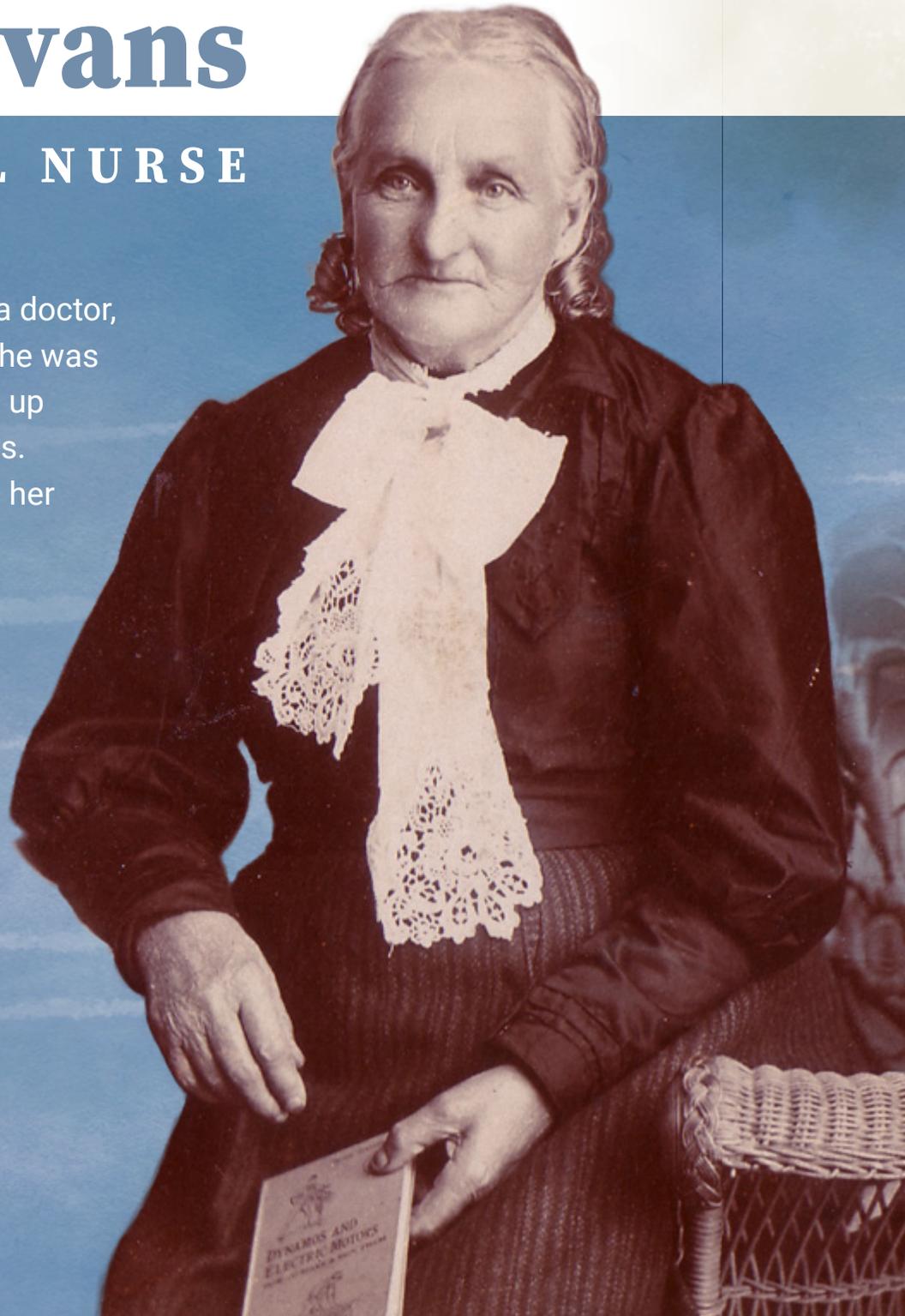


Ann Evans

COLONIAL NURSE

by Kathryn Mercer

Ann Evans was never a doctor, although that's what she was often called. She grew up in England in the 1840s. Most people expected her to become a wife and mother. At the time, very few women had a career.



