

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5410

Hollingsworth, Susan

(1851 - 1936)

Born	7 August, 1851, Yass New South Wales Australia
Died	4 March, 1936, HallHall Australian Capital Territory Australia
Occupation	Community stalwart, Red Cross leader, Volunteer

Summary

Susan Hollingsworth was a widow with three of her eleven children and six grandchildren living at home in Hall, a small village in the north of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT – now the ACT) when World War One broke out. When two of her sons-in-law enlisted with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) she offered safe haven to her daughters and their children who moved back to Hall. Her son Clyde died in France in 1917 aged 23 years. Susan was well-known as a supporter of the Red Cross in their fundraising ventures.

Details

Susan Curran was born in Yass, New South Wales, Australia on 7 August 1851 to Anne (nee Griffiths) and Patrick, a plasterer. She married Malachi Hollingsworth at Yass in 1873 and they had eleven children: Dorothy 'Dolly' 1874, Josephine Ellen 'Queenie' 1881, John Edward 1876, Patrick 'Paddy' Curran 1879, Rose 1884, Eva 'Florence' 1886, Ada 'Myra' 1889, Leila 1891, Clyde 1893, Dora 1896 and Malachi Joseph 'Billy' 1897.

In 1896 the family moved from Murrumbateman to Hall where Malachi ran the Cricketers' Arms Hotel. When he died aged 54 on 9 July 1898, Susan took over the hotel licence and ran it with the help of her older daughters until 1905 when they were evicted at short notice after a gentleman and his illicit lady love were discovered to be guests at the Cricketers' Arms and Susan was suspected of running a house of ill repute. The villagers considered it a trumped up charge. Such was Susan's popularity in the district and the esteem in which she was held – she was affectionately known to all in the village as 'Granny Hollingsworth' – that Hall people rallied together under the leadership of George Kendall Kinlyside (who later married her daughter Ada Myra) and built her family a house on the corner of Victoria and Gladstone Streets, part of a block owned by her son Paddy. She later ran a boarding house from there.

At the outbreak of World War One Susan had three of her children living with her at home and six grandchildren – the children of her daughter Dolly who had died in 1909. Susan's son Clyde, a blacksmith, was the man of the house in that he provided the main financial support to the family. In August 1915 Florence's husband Jack Kevans enlisted. Although families were supported with a generous portion of a serving soldier's pay, they were vulnerable without a man and often sought safe haven with extended family. Florence and her two children moved back to Hall to be close to Susan when Jack enlisted, and leased the old Catholic church at Gininderra (as it was then spelt) where she and her two sons lived. Another of Susan's daughters, Leila, returned to Hall with her two children when her husband Fred Bradley enlisted in February 1916.

Despite the demands of her life with a large family living in her small house, and others nearby, Susan found time to support the Red Cross. The minutes of the Yass branch of the Red Cross record that she was a familiar figure at Red Cross events in the district and beyond.

Clyde enlisted in the AIF in February 1916; the following year Susan received the tragic news that he had been killed by a piece of shell near Bullecourt on the Western Front in France on 11 May 1917. Around the same time Florence would have heard that her husband Jack Kevans was reported missing on 11 April 1917. It was not until 13 January 1918 that the AIF wrote to Florence to advise that Jack had been captured by the Germans during an attack on the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt that day and was officially a prisoner of war. He spent 21 months imprisoned in Germany before being repatriated to England in January 1919 and to Australia in May that year. A letter he wrote from the prisoner of war camp to Florence provides a glimpse of how important the work of the Red Cross was to soldiers overseas and particularly to prisoners of war when he stresses how he looks forward to a Red Cross parcel. The Queanbeyan Age and Queanbeyan Observer published the letter on 19 October 1917:

Some of the boys here have been captured as long as nine months and received their first instalment of parcels from the Red Cross the other day. Underclothes are scarce. I understand the Red Cross send them and we are all anxiously looking forward to some coming to hand at no distant date. With our scanty wardrobe renewals are absolutely necessary, socks and shirts in particular. ('Our Boys in Khaki', 1917, p. 2)

In late July 1919 the Hall Public School principal, Charles Thompson, arranged for thirty pine trees to be planted around the school boundary, each representing a Hall district Red Cross member. He invited Susan, as one of Hall's oldest and most highly respected residents, to plant a Juniper Pine named the 'tree of peace'. She had, he said, 'made a greater sacrifice than anyone present to gain the desired peace.' The Peace Tree still stands in the Hall school grounds.

In October 1919 the Hall branch of the Red Cross Society agreed to cease active work when the need diminished after hostilities ended.

Susan continued to be busy with the care of her children and grandchildren, and growing flowers which she loved even when her advancing years made gardening painful.

Susan died at Hall on 4 March 1936 aged 84 years and was buried at Yass Cemetery with her husband. In a fine tribute to her in the Queanbeyan Age shortly after her death, the writer commented: 'Old and young, rich and poor, will all feel that they are the poorer by the passing of this grand old lady to her eternal reward' ('An Appreciation', 1926).

Hollingsworth street in Gungahlin, a north Canberra suburb, was named after Susan in 2001.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

Canberra Women in World War I: Community at Home, Nurses Abroad, Clarke, Patricia and Francis, Niki, 2015,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cww1>

Resource Section

Clyde Hollingsworth,
<https://www.awm.gov.au/people/rolls/R1632129>

Hollingsworth, Clyde, 2013,
<http://www.memorial.act.gov.au/person.php?id=161>

Book

Ginninderra, forerunner to Canberra: a history of the Ginninderra district, Gillespie, Lyall L., 1992

The Southwell Family: pioneers of the Canberra District 1838-1938, Gillespie, Lyall, 1988

Archival resources

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra

KEVANS John Edward : Service Number - 2694 : Place of Birth - Geelong VIC : Place of Enlistment - Liverpool NSW :
Next of Kin - (Wife) KEVANS Eva Florence

Author Details

Niki Francis

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