Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4521

Hedditch, Mabel Emily

(1897 - 1966)

Born	18971211, Hambrook Gloucestershire England
Died	19660106, Portland Victoria Australia
Occupation	Cheesemaker, Community worker, Local government councillor, Mayor

Summary

In recognition of her service to the community of Portland, Victoria, and women of Victoria in general, Mabel Hedditch was appointed OBE in 1960. Her contribution to her community included foundation membership of the Portland Branch of the Country Women's Association of Victoria. She later served as group president, central vice-president and State president.

Mabel Hedditch also served on the Portland Town Council from 1949 -64 and was its mayor from 1956-60.

Details

Daughter of Alfred and Emily Flux, Mabel Emily was born in Hambrook, Bristol, England on 11 December 1897. She was the youngest child of five children. At the time of her birth, her father was the licensee of the White Horse Inn, Whiteshill, Hambrook. However, around 1905, her father inherited Walton Farm, Hambrook, and the family left the hotel to relocate to the farm.

Mabel's early education began at Frenchay Village School, Frenchay, located near the family farm. However, her older brothers and sister attended the Whiteshill School, Hambrook. Along with her sister, her secondary education was completed Colston's Girls School, Bristol. She was admitted on 16 September 1910 as a free place holder. However, in a registration certificate obtained in 2008, she was found to have been withdrawn from school on 21 December 1913 due "…to serious illness at home".

In 1914, Mabel completed a cheese making course at the Country Dairy School, Bristol. During the 1914-18 World War Mabel joined the "land army" and one of her duties was to deliver milk from her father's dairy by horse and cart.

At the end of the first World War, when Australian soldiers were being offered work on nearby farms whilst awaiting shipment back home, Mabel met Norman Hedditch, who had served in France with the Australian Imperial Force. During this time a friendship developed, which continued on Norman's return home to Australia. In early 1921, Mabel immigrated to Australia, sailing on the S.S. Morea to Melbourne. On the afternoon of her arrival – 15 April 1921 – she and Norman were married at the St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Church St., Richmond, Melbourne.

Mabel and Norman then settled on the Hedditch family farm, "Lal Lal", at Lower Cape Bridgewater, near Portland. Mabel turned her hand to farming "Australian-style". She and Norman lived there for the next 26 years. Over a 14-year period, they had seven children Thomas William (1922 – 1967), Margaret (1923 – 2002), Alfred John (1924 –), Robert Charles (1925 – 2002), James Clifford (1926 – 1926), Katherine Mary (1930 –) and Geoffrey Norman (1934 –).

Mabel and Norman's farming activities included grazing, dairying and the associated roles of raising calves, pigs and poultry. During the Great Depression, from 1928 until the mid to late 1930's, when times were difficult, Norman's father selected other land to farm at Gorae West, which they farmed in conjunction with Lal Lal. Norman also started working as a livestock agent to supplement the limited farm income. As he became very successful at this pursuit, he established an office in Portland.

Mabel continued to run the farm with assistance of the older children and outside help.

However, in 1937, when the Country Women's Association of Victoria formed a branch in Portland, Mabel entered public life.

She was a founding member, but also became secretary that same year. In 1939, with the outbreak of World War 2, the Portland Branch was very busy making camouflage nets and knitted socks, in addition to assembling food parcels for the troops.

In 1946, not long after the war ended, Mabel and Norman left the farm at Lal Lal and moved into the township of Portland so that Norman could pursue his business interests. Their son Robert remained on the farm until it was sold in 1948. This shift of location suited Mabel as it enabled her to actively pursue public life, in particular, her interest in the Country Women's Association. (She had strong insights into the problems facing country women at that time.) She became Group President (1947-49), Central Vice President (1951-53) and State President (1953-55).

In October 1954, during her term as State President, her husband died suddenly. However, this did not deter Mabel – she continued on with public life. In 1949, she was elected to as a Councillor to the Borough of Portland, and continued in this role for the next 15 years. On 2 December 1954, she was appointed an Honorary Justice (Justice of the Peace) for the State of Victoria. In the 1964 election, she lost her council seat in a 5 way contest, leading on primary votes but losing out on preferences.

From 1956-60, Mabel served as the Mayor of Portland. She was to become only the second Lady Mayor of any municipality in the State of Victoria to serve at that time. During her first term as Councillor the municipality of Portland was upgraded to "town"- on 19 November 1949 – at a time when Portland was experiencing a period of rapid progress.

In addition to her duties with the Council and the Country Women's Association, Mabel played many other roles in the community. She served as treasurer of the town's Infant Welfare Centre, directed the "home help" service, worked for "meals on wheels" and was president of the Old Folks' Welfare Committee. She was also an energetic secretary for the Lewis Court Home for the Aged, Portland.

Along with her O.B.E., Mabel was also awarded a Citizenship Award by the Town of Portland on 9 November 1965. Unfortunately, Mabel died shortly before the award could presented, officially, to her. As part of her Council duties, Mabel was also a delegate of the Victorian Decentralisation League achieving the status of Vice President. On 10 March 1966 she was made, posthumously, a Life Member of the League.

Mabel died on 6 January 1966. She is buried at the Lower Cape Bridgewater Cemetery alongside her late husband Norman. This cemetery is located about one mile from Lal Lal, the property she and Norman farmed for 26 years.

In an article in the Melbourne Herald, Mabel was described as someone "…who knows and loves the land, the people who live on it, the things that grow in it…" – for which she will always be remembered.

This information was been prepared by Geoff Hedditch (January 2010) with the assistance of Judith Pike, Mabel's Great niece in Bristol, England and from records currently held by the family. This information was edited by Tricia Ong, Geoff's daughter.

Published resources

Resource Section
Hedditch, Mabel Emily (1897-1966), Bennett, Gwen, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140490b.htm

Book
Women in Australian Parliaments and Local Governments, Past and Present : A Survey, Smith, A. Viola, 1975

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

What's in a Name: Hedditch Court in Strathnairn and the Remarkable Woman Behind its Name,
https://ginninderry.com/inspire-news-insights/community/whats-name-hedditch-court-strathnairn-remarkable-woman-behind-nam

Archival resources

National Library of Australia
[Biographical cuttings on Mabel Emily Hedditch, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details
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