

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE5418

Sheaffe, Catherine Erskine (Katie)

(1886 - 1962)

Born 1 January, 1886, Lake Cargellico New South Wales Australia

Died 21 June, 1962, CanberraCanberra Australian Capital Territory Australia

Occupation Volunteer, War Worker

Summary

Catherine 'Katie' Sheaffe represented the Tharwa community on the Federal Capital Territory War Food Fund committee during World War I.

Details

Catherine Erskine McKellar was born in 1886 at Lake Cargellico, New South Wales, Australia to Jane and Duncan McKellar, graziers of Wooyeo Station. She was educated at Presbyterian Ladies' College, Croydon in the inner west of Sydney, New South Wales.

On 23 March 1913 Katie married Percy Lemprier Sheaffe at Rushcutters Bay, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. She moved to the Canberra region where Percy had been appointed to the Commonwealth Public Service as a Senior Surveyor in 1910. He led one of three teams of surveyors who surveyed the then Federal Capital Territory (the Australian Capital Territory from 1938) border with New South Wales. Katie accompanied her husband on much of the survey defining the boundary of the new Territory, covering the part of the boundary from Coree through Bungendore and Queanbeyan to Mt Clear near Naas. This involved treacherous terrain and unpredictable weather as well as disgruntled land holders and government pressure. The surveys took five years to complete.

The couple had four children; Isabel Gordon born 25 July 1917, Jean Lempriere Gordon born 17 May 1919, Robertson Gordon born 13 December 1920 and Percy Hale 'Gordon' born 24 November 1921.

On 21 August 1914, soon after World War I erupted, Katie attended the inaugural meeting of the Federal Territory War Food Fund convened by the Territory Administrator's wife Jane Miller at the Residency in Acton. The meeting initiated a movement 'for the purpose of helping our soldiers and sailors who are at the present moment on active service upholding the British Empire in the great war now... and for relieving distress amongst the relations of soldiers and sailors or the poor' ('Patriotic Fund', 1914, p. 2). According to the same report, a representative group of women residents of Canberra and surrounding districts attended the meeting and supported the establishment of a local branch of the War Food Fund which had been established by the Sydney Chamber of Commerce to 'assist in relieving the great amount of distress which is inseparable from war'. The War Food Fund aimed to help soldiers, and benefit Australian workers on the home front by purchasing food and products made in Australia by Australian workers, thus providing employment opportunities at a difficult time. The Queanbeyan Age reported that the women present enthusiastically approved Jane Miller's scheme and appointed a committee comprising 'Mesdames Miller, Broinowski, Piggini, and Brown, of Canberra; Mesdames Macartney and Barnard of the Royal Military College; Mrs. E. G. Crace, of Gininderra, and Mrs. Sheaffe, of Tharwa' ('Patriotic Fund', 1914, p. 2). The detail of Katie's involvement was not recorded, but it is possible she handed over the reins for Tharwa once she moved to a more central part of the Territory in 1915 and began having children.

In 1915 Percy left the border work when he replaced Charles Scrivener as Chief Surveyor and the family moved to the historic Acton house, a former pastoral homestead built in late 1823 and acquired by the Commonwealth on 25 February 1911 for the home of the Chief Surveyor. Later it was used as a police station and court house. It was demolished in 1940 to make way for the new Canberra Community Hospital.

Katie was an active member of St John's Anglican Church, Reid and the Women's Guild. She played an active part in the Prince of Wales' visit to the Territory in 1921.

In 1927 the Sheaffes built a house at Forrest where they lived until they moved to Stonehaven Street, Deakin in 1961. The Canberra Times reported in Katie's obituary on 26 June 1962, that she had played an active part in various kinds of auxiliary work during World War II ('Pioneer Woman's Death Severs Historic Link', 1962, p. 7).

Katie died in Canberra on 21 June 1962 aged 75 years. Her husband died the following year and both are buried in the cemetery at St John the Baptist Anglican Church, Reid, Australian Capital Territory.

Published resources

Site Exhibition

Canberra Women in World War I: Community at Home, Nurses Abroad, Clarke, Patricia and Francis, Niki, 2015, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cww1>

Newspaper Article

Patriotic Fund, 1914, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article31402795>

Pioneer Woman's Death Severs Historic Link, 1962, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article130579423>

Book

Sheaffe family history, Sheaffe, Stephen W., 2008

Resource Section

Eulogy - Percy Hale Gordon Sheaffe, 2008, <http://dayborograpevine.com.au/?s=sheaffe>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[Biographical cuttings on Mrs P. L. Sheaffe, wife of Percy Lempriere Sheaffe, surveyor, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details

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