

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0568

Tenison Woods, Mary Cecil

(1893 - 1971)

Born	9 December, 1893, Adelaide South Australia Australia
Died	18 October, 1971, Ryde New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Academic, Barrister, Child welfare advocate, Lawyer, Solicitor

Summary

Mary Tenison Woods (née Kitson) was the first woman to graduate in law in South Australia. She was admitted to the bar on 20 October 1917. Her application to become a public notary in 1921 led to a change in the law: the existing Act did not include women as 'persons'.

When Mary married in 1924 her partners did not wish to work with a married woman. Mary left the firm and formed a new partnership in 1925, in what may have been the first female practice in Australia. In the mid 1930s, Mary moved to Sydney and worked as a legal editor.

Following the failure of her marriage to Julian Tenison Woods, she moved to Sydney with her son, where she worked as a legal editor. In 1941 she became a member of the Child Welfare Advisory Council (NSW), held many honorary positions and served on a number of boards. Mary lectured at the university on legal aspects of social work and wrote several legal textbooks on a range of subjects.

In 1950 Tenison Woods was appointed chief of the office of the status of women in the division of human rights, United Nations Secretariat, New York. During her term two major conventions were adopted: the Convention of the Political Rights of Women (1952), the first international law aimed at the granting and protection of women's full political rights, and the Convention of the Nationality of Married Women (1957) which decreed that marriage should not affect the nationality of a wife.

On 13 June 1959 Mary Tenison Woods was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for public service, especially with the United Nations. Previously she had been appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire on 8 June 1950 for services to child welfare.

Events

1916 - 1916

Graduated from the University of Adelaide, (LLB)

1917 - 1917

First woman to be admitted to the Bar in South Australia

1948 - 1948

Nominated (unsuccessfully) to be the Australian representative on the United Nations Organization Status of Women Commission

1919 - 1919

Became a partner in the reconstituted firm of Johnstone, Ronald & Kitson

1921 - 1921

Kitson's application to become a public notary led to a change in the law: the existing Act did not include women as 'persons'

1924 - 1924

Mary Kitson married barrister and solicitor, Julian Gordon Tenison Woods, they were to have one son

1925 - 1925

Joined Dorothy Somerville in practice, as her former partners preferred not to work with a married woman

1927 - 1927

Her husband's name was removed from the roll for misuse of trust funds. The couple separated.

1930 - 1930

She received grants from the Carnegie Corporation to research delinquency

1937 - 1937

Published *Juvenile Delinquency*

1930 - 1950

After moving to Sydney with her son, she worked as legal editor with Butterworth's Book Company

1944 - 1944

Wrote two articles for the *Sydney Morning Herald* highlighting problems at Parramatta and at the Gosford Boy's Home

1935 - 1940

Served on the New South Wales Board of Social Study and Training

1941 - 1949

Served on the New South Wales Board of Social Studies at the University of Sydney

1946 - 1946

Founder of the New South Wales St Joan's Social and Political Alliance

1950 - 1958

Appointed Chief of the Office of the Status of Women in the Human Rights Division of the United Nations

1959 - 1959

Appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for public service, especially with the United Nations Organization

1950 - 1950

Appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for services to child welfare.

1940 - 1945

Sat on the board of the Women's Australian National Services

1940 - 1950

Lectured part time at the University of Sydney on legal aspects of social work

Published resources

Resource Section

Law, Kerwin, Hollie and Rubenstein, Kim, 2014,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0624b.htm>

Mary Tenison Woods - Social and Political Activist,
<http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/whits/Requestedtranscripts/reqtranscript06.html>

Tenison Woods, Mary Cecil (1893-1971), O'Brien, Anne, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120213b.htm>

Book Section

Mary Tenison Woods, O'Brien, Anne, 1988

Book

Capital issues and economic organization regulations : ... as amended to date and continued in force by the Commonwealth Defence (Transitional Provisions) Act, 1946, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Ex-servicemen's legislation, being the Re-establishment and Employment Act, 1945, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1945

Juvenile delinquency : with special references to institutional treatment, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1937

Landlord and tenant and land sales control legislation of New South Wales : being the Landlord and Tenant (Amendment) Act, 1948 and War Service Moratorium Regulations, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1948

Landlord and tenant Commonwealth regulations, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Price regulations : consolidated and annotated, being prices regulations as amended to date and continued in force by the Commonwealth Defence (Transitional Provisions) Act, 1946, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Three Women of Faith: Gertrude Abbott, Elizabeth Anstice Baker and Mary Tenison Woods, Press, Margaret M., 2000

Edited Book

Butterworth's commercial legislation service : being a complete digest of acts of Parliament, regulations and orders of the Commonwealth and all States of Australia including notes on decisions of the courts, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1948

Butterworths' digest of commercial legislation 1947 being a complete digest of Acts of Parliament, Regulations, Rules and Orders of the Commonwealth and all States of Australia which relate to commerce including notes on decisions of the courts, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1947

Digest of commercial legislation : being a complete digest of Acts of Parliament, Regulations, Rules and Orders of the Commonwealth and all states of Australia which relate to commerce, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil) and Jelbart, J. M. (John McClure), 1946

Digest of war legislation in Australia : being a complete digest of acts of Parliament, regulations, rules and orders, by-laws, proclamations and notices of the Commonwealth and all States of Australia relating to or affected by the existing state of war and including reported decisions of the courts there on, Tenison Woods, M. C. (Mary Cecil), 1939-1945

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[Biographical cuttings on Mary Cecil Tenison Woods, barrister, legal author and editor and child welfare reformer, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details

Anne Heywood and Larissa Halonkin

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