An independent woman

Ann was born in 1832. She grew up in Birmingham, an industrial city known at the time for its factories, factory workers, and slums. Ann's family (the Clives) was middle class. For girls, this usually meant a little education and eventually marriage. Women's lives were managed by their fathers or husbands. But Ann chose a different path: independence. By the time she was eighteen, she was a nurse, working with Florence Nightingale in Turkey during the Crimean War.

In Turkey, Ann saw terrible things. There was little food, and the hospitals were rat-infested and poorly equipped. Many of the patients died from disease. The nurses, led by Nightingale, worked hard to introduce basic hygiene and better systems. Ann and the other nurses would remain mostly unknown, but Florence Nightingale was immortalised.

Opportunity

After the war, Ann continued to work as a nurse. Although it was considered a lowly job, she believed nursing allowed her to make a difference. The 1850s was a time of social change in England. Work was hard to find, and the cities were crowded and polluted. More young men began to leave the country in search of a better life, and single women in England soon outnumbered single men. A woman who worked was looked down on, but for many, the alternative was poverty.

New Zealand had the opposite problem: not enough single women and a large number of single men. There was also a shortage of servants. To address these issues, Otago's provincial government decided to help pay for the cost of single women's fares so they could come to New Zealand. More than 1,200 intrepid young women arrived in the province between 1862 and 1863. This included Ann, who left England against her father's wishes.

A new life

Ann sailed on the *John Duncan*. Half the passengers were young, unmarried women. The journey took ninety-eight days. At sea, one of them died, and a baby girl was born. Ann was thirty when she arrived in Dunedin. She most likely stayed in the crowded women's barracks while she looked for work, but even the tent hospitals on the goldfields wanted male staff. Despite her impressive skills and experience, Ann had to give up. Disappointed, she accepted a position as a housemaid on a remote farm. She was paid three times more than she would have received as a nurse, including two dresses a year. In the spring of 1863, Ann married Thomas Evans. They moved to Napier, then Whanganui, where they lived for six years and had five children.

Whanganui

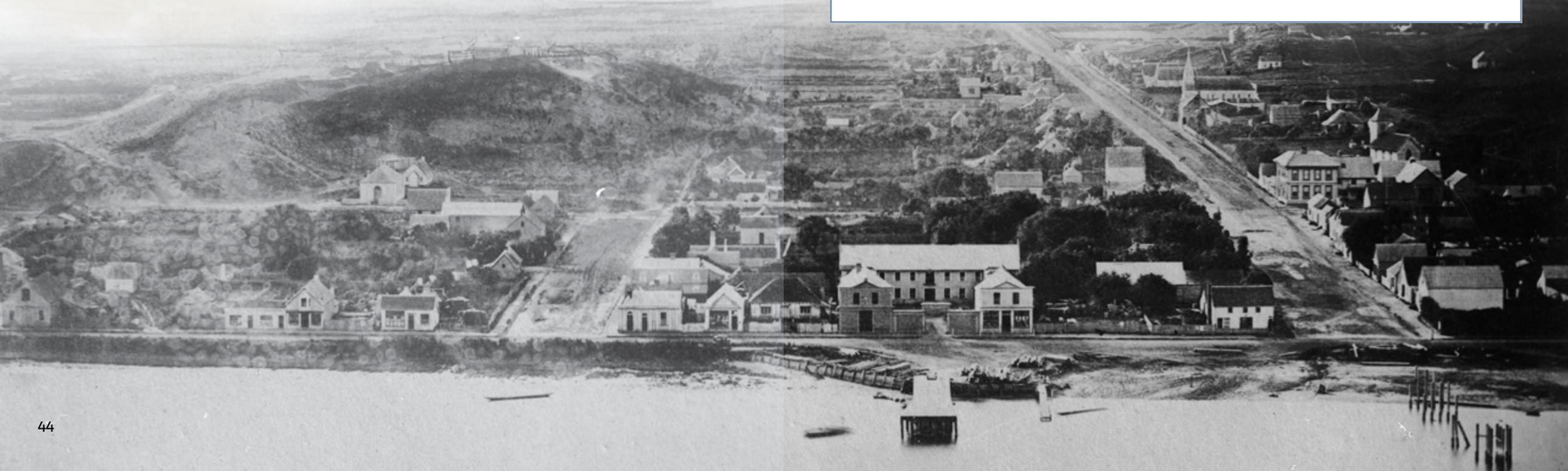
Whanganui in the late 1860s was an unsettled place. War in neighbouring Taranaki was dragging on, and to punish the Māori "rebels", the government confiscated a huge area of land and burnt many kāinga and pā. By 1868, Ngāti Ruanui were facing starvation in South Taranaki. Their leader, Tītokowaru, had campaigned for peace, but now it seemed he was running out of options. It was war.

