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**WORLD WAR ONE  
COMMEMORATION PROJECT**

**NELSON NURSES of WORLD WAR ONE**

**BIOGRAPHY OF Rhoda Georgina McRAE  
NZ Army Nursing Service 22/257**

**Full Name:** Rhoda Georgina McRAE  
**Birth:** 21 Sep 1887  
**Married:** Daniel Frank MYERS 1 Mar 1922  
**Death:** 5 July 1929  
**Buried:**





Rhoda McRae <sup>1</sup>

Nelson Girl's Collegian, 1916, Vol 1, photograph

## Chronology

21 September 1872	Born Richmond Nelson
May 1903	Nelson College for Girls
1911	Probationary Nurse Christchurch
June 1914	State Registration as a nurse
1 Dec 1915	Commenced Army Service
4 Dec 1915	Embarkation from New Zealand on the Hospital Ship <i>Marama</i>
5 Feb 1916	31 <sup>st</sup> General Hospital, Port Said
October 1916	Hospital Ships <i>Braemar Castle &amp; Brittanic</i>
11 October 1916	No. 2 New Zealand General Hospital Walton-on-Thames
2 Nov 1917	Hospital Ship <i>Tainui</i> Te Waikato Sanitorium Chalmers Orthopaedic Hospital Christchurch Trentham Military Hospital
1 Mar 1922	Married Dr Frank Myers
5 July 1929	Died of pneumonia

## Origins

Rhoda Georgina McRae was born in Richmond, Nelson on 21 September 1877<sup>2,3</sup>. She was the fifth of six (4 girls and 2 boys) children born to Roderick and Alice McRAE<sup>4</sup>. The second child Isabella (or Belle as she was often known as), who was Rhoda's older sister, also became a nurse and also served overseas in World War One.

The family lived in "*Bonovoree*" on Salisbury Road, which was alongside where the Salisbury School for Girls is in Richmond<sup>5</sup>. Roderick, the father, was born in County Clare, Ireland on his father's property, which his father had named *Bonovoree* and had brought the name to the property he purchased in Richmond<sup>6</sup>.

Rhoda went to Richmond Girls primary school, starting there on 15 August 1893. Her father, Roderick, was given as her parent/guardian. In 1897, she became ill (although what of is not known) and the records show that she was absent from school from 25 January 1897 and starting again on 26 July 1897. Her last day at primary school was on 18 December 1901 and her destination was given as Nelson Girls College<sup>7</sup>.

The Nelson College for Girls admission records show that Rhoda started at the college in May 1903<sup>8</sup>, which was over a year after she left primary school, the reason remains unknown. Her mother, Alice, was listed as the parent/guardian<sup>9</sup>. As the school was smaller in that era, a lot of information on pupils can be gained from the Nelson Girl's Collegian (NGR) the college's magazine. Rhoda appeared to start as a day pupil in 1903 and was shown as a new boarder for 1904<sup>10</sup>. She joined in the life of the college as she was reported as playing and being on the hockey committee for boarders in 1905 and 1906<sup>11</sup>. 1906 also records Rhoda as playing tennis and being on the tennis committee and as one of the boarders taking part in the School of Music Recitals<sup>12</sup>. The college must have thought well of her as she was appointed a prefect in 1906<sup>13</sup>.

On 5 September 1904, Rhoda's father Roderick died at his residence "*Bonovoree*"<sup>14</sup>. On the following Wednesday, 7 September, his funeral left his late residence, "*Bonovoree*" for the Richmond Cemetery<sup>15</sup>. That Roderick was very involved with horse racing was apparent as the Stewards and Committee of the Nelson Jockey Club were requested to meet at Tattersall's Stables and then attend his funeral<sup>16</sup>.

"*Bonovoree*" was not a small property and even the house required assistance as evidenced by an advertisement for a general servant in September 1900<sup>17</sup>. It was apparent that as Roderick was getting older and maybe ailing, "*Bonovoree*" was getting too much for the family to continue with and the property was advertised for sale in July 1903<sup>18</sup>.



