

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE4859

Holt, Beatrice

(1900 - 1988)

Born 4 January, 1900, Carlton Victoria Australia

Died 1 June, 1988, Bruce (Canberra) Australian Capital Territory Australia

Occupation Community worker, Medical practitioner

Summary

Beatrice Holt was a leading figure in the development of mothercraft and child welfare services in Canberra, and was active in community organisations in Canberra from the 1920s.

Details

Bea studied medicine at the University of Melbourne, graduating in 1923. She then worked with Dr Vera Scantlebury (Brown) who piqued her interest in infant welfare.

In mid-1927 her father, W.H. Sharwood, was appointed Commonwealth Crown Solicitor. Bea moved with her parents to Canberra in October. She quickly opened her own practice, becoming one of the Territory's first female doctors. In December 1931 she married Dr John Holt, whom she had met when she was hospitalised with a serious infection. With the exception of service during World War Two, Bea did not practise medicine after her marriage.

From an early stage Bea was involved in community affairs. She was appointed to the Provisional Committee to establish a Canberra branch of the Young Women's Christian Association and, from 1929 to 1931, served on its Board of Directors. As her children moved through school, Bea served as President of the Telopea Park Infants School Mothers' Club and later, as President of the Canberra High School Parents and Citizens' Association. She was elected President of the ACT branch of the Australian Federation of University Women in 1962 and 1963, and was acting head of the national body for most of 1964. In 1971 she was made a life member.

Bea's most significant contribution, however, was made through the Canberra Mothercraft Society. In February 1935 she was proposed as a council member of the society. Her membership co-incided with one of the most turbulent periods in the society's history, which saw the resignation of all its officers and councillors. At the subsequent Annual General Meeting in May, Bea was elected President. She was to serve a total of nine and a half years in the office (1935-36, 1940-43, and 1948-50) and was made a life member in 1937. In that time she oversaw: an increase in the number of mothercraft sisters; the purchase of a car (sisters had relied on volunteers and buses); the opening of the first permanent Baby Health Centre at Manuka; the introduction for the 'Help for Mothers' scheme (nucleus of the Emergency Housekeeper Service); the formation of the Canberra Kindergarten Society; and the establishment of an Occasional Care Centre.

Bea, who had suffered the loss of two of her own children, noted that her work with the Mothercraft Society was motivated by her 'absolute conviction that the giving of health services & assistance to mothers & babies is of primary importance'.

Published resources

Book

Royal Canberra Hospital: An anecdotal history of nursing 1914 to 199, Newman, Janet and Warren, Jennie, 1993

Journal Article

Obituary: Beatrice Holt, Donovan, Ella, 1988

A short story about a long time, 1943-1988, Rudduck, Loma, 1989

Obituaries: Holt, Dr. Beatrice, Wardle, Pat, 1988

Magazine

Yarralumlan: Magazine of the Canberra High School, 1949

Yarralumlan: Magazine of the Canberra High School, 1950

Newspaper Article

Personal, 1927

Professional, 1927

Resource Section

Holt, Beatrice (Bea) (1900 - 1988), Waterhouse, Jill, 2007

Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Records of the Australian Federation of University Women- ACT, 1944-1985 \[manuscript\]](#)

ACT Heritage Library

[HMSS 0043 Canberra Mothercraft Society Records](#)

Author Details

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