

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3657

Abbott, Gertrude

(1846 - 1934)

Born 11 July, 1846, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Died 12 May, 1934, Strawberry Hills New South Wales

Occupation Matron, Social worker

Summary

Born in Sydney in 1846, Mary Jane O'Brien moved with her family to South Australia when she was two years old. In February 1868, taking the name Sister Ignatius of Jesus, she entered the Order of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart, the Catholic order founded at Penola two years earlier by Mary MacKillop and Julian Tenison-Woods.

Caught up in a scandal which enveloped the order, but in which she was subsequently proven to be blameless, Sister Ignatius left the order in July 1872, only four months after she had taken final vows, and returned to Sydney. There she became known as Mrs Gertrude or 'Mother' Abbott.

She leased a house in the Sydney suburb of Surrey Hills and gathered about her a group of pious women. They lived by dressmaking and adopted the rule of contemplative congregation, hoping that the Roman Catholic Church would give the group the status of a religious order. After Tenison-Woods's death in her care in 1889, she inherited his estate of £609.

It is reputed that in 1893 Mrs Abbott took in and cared for a pregnant girl brought to her by a policeman, an event that led to her establishing the St Margaret's Maternity Home at 561 Elizabeth Street, in the area known as Strawberry Hills. She ran what would become St Margaret's Hospital for Women, the third largest obstetric hospital in Sydney, for the next forty years.

Upon her death in 1934, she passed the Hospital into the hands of the Sisters of St Joseph.

Published resources

Resource Section

Abbott, Gertrude (1846-1934), Cunneen, Chris, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070001b.htm>

Edited Book

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders>

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[St. Margaret's Hospital \(Darlinghurst, N.S.W.\) records, 1894-1998](#)

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Gertrude Abbott, Social worker, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

Author Details

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