“Bonovoree” Salisbury Road Richmond 1850

Source Shona McRae 'By the Braes of Balquether'

The size of “Bonovoree” can be seen from the proposed auction advertisement, a section of which follows<sup>13</sup>:

**That Valuable Freehold Agricultural Property known as “Bonovoree” containing 75 Acres, more or less, being part sections 80 and 81, situated in the Borough of Richmond, together with large and commodious Family Residence and out-buildings thereon.**

**It is generally admitted that the above Property is one of the best agricultural farms and picturesque homesteads in the Nelson Province. The soil is excellent, capable of growing to great advantage either cereals or root crops, for small or large fruit cultivation, and for dairy farming it cannot be excelled.**

**The commodious family residence is roofed with slate, contains some 12 rooms, which are large, lofty, and well finished, has every modern convenience, and water laid on to all parts of the house.**

The property was acquired by the Government in the end, and as the area now has quite a surrounding collection of different educational schools, the report of why the Government acquired it is of interest. A report in the local newspaper follows<sup>15</sup>:

**The Government having acquired the late Mr Roderick McRae's Bonovoree estate, Richmond, Mr Campbell, Colonial Architect, Mr Pope, Inspector of Schools, and Mr Maginnity, representing the estate, visited the locality yesterday. Mr Campbell expressed astonishment at the excellent preservation of the house, though it has been in existence for 30 years, and said it would be very suitable for the purpose of a home for imbeciles, for which the estate is intended. It is probable that an early establishment of the home will be made.**

Alice McRAE, Isabella's mother, moved into Nelson and is seen at Tipahi Street with her oldest daughter Alice Catherine in the 1905-1906 Electoral Roll, prior to her moving into her final residence, Shakespeare Walk<sup>19</sup>.

With “Bonovoree” sold, in 1907 Rhoda spent some months staying with her brother, Roderick, in Tapawera, where she was reported as being one of three ex-pupils from Nelson College for Girls representing the “Old Girls” in the Sherry District<sup>20</sup>. In 1908, Rhoda was living ‘at home in Bridge Street’ and was a daily governess to the younger children of Mrs Maclaren at their home on Wakapuaka Road, to where she cycled daily<sup>21</sup>. For the next two years Rhoda continued with teaching and moving with the family from Bridge Street to Shakespeare Walk where she is recorded as living with her mother and older sister Cora Louisa in the 1911 Nelson Electoral Roll<sup>22</sup>.

## Nursing Training

In 1911, Rhoda started on her nursing training and she was appointed a probationer at the Christchurch Public Hospital. Presumably, Rhoda chose to train at Christchurch as her older sister Isabella was a Sister in the same hospital<sup>23</sup>.

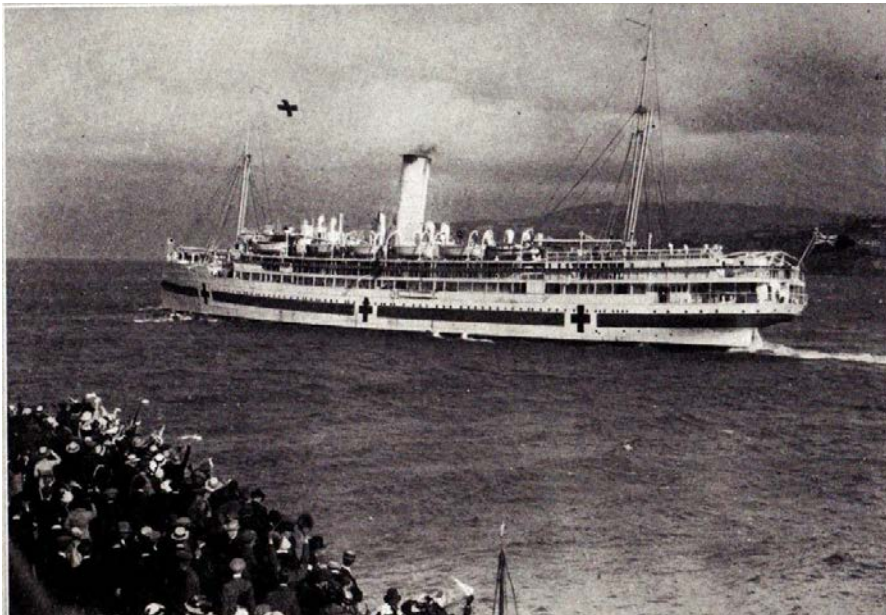
After 3 years training, Rhoda gained a Christchurch Hospital Certificate and passed the State examination in June 1914. Her date of registration was August 1914 and her registration number 1562<sup>24</sup>.