Tītokowaru's men won two decisive battles in the area, taking back 110 kilometres of land between the Waingongoro and Whanganui rivers. When he brought taua to within 5 miles of Whanganui, settlers terrified themselves with wild rumours of what would happen next. Like many others, the Evans family fled. They wouldn't return until Tītokowaru and his men had gone.

A TROUBLED TOWN

Whanganui was one of New Zealand's first towns. Its early years of European settlement were troubled and violent. Almost all Māori disputed the Whanganui land sale of 1840, and some wanted their land back and the settlers gone. The first soldiers were sent to Whanganui in 1846, and the town soon had a large stockade, with eight hundred soldiers protecting fewer than two hundred settlers. In the winter of 1847, there was several months of conflict after a young Māori man was accidentally shot by a British soldier. A few days later, a settler family was killed, and four of the Māori men responsible were hanged. In retaliation, taua attacked the town in May and again in July.

More than a decade of peace followed. Fighting resumed in 1864, when the government and its Māori allies fought followers of the Pai Mārire faith, most of whom resisted Pākehā rule. The following year, the government announced the Taranaki land confiscation. This involved Māori land almost as far south as Whanganui. The taking of this land caused much suffering for local iwi and contributed to what became known as Tītokowaru's war.



“Ann the Doctor”

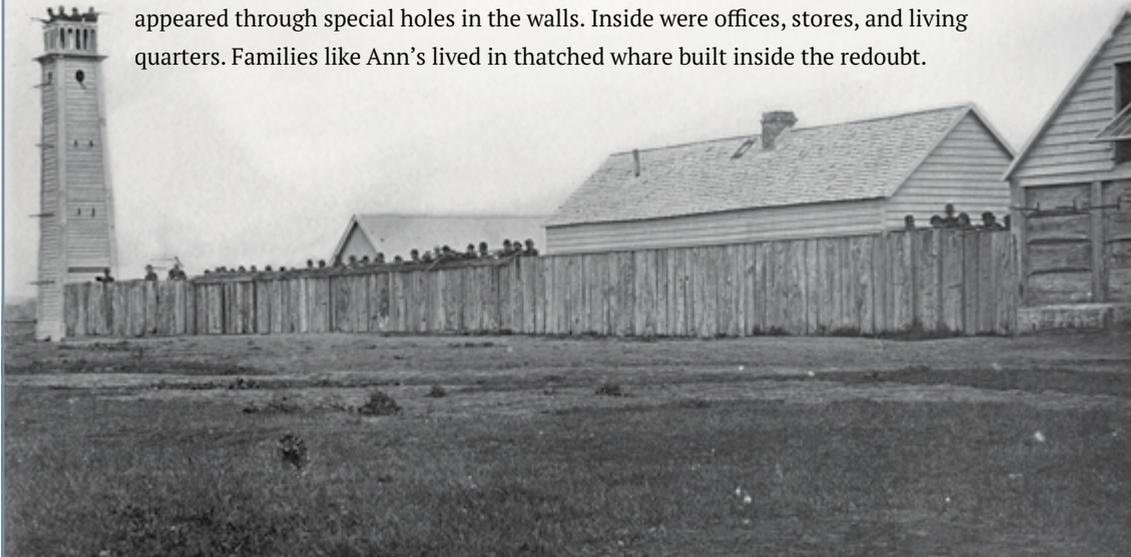
Thomas’s work as a house painter exposed him to toxic dust and fumes. He became sick with lead poisoning. Ann nursed him but couldn’t save him, and he died in 1871. She was left with five young children to support. The following year, she packed their possessions into a wagon, and the family set off for the Waihī Redoubt near the small town of Normanby in Taranaki.

