

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE6618

Bennett, Ivy Verna Peace

(1919 - 2011)

Born 1 January, 1919, Wagin Western Australia Australia

Died 2 December, 2011, Kansas City Kansas United States of America

Occupation Clinical psychologist, Psychoanalyst

Summary

Ivy Verna Peace Bennett, who trained with the London Institute, was the first 'lay' psychoanalyst in Australia. She practiced in Australia from 1952 to 1958.

Details

Ivy Bennett was born in Wagin, Western Australia, in 1919, the second youngest of six children born to Mary and Ern Bennett. She grew up at Lake Grace, in *Ballardong boodja* country some thirty kilometres away. With a small population of several families in 1920, Lake Grace a Western Australian Wheat Belt town, is 345 kilometres from Perth along *State Route 107*. It is the main town in the Shire of Lake Grace. Her first school was the local one teacher school. At the age of twelve she won a scholarship to Albany High School where she became a boarder. She matriculated to the University of Western Australia and subsequent scholarships funded her degree in Modern Literature.

A chance encounter with Experimental Psychology when she was employed in a summer job as a Reader for the University of Western Australia's Professor of Education, Robert Cameron, changed her career direction. In 1943 she completed her Master's degree, 'Some Aspects of the A Social Behaviour of Pre School Children' under the supervision of Dr Lionel Fowler, head of the Department of Psychology. Simultaneously she was appointed as a lecturer on Dr Fowler's staff. She became involved in the Department's Child Guidance Clinic supervised by a Scottish Psychiatrist, Dr Murdoch from the Heathcote Mental Hospital. She gathered experience in vocational psychology work for the RAAF, participated in a research project examining the effects of Rubella in pregnancy on unborn children and worked with returning War Veterans at Western Command General Hospital.

In 1943 she was awarded a Hackett Scholarship and intended to study Child Psychology with Florence Goodenough at the University of Minnesota. However, the monetary exchange rate during wartime rendered that plan unviable. Her first application for a British Council Scholarship in 1944 was rejected because she was too young. She reapplied successfully the following year and, on 1 January 1946, departed for Britain.

Her plans to find a venue for further study were hampered by post war conditions. However, Anna Freud, to whom Bennett was introduced by another Australian expat psychologist, Ruth Thomas, included Bennett in her first training program at the Hampstead Clinic in 1947. Under the supervision of Kate Friedlander, a follower of Anna Freud, Bennett commenced research for her doctorate, later published as *Neurotic and Delinquent Children*. Bennett worked with children who had come to Anna Freud's Clinic from Belsen and Thereisenstadt after the War and was a regular attendee of Anna Freud's "Wednesday Meetings". Bennett also commenced training at the London Institute of Psychoanalysis and in 1951 gained Associate Membership of the British Psychoanalytical Society.

In 1952 Bennett fulfilled her goal of returning to Australia and established her psychoanalytic practice at 32 Bellevue Terrace near Kings Park, thus becoming the first BPAS accredited lay analyst in Australia. She attended and presented at meetings of the Melbourne and Sydney Institutes of Psychoanalysis. Bennett also became a founding Member of the Australian Association of Psychoanalysts, which was established in December 1952. In Perth, Bennett conducted reading groups and seminars for members of the medical and psychology professions.

Nancy Stewart, a local psychologist, travelled to England, with Bennett's support, to train with Anna Freud. However isolation from the Melbourne and Sydney centres, and it appears, lack of support from medically qualified colleagues led to her decision to return to Britain for further training. Her plans were also changed by her decision to marry and emigrate to the United States of America in 1962. Her husband, Eric H. Gwynne-Thomas (1917-2008), was an English-born educational scientist. Three years later she moved with him and their daughter, Elizabeth, to Kansas, where her husband became Professor of Education at the University of Missouri – Kansas City (UMKC). Ivy Bennett Gwynne-Thomas became a member of the Topeka Psychoanalytic Society, and in 1965 she was a founding member of the Greater Kansas City Psychoanalytic Society. From 1968 to 1980 she taught at the UMKC Medical School.

Retired since 1993, Ivy Bennett died from leukaemia at the age of 92 on 2 December 2011.

Author Details

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