

*Matching the Ideal? The First Generation of Nightingale Nursing Probationers, Sydney Hospital, 1868–84 **

Judith Godden

ON 1 MARCH 1869, NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD NATHALIE MARX BECAME A nurse probationer at Sydney Infirmary and Dispensary (from 1881, Sydney Hospital).¹ There she expected to be taught the rudiments of Nightingale nursing under the superintendence of Lucy Osburn. Osburn, along with five other nurses who had all trained at the Nightingale School of Nursing, St Thomas's Hospital, London, had arrived in Sydney on 5 March 1868. She and her nursing team had been employed by the New South Wales Government, on the recommendation of Florence Nightingale, to reform nursing at the Sydney Infirmary and to spread the new system of Nightingale nursing throughout the colony. Before the arrival of Osburn and her band of nurses, the only comparable group of nurses in the colony was the Sisters of Charity who provided general training to members of their order.²

Nathalie Marx and her family were political refugees who had fled the upheavals of their native Germany, and were reputed to have arrived in Australia in 1865 with no understanding of English. Nevertheless, the family made the arduous journey to the mid north coast of NSW and established themselves as storekeepers at the tiny settlement of Bellingen. They initially prospered, with extensive property holdings and a vineyard, but later went bankrupt.³ It is not known what caused Nathalie to seek a means of livelihood elsewhere. Nor is it known how, despite living in the obscure backblocks of Bellingen, she entered Sydney Infirmary with the recommendation of 'Mr Roberts', who was most likely Alfred Roberts, the infirmary's honorary surgeon and one of the most influential medical practitioners in Sydney.⁴ Roberts soon became a bitter opponent of Lucy Osburn's and we can speculate if his recommendation prejudiced her against her young probationer. It is possible that Osburn and Nathalie Marx could communicate in German; Osburn knew the language⁵ although possibly the Marx family only spoke a dialect. Nathalie Marx stayed a little over two years at Sydney Infirmary, then left to visit her parents before returning to Sydney, pre-

sumably having gained their permission to marry plumber and gas fitter and fellow German, Mr Scholer.⁶ Nothing more is known of Nathalie Marx's story, or her contribution to nursing history.

Her younger sister Freda, however, is celebrated as a pioneering midwife. Freda was widowed in 1879 and chose to undertake the shorter, and probably more profitable, course in midwifery. Whether she stayed with her sister in Sydney to do the course, or whether she was influenced by Nathalie's nursing knowledge, is unknown. The only institution known to offer such a course then was the New South Wales Benevolent Asylum so it is almost certain that she trained there.⁷ What is known is that after six months of training Freda returned to Bellingen and soon married a chemist and 'quack' doctor. As 'Nurse Hicks' she achieved mythic status as a rural midwife, and began the wonderful career that made her a legend in the Valley. Her services as a midwife were available twenty-four hours a day in all weathers. Many are the stories told of her visits through rain and darkness and almost impenetrable scrub to some lonely settler's home when a baby was expected.⁸

Such women as the Marx sisters are an integral part of the founding years of modern Australian nursing and midwifery, and form a 'missing' generation of nurses in Australian historiography. With a few exceptions, scant is known about bush midwives such as 'Nurse' Hicks;⁹ they have become little more than vehicles for local legends. Such legends have no room for any inadequacies, mistakes or even learning in the midwife; all human frailty has been leached from the stories. Even less is known about trained nurses such as Nathalie Marx. Historians of nineteenth-century nursing in New South Wales have generally focused on Lucy Osburn and her team of Nightingale nursing founders, or have skipped to the *fin de siècle* years with the recognisable disciplined Nightingale-style matrons of large training hospitals.¹⁰ No study of the first, transitional generation of Nightingale-style nurses has ever been made. In sections of the nursing literature there has been, as Maggs has argued in the British context, confusion between 'descriptive' and 'prescriptive' understandings of nurses. That is, there has been confusion between the prescribed ideal for Nightingale nurses and the historical realities of their lives and work.¹¹

Osburn and the 'Australianisation' of Nightingale nursing

This paper offers an introduction to the nurses, like Nathalie Marx, who trained under Lucy Osburn, the first of many generations of Australian nurses considered to have been trained in the 'Nightingale system'. Essentially Nightingale nursing was carried out by laywomen but

characterised by the sense of vocation and strict discipline instilled in members of religious sisterhoods. Nightingale nursing displaced male nurses by insisting that almost all nurses had to be women. There was an intense stress on moral and physical cleanliness, and an assumption that nursing was a distinct discipline for which one had to train. During Lucy Osburn's time, one year's training was usual.¹²

