Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE1829

Gullett, Lucy Edith

(1876 - 1949)

Born	18760928, Hawthorn Victoria Australia
Died	19491112, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Medical practitioner, Philanthropist

Summary

A pioneer for women doctors and a tireless committee-woman, Lucy Gullett was inspired by the success of the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital in Melbourne to found a hospital run by women for women. The Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children, as it became, opened in 1922. Gullett was also a one-time candidate (Independent) for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly seat of North Sydney in 1932.

Details

Lucy Edith Gullett was born in Melbourne, daughter of journalist Henry Gullett and his wife Lucy (née Willie). The family later moved to Sydney, where Lucy Gullett was educated at Sydney Girls' High School and the University of Sydney. She completed a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery in 1901 and became first resident medical officer at the Crown Street Women's Hospital. From 1902 she was resident surgeon at the Hospital for Sick Children in Brisbane. In 1906, Gullett's father bought her a general practice in Bathurst, NSW, but five years later she returned home to live with her unmarried sister, Minnie.

Lucy Gullett seemed to collect eccentric characters. Her sister was 'a Shakespeare 'buff', an enthusiastic member of the Lunacy Reform League of Australia, and a generous supporter of stray animals, drunks and ex-patients from lunatic asylums to whom she devoted most of her inheritance', according to Ann Mitchell of the *ADB*. In 1922, Gullett set up the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children (Sydney) with Dr Harriet Biffin, who was known for visiting her patients in a dog-cart and had a 'flair' for Greek. Her mother, Mrs Henry Gullett, wrote the 'fashionable intelligence' of the Ladies' Column in the *Australasian* under the pseudonym Humming Bee. The Gullett family were comfortably off, and Lucy and Minnie were able to persuade their sisters to contribute to a commission from Bertram Mackennal costing £10,000, installed in 1926. The six-figure group was a Shakespeare memorial proposed by Henry Gullett before his death in 1914.

Lucy Gullett was a member of Queen's Club. She travelled to Europe during the first World War to serve in a French Red Cross military hospital in Lyons. She was honorary physician to the Renwick Hospital for Infants (1918-32). Later, from 1934-49, she was on the council of the Sydney District Nursing Association. In 1932 she stood unsuccessfully as women's candidate for the Legislative Assembly seat of North Sydney, but was elected to the executive committee of the United Associations of Women in 1935, serving as vice-president in 1936-38 and 1943.

Gullett's plans for what became the Rachel Forster were inspired by the success of Melbourne's Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital, and she founded the New South Wales Association of Registered Medical Women in 1921 to get things started. Like so many hospitals, the Rachel Forster began as an outpatient dispensary. Gullett and Biffin 'shouldered most of the early financial responsibility', according to the hospital history. In 1941 Gullett announced her next project, and the Lucy Gullett Convalescent Home was opened in Bexley in November 1946. Described as 'short and thickset like her father', Lucy Gullet was 'unfailingly kind-hearted' and had 'instant rapport with the working-class women who were her patients'. On her death in 1949, the majority of her £15,918 estate was left to her family.

Published resources

Resource Section
Gullett, Lucy Edith (1876-1949), Mitchell, Ann M., 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090133b.htm

Book
Rachel Forster Hospital: the first fifty years, Cohen, Lysbeth, 1972

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Thesis
In Her Gift: Activism and Altruism in Australian Women's Philanthropy, 1880-2005, Lemon, Barbara, 2008

Site Exhibition
In Her Gift: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wiph/home.html

Putting Skirts on the Sacred Benches: Women Candidates for the New South Wales Parliament, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2006,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/pssb/home.html

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Archival resources

National Library of Australia
Dr. Lucy Edith Gullett

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