

# **CROKER PRIZE FOR BIOGRAPHY 2021**

## **2124 Elenor McGuinn – A long Journey Home**

**By Andrew Redfern**

## Elenor McGuinn – A Long Journey Home

The nightly mail train pulled into Dubbo just before 9am on Monday, September 16, 1907, having left Central Station, Sydney twelve hours before.<sup>1</sup> Onboard was Elenor McGuinn, returning to her birthplace for the first time in seventeen years. The family were well known in Dubbo, her father Luke had been the first Clerk of Petty Sessions and her elder brother, Denis had recently been elected mayor.<sup>2</sup> Elenor's ticket had been paid for by her family at a cost of seven pounds, one shilling and sixpence, more than three times the first-class single adult fare<sup>3</sup>. Calculated at sixpence per mile, Elenor was given her own special compartment, clearly identified with her name for the 283-mile journey. This special treatment had also been afforded her mother some two years previously in 1905. Despite the expensive fare and special treatment, Elenor knew nothing of her journey. The special compartment was in the brake van, and she was being transported to her own funeral. She was dead. Having passed away ten days earlier on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1907 at the age of 42<sup>4</sup>, this would be her final journey.

Born on 12<sup>th</sup> June 1865,<sup>5</sup> Elenor was the third eldest daughter and sixth child of Luke McGuinn and Sussanah Carroll. Her mother and maternal grandparents emigrated from Ireland, aboard the Duchess of Northumberland, arriving in Hobart in December 1854. Also on board was her father as the ship's schoolmaster.<sup>6</sup> The journey to Australia proved to be a successful courting period for her parents it seems, as they were married in January 1855 at St Joseph's Catholic Church, Hobart and subsequently moved to New South Wales, settling in Dubbo in the early 1860s.

Affectionately known as Nellie, Elenor grew up in Dubbo. At the age of eight, she had an attack of Scarlet Fever which caused her to become deaf.<sup>7</sup> Despite treatment for her condition, there was little to no improvement. Nellie became quite an accomplished musician.<sup>8</sup> Her sister, Mary, says, "She was of a bright happy disposition, but rather excitable and most particular about her appearance."<sup>9</sup>

Following the death of her father in 1887, Nellie, her mother and some of her siblings moved to Sydney, settling in a home at Railway Parade, Marrickville which they named Dubboville – the connection with the Central West town remained strong. The family relocated to Elizabeth Bay for two years before returning to Dubboville where her life changed dramatically. At the age of thirty-eight, on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1904, Elenor was declared medically insane and was admitted to the Callan Park Asylum for the Insane at 5pm the very same day.<sup>10</sup> Research at the State Records, NSW had produced the most unexpected research findings. A copy of her death certificate in the Deceased Estate Files<sup>11</sup> led to the discovery of her extensive mental health records.<sup>12</sup>

A statement by her sister Mary,<sup>13</sup> found within these records, recounts the full story of Elenor and her struggle with mental illness over several years. The statement speaks of the many attempts of the family and various doctors to assist Elenor but despite their efforts, appeared to have little effect. This emotional narrative shows Mary's despair who had lived with and cared for her sister for many years, becoming her primary carer following their mother's death. Elenor's medical history includes details of the removal of most of her teeth and

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episodes of nervousness and suspicions of people talking about her and the family, including a fear that people were trying to kill them. Elenor broke her leg sometime around 1903, and this, as predicted by her doctor, had a good effect on her mind until a fever attacked resulting in her decline and ultimate institutionalisation. The medical notes from her time in Callan Park continue a sad story of hallucinations, hearing voices, episodes of paranoia and depression. She is reported as constantly talking nonsense and did have violent outbursts towards other residents. The ultimate cause of her death was recorded as tuberculosis.<sup>14</sup>

Following her requiem mass at St Brigid's Church, Dubbo, she was interred in the Roman Catholic section of the Dubbo cemetery in the McGuinn family plot along with her brother, father, uncle, and mother. Elenor's other sister, Susan was also interred with the family after her death in 1948.<sup>15</sup> Elenor never married and her obituary states she was remembered as a kindly, helpful, and popular lady before her illness.<sup>16</sup>

Elenor died intestate but in 1951, letters of administration were applied for by Rosa Mary McGuinn,<sup>17</sup> the wife of Elenor's brother, Denis who had died in 1940. When prospective purchasers of a property in Mary Street, Dubbo enquired as to the owner, it was discovered that Elenor held the title. Letters of administration were granted, and the sale of the property proceeded.<sup>18</sup>

While there are no living relatives who knew Elenor directly, her memory continues to live on with a great-grandniece as well as a 3<sup>rd</sup> great-grandniece both having her first name. The uncovering of unexpected records has led to Elenor's story being told, one which may have been forgotten over time. The story of Elenor McGuinn demonstrates the love and support of family, despite mental health difficulties. The special treatment she received on her final train journey to Dubbo shows great care and attention from her family as they returned their dear Elenor home.

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<sup>1</sup> Research conducted via email from NSW Railway Historical Society, Alexandria.

<sup>2</sup> Dubbo City Council annual report to ratepayers 1989, Richmond Villa, Society of Australian Genealogists, Item Number: 04/017819

The Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate, Wed 6 Feb 1907, Page 3, ELECTION OF MAYOR.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/77238934>

<sup>3</sup> Information from Railway Historical Society, research conducted by email.

<sup>4</sup> NSW Births, Deaths & Marriages, 8051/1907

<sup>5</sup> NSW Births, Deaths & Marriages, 8227/1865

<sup>6</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania; Tasmania, Australia; Descriptive List of Immigrants; Film Number: SLTX/AO/MB/138; Series Number: CB7/12/1/1-3. Source Information:

Ancestry.com. Tasmania, Australia, Passenger Arrivals, 1829-1957 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Statements Re E McGuinn by her sister, M. McGuinn. Contained with Medical Case Books, Callan Park Mental Hospital, State Records, NSW. NRS-4994

<sup>8</sup> Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent, Wed 18 Sep 1907, Page 3, Death.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/227034833>

<sup>9</sup> Medical Case Books, Callan Park Mental Hospital, State Records, NSW. NRS-4994

<sup>10</sup> Admission Files, Callan Park Asylum for the Insane, State Records, NSW. NRS-4984

<sup>11</sup> Probate Packs, State Records, NSW. NRS-13660-31-10143-Series 4\_377957, Elenor McGuinn - Date of Death 14/09/1907, Granted on 12/07/1951

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<sup>12</sup> NSW Births, Deaths & Marriages, 8051/1907

<sup>13</sup> Statements Re E McGuinn by her sister, M. McGuinn. Contained with Medical Case Books, Callan Park Mental Hospital, State Records, NSW. NRS-4994

<sup>14</sup> Medical Case Books, Callan Park Mental Hospital, State Records, NSW. NRS-4994

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/182426088/eleanor-mcguinn>; Dubbo and District Family History Society; Collection Title: Dubbo and District Cemeteries, Vol. 5; Reference: Dubbo Cemetery. Source Information: Ancestry.com. Australia Cemetery Index, 1808-2007 [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> The Catholic Press, Thursday 26 September 1907, pg 27;

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/106297204>

Dubbo Dispatch and Wellington Independent, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> September 1907, page 3.

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/227034833>

<sup>17</sup> Probate Packs, State Records, NSW. NRS-13660-31-10143-Series 4\_377957, Elenor McGuinn - Date of Death 14/09/1907, Granted on 12/07/1951

<sup>18</sup> Dubbo Building Permits & Land Transfers, The Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate, Wednesday 5 September 1951, page 2. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/131341198>