



Kimberley Society

Book Note

***Memoirs of a Nurse, Hall's Creek, Western Australia, 1921* by Mary McCombe with editing by Joan Rogasch. Peacock Publications, Norwood (SA), 2010, 193 pp., illustrated, map, ISBN 978-1-9807855-1-7.**

These unusual memoirs were written in draft form in Wyndham in 1925 while the author, aged about 45, lived there with her husband. Before their marriage in 1923, they had been at Halls Creek. She had arrived in 1918 as Mary Elizabeth Rogasch, the first fully qualified nursing sister for the Kimberley's first Australian Inland Mission hospital. Cecil David McCombe had been in and around town for some years, first as a civil servant and then as a storekeeper and pastoralist. Sister Rogasch stayed until 1921, and the memoirs cover her final period at the hospital – a time when she shared duties with her youngest sister.

The book can be read at several levels. A reader interested in period writing is likely to find it appealing for what it tells of day-to-day activities, attitudes, travel, courtship, and personal interaction. Historians and researchers might find it frustrating as well as useful because, while real places and events are mentioned, all or most of the people's names are fictitious. Helpful notes provided by the editor reveal the identities of the two main characters. "Madge" is the author. She was known variously as Lilly or Lil. "Rosalie" is her sister Beatrice May, who was known to family and friends as Dot. More is revealed in *Lil's story*, in which Mary McCombe wrote about her life and gave people their real names. A separate book note has been written for that book and is listed under the name of its compiler, Joan Rogasch.

The first four chapters of *Memoirs of a Nurse* tell of Rosalie's car journey from Derby to Halls Creek. Information about the trip and stopovers at places en route is delivered in easy-to-read narrative and dialogue. The next 11 chapters, set in and around Halls Creek, tell of hospital life, Aboriginal workers, the monthly mail and the lending library, rides in the countryside, a race meeting, and the teamsters who packed freight to Halls Creek. A reflective piece in Chapter 10 tells of the trips that Madge made when she first went to Halls Creek via Wyndham in 1918. The last two chapters tell of the sisters' journey back to Derby to begin their sea voyage home to Adelaide. An epilogue then provides a little more information about them.

Memoirs of a Nurse can be purchased from [Halls Creek Visitor Centre](#).

For a later work that is related to this one, see the book note for *The garden of myth : life at the AIM Hospital, Halls Creek, Western Australia, 1918–21 and 1946–48* by Joan Rogasch & Dulcie Andrew.

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