

D'Ray, Edna Nita (1898–1991)

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D. Graham Stacey, Ph.D. (Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, the United States) retired in 2018 as the associate dean for Admissions and Student Affairs, Loma Linda University. Graduate qualifications in family therapy, clinical psychology and bioethics, enriched by experience as pastor, psychologist, lecturer and administrator – permitted a full career in Australia and the United States. Published research on the statistical analyses of student performance has given way in retirement to research of family history.

Nita D'Ray trained as a nurse at the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital and, during a distinguished career, became the matron of both the Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital and the Warburton Sanitarium and Hospital in Australia.

Edna Nita Dray was born on August 2, 1898, in Croydon, an inner suburb of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia.¹ Her father, a house painter and decorator, had emigrated from Maidstone, Kent, in 1883, and married Letitia "Lettie" Smith at Saint Paul's Anglican Church, in Redfern, Sydney, in 1885. Seven children were born into the family: Ruby, Alfred, Edwin, May, Lettie, Dorothy, and Nita. Nita's parents were involved as members of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church after being baptized at the Ashfield camp meeting and evangelistic series in 1894. Five-year-old Nita moved with her family to Auckland, New Zealand, around 1903. Family interviews indicate that they were destitute.²

Little is known about Nita's early education. In 1916/17, she attended the Remington Business College while working at the Auckland Sanitarium Café.³ She then spent a year at the Ororua Missionary College (later Longburn College), New Zealand, in 1918.⁴ In 1919 she commenced her nurse's training at Sydney Sanitarium, graduating in 1922.⁵ Upon graduation, there was no immediate entry into her desired nursing career, and records indicate she received an invitation to work as a literature evangelist for the South New South Wales Conference⁶ The fact that her sister Ruby was employed by the conference at Strathfield New South Wales (N.S.W.) at the time may have played a role in the invitation. There was no record that Nita accepted this offer; instead, she completed an obstetrical certificate in 1923.⁷

In 1925 Nita received an invitation to connect with the Sydney Sanitarium,⁸ where she immersed herself in the work of health and healing. The *Australasian Record* reported that, beginning in 1927, the state of New South Wales required that all who wished to practice as nurses pass a state examination and be registered. The first class of nurses to take four years of training at the Sydney Sanitarium—Hilda Judge, Nita Dray, and Mabel Foster⁹—sat for this examination in November 1927, and all passed. It was subsequently reported,

Sister Nita Dray has been appointed medical and surgical matron of the Sydney Sanitarium, on the resignation of Nurse N. Faulkner, who has returned to South Australia. It is gratifying to know that the Sanitarium was able to fill this position with one of its own trainees, Matron Dray having spent four years in training at the Sanitarium and having passed the examination of the Nurses' Registration Board, thus qualifying her for this position.¹⁰

During this time, Nita Dray decided to change her name. The family name Dray was adjusted to D'Ray. This small, but significant, change seemed to encapsulate a spirit that helped define her. After two short years as matron, Nita decided she should further her training and experience by spending time at SDA institutions in the United States!¹¹ Nita joined her traveling party in New Zealand, and the record indicates that she undertook postgraduate work at



Edna D'Ray, graduation from Sydney Sanitarium, 1922.
Photo courtesy of Graham Stacey.

White Memorial and Glendale Hospitals in California, United States of America (U.S.A.):¹² During her stay at Glendale Hospital, Nita reported on the death of a Doctor Keller who had been shot by a patient.¹³

Returning to Australia at the end of 1932, Nita attended a reunion at Ashfield Church, where she attended as a child, on her way to her next posting at Warburton Sanitarium, Victoria, Australia.¹⁴ Here she served as matron from 1932 until 1947.¹⁵ Nita pursued more postgraduate study at Bethesda Hospital (six months) and Brighton Community Hospital (three months) in Victoria before she returned to the Sydney Sanitarium, where she was invited to supervise the ladies' treatment rooms, an appointment that lasted from 1948 until her retirement.¹⁶ This work was of special interest to Nita, and her extensive teaching notes are preserved, recording her teaching objectives, course content, and techniques. Another training experience was included in her service. From December 1950 until April 1952, she gained experience at Saint Helena Hospital in Napa, California, for three months; White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles, California, for six months; Takoma Park, Washington, D.C., Sanitarium and Hospital, U.S.A., for three months, and at Skodsborg Sanitarium and Hospital in Sweden for a short time.¹⁷

Upon her retirement in 1968, Nita D'Ray moved to Kressville Retirement Village in Cooranbong, N.S.W.,¹⁸ and allocated a significant proportion of her available funds to a division-sponsored investment program. Her life savings were invested, and the South Pacific Division benefited from the interest on those funds. At her passing, and after all the expenses had been addressed and personal items dispersed, her remaining estate was donated in full to the division.¹⁹

Edna Nita D'Ray died on September 2, 1991, in Wyong Hospital, N.S.W. Matron D'Ray was loved by her many friends and the hundreds of nurses she helped train.²⁰

For much of her professional life, Nita kept a comprehensive record of daily diary entries.²¹ For this record, references to the diary entries will remain appropriately private. Each day, Nita recorded her work challenges, long and tiring days, administrative decisions, travels, plans, and notable achievements. Her love for her students and their well-being was a frequent topic. She also recorded her emotional reactions and her range of feelings as she journeyed through life. Significantly, she commented on her Bible study and "lesson" study insights and talked of her love for God and her commitment to the church. The diaries provide a window of understanding into her life.