In sending Osburn and the five other nurses to Sydney, Florence Nightingale's intention was for them to become a permanent training group at Sydney Infirmary. They were unique among the pioneering groups of Nightingale nurses in that they were effectively public servants employed by the NSW Government, which had paid for them to come to Sydney and guaranteed their salaries for the first three years. Ultimately, however, Osburn rejected all the other nurses who accompanied her from England.¹³ Instead she decided that the nurses she recruited in the colony would be the backbone of the fledgling profession in Australia. Osburn later justified her action by claiming that it was a result of 'a very strong bitter feeling against us in the town because we were English'.¹⁴ Despite such self-justifications, Nightingale and her supporters never forgave Osburn for her effective sacking of first four, and then finally all, of her Nightingale-trained companions.¹⁵ This rejection of the other Nightingale-trained nurses proved to be the final and unforgivable offence in a long list of offences committed by Osburn, and she found herself effectively excommunicated by Nightingale. The 'Australianisation' of Nightingale nursing, therefore, came at a very high cost for Osburn.

Osburn's nursing probationers are also significant because they set the standard for subsequent generations of Australian nurses for at least 120 years. That they did not immediately become Nightingale-style nurses and matrons recognisable to historians and older nurses is even more reason for investigating this 'lost' founding generation. They also occupy, as Bashford has argued, an ideological space that challenges conventional historical notions of progress. The new 'Nightingale' nursing was as much about the continuity of religious ideas of purity and contamination as it was about the adoption of new ideas from science.¹⁶ With the centrality of the notion of a nursing vocation, Nightingale nursing also tried to be as much about philanthropic motives for work as about modern understandings of women working to earn their living.

This paper also contributes to the increasing recognition of the importance of the 'ordinary' nurse. In the British context Rafferty, Summers and others have argued that Florence Nightingale's social pre-eminence obscured the reality that most ordinary nurses were recruited from the working class, both before and after the establishment of Nightingale training. In particular, the 'Sairey Gamp' stereotype of the

working-class nurse obscured the reality that highly competent nurses existed both before Nightingale and outside of religious orders.¹⁷ Helmstadter's work serves as a warning against too strong a reaction to the grounding in reality of Charles Dickens' 'Gamp' stereotype, and a reminder of the appalling conditions, even for the time, under which ordinary nurses worked.¹⁸

The Nurses' Register

Florence Nightingale had a passion, and genius, for statistics and required all her nursing superintendents to keep detailed records of the students they accepted for training, that is, the probationers. Lucy Osburn began her Nurses' Register some time after 10 April 1868, five weeks after her arrival, when she accepted the third previous staff member of the Sydney Infirmary for training as a probationer. Osburn's register is an extraordinarily detailed document about each probationer. The information it contains ranges from seemingly unproblematic facts, such as each one's age, religion, and country of birth, to Osburn's recording of gossip about the probationer or her family, even years after the nurses left the hospital. During the sixteen years Osburn stayed in Sydney, she noted in her register extensive details about at least 153 nurses, and some sisters, who entered as probationers.¹⁹

Despite its importance as a source of evidence the Nurses' Register has been barely used by historians,²⁰ with the exception of Bartz Schultz in her general history of Australian nursing, *A Tapestry of Service*. However, even Schultz only used the Nurses' Register in a limited way. For example, Schultz summarised Lucy Osburn's comment about one nurse, Frances Gillam Holden, as 'it would seem she found nursing somewhat difficult and Miss Osburn was unwilling to keep her at the end of her course'. Compare this with Osburn's comment in the register, written three months before Holden finished her training: 'Discharged as incompetent. Objected to so very strongly Mr Street [the honorary secretary] had to come in and discharge her.'²¹

Before considering the Nurses' Register, however, a note of caution is needed. Like any single source of evidence, it is a flawed document and must be used in context. At an early stage of its history some pages were torn out and lost, a fact almost obliterated by over-zealous conservation efforts.²² Such problems are compounded by the fact that almost all other contemporary documents from the Sydney Infirmary have been destroyed, including minutes from the board of directors and the house committee along with Osburn's reports. Although the register was meticulously kept, even the most meticulous records may still be full of errors and omissions, as Nightingale found out to her

frustration in relation to the ones at St Thomas's Hospital's Nightingale School of Nursing.²³

It is also important to know that the probationers themselves could not check the wide range of information about them recorded by Osburn in the register. Nightingale later regretted the power accrued by her matrons. This power included writing what they pleased in their registers. Certainly, as early as 1891, the British *Nursing Record* condemned the Nightingale Nurses' Registers as recipients of 'all ill natured gossip', which did cruel injustices to nurses who did not know what was written and thus could not defend themselves.²⁴

An additional problem is that there are few ways of checking the accuracy of Osburn's comments although we do know that she made at least one mistake. One such error occurred in the register entry for nurse Mary Gordon. Osburn recorded a number of comments about this nurse's activities eight years after she left Sydney Hospital and then wrote: 'mistake[,] another M. Gordon'.²⁵ We do not know how many other mistakes were made by Osburn that went uncorrected.