Rhoda stayed at Christchurch Hospital, where she apparently gained rapid promotion as in her NZ Expeditionary Force Nursing Service application, she listed her present position at the time as Ward Sister, Christchurch Hospital<sup>25</sup>.

She signed the attestation to the King and his descendants, on the above application and in front of an attesting officer, on 1 December 1915.

## The War Years

Rhoda Georgina McRAE was appointed to the NZ Army Nursing Service as a Sister on 1 December 1915 and her service number was 22/257. She gives her occupation as Ward Sister, her religion as Church of England and her last New Zealand address as Christchurch Hospital. Her mother (Alice) is listed as next of kin, from Shakespeare Walk, Nelson. The start of her service, 1 December 1915, is timed to coincide with her embarkation from New Zealand on the Hospital Ship *Marama* on 4 December 1915<sup>26</sup>.



HMTS *Marama* leaving Wellington Dec 1915

The Earl of Liverpool 'The Voyages of His Majesty's New Zealand Hospital Ships "Marama" and "Maheno" (2<sup>nd</sup> volume)

*Marama* was New Zealand's second Hospital Ship and it was to leave Wellington on its first charter. Unlike her older sister Isabella, who was one of the three Sisters on the staff of the hospital ship, Rhoda was on board as one of the first division of the Third Contingent of nurses, totalling somewhere between 49 and 53 depending on the information source, and bound for Egypt<sup>27</sup>.

On arrival in Egypt, Rhoda disembarked at Suez on 11 January 1916 and on 5 February was appointed as a Staff Nurse on duty to the 31<sup>st</sup> General Hospital, Port Said<sup>28</sup>. Port Said, at the northern outlet of the Suez Canal, was an important hospital centre during the First World War. From May-November 1915, it received wounded from Gallipoli and later from operations in Egypt and Palestine. In February 1916, Port Said contained No 31 General Hospital, No 15 Stationary Hospital and No 26 Casualty Clearing Station. The New Zealand Stationary Hospital and No 14 Australian General Hospital came later<sup>29</sup>.

On the 30 September 1916, Rhoda leaves Egypt bound for England. She first embarked on the Hospital Ship *Braemar Castle* bound for Madras where she transferred to the Hospital Ship *Brittanic* and finally arrived in England. On 11 October Rhoda was taken on strength as a Staff Nurse at Walton-on-Thames, also referred to as No. 2 New Zealand General Hospital<sup>30</sup>.



**Prime Minister William Massey and Sir Joseph Ward at Walton-on-Thames Hospital.**

*Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association :New Zealand official negatives, World War 1914-1918.*

Ref: 1/2-014018-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22848638>

From Hester Maclean's reminiscences, we get a brief background to the Walton on Thames Hospital as follows<sup>31</sup>.

*When we first landed in England, even the Walton-on-Thames Hospital had not been established. It was opened by the War Contingent Association to admit New Zealand soldiers from Gallipoli, on August 1st, 1915. ....*

*The hospital was situated not far from London, and stood within most beautiful grounds, on the banks of the Thames.*

*It was with joy that New Zealand soldiers found themselves in a hospital run by their own countrymen and women. Here, when convalescing, they had many recreations, boating, swimming, and watching the river with its interesting procession of boats passing up and down. Later the Military authorities of the N.Z. Expeditionary Force took over this hospital from the War Contingent Association, and it became No. 2 New Zealand General Hospital.*

*..... At one time almost 2,000 patients could be accommodated and therefore, a large nursing staff was required. ....*



**A nurse and patients at the hospital at Walton-on-Thames, England.**

*Playford, L M :Photographs and loose pages of album containing photographs of the hospital at Walton-on-Thames during World War I, and scenes at Gallipoli, Turkey, during World War I.*

Ref: PAColl-0251-1-1. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22304003>

On 9 March 1917, Rhoda went off duty sick and while 'discharged to leave' on 15 March, the 17 March saw her admitted to the Nurses Rest Home at Sandwich and her Army record notes in brackets "influenza". She was then discharged for duty back at Walton-on-Thames on 5 April<sup>32</sup>.

