Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3987

Rasp, Agnes Maria Louise

(1857 - 1936)

Born	18570101, Woldenberg Friedeberg Germany
Died	19360526, Adelaide South Australia Australia

Summary

Agnes Rasp was the wife of Charles Rasp, founder of the global mineral resources company, BHP.

Details

Agnes Klaversahl migrated to South Australia with her parents in 1882. In 1883, while working at Kindermann's coffee shop in Rundle Street, Adelaide, she met and became engaged to Charles Rasp. Born at Stuttgart, Rasp had migrated to Melbourne in 1869 and found employment on a series of agricultural properties. Later, as a boundary rider on the Mount Gipps station (New South Wales), he became convinced that deposits from the shallow mines at Silverton contained tin oxide. He formed a syndicate of seven station workers who pegged out the area and financed exploratory shafts. By 1884, rich silver chlorides were found by the syndicate at Rasp's Hill and wealthy local pastoralists began buying into the enterprise. The Broken Hill Mining Company, as it was then known, became the Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited (BHP) in 1885.

On 22 July 1886, Charles and Agnes were married by the Reverend J.C. Woods at the home of Mrs Hogan, West Terrace. They travelled to Silverton and Broken Hill, where Agnes became in all likelihood the first woman to go underground, and they completed a tour of Europe, returning to Australia in 1887. Charles purchased a large home, 'Willyama', at 12 The Avenue, Medindie, Adelaide. In that year, BHP's dividends exceeded the incredible sum of ?200,000 – the company was mining into the world's largest-known silver-lead-zinc orebody.

Charles Rasp died in 1907 at the age of 61. His widow departed for another tour of Europe the following year. Agnes Rasp was, allegedly, armed with a substantial sum of money which gained her entry to the Hapsburg Court. She was linked with the Baron von Eisenstein and, in exchange for the title of Baroness, is said to have agreed to rescue him from financial ruin. In one version of the story, the Baron suffered a heart attack the day before the wedding. A more sinister version suggests that the Baron shot himself before fulfilling his side of the bargain. In 1914, Agnes married Count von Zedtwitz in London. During the First World War, the pair lived in Carlsbad, then Leipzig, and finally Berlin, where the Countess was informed that her assets had been frozen. Count von Zedtwitz died in Graz at the end of the war, and his wife returned home to 'Willyama'. She was able to reclaim her assets in 1920.

A recluse at the end of her life, the former Agnes Rasp died in May 1936 at the age of 79, and is buried with Charles Rasp in the North Road Cemetery, Adelaide.

Published resources

Book
Some Outstanding Women of Broken Hill and District, Camilleri, Jenny, 2002

United We Stand: Impressions of Broken Hill 1908-1910, Stokes, Edward, 1983

Anya: Countess of Adelaide, Armstrong, Judith, 1998

Broken Hill, Kearns, Richard Hugh Bell, 1974

Resource Section
Rasp, Charles (1846 - 1907), Coulls, A., 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A060011b.htm

Site Exhibition
Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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