



Marire Hospital

24 Juliet St

1907

Use:	Residential	Historic Value:	2 out of 5
Materials:	Timber, concrete floor, iron roof	Architectural Value:	- out of 4
NZHPT Registered:	Not registered	Technical Value:	- out of 2
Legal Description:	Lot 2 DP 6018	Symbolic Value:	1 out of 3
		Rarity Value:	- out of 2
		Townscape Value:	- out of 2
		Group Value:	- out of 2
		Overall Heritage Value:	3 out of 20



Doris Clifton Jolly was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1890, and immigrated with her family to New Zealand when she was four. Doris was often ill, and so had limited primary education. For this reason, she refused to go to high school, and instead became the family housekeeper.

However, when she was 17 she changed her mind, feeling she was destined to become a medical missionary for women in Africa. Doris made up her schooling, and after working extremely hard she entered the University of Otago Medicine School in 1911 – becoming what she claimed to be *“the most poorly educated student ever to cross the university threshold”*.

Doris dedicated herself to the midwifery aspect of medicine, after assisting with many painful and complicated births while studying. In 1916, she graduated with a Masters in Medicine, further showing her persistent, ambitious attitude. In the following year, she married fellow graduate William Gordon – two weeks before he left to carry out his war service. Doris gained a diploma in public health, and acted as a stand-in doctor for various practices around the North Island.

One of these practices included the Stratford Hospital, run by Dr T.L. Paget. This was a modern operating theatre, with fine corrugated iron walls and concrete floors. Dr Paget had opened his medical service in 1907, and due to a rise in the district population, by late 1918 he was able to give Doris Gordon the opportunity to go into partnership with him, which she accepted. A practicing women doctor was met with a large amount of curiosity and even suspicion by the Stratford people, but she was soon well-known and well-loved.

The Stratford Hospital experienced possibly its busiest period in 1918, when the influenza epidemic hit the Stratford district. A large number of people died, and most fell sick. Dr Paget and Dr Doris worked hard, stripping local shops of all their bedding stock, dismantling hotel beds, and using the school and an empty boarding house as makeshift hospitals. Thankfully, the epidemic disappeared as quickly as it had come.

In 1919, Doris' husband William came home from the war, and together they purchased Dr Paget's practice. They renamed the hospital 'Marire', which is a Maori word meaning “peace and happiness”, as that is what they wanted their hospital to be like. The ice-cold Taranaki winters had the effect of electricians being quickly brought in to add electric heat to the theatre! However, early electricity was temperamental, and there are instances where the Gordons had to perform surgery in the dark and cold.

Dr Doris introduced 'twilight sleep' to New Zealand in the labour room at Marire Hospital. This involved the use of morphine and scopoline to put the mother into a “half” sleep during birth, making it a less painful experience. Doris had trialled this method on herself when she had her four children, before introducing it to other women. She also made full use of other anaesthesia, and caesarean section, to try and give every mother proper pain relief.

During the Depression, locals found it hard to pay for treatment in money, and so the doctors accepted chickens, pigs and potatoes as payment – noting that their biggest risk was having too much food to be able to eat or sell. It was around this time that Doris became aware that the hospital building was *“Old! Adapted! Then re-adapted! A hotchpotch of architecture.”* Subsequently, battling the wartime shortages, she monitored the construction of a 14-bed hospital alongside their home in Portia St. This was officially opened in early 1942 by the Minister of Health, A.H. Nordmeyer.

Dr Doris became the first women in Australasia to gain a fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1925, when she and Bill went to Edinburgh and sat exams to qualify as surgeons. Later on, among other awards, Doris became an honorary fellow of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists – becoming the only women outside royalty to have this honour, and being only one of twenty obstetricians to gain it.

Unfortunately, Doris died of a heart attack at Marire Hospital on July 9, 1956, aged 65. Her life had been dedicated to the wellbeing of the people (especially women) of Stratford and New Zealand, and the original Marire Hospital building can be seen as a memorial to this incredible lady.

Bibliography

*Puki Ariki – Taranaki Stories, Dr Doris Gordon, Sorrel Hoskin
Stratford District Centenary 1878-1978, p68*