

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6622

Jones, Shirley

(1927 - 2021)

Born 11 September, 1927, Napier New Zealand

Died 4 September, 2021, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Editor

Summary

Shirley Jones was instrumental in establishing the Jessie Street Women's Library Association, now the Jessie Street National Women's Library, in Sydney.

Details

Shirley was born Shirley Hannah in New Zealand on 11 September 1927. The family was living in Napier when the earthquake struck in 1931, which was her earliest memory. Later they moved to Hastings where she was Dux of the High School, which at the time was co-ed. From there she went on to study Science at the University of Auckland, living at St Margaret's College, Otago, Dunedin, until 1949. In 1950 she married Gwynne Trevallyn Jones (19 September 1925 – November 2015) in Hastings. In 1954 they went to Oxford where Gwynne was undertaking a D Phil. In 1958 with his degree completed they moved to Australia, to Armidale where he had been appointed a lecturer in the history department of the University of New England. There she had two children, Meredith and Nicholas.

In 1963 they moved to Sydney, where Gwynne had been appointed to the history department of Sydney University. In 1966 they went on sabbatical and spent most of their time in Salzburg, Austria.

Back in Sydney, when the children were old enough to go to school Shirley began work as an assistant editor at the department of coal research at CSIRO, but she resigned in 1973 to go on sabbatical again to Salzburg.

Back in Sydney she became an editor once more in the Office of the Supervising Scientist, which was a statutory office set up by parliament to oversee the uranium mines, especially in Kakadu National Park (now inside the department recently restructured as the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment).

In the 1980s she and a number of her friends became exasperated with the difficulty of finding some published books written by women in Australia and material about women in the area generally. They determined to establish a specialist women's library to collect such works. Together with Lenore Coltheart, an association was started and the first Annual General Meeting of the Jessie Street Women's Library Association was held in August 1989. Sir Laurence Street, Jessie's son, agreed to be a Library patron and was later joined by the Hon Elizabeth Evatt and poets, Judith Wright and Oodgeroo Noonuccal (formerly Kath Walker). the Library was incorporated in March 1990 and became a registered charity with tax-deductible status. Shirley worked tirelessly for the next twenty years to establish it on a firm footing, which involved finding it a suitable location and linking the association to women's libraries around the globe. She found various locations, including the rooms in the basement of the city Town Hall, before it was finally settled in Ultimo. During this time she did a round the world trip to visit as many other women's libraries as she could access. The Newsletter was begun to keep members in touch with developments. When she eventually retired from the board of management, the library was established on a firm footing.

Author Details

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