

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5669

Hackett, Patricia

(1908 - 1963)

Born 1 January, 1908, Perth Western Australia Australia

Died 31 December, 1963

Occupation Actor, Barrister, Lawyer, Producer, Solicitor

Summary

In 1933, probably for the first time in the history of Australian Criminal Court practice, Patricia Hackett became the first woman barrister to appear in the defence of a man charged with murder.

After a short career in the law, Hackett went on to open theatre company, the Torch. She went on to appear in, direct and produce many plays in Adelaide.

Details

Patricia Hackett, theatrical producer, actress and lawyer, was born on 25 January 1908 in Perth, the second of five children of (Sir) John Winthrop Hackett (d.1916), newspaper proprietor, and his wife Deborah Vernon, née Drake-Brockman. In 1918 Deborah remarried and the family moved to Adelaide. Educated in 1919-22 at Church of England Girls' Grammar School (The Hermitage), Geelong, Victoria, and for two months in 1923 at Woodlands Church of England Girls' Grammar School, Adelaide, Patricia matriculated by private study in 1924. Next year she passed two subjects towards a law degree at the University of Adelaide, but was dismissed for sitting her sister's Latin examination (Peoples). In 1927 Patricia went to London where she passed her final examination in law in 1929. Called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in 1930 and admitted to the South Australian Bar that year, she practised in Adelaide; Don Dunstan was to share her chambers from 1952 (Peoples).

In 1933, probably for the first time in the history of Australian Criminal Court practice, Patricia was the first woman barrister to appear in the defence of a man charged with murder. Creating intense interest, the trial of Salem Mackaad, a Syrian storekeeper, charged with the murder of Richard Joseph Supple, whose dead body was found last June on the bank of the Torrens river, commenced in Adelaide (The West Australian). Patricia acted as the defence counsel for the accused with the legal firm, Matthews and Patricia Hackett of Adelaide.

According to a report from the West Australian Newspaper from July 1933, "In her early twenties, Miss Hackett, in conjunction with her partner, Mr. L. B. Matthews, has already conducted successfully a number of cases in the Adelaide Courts but had not previously appeared in a trial of the present magnitude" (The West Australian).

Patricia went on to produce and perform in many plays in Adelaide. She opened her own theatre company, the Torch. She was an actress of 'remarkable purity', although her performances were occasionally marred by pretentiousness. By nature she was generous, witty, flamboyant, temperamental, outspoken and fiery. Her drive and energy were astonishing (Peoples).

Patricia's last play, Legend, comprised much of her verse and was performed as a fringe production during Adelaide's inaugural Festival of Arts (1960). She died of coronary thrombosis on 18 August 1963 at Hackney and was cremated. In 1965 the University of Western Australia established the Patricia Hackett prize, awarded annually for the best creative writing published in Westerly magazine (Peoples).

Published resources

Resource Section

Hackett, Patricia (1918-1963), Peoples, Jo, 2006,
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hackett-patricia-10385>

Newspaper Article

Woman Barrister, 1933,
<http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/33329630>

Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

Author Details

Larissa Halonkin

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