It was about now that another person that was to play an important role in Rhoda's future comes into the picture. Captain Daniel Frank MYERS, a doctor, is posted to Walton-on-Thames in July 1917 and he is the man that Rhoda will marry<sup>33</sup>.

Injured soldiers are being sent home as opportunities arise and Rhoda is returned to New Zealand on duty on the ship *Tainui*, under contract to the New Zealand Government, with draft 130. Draft 130 consists of 43 officers, 395 other ranks and 2 nurses (total 440) and left England on 2 November 1917<sup>34</sup>, all 'walking wounded'. The totals that were on the *Tainui* varied slightly depending on the source of information. For example, in the *Auckland Star* of 3 January 1918, the report is as follows<sup>35</sup>.

*Another draft of 442 wounded and invalided soldiers arrived at Auckland this morning. Included in the contingent are 43 officers, while three nurses returned on duty. Following on the hospital ship which arrived the other day, it is a relief to find that the draft which returned this morning*

*does not include any very serious cases, but all come under the description of "walking wounded." The majority of the wounded men were put out of action at the battle of the Somme, and a smaller proportion at Messines. For the most part they have been for lengthy periods in English hospitals and convalescent homes, and have returned to New Zealand for final discharge.*

While on the *Tainui* heading for New Zealand, Rhoda was promoted from Staff Nurse to Sister. This was on her army record as at 5 December 1917<sup>36</sup>.

Rhoda was back in New Zealand and her overseas war experience had ended, but she is still on the strength of the NZ Expeditionary Force. She was apparently posted to Te Waikato Sanatorium, Cambridge, as her record says that she was posted from there to Christchurch. Te Waikato Sanatorium was for the treatment of tuberculosis and was taken over by the Government to treat returned soldiers. The sanatorium was built on a hill and the buildings were able to be opened up to allow the patients to live and sleep in fresh air as this was thought to be the best conditions at the time for their recovery. There was a severe shortage of suitable beds for tuberculosis patients in New Zealand at the time and there was criticism of patients sent out after 3 months when they were not considered 'cured' or in an ideal situation ready to leave, just to enable more patients to be treated. This was the situation in 1918 when Rhoda was there and the Government was trying to establish additional facilities in other locations to meet the need of the day.

January 1919 saw Sister Rhoda McRae transferred to Christchurch to the newly established Chalmers Orthopaedic Hospital<sup>37</sup> where her older sister Isabella is the Charge Sister. This hospital's development is recorded in the April 1919 Kai Tiaki nurses magazine as follows<sup>38</sup>:--

*This hospital is the new block of buildings recently added to the Christchurch Hospital for chronic cases, by Miss Chalmers. It has been lent to the Defence Department for the purposes of orthopaedic work, and some additions have been made of a special massage and electrical department, with all the latest improvements of baths, plaster departments, and everything used in the re-education of muscles and limbs injured in the war. The staff of trained sisters and masseuses is all military. Probationers of the Christchurch Hospital assist in the wards as a portion of their training, and therefore the acting-matron of the Christchurch Hospital is at the head of the institution though the charge sister works directly under the O.C. The sisters hitherto have lived in the Christchurch Hospital, but as the staff increases it is somewhat difficult to find adequate quarters, therefore a house adjacent to the hospital has now been taken to accommodate them. There is also a large class of student masseuses attached to the Orthopaedic Hospital for their practical training and special orthopaedic lectures.*

It is not known when Rhoda left the Chalmers Orthopaedic Hospital, but it must have been around the middle of 1919, as the Nelson Girl's Collegian Magazine of the second half of 1919 reports that "*Rhoda McRae is in charge of the Plaster Department at the Trentham Military Hospital*"<sup>39</sup>. She is also reported in the January 1920 edition of Kai Tiaki as being on the staff of Trentham Military Hospital<sup>40</sup>.