Ann’s family was welcomed at the soldiers’ camp. There she ran a shop while their house was built. Other settlers were establishing themselves in the district, and soon there was a school – but no hospital. The nearest doctor was several hours away, and word quickly spread about Ann’s skills. Keen to ease suffering, she earned the nickname “Ann the Doctor”. She treated both Māori and Pākehā patients and attended almost every birth and medical need in the area.

THE WAIHĪ REDOUBT

The Waihī Redoubt was built in 1866 and was used as a base for colonial forces until the 1880s. By the early 1870s, it held the largest number of soldiers in the area: thirty-six men. These men were part of the armed constabulary, which fought Māori during the New Zealand Wars and occupied confiscated Māori land. After the wars, the armed constabulary split to form the police force and army.

During times of unrest, the Waihī Redoubt became a safe haven for local settlers. It had imposing high walls and an even higher lookout. When under threat, rifles appeared through special holes in the walls. Inside were offices, stores, and living quarters. Families like Ann’s lived in thatched whare built inside the redoubt.



Patients

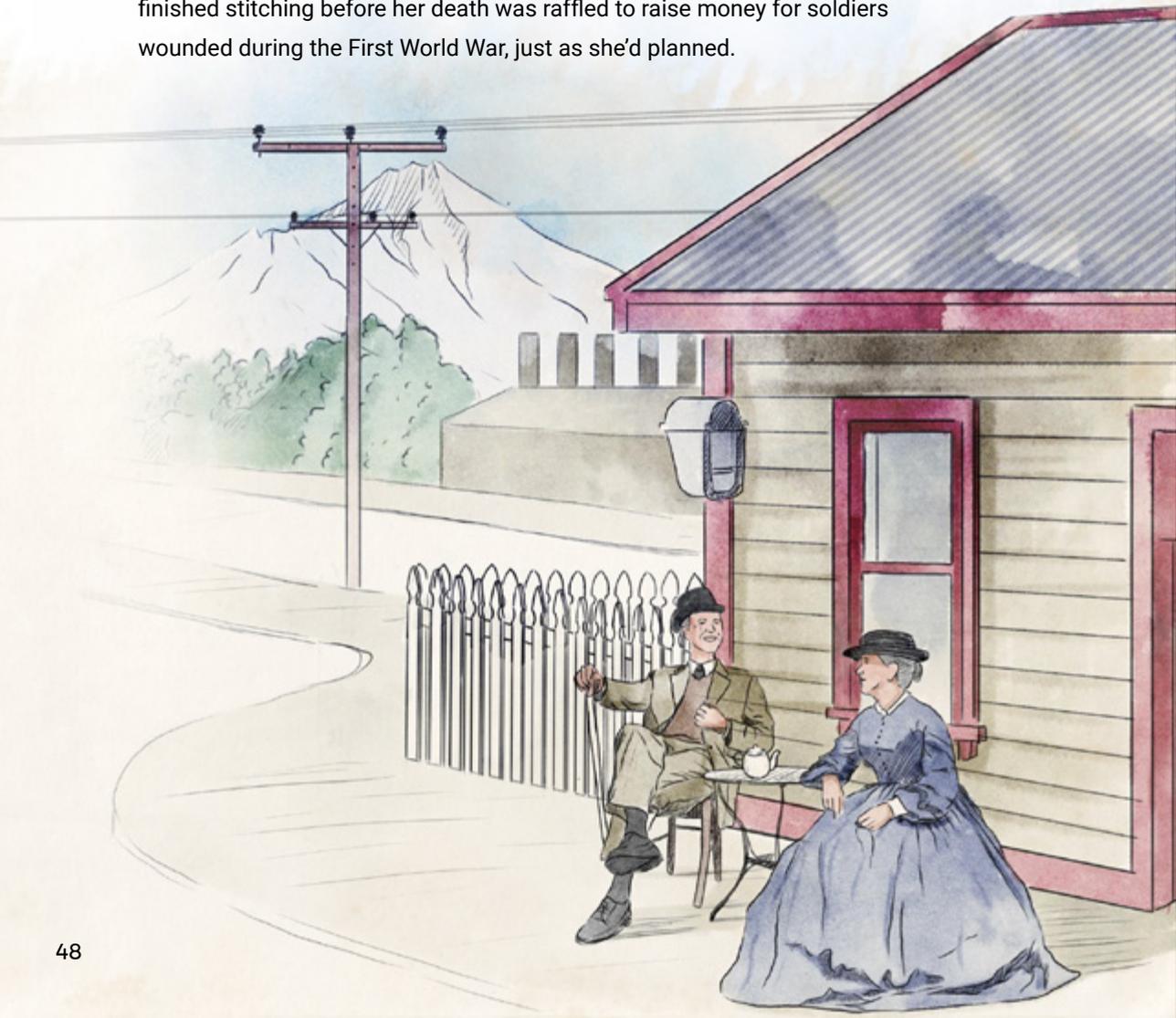
Ann travelled long distances on horseback to reach her patients. She took lonely tracks deep into the bush, in all weather, sometimes in the middle of the night. There were some close calls. One time, just before dawn, two men emerged from the gloom, clearly intent on robbing her. Ann took control and threatened them. She didn’t let on that her only weapon was a riding crop.