Osburn's management style is also a key determinant of what is written in the register. Even years after the probationers left the hospital, Osburn wrote down hearsay and gossip about them and their families without recording one positive opinion. Her guiding principle appears to have been that if she did not have an adverse opinion, then there was no point in writing anything at all. This punitive approach, however, did not mean that Osburn failed to develop warm relationships with her staff. It is just that if she did, it left her nothing to record in the register other than the barest details. For example, she enjoyed a life-long friendship with one of her probationers, Nora Barton, and with Barton's mother. Consequently, it is entirely consistent that there are no personal comments about either Barton or her family in the register.²⁶

The register, then, is a flawed document reflecting the idiosyncrasies of its author. Nevertheless, it is a rich source particularly given the scarcity of information available on young working girls, including nurses, in the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, although there is a margin of error when using such a source, it is still able to reveal much about these forgotten 153 probationers, women like Nathalie Marx. What can we learn about them, and from them? In this paper the focus is on exploring the following demographics: overall numbers; continuity with the previous staff; gender; probationer status; age; country of birth; marital status; religion; class; length of stay at Sydney Infirmary/Hospital; and reasons for leaving. In conclusion, a profile of Sarah Hill, a 'typical' probationer, highlights the theme of the enlarged opportunities for meaningful employment for young women which trained nursing provided during 1868–84.

Numbers of probationers

The first factor evident from the Nurse's Register is that trained nursing was in no sense a large-scale occupation. The total intake of 153 nurses by Lucy Osburn amounts to slightly less than ten a year. Yearly intake fluctuated but with no discernible pattern. Nurses trained in the name of Nightingale during this period were often in positions of power as nursing superintendents, but numerically they were still outnumbered by their untrained, and in Australia at least, predominantly male colleagues.²⁷ As the story of the two Marx sisters reminds us, the scantily trained midwives were often much more important to contemporaries than the new, fully trained 'Nightingale' nurse.

On the other hand, Nightingale trained nurses were frequently in positions of power as nursing superintendents so that their influence was greater than their numbers may suggest. They were also, at least, a substantial minority. The 1881 census indicates that there were 675 'nurses, midwives etc' in New South Wales compared to a total white population of nearly 750,000.²⁸ It is not known how many were midwives and how many were nurses, and whether there was any confusion with nursemaids who cared for young children, or just what categories 'etc.' counted. Osburn's total intake of 153 nursing probationers during 1868–84 amounts to 22 per cent of the above census count of nurses and midwives, 'etc'. Thus, it can be surmised that Sydney Hospital nurse probationers were at least a substantial minority of nurses in NSW, but there are so many ambiguities in the statistics that it is difficult to say more.

Continuity

In her Nurses' Register Osburn first recorded the three members of staff—Ann Brannagan (or Branigan)²⁹ and sisters Jane and Elizabeth Morrow—already working in the hospital when she arrived and whom she kept on as nursing probationers. Ann Brannagan's register entry is first even though she started her training after the Morrow sisters. Brannagan had been employed in the hospital since 1867, initially as a servant and then in the unpopular position of permanent night nurse. As her record appears first, Brannagan's acceptance as a probationer probably prompted Osburn to begin the probationers' register. Brannagan's value as an employee included her willingness to take on unpopular nursing tasks. When she accepted her probationer status Osburn employed her in the Magdalene ward for women with sexually transmitted diseases, where the patients were largely assumed to be prostitutes. Brannagan stayed with that ward for a year. Osburn

considered nursing on the Magdalene ward a difficult task, writing to Nightingale that the ward needs ‘careful judicious supervision & the whole only kept in proper working order by the greatest patience & forethought’.³⁰

The Infirmary had employed the Morrow sisters six weeks before Osburn arrived and she accepted them as probationers three weeks later. Jane Morrow had been hired from the Immigration Barracks, a common venue for employers to find domestic servants, ten weeks after her arrival from Ireland.³¹ Although Osburn noted she had not been ‘in service’ before, Jane Morrow had been placed in the female surgical ward with twenty-one patients. Her only help appears to have been assistance with scrubbing the floors twice a week. Jane was apparently successful there as Osburn left her in this ward until 1869 when she was moved to the male medical ward.³²

