

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6083

Sewell, Alice Maud

(1881 - 1971)

Born 1 January, 1881

Died 31 December, 1971

Occupation Chairperson, Women's advocate

Summary

Alice Sewell was the first woman to win the Wyselaskie Scholarship in classical and comparative philology and logic from the University of Melbourne.

Alice was very much involved in organisations promoting the interests of women and alongside Ethel Osborne, recommended the establishment of a women's club along the lines of London's Lyceum Club.

Alice is also remembered for her involvement in the Country Women's Association.

Details

Alice, Lady Sewell nee Cunning appears as a 'minor entry' in the biography of her husband, the celebrated physician Sidney Valentine Sewell (1880-1949), in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.^[1] Her career, although largely defined by her marriage, was interesting nonetheless.

Alice Cunning, who took her BA in 1902 and MA in 1906 at the University of Melbourne, was the first woman to win the Wyselaskie Scholarship in classical and comparative philology and logic. The Wyselaskie scholarships, initially awarded in Mathematics, Natural Science, English Constitutional History, Political Economy, Modern Languages and Classical and Comparative Philology and Logic, are the result of a bequest by John Dickson Wyselaskie, a notable supporter of Ormond College and other Presbyterian institutions, who died in 1883.^[2]

Sir Sidney and Lady Sewell had seven children, two sons and five daughters, of whom one died before 1949. Both sons graduated MBBS from the University of Melbourne.

Alice Sewell was very much engaged in organisations promoting the interests of women. Following a visit to England with her husband in 1910, she and Ethel Osborne, medical practitioner and wife of Professor W.A. Osborne recommended the formation of a women's club along the lines of the Lyceum Club in London. It was established in 1912 with Alice Sewell, who was a member of the Catalysts which had preceded it in 1910, among the founding members. Her interest in medical matters led to a long involvement with the Australian Tuberculosis Association, of which, in the 1950s, she was a Victorian Vice-President. This non-profit association aimed to foster active interest in combating the disease and educational programs on what causes it.

It is, however, for her activities in the Country Women's Association that Alice Sewell is best remembered. She founded the CWA Festival and chaired the handicrafts and home industries committee from 1937 to 1940. She also edited its *Country Crafts* which was published by the Country Women's Association of Victoria from 1930 to 1951. She was a member of the Victoria League and the Ormond Women's Association and awarded one of the 6,500 Coronation Medals allotted to Australia in 1937, on the coronation of George VI.

^[1] John V. Hurley. 'Sewell, Alice Maud (1881-1971)'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988.

^[2] J. Ann Hone. 'Wyselaskie, John Dickson (1818-1883)'. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976.

Published resources

Book

40 Years 40 Women: Biographies of University of Melbourne Women, Published to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the International Year of Women, Flesch, Juliet, 2015,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/4040/>

Author Details

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