

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2605199

Gorton, Bettina

(1915 - 1983)

Born 19150623, Great Barrington Massachusetts United States of America

Died 19831002, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia

Occupation Linguist

Summary

Bettina Gorton was a linguist whose involvement with the compilation of a Malay-English dictionary at the Australian National University in Canberra was interrupted by the appointment of her husband, John Gorton, as Australian Prime Minister from 1968 to 1971.

Details

Bettina Brown met John Gorton while on holidays in Spain when she was studying languages at the Sorbonne in Paris. They married in Oxford in 1935 and had a daughter and two sons while living on Gorton's family farm near Kerang in Victoria. After Gorton's war service he entered Federal parliament as a Senator for Victoria and then the family moved to Canberra in 1958 when he was appointed Minister for the Navy. Bettina graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Asian Studies from the Australian National University in 1965 and completed a Masters qualifying degree in 1968 on Indonesian author and playwright Achdiat Karta Mihardja. From 1967 she also worked as a part-time tutor and as a research assistant on the English-Malay dictionary project.

In 1968 when Gorton became Prime Minister they moved into The Lodge where she established a garden of Australian native plants now named in her honour. Her knowledge of Asian languages was beneficial to Australia's relations with countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, when she accompanied her husband on official visits in 1968. When Gorton left the prime ministership in 1971, she returned to her work on the dictionary until the project folded in 1977 due to lack of funding (it was finally completed in Kuala Lumpur in 1982).

Published resources

Obituary

Lady Bettina Gorton: A distinguished graduate, Johns, Yohanni, 14 October 1983, https://oa.anu.edu.au/uploads/obituaries/434/gorton_bettina_obit_1982-83.pdf

Archival resources

Australian National University Archives

[Gorton, Bettina](#)

National Archives of Australia, New South Wales Office, Sydney

[Interviews with Bettina Gorton](#)

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra

[Issue of passports - John Grey Gorton and Bettina Edith Gorton](#)

National Library of Australia

[Biographical cuttings on Bettina Gorton, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals](#)

Author Details
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