Elizabeth Morrow, the elder of the two, and had been working in the colony as a servant for four years before her sister joined her in Sydney. They then both accepted positions at the Sydney Infirmary, where they worked together, but where Elizabeth had the harder and more dangerous task. Placed in the female fever ward, where Osburn recorded she was ‘quite alone’, Elizabeth Morrow had to do all the scrubbing as well as all the nursing. When Osburn arrived, Elizabeth Morrow was promptly moved to the female medical ward, but by May 1868 she was ill with ‘colonial fever’ (presumably typhoid fever). It was four months before she was well enough to nurse again. Osburn reported to Nightingale that Elizabeth Morrow had been so unwell that ‘her doctor... [had] given her up [as dying] for more than a fortnight’, and went on to describe the ward in which Morrow had worked. With as many as fifteen patients at once with colonial fever, which

almost always takes a dysenteric type of haemorrhage purging & straining ... we have had many deaths fr[om] it since we came—there is no W.C. [water closet] no sink, no tap, belonging to this Ward all the slops are emptied into a pail that is carried through the whole length... [of this and other wards]... to a W.C. containing 1 seat for 50 patients.³³

Nightingale was critical of Osburn’s decision not to keep more of the old staff; for her ‘hasty endeavours to make fresh arrangements’.³⁴ Osburn defended herself on the grounds that most of the nurses employed when she arrived were of poor quality. She had previously written that they were, noting no exceptions, ‘all rough raw nurses brought up in dirty higger migger Irish ways without a clean or systematic idea in their heads’.³⁵ This comment, designed to elicit Nightingale’s sympathy for the difficulty of Osburn’s task, did not do justice to Brannagan and the two Morrow sisters.

Osburn's comment to Nightingale also disguised the fact that she retained a greater proportion of the previous nurses than might at first have been apparent. Three nurses was a significant portion of the nursing staff, which constituted nine wardsmen and between four to six female nurses,³⁶ employed at the Sydney Infirmary in March 1868. As Summers, Dingwall and others have argued in the British context, there were significant continuities in recruitment in Sydney too before and after the introduction of Nightingale nursing.³⁷

Osburn had little choice but to dismiss those nurses who were old and/or male, as age and gender were two highly significant markers of the 'new' Nightingale nurse. In Osburn's justification to Nightingale, she described how she dismissed all the 'Dirty frowsy looking old women', but decided to retain 'the young women who wished to stay & promised to amend'; that is, agreed to train as probationers.³⁸ The three nurses she kept on were all in their twenties: Ann Brannagan and Jane Morrow were both twenty-three years old and Elizabeth Morrow was twenty-six.

Although some compromises could be made as to the ideal age profile of the Nightingale nurse, this was never the case with gender. While the majority of nurses in Australia at this time were probably male, the 'Nightingale' nurse was exclusively female.³⁹ (It would be another century before men could enter the Lucy Osburn School of Nursing at Sydney Hospital.) Osburn, therefore, dismissed all the male nurses, except one who was kept on to take charge of the ward for male patients with sexually transmitted diseases.⁴⁰

Sister probationers

Of the 153 probationers recorded in the register five did not enter as nurses, but as sister probationers. These five women entered as sisters not nurses, to train as nursing managers rather than bedside nurses, simply because they were middle class. At this stage the two categories of nurse and sister were quite distinct and nurses did not normally become sisters through promotion. Perhaps significantly, or perhaps as a corollary with being middle class, all the sister probationers were members of the Church of England.

Four of the five—Gertrude Moule, Mary Dickson, Nora Barton and Mary Bland—are specifically noted as sister probationers in the register. The evidence that the fifth one, Frances Holden, was a sister probationer comes from a letter of Lucy Osburn's.⁴¹ It is probable that others were also sister probationers. For example, Rosamund Holden entered nurse training at the same time as her sister Frances but no evidence identifying Rosamund as a sister probationer has survived.⁴²

Rosamund Holden is, therefore, not counted as a sister probationer in this article although it would seem likely that she was one.

The difference in the experiences of these 'sister probationers' compared to the bulk of the 'nurse probationers' was that their middle-class access to resources enabled them to acquire attributes of gentility and education, which gave them a claim to authority over working-class women. The commonality of the experiences of nurses and sisters, however, was due to their shared gender. The plight of the thirty-eight-year-old, middle-class spinster, Mary Dickson, for example, cut across class lines. Prior to her appointment as a sister probationer, Mary had been housekeeper for her uncle until he unexpectedly married and she suddenly found herself with no home and no job.⁴³ Nursing provided such women with a much-needed means of livelihood and a safe place to live.

