

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE4873

Rees, Lucy Frances Harvey

(1901 - 1983)

Born 19 August, 1901, Guy Fawkes Station, Ebor New South Wales Australia

Died 23 January, 1983, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia

Occupation Authority on children, literature, Book collector, Bookseller, Secretary

Summary

After an upbringing in the bush Lucy Frances Harvey (Lu) Rees worked as a shearers' cook on a family property during the Depression; she moved to Canberra with her three sons in the late 1930s. In 1950 she became inaugural secretary of the Canberra Branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers remaining a central figure in the organisation for many years. In 1955 she opened Cheshire's Canberra bookshop which she managed for ten years. Always passionate about children's literature she amassed a personal collection that became the nucleus of the ACT Children's Book Council collection. It was donated to the University of Canberra where it is named the Lu Rees Archives of Australian Children's Literature in her honour. She was created a Member of the Order of Australia and awarded the inaugural Dromkeen Medal for services to Australian children's literature, both awards being announced posthumously.

Details

Lucy Frances Harvey (Lu) Rees was born on 19 August 1901, the eldest child of James Harvey Waugh and Jeanette Isabel Waugh, nee Johnston, at Guy Fawkes Station, a Waugh family property, near Ebor, on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. Her schooling was limited to a short period following a horse-riding accident that made attendance difficult. Drawing on her father's collection of poetry and the classics, she was largely self-taught, a child with a highly retentive memory, who claimed always to have a book in her saddle bag.

After the family moved to Sydney she worked at several Red Cross convalescent homes caring for World War I veterans. In 1925 she married Wilfred Benjamin Rees, a former member of the First AIF; they had three sons, John, Paul and Lauron. During the Depression the family moved to a Waugh family property at Bogan Gate where Lu cooked for station hands and shearers until the early 1930s when Wilfred Rees was appointed by the Director of the Australian War Memorial, Colonel J. L. Treloar, to market war histories and other Memorial publications in Queensland. Sometime later Lu was also employed by Colonel Treloar in the War Memorial's Brisbane office.

At the beginning of 1938, after the Australian War Memorial Brisbane's office closed, Lu Rees and her three sons moved to Canberra. Lu was employed at the Australian War Memorial at first in a clerical position and later as assistant to Dr Graham Butler in researching the medical volumes for the History of World War I. Wilfred Rees after putting his age back ten years, enlisted at Townsville in the Second AIF as a sapper on 18 September 1941. The family effectively separated as after his discharge in June 1945 he farmed a soldier settlement block in Queensland.

In 1950 Lu became inaugural secretary of the newly formed Canberra Branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. For the next 25 years she was a familiar figure at monthly meetings that featured prominent local and international writers. Much of the planning for the Fellowship's landmark anthologies, published in the 1950s, took place at meetings of the Editorial Committee at her home in Reid. It was largely through her initial approach to publisher, Dr Andrew Fabinyi, that F.W. Cheshire published *Australia Writes*, edited by T. Inglis Moore, in 1953; *Australian Signpost*, edited by T.A.G. Hungerford, 1956, and *Span*, edited by Lionel Wigmore in 1958.

In 1955 she accepted a new challenge to open and manage a bookshop for Cheshire's in Canberra. It was an unfamiliar field for which she was given a few weeks training at Cheshire's headquarters in Melbourne. Under her management, Cheshire's bookshop in Garema Place, Civic, became a friendly meeting place and a venue for book launches until she retired in 1968. On behalf of the Commonwealth Government, she was responsible for selecting and dispatching representative collections of Australian books as gifts to emerging nations.

Always interested in children's literature, in 1957 Lu Rees was instrumental in establishing the Children's Book Council in the ACT becoming first president. She remained an office bearer or committee member until her death and published a history of the Council. When the Children's Book Council became a national body, she was successful in gaining support from the Literature Board and Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council for Children's Book Awards. She assembled exhibitions for the international children's book fairs and in Canberra inaugurated Christmas gifts of books for needy children.

As evidence of her passionate devotion to children's literature, she amassed a personal collection of children's books and compiled archival files on Australian children's authors and illustrators. She was indefatigable in writing to authors, editors and publishers seeking copies of children's books, particularly international and translated editions, and her generosity in sharing her resources became legendary. Her books and files became the nucleus of the Children's Book Council's ACT Branch's collection which in 1980 was donated to the Canberra College of Advanced Education (now University of Canberra) for study and research purposes. It was named the Lu Rees Archives of Australian Children's Literature in her honour.

Lu Rees was a tall woman, rangy in build, described in an obituary as having 'immense vitality, generosity and warmth'. Beneath a gentle manner she had a consummate ability to get things done. Those who knew her could never say 'no' to the many inspired projects she instigated. Over many decades, innumerable meetings of the organisations she cherished were held in her lounge room, collections of children's books lined her walls and her garage developed into an office annexe.

In 1964 she was awarded Member of the British Empire Medal for services to literature. In 1983 she was created a Member of the Order of Australia for services to Australian children's literature and was awarded the inaugural Dromkeen Medal, both these awards being announced posthumously. The Dromkeen Medal was awarded for her significant contribution to the appreciation and development of children's literature in Australia.

Lu Rees died in Canberra on 23 January 1983.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book

The Children's Book Council of Canberra, 1957 to 1972: a brief account of the formation and activities of one of the six Councils which now form the Children's Book Council of Australia, Rees, L. F. H., 1972

Lu Rees - An Appreciation and a Tribute, McDonald, Kath, 1982

Journal Article

The Children's Book Council Collection of Children's Books by Australian Authors, 1980

The Dromkeen Collection of Australian Children's Literature, 1983

A Gift to Japan, 1978

Book Section

The Lu Rees Archives of Australian Children's Literature, Alderman, Belle, 2003

Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services 1914-18. Vol. III: Problems and Services, Butler, A.G., 1943

Resource Section

Rees, Lucy Frances Harvey, Clarke, Patricia,
<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rees-lucy-frances-harvey-14414/text25493>

Lu Rees Archives of Australian Children's Literature,
<http://www.canberra.edu.au/lurees/about/bibliography>

Newspaper Article

Finis to a Bookshop Chapter: History of Dalton's Bookshop, Canberra, Dalton, Teki, 1987,
<http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/39151220>

Obituary, 1983

Journal

Lu Rees Archives: Notes, Books and Authors, Mills, Carol and Harman, Lauren, 1983

Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

Archival resources

ACT Heritage Library

[HMSS 0048 Fellowship of Australian Writers, ACT Branch Records](#)

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Lucy F. H. Rees, 'A note for Alec Bolton, NLA, on handing over the early records of the Fellowship of Australian Writers in Canberra', Reid ACT](#)

[Papers of Patricia Clarke, 1887-2010 \[manuscript\]](#)

Author Details

Patricia Clarke

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