On 1 February 1920, Rhoda was struck off the strength of the NZ Expeditionary Force and placed on the active reserve list<sup>41</sup>.

## Medals Awarded

Rhoda's Defence record shows she received two medals for her War services. They were the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

### British War Medal

The British War Medal 1914-1920, authorised in 1919, was awarded to eligible service personnel and civilians. Qualifications for the award varied slightly according to service. The basic requirement for army personnel and civilians was that they either entered a theatre of war, or rendered approved service overseas between 5 August 1914 and 11 November 1918. Service in Russia in 1919 and 1920 also qualified for the award.





## Victory Medal



The Victory Medal 1914-1919 was also authorised in 1919 and was awarded to all eligible personnel who served on the establishment of a unit in an operational theatre.

## Post War Marriage and Post War Life

It is not known how long Rhoda stayed at Trentham Military Hospital, but she was still on staff there in 1921 when her engagement to Dr Frank Myers, Wellington was announced<sup>42</sup>.

The marriage was reported in the Kai Tiaki magazine as follows:

Sister Rhoda McRae was married on 28th February, to Dr. Frank Myers, radiologist, Wellington Hospital. Dr. Myers served throughout the Great War, and Sister McRae did several years' military service.

The McRae family history<sup>43</sup> and the online births, deaths and marriages records<sup>44</sup>, show the marriage taking place on 1 March 1922.

The Myers had a daughter in 1923 and a son in 1925<sup>45</sup>.

Sadly Rhoda died on 5 July 1929 at the young age of 41 years. Her obituary was reported in the Evening Post as follows<sup>46</sup>:--

*Many friends, specially in the nursing world, will learn with deep regret of the death of Mrs. Rhoda Myers wife of Dr. D. S. Myers of Wellington. Mrs. Myers, as Miss Rhoda McRae, belonged to the New Zealand Army Nursing Service, and from 1916 to 1918 served in military hospitals in England. She continued her service for four years after her return, having been at Trentham, Waikato Sanatorium, and at Rotorua. In 1922 she was married to Dr. Myers for whom, with his two small children, deep sympathy will be felt. Mrs. Myers was very popular, and had delightful social qualities, as well as those which made her an excellent nurse. Her sister is Miss McRae, matron of the Wellington Red Cross Hospital, with whom also much sympathy will be felt in her loss.*

While some of the detail above may not be 100 per cent accurate, the sentiment was the same in the Kai Tiaki magazine obituary as follows<sup>47</sup>:

On Friday night, July 5th, there passed away Rhoda Myers (Sister Rhoda McRae), wife of Dr. F. Myers, of Wellington, after a very short illness (pneumonia). Mrs. Myers was trained at the Christchurch Hospital, and served during the war and afterwards at Trentham Military Hospital until she married Dr Myers. She leaves, besides her husband and her sister, two little children to mourn their loss. Her sweet disposition and happy personality endeared her to those around her, and her loss at so early an age is indeed sad.

Rhoda predeceased her mother who died in 1933<sup>47</sup> and Rhoda's husband died in 1950<sup>48</sup>.

## Sources

Helen Harkness - relative

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Shona McRae 'By the Braes of Balquether'

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[www.paperspast.govt.nz](http://www.paperspast.govt.nz) Colonist, Nelson Evening Mail, Kai Tiaki, Auckland Star, Evening Post,

<http://www.nzwargraves.org.nz/cemeteries/port-said-war-memorial-cemetery>

<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz>/Hester Maclean 'Nursing in New Zealand: History and Reminiscences

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian, 1916, Vol 1, photograph

<sup>2</sup> Molly J Akers 'MacRaes to New Zealand' page 156 NZSG Nelson library there is an anomaly in the Government birth, deaths and marriages on line records which indicate a birth date of 21 Oct 1887

<sup>3</sup> [www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz](http://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz) NZ Births Deaths Marriages

<sup>4</sup> Helen Harkness – relative and Molly J Akers 'MacRaes to New Zealand' page 156 NZSG Nelson library