Despite the middle-class status of sister probationers and the comparatively generous salaries paid to them—£40 during training and an annual starting salary of £60 with board, compared to £26 and £30 respectively for nurses—not all were a success. Frances Holden was publicly dismissed in 1887 as Lady Superintendent of the Children's Hospital in Sydney.⁴⁴ As a probationer in 1874–75, she had fared little better having been discharged as 'incompetent' and, as noted above, forcibly evicted from the hospital after completing only nine months of her training.⁴⁵ Mary Dickson was dismissed after she completed ten months of the year-long training with Osburn noting her to be 'unfitted for the duties of a nurse or a sister'.⁴⁶

Even the successful sister probationers did not stay to form the nucleus of the planned training school. Although Nora Barton maintained a life-long friendship with Lucy Osburn she only stayed in nursing for two and a half years.⁴⁷ Gertrude Moule lasted more than five years but then left reluctantly for life in a (non-nursing) Church of England Sister hood.⁴⁸ There is no evidence that Lucy Osburn's eventual successor, Sydney Hospital-trained Rebecca McKay, entered as a sister probationer.

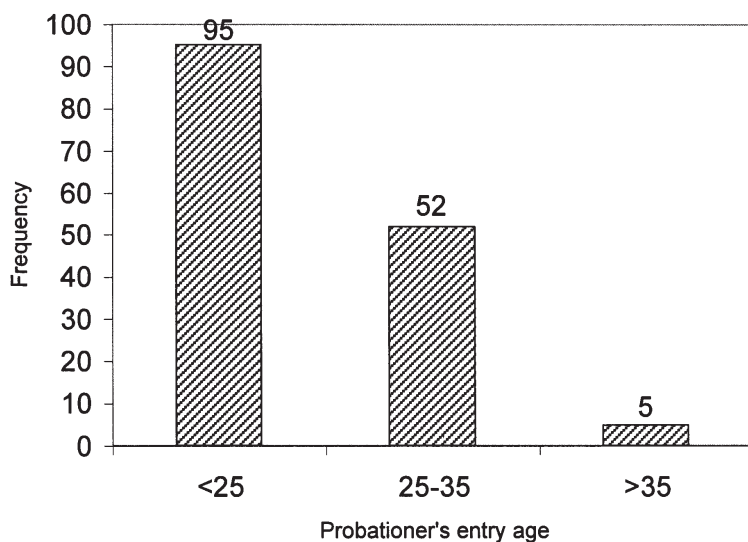
The one nursing success story of the sister probationers was Mrs Mary Bland who entered nursing as a thirty-three-year-old widow and stayed for four and a half years. Unlike the others, she stayed in nursing after leaving Sydney Hospital, firstly as matron of the Tarban Creek Asylum (later Gladesville Psychiatric Hospital), then as matron of Hobart Hospital, Tasmania. Ironically for the social aspirations of Nightingale nursing, Bland had probably the lowest social status of the five sister probationers: she had been a nursery governess or housekeeper and Osburn thought Mrs Bland's husband had been a shopkeeper.⁴⁹

Age

As indicated above, the older style nurse learnt from experience and thus was rarely young. The image of the Nightingale nurse, however, was explicitly linked to the idea that they were young and that their nursing practice was due to training, not to years of experience. Nightingale nurses were ideally aged between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age,⁵⁰ but many, as Maggs found in his study of recruitment in four British provincial hospitals, were more likely to be in their early twenties.⁵¹

How did Osburn's recruits fit this pattern? As can be seen in Figure 1 most conformed to the British practice, as revealed by Maggs, rather than to the Nightingale ideal. The probationers ranged in age from eighteen to forty years, with more (twenty-eight women) entering at twenty years than at any other age. The average age of entry into nursing was twenty-four and a half years, just below the minimum Nightingale ideal. As indicated in the figure below, 65 per cent were under the ideal minimum age. On the other hand, older women were clearly avoided or harder to recruit, with only five of Osburn's probationers during 1868–84 known to be over the ideal minimum age of thirty-five years.

Figure 1: Age of Probationers (n=152)



The upper age range of forty years old was limited to one nurse, Mary Moore. An English policeman's widow who had only been in the colony for four months, Moore was admitted as a probationer in October 1870 when attacks on Lucy Osburn were at their height. The inquiry into the *Protestant Standard* newspaper's serious allegations that Osburn was creating a quasi-Catholic 'nunnery' at Sydney Infirmary had just finished, and Osburn was questioning her future in New South Wales.⁵² The scandal of a public inquiry caused a decline in nursing applicants, forcing Osburn to be less choosy. However, if Moore's appointment was an experiment, it was not one Osburn would be tempted to repeat, for Moore was found drunk on the ward and dismissed after one year.⁵³

The other extreme in age is found in the three eighteen-year-old probationers, and Osburn was severely attacked for admitting such young girls into nursing. In 1870, the *Sydney Punch* newspaper published this diatribe, which neatly conflated religious, moral and misogynist concerns:

a seminary of empty-headed girls... the so called 'probationers'... utter disgust of a system which accepts as novitiates hysterical chits of eighteen, and inducts them under the specious film of maudlin sentimentality into a region in which indecency and pruriency may sate an unhealthy appetite.⁵⁴

