

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE3802

Rappolt, Pat

(1905 - 1978)

Born 1 January, 1905, Frome Somerset England

Died 31 December, 1978

Occupation Journalist, Print journalist

Summary

In light of her future career as a journalist and literary editor, Pat Rappolt's early education was somewhat remarkable. Living in the Cooktown region in Far Northern Queensland in the early twentieth century limited one's options – she never received a formal education and was home schooled with her brother and two sisters by her parents. This did not stop her from enjoying a lengthy career in journalism, one which extended across four decades and four states and territories in Australia. Pat's first journalist posting was on a Queensland provincial paper; her last was as the literary editor for the *Canberra Times*. Her importance in this role was acknowledged when a prize for young short story writers was named in her honour – The Canberra Times Pat Rappolt Literary Award.

Details

Pat Francis was born in Frome (Somerset, UK) in 1905, and migrated with her family in 1909 to the Cooktown region in Far North Queensland. Her father was advised, for health reasons, to move from England to a warmer climate, so the family moved to the jungles of North Queensland to join his brothers, who had established a tin mining venture there. Pat's mother, Nancy, was a writer who wrote many poems and articles about life on Cape York Peninsula, several of which were published in the *Cairns Post*, the *Bulletin*, the *Brisbane Courier Mail* and the Melbourne *Argus* some of which were collected and published in 1947 under the title, *Feet in the Night*. Nancy encouraged her children to write and it appears that Pat's talent was recognised at an early age. She had her first poem published in the *Bulletin* at the age of thirteen.

Pat was still a teenager when she took the boat from Cooktown to Cairns, travelling inland and up the mountains to settle in Atherton, where she was a secretary with the Maize Board until 1942. In this time she continued to write short stories, articles and poems for Australian publications. She married, had two children, and was the main breadwinner during the Depression.

Writing, however, was in her blood, and it was what Pat wanted to do. Indeed, her family history suggests she was destined for the job. Her mother, father and a sister were country correspondents for Queensland newspapers for many years after 1930. (Indeed, one of her granddaughters, whose father was a journalist, Juliet Middleton, has worked as a reporter and sub-editor on provincial newspapers in Queensland and New South Wales.) Pat's chance came in 1942, when her application as a general reporter was accepted by the *Daily Mercury*, Mackay. A by-product of the Second World War was that in the absence of the men, who had joined the armed forces, women filled their positions – Pat was one such woman. Under these conditions, it became apparent to editors and newspaper proprietors that women, too, were capable journalists who were able to report on news beyond the women's or social pages. They could cover court cases and important meetings, conduct interviews and review plays. Pat very quickly gained an excellent reputation for accurate and precise reporting. She was never interested in contributing to the social pages, and made this known to her employers. Pat became a sub-editor before 1948.

In 1956 she decided it was time for a change and, with her family now living in the south, Pat obtained a sub-editorship with the *Wangaratta Chronicle*, where she stayed for two years before moving to newspapers in Sale, Horsham and Mount Gambier. As a writer for provincial papers she had occasion to set the agenda for the metropolitan papers. In 1957, as acting editor of the *Wangaratta Chronicle* she authorised a story which about animal cruelty at the Wangaratta stock sale yards, and wrote the accompanying editorial. Under the title 'Are we really civilised?', Pat called for greater monitoring of the handling of cows and calves as they were penned and then transported, many of which suffered enormously from dehydration, mal-nourishment and appalling injuries as a result of the conditions there. She argued that any society that mistreats the vulnerable is not entitled to call itself civilised. (*Wangaratta Chronicle*, 12 August 1957). The article and editorial hit a raw nerve with the local community and letters of support began to come in. Two days later, on August 14, the Melbourne *Herald* made the story its front page lead. The Melbourne police responded by sending several officers to the Melbourne markets to meet the trucks from Wangaratta, where they found dead calves, inspected the dying and injured, along with the starving and under-aged.

By 1961 Pat was in Adelaide, where she was Associate Editor with News Review Publications and *Young Modern* (Australia's magazine for the younger set, according to its banner). Later she was a sub-editor on the *Adelaide Advertiser*, her first break on to a metropolitan newspaper. She eventually became the paper's literary editor. Early in 1971 it was time for yet another move, to Canberra, where she had family, and where the *Canberra Times* offered her the position of Literary Editor. She enjoyed this job until her sudden death in 1978.

Pat Rappolt was an all-round journalist, reporter, sub-editor, feature writer, theatre critic and book reviewer, highly respected by her editors and colleagues.

Events

1942 - 1978

Published resources

Site Exhibition

The Women's Pages: Australian Women and Journalism since 1850, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cal/cal-home.html>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[Biographical cuttings on Pat Rappolt, journalist, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details

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Created 3 November 2008

Last modified 16 September 2013