

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6009

Warren, Helena

(1871 - 1963)

Born 1 January, 1871, Bulumwaal, Victoria Australia

Died 31 December, 1963, Orbost Victoria Australia

Occupation Photo Journalist, Photographer

Summary

Helena Warren was known for her press photography and trompe l'oeil postcard images. She worked in the goldfields district, supplementing the family income with the income of her commercial work. Entirely self-taught, her first camera was an Austral Box quarter-plate camera.

Details

Helena Warren was born in Bulumwaal, close to Bairnsdale, Victoria, c.1871. She was one of six children (the second of four daughters and twin brothers) born to her parents, Edward McKeown and Mary Damson.

Her parents were gold miners and moved from town to town in their quest for gold. Warren was only three months old during one of these moves; her mother carried her in her arms sitting side-saddle on a horse. Eventually the family gave up gold mining, as it did not bring the rewards they anticipated, and bought a farm in Mossiface, near Bruthen, and settled there. When Warren turned 29, she married one of her neighbours and the couple established a farm in Newmerella, near Orbost.

In 1904, at the age of 33, Warren acquired her first camera by postal order: an Austral Box quarter-plate camera, which she used throughout her life. Warren taught herself all there was to know about photography through trial and error. She was said to have loaded her first roll of film in daylight, completely ruining it. As the only photographer in the district she gained a lot of work, and used her living room as a darkroom at night. Her semi-commercial photographic work supplemented the family income and enabled them to purchase luxuries such as a piano.

Her photographs documented all aspects of life in the district, portraiture, sporting events, flower and animal studies, Snowy River scenes, soldiers and families. She shot her portraits out of doors using a sheet as a backdrop to simulate a studio setting and also experimented with collage, incorporating leaves into her photographs to create postcards.

Some of her photographs were published in newspapers such as *The Weekly Times* and one photograph was published in *The London Strand* magazine.

She was one of the founding members of the *Country Women's Association* and was renowned for her abundant energy and her prize-winning handiwork (sewing, soft toys, woodwork).

Helena Warren died aged 91 in Orbost, Victoria, c.1962.

Collections

Mrs. Ivy E.E. Rodwell, Cooma, New South Wales (Private Collection)

Events

1900 - 1953

1981 - 1981

Helena Warren's work featured in *Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950*

Published resources

Book

Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

Edited Book

Heritage : the national women's art book, 500 works by 500 Australian women artists from colonial times to 1955, Kerr, Joan, 1995

Resource Section

Helena Warren,

<https://www.daa0.org.au/bio/helena-warren/>

Helena Frances Warren, Australia, Death Index, 1787-1985,

<http://www.ancestry.com.au/>

Magazine article

A First For Women Photographers in Australia: Quick Thinking and Ladders Got the Top Shots, Bowen, Jill, 1981,

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55457051>

Exhibition Catalogue

Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

Author Details

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

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