



Janet Wyse Mackie Williamson was one of the Otago region's early military nurses. She was born in Dunedin 26 September 1862, the second daughter of Jane Sangster Waters and John Mackie Williamson, a highly respected landowner and elder of North Taieri Church. Little is known of Janet's

early education but she started training at Dunedin Hospital in 1890 and graduated in 1893. She practiced private nursing until in 1897 she was appointed matron to Lincoln Agricultural College.

In February 1899 she was one of 50 nurses from Otago and Southland who applied to serve in the South African War. Her application was successful and she was appointed Sister-in-Charge of the nine nurses who were selected. They were initially sent to Weinburgh and then to Number 10 General Hospital Bloemfontein, where they were stationed for the next 17 months.

On 4 September 1901, Janet Wise Williamson was mentioned in despatches by Lord Roberts, British Commander-in-Chief, and on 27 September 1901 was awarded the Royal Red Cross – being the first New Zealander to receive this military award for women. She was presented with it personally by Edward VII in December of that year.

On returning to New Zealand in 1902 she was appointed Matron of Nelson Hospital, but resigned in 1903 due to ill-health. She returned to Dunedin, where she worked as a private nurse when her health permitted. For a period in 1908 she relieved as matron of the Nordrach Sanitorium in Otago.

[The sanatorium was situated about 1300 feet above sea level on the northern slope of Flagstaff about six miles from Dunedin and reached by way of Halfway Bush and the road to Whare Flat –see Otago Witness, Issue 2502, 5 March 1902, Page 72, for a full description]

Janet Williamson was one of the 17 foundation members of the Dunedin Trained Nurses' Club in 1907. She frequently attended meetings, although because of ill-health was not able to take an active part in its affairs. Her experience in the Boer War was valuable, and in 1914 she was asked to represent the Association to the Minister of Defence, James Allen, requesting that the government establish a Nursing Service for overseas duty, as New Zealand nurses were travelling to Australia to join the Army Nursing services there.

Janet Williamson died on 12 March 1936 and is buried in Dunedin's Southern Cemetery and marked by a beautifully engraved headstone. Her medals are held at the Auckland War Memorial Museum.

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