

Shannan, Elsie Mary (Fredrickson) (1871–1948) and George Thomas (1872–1902)



Elsie Shannan

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre.

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Milton Hook, Ed.D. (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, the United States). Hook retired in 1997 as a minister in the Greater Sydney Conference, Australia. An Australian by birth Hook has served the Church as a teacher at the elementary, academy and college levels, a missionary in Papua New Guinea, and as a local church pastor. In retirement he is a conjoint senior lecturer at Avondale College of Higher Education. He has authored *Flames Over Battle Creek*, *Avondale: Experiment on the Dora*, *Desmond Ford: Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist* the *Seventh-day Adventist Heritage Series*, and many magazine articles. He is married to Noeleen and has two sons and three grandchildren.

Elsie Mary Fredrickson was a nurse and matron in Australian Sanitariums.

Elsie Mary Fredrickson, born in November 1871 at Harlan, west of Des Moines, Iowa, was the only child of O. C. and Mary (Shattock) Fredrickson.¹ When she was a toddler her parents became Seventh-day Adventists under the ministry of Elder John Matteson while working among those of Scandinavian heritage. At fifteen years of age Elsie was baptised and attended Battle Creek College for the next five years followed by the nursing course at the Battle Creek Sanitarium.²

In Elsie's training classes was an Australian named George Thomas Shannan. His father was the master builder engaged by Ellen White to construct her home she named "Sunnyside" at Cooranbong, New South Wales, a project that generated friction between White and Shannan over the speed of construction, weekly hours of work and wage rates.³ George and Elsie were married in Battle Creek on August 26, 1897, having completed their studies and wanting to embark on a mission of humanitarian service. Elder J.I. Gibson performed their wedding service.⁴

Work in Australian Sanitariums

Within a few weeks of their marriage George and Elsie sailed for Australia, arriving in October 1897. They connected with the Medical and Surgical Sanitarium in Summer Hill, suburban Sydney, where Dr Edgar Caro was in charge.⁵ Initially, Elsie took a minor role because in 1898 she gave birth to their only child, Dorothy.⁶ By 1900 George was employed as the institution's chemist on a salary of fifty shillings each week. Elsie served as head of the female nurses and matron over the entire sanitarium. Her weekly salary was forty shillings.⁷

When the Summer Hill institution closed in 1901 George and his family went north to Bundaberg where he taught hydrotherapy methods at a hospital. Tragically he contracted tuberculosis. They sought treatment back in Sydney but he passed away on September 24, 1902,⁸ and was laid to rest in the Gore Hill Cemetery.⁹

Elsie joined the nursing staff of the infant Sydney Sanitarium.¹⁰ In 1903 she took a vacation back to America and returned to engage in home and relief nursing. She rejoined the nursing staff at the Sydney Sanitarium in 1908 and in 1911 was appointed matron of the institution.¹¹ In this role she became well-known as a very efficient team leader of the nursing staff, holding the position until 1927. In that year the government upgraded the qualifications needed by a matron in order for the institution to retain registration as a hospital. Elsie chose not to improve her American qualifications and opted, instead, to transfer from the wards to the classroom and become a tutor sister. Once again she fulfilled her role with distinction, retiring in 1938.¹²

In some respects Elsie cast a lonely figure in her responsibilities at the Sydney Sanitarium. She was far removed from her homeland and parents, a widow, and to heap calamity on tragedy her only child, Dorothy, passed away the day before Christmas 1909. Dorothy was described as "a frail and delicate plant," only eleven years old. She was laid to rest alongside her deceased father.¹³

During her days as a tutor sister, when George's parents were living near the Sanitarium precincts, Elsie loyally ministered to them in their infirmity.¹⁴ Elsie herself passed away peacefully on May 2, 1948, She was laid to rest alongside George and Dorothy in the Gore Hill Cemetery.¹⁵ Elder Gordon Turner wrote in her memorial, "Her life was devoted to service for God and humanity....Her constant thoughtfulness for others and her kindly ministry will long be remembered..."¹⁶

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