



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***An Outback Nurse* by Thea Hayes. [Allen & Unwin](#), Crows Nest (NSW), 2014. Paperback, 288 pages, ISBN 9781760111328, RRP \$32.99.**

Thea Hayes personal account of life on Vestey's Wave Hill Station in the Northern Territory and Gordon Downs Station in Western Australia is an interesting social history of the period. The legendary drover Nat Buchanan was connected to the establishment of both cattle stations in the late nineteenth century. Wave Hill is on the upper reaches of the Victoria River, towards the Western Australian border, and Gordon Downs Station, now only on the WA side of the border on Sturt Creek, is at the end of the Tanami Track which by 1963 was very overgrown with very few travellers.

The book reveals life towards the end of the great pastoral stations era, their demise, and the changes that have followed. Thea's happiness; finding love, rearing a family during this period despite many tribulations; her love of the Aboriginal people - all shine through. The description of her return visit in 2010, about 30 years after her family left Wave Hill, juxtaposes an old world with the new paradigm.

After Thea qualified as a nurse in 1959, her first posting was at Wave Hill Station, one of the biggest cattle runs in the world, which was part of the Vestey's massive business enterprises.

I first met Ralph and Thea Hayes in 1967 when they managed Gordon Downs Station. I taught many Gordon Downs Station kids at the government school at Balgo Mission and they were a very happy and healthy group. The Hayes were highly respected and very professional managers. Thea's accounts of events and people that I knew are refreshingly accurate. The descriptions of many of the characters including Father John McGuire of Balgo, Tom Quilty and his sons, the Linacre Races at the Negri River on Nicholson Station, how Vestey's stations and managers operated, relations between whites and Aborigines, the running of the station household, and her work as a nurse, with her sense of fun, make great reading.

An encounter with Dr Lawson Holman in Derby when she went for breast cancer tests makes interesting reading, revealing some of the psychology behind the way this great surgeon went about his work. Her account of the handover of title of part of the Wave Hill lease to the Gurindji by PM Gough Whitlam in 1975 when the Ralph and Thea Hayes were the managers of Wave Hill reveals insights. Their relationship with Vincent Lingiari and other characters such as Subu "Peter Sing", Tom Fisher; the critical work of the Royal Flying Doctor Service all help paint a picture of life in the outback in the 1960 and 1970 from a woman's perspective.

Mark Nevill