

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE6411

Marginson, Betty May

(1923 - 2015)

Born 3 February, 1923, Clifton Hill Victoria Australia

Died 18 December, 2015, Kew Victoria Australia

Occupation Activist, Councillor, Mayor, Teacher, Volunteer

Summary

Betty Marginson was a pioneer in many fields as a teacher, a student and community activist, local Councillor and advocate for citizens' and women's rights. Her academic career spanned the World War II years as an undergraduate student to 1985 when she took her Diploma in Public Policy at the age of 62. As well as raising four children with her husband Ray Marginson, she taught at various State Schools from 1943 to 1982. She was the founding President of the Hawthorn Chapter of the University of the Third Age, becoming President of the Victorian network in 1993. The first woman appointed Mayor of the City of Hawthorn from 1976 to 1977, she was a Council Member from 1972 to 1981. In the wider world, Betty Marginson was President of University College, University of Melbourne from 1986 to 1991, and was a voluntary worker in many fields, including at Heide Park and Art Gallery.

Details

Betty May Marginson, was born on 3 February 1923 in Clifton Hill, Melbourne, the youngest of the five children of Winifred and William John Reilly and educated at Geelong Road Primary School, Footscray and Williamstown High School. The first in her family to attend a university, she enrolled at the Melbourne Teachers' College in 1939 and in 1943 at the University of Melbourne from which she took her BA. In 1946 she was Vice-President of the Students' Representative Council and served as Victorian Minute Secretary of the Council for Civil Liberties, working with Brian Fitzpatrick in its unsuccessful campaigns in the 1944 and 1946 referenda to persuade Victorians to vote in favour of extending Commonwealth powers.

In 1947 she married Raymond David Marginson. Their first son, Simon, was born in 1951 and although she returned briefly to teaching at Eltham High School, she left in 1955 after the birth of their second son, David. A third son, Gregory followed, and it was not until 1969, when their daughter Jenny was old enough for school that she returned to teaching. At Hawthorn West Central School, she taught English to immigrant children until 1982. She joined the Victorian Teachers' Union in 1969.

She became the Treasurer of the School Council and in 1972 was elected to the Hawthorn City Council on which she served until 1981. In 1976, she was elected its first woman Mayor and in 1979, she became the first woman elected to the Municipal Association of Victoria. She was the Local Government representative on the Victorian Child Development and Family Services

Council and Hawthorn City Council representative on the Family and Community Services Regional Committee.

Betty Marginson's influence through local government was extensive and long-lasting. Her time on the Council saw the establishment of a day-care hospital, the commissioning of a report on the needs of the ageing in the area and construction of the Hawthorn Aquatic and Leisure Centre. She joined the Australian Local Government Women's in 1972.

Her influence on the wider community was equally impressive. Long active in the campaign for abortion law reform, Betty Marginson chaired the Consultative Council on Senior Citizens set up by the Victorian government from 1981 till 1988, when she became Vice Chairperson of its successor, the State Government Older Persons' Council. She was the foundation president of the Hawthorn chapter of the University of the Third Age and in 1993 was elected President of the Victoria State University of the Third Age Network.

She became a Justice of the Peace in 1979 and was a member of the Council of University College, University of Melbourne from 1983 to 1993, and served as President from 1986 to 1990. She was equally active in other areas, as a member of the National Trust of Australia and National Gallery Society of Victoria from 1960, in the Lyceum Club and as a voluntary worker at the Heide Park and Art Gallery.

Betty Marginson's contribution to Australia life was recognised by the award of the Queen's Jubilee Medal in 1977, becoming a Member of the Order of Australia in 1993 and in 2001 becoming one of the two hundred women placed on the Honour Roll of 'Women Shaping the Nation' and receiving the Centenary of Federation Medal.

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Betty Marginson interviewed by Ann Turner \[sound recording\]](#)

The University of Melbourne Archives

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