This extract demonstrates the fears surrounding trained nursing; how innovative a concept it was and how stereotypes of youthful impressionism inflamed these fears. As usual with sensational press claims, hyperbole had won over substance. At the time of the *Sydney Punch*'s denunciation the register recorded only one eighteen-year-old nurse probationer, Elizabeth Leech. Born in the United States of America, Leech had come to the colony as an infant. After her parents died she had been brought up in the School of Industry, a well-meaning but one of the most harshly repressive girls' orphanages in colonial Australia.⁵⁵ Leech had been a general servant prior to being recommended to Osburn by Miss Deas Thomson. Osburn could hardly refuse: Miss Thomson was a regular 'lady visitor' to the Infirmary while her father was an influential former colonial secretary and President of the Infirmary Board.⁵⁶ Elizabeth Leech was caught up in the turmoil of the *Protestant Standard* Inquiry and, shortly after she completed her year's training, was dismissed when the Inquiry published its report vindicating Osburn. Osburn sternly noted in the register that Elizabeth Leech was 'not steady enough for a nurse and behaved badly at the time of the Protestant Standard Inquiry'.⁵⁷ Cast adrift without family and socialised only for institutional life, her fate was highly predictable. Osburn wrote in her register that Leech 'came to grief & applied for

admission into the Benevolent Asylum'. 'Came to grief' was a popular euphemism for an unmarried, pregnant girl being abandoned without means of support. The most likely interpretation of Osburn's note is that Leech was admitted to the Benevolent Asylum's Lying-in (Maternity) Hospital to give birth as an unmarried mother with no support other than that of public charity. Children born in these conditions had few other options than to repeat the cycle of institutionalisation and deprivation.

Country of birth

From 1868 an increasing majority of the white population of Sydney and its suburbs was born in the colony, so that by the 1881 census 62 per cent were Australian-born.⁵⁸ However, as shown in the following table, only about half of Osburn's probationers were native-born. This less than expected proportion is a little surprising given that Osburn wrote enthusiastically about her Australian recruits: 'I like these Australian ones very much' and 'I love my nurses heartily'.⁵⁹ The high proportion of immigrant nurses is less surprising, however, if nursing is viewed as a form of domestic service. McBride argued that the study of domestic service is the study of urban migration. Gothard extended this argument by claiming that government-sponsored female emigration schemes were essentially about increasing the supply of domestic servants.⁶⁰ It is logical that Osburn, herself a migrant, looked to migration, just as employers of domestic servants did, to fulfil demand.

Table 1: Country of Birth of Probationers (n=151)

Country of Birth	No. of Probationers	% of Probationers (to nearest %)
Australia	74	49
England	41	27
Ireland	21	14
Scotland	7	5
New Zealand	3	2
USA	2	1
Germany	2	1

Osburn's actions are in marked contrast, for example, to that of Maria Machin, a close friend of Nightingale's who was sent to Montreal to found Nightingale nursing in Canada. Machin employed only St Thomas's trained British sisters and nurses and did not recruit nor promote any Canadian nurses.⁶¹ After the Australian-born probationers

the next largest category at Sydney Infirmary were from England, Ireland and Scotland, with sixty-nine probationers, or 45 per cent, in this category. Only seven of the probationers were born in a country other than Australia or the British Isles. This recruitment pattern is a logical reflection of the overall pattern of migration to the colony, as the United Kingdom was the largest source of Australian immigrants.

Marital status

The ideal Nightingale nurse was a single woman who was required to resign if she married. Accordingly, none of Osburn's nurses were recorded as currently married although ten were listed as widows. One nurse, Mary Ann Raftos, was noted by Osburn as having been married for nearly a year before her secret was discovered and she was dismissed. The Nurses' Register allows us the occasional glimpse of the desperation of some women at a time when their success, or otherwise, in life was so largely defined by marriage. Eliza Stanbury, for example, is noted in the register as having left Sydney Hospital because 'George Abbott the night porter was also leaving... For some two years I heard she followed George Abbott about and after[war]ds they were married.'⁶²

Similarly, probationer Mary Jones followed a doctor to and from England before finally marrying him.⁶³ Jane Henrie showed equal desperation and courage. A Scottish immigrant with no relatives in Sydney, Henrie's economic and social prospects were dim especially as she grew older and a period of illness became more likely. When Henrie was twenty-nine, in July 1874, Osburn noted that she

[l]eft to be married up the country to a man she had never seen [-] a patient whose nurse she had been [,] recommended her to this man & he sent for her. She bought her wedding things & started.⁶⁴

That is the last we hear of Jane Henrie. Within the covers of a romantic novel, her fate would have been certain. In real life, we can only hope Jane found a family and economic security, if not romantic love.