Significant Events

1898	Born in Summer Hill Sanitarium, Summer Hill, N.S.W., Australia, August 2
1916–1917	Remington Business Course
1917–1919	Clerical work, Health Food Department, Auckland café, Auckland, New Zealand
1918	New Zealand Missionary College, Palmerston North, New Zealand
1925	Commenced work for the church, December 7
1925–1928	Nursing sister, Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital, Wahroonga, N.S.W.
1926	Sister in charge of maternity ward; Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital, N.S.W., December 15
1928–1930	Matron, Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital, Wahroonga.

1930–1932	Postgraduate work, White Memorial (Los Angeles) and Glendale Hospitals, California, U.S.A.
1932–1947	Matron, Warburton Sanitarium, Warburton, Victoria, Australia
1932–1947	Matron, Warburton Sanitarium, Warburton, Victoria, Australia
1947–1948	Nursing sister, Bethesda Hospital and Brighton Community Hospitals, Melbourne, Victoria
1948–1950	Nursing sister, ladies treatment rooms, Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital
1950–1952	Postgraduate work, Saint Helena (Angwin, California), White Memorial (Los Angeles, California), Washington, (Washington, D.C., U.S.A.) and Skodsborg (Sweden) hospitals
1952–1961	Nursing sister, ladies treatment rooms, Sydney Sanitarium and Hospital
1964	Retirement, Kressville Retirement Village, Cooranbong, N.S.W.
1991	Death, Wyong Hospital, N.S.W., September 2

SOURCES

“Beginning with 1927. . . .” *Australasian Record*, January 16, 1928.

“Distribution of Labour.” *Australasian Record*, October 16, 1922.

D’Ray, Nita. “From Glendale Sanitarium.” *Australasian Record*, December 7, 1931.

Dray, Nita. Personal diaries. Personal collection of the author.

Edna Nita Dray Biographical Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives. Folder: “D’Ray, Edna Nita.” Document: “Worker’s Biographical Record.”

Edna Nita Dray Service Records. South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives. Folder: “D’Ray, Edna Nita.” Document: “Personal Service Record.”

Goldstone, S. R. “Edna Nita D’Ray obituary.” *Record*, October 12, 1991.

Petterson, Cecilia. “An Accomplished Aim.” *Australasian Record*, December 11, 1922.

Piper, A. H. “The Australian Delegation to the General Conference.” *Australasian Record*, May 19, 1930.

R., V. M. “A Historic Church: Testimonies from Others,” *Australasian Record*, December 12, 1932.

“Sister Nita Dray. . . .” *Australasian Record*, January 30, 1928.

Turner, W. G. "Distribution of Labour." *Australasian Record*, September 14, 1925.

NOTES

1. Australia Birth Index, 1788–1922, Ancestry.com, record for Ruby G. Dray, [http://www.search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1778&h=2523200&indiv=try.?](http://www.search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=1778&h=2523200&indiv=try.)
2. Desmond F. Stacey, nephew of Nita D'Ray, interview by author, 2011.?
3. Edna Nita Dray Biographical Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "D'Ray, Edna Nita," Document: "Worker's Biographical Record."?
4. *Ibid.*?
5. *Ibid.*; Cecilia Petterson, "An Accomplished Aim," *Australasian Record*, December 11, 1922, 6.?
6. "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record*, October 16, 1922, 63.?
7. Edna Nita Dray Biographical Records, "Worker's Biographical Record."?
8. W. G. Turner, "Distribution of Labour," *Australasian Record*, September 14, 1925, 4.?
9. "Beginning with 1927 . . .," *Australasian Record*, January 16, 1928, 8.?
10. "Sister Nita Dray . . .," *Australasian Record*, January 30, 1928, 8.?
11. A. H. Piper, "The Australian Delegation to the General Conference," *Australasian Record*, May 19, 1930, 7.?
12. Edna Nita Dray Service Records, South Pacific Division of the General Conference Archives, Folder: "D'Ray, Edna Nita," Document: "Personal Service Record."?
13. Nita D'Ray, "From Glendale Sanitarium," *Australasian Record*, December 7, 1931, 3.?
14. V. M. R., "A Historic Church: Testimonies from Others," *Australasian Record*, December 12, 1932, 4.?
15. Edna Nita Dray Service Records, "Personal Service Record."?
16. *Ibid.*?
17. *Ibid.*?
18. Between 1968 and 1970, the author, while a student at Avondale College, visited Edna, learning firsthand much of her lifelong dedication as a nursing sister for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Stories emerged of a life defined by service, spirit, generosity, and sacrifice.?
19. Desmond F. Stacey, executor of Nita D'Ray's will, interview with author, 2011.?
20. S. R. Goldstone, "Edna Nita D'Ray obituary," *Record*, October 12, 1991, 14.?
21. Nita Dray, personal diaries, personal collection of the author.?