

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4798

Musk, Jean Mary

(1907 - 1988)

Born 4 March, 1907, Kalgoorlie Western Australia Australia

Died 1 November, 1988

Occupation Teacher

Details

Jean was born in Kalgoorlie to Mary Elizabeth Scott (nee Downey) and Thomas Cleghorn Scott. Her father moved to Kalgoorlie as a 21 year-old in 1896 to work on the water supply prior to the construction of the Eastern Goldfields pipeline. He worked on the condensers, which distilled water from the salt lakes outside Kalgoorlie and delivered it door-to door to the townspeople. When scheme water arrived he became a meter-reader.

Her siblings were Tom, Frank and Bill. There were two other siblings, one a girl who died as a toddler and the other a boy who died at a few months, both of typhoid in an epidemic in 1906, leaving Jean as the only daughter.

She attended primary school and secondary school in Kalgoorlie. When she was in her 4th year at high school her mother became ill with gall bladder disease and Jean (as the only daughter) was required to stay at home as housekeeper, thereby missing several months of schooling and impressing on her a sense of indignation at having been selected out of the family to forego education because she was female. Despite this she continued to the end of her 5th year and achieved a conceded matriculation enabling her to enrol at the Claremont Teacher's College in Perth for two year's training as a primary school teacher.

On graduation from teachers' college she was posted to a one-teacher school at Wishbone in the wheat belt of Western Australia. Her next posting was to the Fairbridge Farm School and then back in Kalgoorlie at the North Kalgoorlie Primary School where she taught the middle grades, until she married Arthur Thomas Musk on 5 October 1940 and was required to resign to comply with Education Department policy on the employment of married women. Although she did subsequently return to teaching for many years it was only ever as temporary staff/casual employment. As a result of the employment policies of the time married women could not be employed as permanent staff and every year there was great angst in the family until a job became available for her.

Jean had three children, Francis Alfred in 1942 and twins Arthur and Alexander in 1943. The family moved to Perth at Easter 1945 for more secure employment for Arthur.

There was a great shortage of teachers in the post-war period and Jean was invited to return to teaching in mid-1947. Jean continued to teach, wherever a teacher was needed.

Jean also took on the teaching of English as a second language to post-war migrants ('New Australians'). Initially she did this in the evenings at the Queens Park School but the environment was inhospitable and she persuaded the Education Department to allow her to conduct the classes at her home. Many lasting friendships resulted including all the family members.

Jean retired from teaching in 1967 aged 60. Her background in Kalgoorlie and her personal qualities equipped her to make an important contribution to Western Australia.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

Karlkurla Gold: A History of the Women of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Criena Fitzgerald and National Foundation for Australian Women, 2012,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wikb/wikb-home.html>

Archival resources

Private archives held by Professor AW Musk

Papers regarding Jean Mary Musk

Author Details

Criena Fitzgerald

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