<sup>5</sup> Helen Harkness - relative

<sup>6</sup> Molly J Akers 'MacRaes to New Zealand' page 153 NZSG Nelson library

<sup>7</sup> NZSG Nelson – Kiwi Index

<sup>8</sup> Nelson College for Girls – admission records

<sup>9</sup> Nelson College for Girls – admission records

<sup>10</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1904, no.1, pages 4 & 7

<sup>11</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1905, no.1, page 12 and Nelson Girl's Collegian 1906, no.2, inside cover and pages 8, 13 & 16

<sup>12</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1906, no.2, inside cover and pages 8, 13 & 16

<sup>13</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1904, no.1, pages 4 & 7

<sup>14</sup> Colonist, 7 September 1904, page 2

<sup>15</sup> Nelson Evening Mail, 29 November 1904, page 2

<sup>16</sup> Colonist, 7 September 1904, page 2

<sup>17</sup> Nelson Evening Mail, 14 September 1900, page 3

<sup>18</sup> Nelson Evening Mail, 20 July 1903, page 4

<sup>19</sup> [www.ancestry.com.au](http://www.ancestry.com.au) NZ Electoral Rolls and Wises NZ Directories

<sup>20</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1907, no.2, page 23

<sup>21</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1908, no.1, page 21

<sup>22</sup> [www.ancestry.com.au](http://www.ancestry.com.au) NZ Electoral Rolls

<sup>23</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1911, no.1, page 27

<sup>24</sup> NZ Gazette 1922, Vol 1, page 368

<sup>25</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record

<sup>26</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record, [www.ancestry.com.au](http://www.ancestry.com.au) NZ Army WW1 Nominal Rolls 1914-1918 and Sherayl Kendall & David Corbett 'New Zealand Military Nursing'

<sup>27</sup> The Earl of Liverpool 'The Voyages of His Majesty's New Zealand Hospital Ships "Marama" and "Maheno"' (2<sup>nd</sup> volume), Kai Tiaki, Issue 4, October 1915, Page 166 and

Nelson Girl's Collegian 1915, no.2, page 23

<sup>28</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record and Nelson Girl's Collegian 1916, no.1, page 35

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.nzwargraves.org.nz/cemeteries/port-said-war-memorial-cemetery>

<sup>30</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record and Nelson Girl's Collegian 1917, no.2, page 35

- <sup>31</sup> <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-MacNurs-t1-body-d39.html>  
Hester Maclean 'Nursing in New Zealand: History and Reminiscences : Chapter XXXIX'
- <sup>32</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record
- <sup>33</sup> [www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz](http://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz) NZ Births Deaths Marriages and [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record
- <sup>34</sup> Barry O'Sullivan & Matthew O'Sullivan 'New Zealand Army: Personal Equipment 1910 – 1945'
- <sup>35</sup> Auckland Star, 3 January 1918, page 4
- <sup>36</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record
- <sup>37</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record and Nelson Girl's Collegian 1919, no.1, page 35
- <sup>38</sup> Kai Tiaki, Issue 2, April 1919, page 77
- <sup>39</sup> Nelson Girl's Collegian 1919, no.2, page 27
- <sup>40</sup> Kai Tiaki, Issue 1, January 1920, page 17
- <sup>41</sup> [www.archway.archives.govt.nz](http://www.archway.archives.govt.nz) Archived NZ Service Record
- <sup>42</sup> Evening Post, 10 October 1921, Page 9 and Kai Tiaki, Issue 4, October 1921, Page 213
- <sup>43</sup> Molly J Akers 'MacRaes to New Zealand' page 156 NZSG Nelson library
- <sup>44</sup> [www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz](http://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz) NZ Births Deaths Marriages
- <sup>45</sup> Molly J Akers 'MacRaes to New Zealand' page 156 NZSG Nelson library
- <sup>46</sup> Evening Post, 9 July 1929, Page 13
- <sup>47</sup> [www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz](http://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz) NZ Births Deaths Marriages and Molly J Akers 'MacRaes to New Zealand' page 156 NZSG Nelson library
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