

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6628

Hockings, Jessie

(1899 - 1991)

Born 15 June, 1899, Stamford Hill, Hackney England

Died 27 April, 1991, Southport Queensland Australia

Occupation Community worker, Farmer, Volunteer

Summary

Jessie Hockings (nee Miller) was a child when her family migrated to Australia from England. After leaving London on 31 July 1909, they arrived in Brisbane on 20 September 1909. They then travelled to a property at Dulacca in the Western Downs region of Queensland.

In February 1923, at the age of 23, Jessie Miller married Frank Hockings and almost immediately moved to Thursday Island, where Frank and his brother ran the Wanetta Pearling Co. World War 2 interrupted those operations and the family moved backed to continental Queensland to run a dairy farm at Springbrook, which they purchased in 1945. Sadly, Frank passed away in 1952, but Jessie remained on the farm for another thirteen years. She moved down to the coast at Southport in 1965.

Regardless of where she lived, the Queensland Country Women's Association (CWA) was a constant feature of Jessie Hocking's life. She was a member for roughly sixty years, maintaining a tradition that ran in the family. Her mother, Jessie Strathearn Miller, was president of Dulacca (Qld) CWA and a younger sister was the secretary-treasurer of the same branch. Jessie was a founding member of the Springbrook CWA in 1957 and a three-time president during the 60s to 80s. She was secretary-treasurer of the Thursday Island branch during her time up there.

As well as the CWA, Jessie volunteered at the Red Cross, an aged care residence, and the local hospital ladies' auxiliary.

In 1982, a British Empire Medal for Meritorious Civil Service, which she received on her 82nd birthday, acknowledged Jessie's community work, which she continued to do until well into her 80s.

Jessie Hockings passed away in 1991 and is sadly missed by her family and friends. Her legacy lives on in an educational bursary awarded every year by the Springbrook-Mudgeeraba CWA. Since 1992 the branch has presented a local primary school student with the Jessie Hockings Encouragement Award. The \$200 bursary aims to help a family ease the financial burden of their child transitioning to high school. It represents her prevailing belief in the importance of a good education.

Details

The following essay was written by Avril Priem and published in the Winter 2020 edition of the CWA Queensland magazine. It is reproduced in full with permission.

THE LADY AND THE LEGACY

Story by Avril Priem

For 27 years, Springbrook-Mudgeeraba CWA has presented a local primary school student with the Jessie Hockings Encouragement Award. "This \$200 bursary aims to help a family ease the financial burden of their child transitioning to high school," says president, Robyn Keene.

Who was Jessie Hockings?

Jessie Hockings was a founding member of the Springbrook CWA in 1957 and a three-time president during the 60s to 80s. Well-respected and much-loved in the district, her belief in supporting education prevails through her legacy.

Jessie's granddaughter, Lorraine Mitchell, says her grandmother did not attend school while growing up on the western Downs. "Instead, she had lessons at home because there was no money for boarding school." Lorraine continues, "We affectionately called her Grandy. She was eloquent, well-read, an accomplished pianist and singer who held her audiences spellbound. She could quote Shakespeare, whip up a delicious strawberry mousse or make luscious brandied cumquats."

Prickly pear, pearly shells and dairying

As a young girl of nine, Jessie Miller emigrated with her family from England in 1909 to the Dulacca district, west of Miles. In contrast to 'England's green and pleasant land', their new country was hot, dry and peppered with prickly pear.

Lorraine recollects the family story: "When they first arrived from Brisbane with a month's supply of groceries, a 7-pound billy of golden syrup had burst over everything and there was no water to wash it off. Water had to be carted in barrels from a waterhole three miles away. The family lived in bush tents for 14 months while great-grandpa Miller built a house, a dam with pick and shovel, and tried to clear the land of prickly pear by hand – an impossible task. They eventually left that grant of land and developed *Myalla*, their wheat and beef property."

At 23, Jessie married Frank Hockings and moved to Thursday Island – to stay for 18 years. Frank and his brother Norman ran the Wanetta Pearling Co.

When Japan entered the war in 1941, Thursday Island became an Australian military zone. The armed services requisitioned the luggers and pearling came to a standstill. Lorraine explains what happened next: "In 1942, Australian civilians were ordered to leave within 24 hours. Grandy and her three children – my mother Robin, Peg, and David – were evacuated to Brisbane. Leaving her home and life on TI was very stressful for her. Grandpa Frank joined his family later and for a time worked in the Rocklea munitions factory that made hand grenades."

In 1945, the Hockings took up a dairy farm at Springbrook in the Gold Coast hinterland, and began the hard work of milking twice a day for 20 years. Lorraine's childhood memories are of lush paddocks, spectacular scenery, banana passionfruit growing under the verandah, and finger limes growing in tree stumps. And inside the farmhouse: "the woodstove, Grandy's roasts and home-baked pies, a sweet cordial made from finger limes, and hot porridge for breakfast served with brown sugar and fresh cream from the dairy."

In the CWA

Being in the CWA ran in the family. Jessie's mother was president of Dulacca CWA and a younger sister, the secretary-treasurer. On Thursday Island, Jessie was the branch secretary-treasurer. "As a Springbrook CWA member, she was often on the phone organising events, or chatting with members, supporting them and their families," remembers Lorraine. "Grandy was gifted with a wonderful kind heart. Her positive energy and enthusiasm enveloped those around her."

After Frank died of a heart attack in 1952, Jessie and family kept the farm going until 1965. She then moved from mountain to coast but continued to attend Springbrook meetings, getting a lift with her friend, Lola Hicks, who had also been a president over the years. Lola would motor up in her 1965 Humber Super Snipe.

As well as the CWA, Jessie volunteered at the Red Cross, an aged care residence, and the local hospital ladies' auxiliary. "She was a hospital 'flower lady' for 15 years and used to say that a bit of flower power helps cheer up the day for both patients and staff," smiles Lorraine.

Jessie was also renowned for her jams, pickles and chutneys, all made from garden produce given to her by family, friends and neighbours. A local newspaper reported that in one year she cooked up 491lbs or 222kg! Her jars of tasty home-mades were given away for fundraising or entered into shows and CWA competitions. Her Madras chutney won the CWA state final two years in a row in the 70s.

In 1982, a British Empire Medal for Meritorious Civil Service acknowledged Jessie's community work, which she continued to do until well into her 80s. "She was thrilled to receive a BEM," says Lorraine. "It coincided with her 82nd birthday, so it was a double celebration."

Jessie Hockings passed away in 1991 at the age of 91. She was a quintessential CWA lady and true to the CWA Creed was always giving – and looking up, laughing, loving and lifting.

Events

1982 - 1982

Jessie Hockings was awarded a British Empire Medal for Meritorious Civil Service in acknowledgement of her community work across several decades.

Author Details

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