Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0623

Clarke, Jessie Deakin

(1914 - 2014)

Born	19141228, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Died	20141111, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia
Occupation	Social worker

Summary

Jessie Clarke, daughter of Ivy Brookes and grand daughter of Alfred Deakin, trained in social work and was professionally active in the Port Melbourne, Victoria, area. She studied in New York in the 1930s, was a junior delegate to the League of Nations Union in Geneva and an activist on behalf of refugees. She founded the Nappy Wash delivery service in the period after the Second World War.

Details

Jessie Clarke, the granddaughter of Alfred Deakin (Australian Prime Minister 1903-1910) and the daughter of Ivy (née Deakin) and Herbert Brookes, enrolled at the University of Melbourne in 1931. She graduated with an Arts/Social Work degree and continued her studies in New York before the Australian government offered her a position as junior delegate to the League of Nations Union in Geneva.

Later, with the war imminent, she returned to Australia and became president of the Victorian International Refugee Emergency Council. A few days after the outbreak of World War II she married William Anthony Francis Clarke, the son of Sir Frank Clarke, MLC, whom she had earlier taken to task for his reported remarks in the Legislative Council about ‘rat-faced refugees’. Clarke worked with the Lord Mayor’s Patriotic and Welfare Fund as a voluntary social worker dealing with the problems of army wives and relatives at first in Sydney, where her husband was stationed, and later in Melbourne.

In 1946 the Clarkes decided to start a napkin wash service in response to the post war baby boom. Nappie Wash, which grew to become the second largest such service in the world, was largely a family affair, with 13 relatives and friends providing the initial capital. At various stages of its history members of the family have been directors of the company which was sold in 1975.

Clarke, whose husband died in 1953, was a foundation member of the Australian Assistance Plan set up by Prime Minister Whitlam. She was involved also with community health groups such as the Abbeyfield Society, Melbourne-South Yarra Group, Broadmeadows Community Health Centre and the Melbourne District Health Council.

Published resources

Book Section
Jessie Clarke: Founder of Nappie Wash, Tipping, Marjorie, 1985

Journal Article
The Jessie Clarke Collection, Gladwin, Frances, 1998

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Jessie Clarke interviewed by various interviewers [sound recording]

National Library of Australia
[Biographical cuttings on Jessie Clarke, managing director of Nappie Wash Ltd, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

State Library of Victoria
Papers of Jessie Clarke, [ca. 1900-1990] [manuscript]

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Jessie Clarke, 1954-2008 (bulk 1990-2008) [manuscript]

Author Details
Anne Heywood

Created 4 November 2003
Last modified 15 July 2020