Religion

The ideal Nightingale nurse was Church of England and, as has been seen, all of the sister probationers belonged to this dominant church. Osburn was severely criticised by the newspaper the *Protestant Standard* for favouring Catholics. Yet in the end 67 per cent, or approxi-

mately two-thirds (103 of the total of 153), of the probationers were members of the Church of England. Only 9 per cent, or fourteen, of the probationers were recorded as Catholic, compared to a Catholic population of Sydney and suburbs of 25 per cent.⁶⁵ Ironically, the highest intake of Catholic probationers (and then only three) occurred in 1870, the year that a public Inquiry into allegations by the Protestant Standard was likely to have adversely affected recruitment. Given the strength and social commitment of the evangelical community in Sydney,⁶⁶ sectarian conflict arising from the fear that Osburn was imitating the Sisters of Charity at their St Vincent's Hospital could only have had a detrimental impact on her ability to recruit the most suitable probationers.

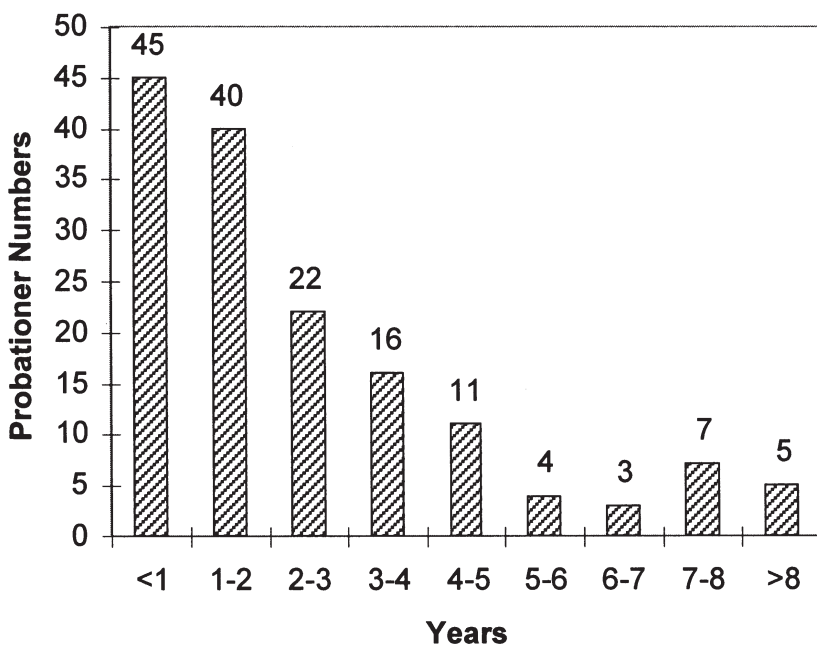
Class

The stereotypical Nightingale nursing probationer was middle class, but the register indicates that this class stereotype was only relevant for the five women, discussed above, identified as sister probationers. The majority of the 153 probationers were, in fact, firmly working class, with sixty-one described as having been some form of domestic servant. If 'upper' servants are included, such as housekeepers and cooks, the number of probationers previously employed in domestic service rises to seventy-one, or 46 per cent. The next largest category noted by Osburn were those twenty-five women who were working, as distinct from living, at home. This group were, in effect, unpaid domestic servants for their own families. If these women are also included, then approximately two-thirds of the probationers had previously been working, either paid or unpaid, in domestic service. Such women previously had little choice of employment other than domestic service or unpaid work for their own families. The attraction of trained nursing was that it significantly widened the narrow range of occupations available to working-class women.

Duration at Sydney Hospital

The average length of stay of each probationer at Sydney Hospital was two and a half years, the median stay one year eight months, and the most frequent length of stay (in one-year cohorts) less than one year. The figure on the following page indicates the length of stay for the probationers at Sydney Hospital during 1868–84.

Figure 2: Length of Stay



About 70 per cent of probationers completed the one-year training period, with 30 per cent (forty-six) dropping out before the end of training. This is a much lower drop-out rate than the approximately 50 per cent Maggs found at Southampton Poor Law Infirmary, and the 59 per cent in 1881 at the Nightingale School of Nursing.⁶⁷ In the colonial context those nurses who left before completion of their training did not necessarily leave nursing. Even partial training as a Nightingale nurse under Lucy Osburn generally guaranteed another nursing position elsewhere. The most dramatic example of this, as mentioned above, is Sister Probationer Frances Holden. Dismissed by Osburn after only nine months, five years later she was appointed Matron, and then Lady Superintendent, of the Children's Hospital, Sydney.