Another event was even more memorable. One day, so the story goes, a group of Māori from Ngāti Ruanui visited Ann, asking her to help a sick man. Ann went with them. She was blindfolded by the Waingongoro River, and her horse was led for what felt like miles. Her blindfold was removed in a forest clearing, and there in a whare she met the sick man. It was the outlawed Tītokowaru, who had both pneumonia and a thousand-pound bounty on his head. Although she was at first alarmed, Ann stayed with him. She helped care for Tītokowaru and other sick people in the camp for six weeks. Each day, Ann wrote a letter to her family, which Ngāti Ruanui delivered along with gifts of meat. She later described their treatment of her as “kindness itself”. It’s said that Tītokowaru thanked Ann and handed her a hundred-pound note. She didn’t want the money. “Take it,” the rangatira insisted wryly. “My life is worth more than that.”

Final years in Hāwera

Ann moved to nearby Hāwera in 1875. Two years later, the growing town had a qualified doctor, and medical duties could be shared. To supplement her income, Ann ran a boarding house, restaurant, and employment agency. She adopted a foster child. When the physical demands of her work became too much, she leased space next to the Hāwera railway station and ran tea rooms. The straight-talking but kind “Granny Evans” was popular with customers and railway employees alike. One time, a man who’d served in the Crimean War passed through and recognised Ann. She had spent six months nursing him back to health.

Ann died in 1916 aged eighty-three and still running the tea rooms. Despite a long working life, her death certificate read “Occupation: widow”. The tapestry Ann finished stitching before her death was raffled to raise money for soldiers wounded during the First World War, just as she’d planned.



Ann Evans: Colonial Nurse

by Kathryn Mercer

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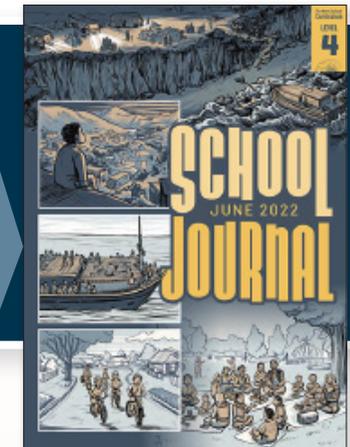
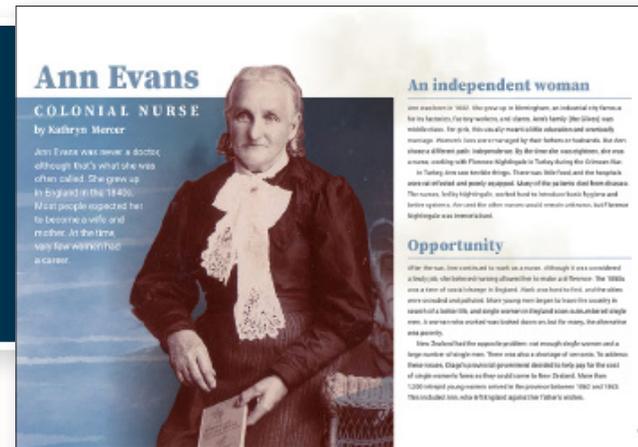
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