] Trina shared this news with Priscilla’s family who were excited that the Diary could now be read by the world and used for research. The family offered

the entire collection of original Priscilla Wardle nursing memorabilia to the League as they felt this would be the Priscilla Wardle Collection’s “coming home.”

Kath, a librarian, had offered her skills to help archive the large numbers of donated documents given to Legacy Melbourne over many years. She found a collection of eleven handwritten pages in a drawer. They appeared to be letters, but after a quick examination Kath realised, from the many dates included that they were in fact diary pages describing an Australian nurse’s experiences in France during the First World War. How interesting! But who was she? Where did she come from? Could she find out? It was March 2020 with travel restrictions and ‘lock down’ in Victoria. She spent the Corona virus ‘lock down’ researching her newly discovered nurse’s diary pages. After transcribing the eleven pages dating from February 1916 to January 1917 she read in wonder about the nurse’s experiences, the famous people she met, the surgeries performed, the numbers of patients treated and the hospitals and places in France and England where she worked and had leave. With determined research Kath became convinced that the nurse was Priscilla Wardle from Ballarat



in Victoria. Would she ever know if this was correct? In June 2020, Kath posted copies of her transcribed diary pages including her research results on the Legacy Melbourne webpage.^[7]

"Show the family! Show the family! they will recognise my scrolling script handwriting. How have my diary pages ended up in a drawer in Melbourne? Did "Cherub"^[8] take them to show someone in Legacy?"

Bob wanted to find and read the pages Trina had placed on the Ballarat Base Hospital Trained Nurses League website. Poor computer skills let him down and he could not find the PDF document of the Diary Transcription. The League's website was linked to the Victorian Collections website,^[9] and after a lengthy search of this website he suddenly recognised a page of Priscilla's script style handwriting and thought he had found Trina's PDF document. Imagine his surprise, confusion, and excitement when he discovered, by mistake, Kath's Legacy Melbourne website transcription which was also linked to the Victorian Collections website.

"Yes! Yes! Yes! They have found my second diary! I am so happy that they all kept looking!"

You can only imagine the excitement that this accidental discovery created amongst the family and everyone associated with the two Priscilla diaries.

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Trina contacted Kath and explained about the first diary. Kath was excited that they were in fact Priscilla's diary pages she had found and that she could now "meet" Priscilla through the photographs and diary posted by Trina.

Legacy Melbourne generously offered the original pages from the second diary to the Wardle family so both diaries could be re-united as part of the Priscilla Wardle Collection.

The government sponsored 'Victorian Collections' which supports Victorian historical organisations, their records, displays and the promotion of the state's history, particularly through their website, and together with Legacy Melbourne and The Ballarat Base Hospital Trained Nurses League were astonished with the very unique and wonderful "chance outcome" that the two diaries would be re-united.

"Will they re-unite my 'twain',^[10] diaries in 2021, possibly during a 'gathering' at 'Rheola',^[11] my old family home in Ballarat? Will all the memorabilia come home to the 'Rat'? I hope so!" I wonder where my third diary is?"

ATRIBUTIONS & NOTES

1. A line from the Poem. "The Ballad of East and West" by Rudyard Kipling. Meaning; 'The two can never be brought together.'
2. Full name. No 7 British General Hospital Malassises, Saint Omer, France.
3. Details appeared in the November 2019 edition of Ballarat LINK.
4. <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5f937ddb8c0aac160c829ccf>
5. <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5f92bf93334e610c448239f5>
6. <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5f937ddb8c0aac160c829ccf> Click to the right 12 times for PDF document.
7. <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5e9f975771490c0c981718ae>
8. 'Cherub' - 'One of the unearthly beings', Hebrew. Priscilla's nickname for husband Cyril Terence Charles Kirby.
9. <https://victoriancollections.net.au>
10. 'Twain' - Archaic word for 'two'
11. 'Rheola' at 16 Dawson Street, Ballarat.