Reasons for leaving

The most common reason for leaving was voluntary resignation to go to another nursing position, often with Lucy Osburn's recommendation. Nearly one-third, that is, forty-nine probationers, left for this reason and they have the greatest claim to credit for spreading Nightingale nursing throughout the Australian colonies. However, of these, four-

teen went into the more lucrative practice of private nursing, that is, looking after middle-class patients in their own homes. Nightingale deplored this practice as it undermined vocation as a motivation for nursing training.⁶⁸ Only thirty-five probationers, less than a quarter of the total intake, took their Nightingale training straight from Sydney Hospital to other hospitals in the manner that Nightingale intended, and for which she and Osburn have been celebrated.⁶⁹

The difficulty in assessing the influence of Osburn's probationers is compounded by claims that they spread Nightingale nursing to particular hospitals. Such claims include cases where Osburn had dismissed the nurse concerned.⁷⁰ The most notable example of this is Florence Abbott, first reprimanded by Osburn for 'flirting with the resident doctors & impropriety of conduct' and later for behaving 'badly'. She was dismissed as being 'unsuitable for a sister... Too flirty and unsteady', but then appointed matron of Hobart Hospital. Abbott took with her to Tasmania a group of Sydney nurses, thereby becoming the effective founder of Nightingale nursing in that colony.⁷¹ The claims in this case are on surer grounds with the appointment of Mary Bland as Abbott's successor.

Twenty-four probationers (nearly 16 per cent) are noted as having been dismissed, but only one of these for drunkenness. While the dismissal rate is similar to that of the Nightingale School of Nursing at St Thomas's Hospital, London, where approximately 15 per cent were sacked for misconduct in the first decade,⁷² that only one nurse was dismissed for drunkenness is unexpected. Australians were heavy drinkers and hospitals were notorious for the misuse of patients' alcoholic medications.⁷³ This unexpected finding suggests either that incidents of drunkenness have been exaggerated or that Sydney Hospital was a miracle of sobriety among nineteenth-century hospitals. It could also mean that drunkenness was usually reported under the general heading of misconduct rather than specified as alcohol abuse.

Twenty probationers (13 per cent) left voluntarily due to ill health, which is understandable given the working conditions and misunderstandings about infection control. The number of probationers who resigned because of illness is also remarkably similar to the resignation rate due to sickness in the first decade at St Thomas's Hospital, where, between 1860–70, about 12 per cent resigned due to illness.⁷⁴

A representative probationer

The typical nursing probationer at Sydney Hospital was not an Antipodean version of the wealthy Florence Nightingale. Rather, she was an Australian-born single woman, twenty years of age, an adher-

ent of the Church of England, and ex-servant who stayed less than two years before moving on to another nursing position. The nurse who most fitted this profile was Sarah Hill. An Australian-born orphan who became a nurse probationer in 1876 at the age of twenty, Hill had previously been a servant before joining Sydney Infirmary. She stayed at the hospital for one year and seven months, which was less than the average of two and a half years, but approximates to the median stay of 1.8 years. Hill left voluntarily on 1 February 1878 because of bad health: Osburn noted her as 'phthical', that is, having tuberculosis.

In 1879 Hill married, and three years later visited the Infirmary with her two children. Like Nathalie Marx, whose story began this paper, nothing is known of Hill after Osburn ceases to write about her in the Nurses' Register. Domestic service, marriage, children and even ill health were all part of the expected life pattern of a working-class woman. Sarah Hill may well have taken her children to visit the hospital as a workplace that was out of the ordinary; a place where she could bask in the reflected glory of the famed Nightingale-trained, English, Lady Superintendent Lucy Osburn. Osburn's entries in the register imply that Sarah Hill was happy at Sydney Infirmary; she certainly found there an alternative occupation to domestic service. It was an opportunity that generations of young women were to seize eagerly. In turn, nursing was to benefit greatly from skilled, devoted workers with few other real employment options.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The nurse probationers discussed here are far from the mythical, middle-class, air-brushed angels of the Nightingale nursing myth. They were predominantly working-class women who struggled with the harsh realities of life in a young colony. Nursing for them represented an opportunity for employment as something other than paid, or unpaid, domestic servants. Many of them took up nursing after leaving their families and friends to find work in the nearest city, or in a new colony half-way around the world. For all, the introduction of trained nursing offered them a greater choice in the narrow range of occupations available at the time. These are the nurses who need to be acknowledged for their role, alongside Osburn, in the founding of modern nursing in Australia.

University of Sydney

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63. *ibid.*, entry no. 11 for Mary Jones.
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