The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5131

Hill, Ernestine

(1899 - 1972)

Born	18990101, Rockhampton Queensland Australia
Died	19720822, Brisbane Queensland Australia
Occupation	Biographer, Photographer, Writer

Summary

Ernestine Hill travelled extensively around Australia photographing and writing about the varied landscapes and people she encountered. She is particularly well known for her photographs of Aboriginal people.

Read more about Ernestine Hill in our sister publication The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia.

Details

Ernestine Hill was born in 1899 in Rockhampton, Queensland. She was the only child of Robert Hemmings, who was born in London and worked as a factory manager. He married his second wife Margaret Foster (née Lynam), who was a Queensland-born schoolteacher.

Hill grew up in Brisbane. As a young student she showed sufficient academic promise to win a bursary to attend the All Hallows convent school. In 1916 her first book of poems, *Peter Pan Land and Other Poems*, was published by Hibernian Newspaper. The collection included a preface by Archbishop (Sir) James Duhig. In 1917 Hill won a scholarship that enabled her to study at Stott & Hoare's Business College, Brisbane. She completed her studies with top marks and subsequently gained employment with the public service. By 1918 she was working for the Department of Justice library as a typist.

In 1919 Hill left the public service and began working for *Smith's Weekly* in Sydney. She worked as a secretary to the literary editor J.F. Archibald, before becoming the subeditor of the newspaper and embarking on a career as a journalist in the 1930s.

Hill became the editor of the *ABC Weekly*'s women's pages from 1940-1942, and then held the position of commissioner with the ABC from 1941-1944. Hill then resigned from this role and embarked on her travels. She travelled across Australia, covering 100 thousand miles by foot, camel, train, truck, and by a pearling lugger. Hill took over three thousand photographs during these travels, documenting the landscape and encounters with Aboriginal people; some of her images include a number of male and female corroborees as the subject. Hill wrote numerous articles relating to her travels, some of which were considered controversial at the time. They were published in newspapers and periodicals such as *Walkabout* and the *Sunday Sun*.

Following her travels, Hill continued to write, producing a number unpublished novels, plays, and radio and film scripts. She published three books: *The Great Australian Loneliness*, in 1937, and *My Love Must Wait: The Story of Matthew Flinders*, in 1941 and *The Territory*, in 1951.

Hill's photographs express the observations of an intelligent and well-travelled woman. Candice Bruce noted that Hill had 'lamented that the "echoes of the wild sweet singing" were dying.' Hill's images were not ethnographic studies; rather, they revealed a deep 'understanding of the land and its people that many writers have failed to discover' (Bruce 147). Hill's appreciation of Aboriginal culture was evident in her photographs and writing.

In 1959 Hill was awarded a Commonwealth Literary Fund fellowship and received a small pension. Unfortunately the latter part of her life was plagued by financial and health difficulties. Hill returned to Brisbane in 1970 to be cared for by her family and died in their care on 22 August 1972.

Hill's vast collection of manuscripts, letters and photographs are held by the Fryer Library, University of Queensland. Portraits of Hill are held by the Art Gallery of Queensland.

Collections

Fryer Library, University of Queensland

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

Events

1995 - 1995
Ernestine Hill's work featured in *Twentieth Century Australian Women Artists*

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book
Great Australian Loneliness: Ports of Sunset, Hill, Ernestine, 1940

My Love Must Wait: The Story of Matthew Flinders, Hill, Ernestine, 1941

The Territory, Hill, Ernestine, 1951

Resource Section
Hill, Mary Ernestine, Bonnin, Margriet R. and Bonnin, Nancy,
http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hill-mary-ernestine-10503

Ernestine Hill, 1995,
https://www.daao.org.au/bio/ernestine-hill/

Book Section
Ernestine Hill, Bruce, Candice, 1995

Newspaper Article
Ernestine Hill dies,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article102000577

Obituary: The writer and her country, Dunlevy, Maurice,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article102000660

Edited Book
Heritage : the national women's art book, 500 works by 500 Australian women artists from colonial times to 1955, Kerr, Joan, 1995

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

Archival resources

State Library of Victoria
Autobiographical notes, [not after 1972]. [manuscript].

Fryer Library, The University of Queensland
Ernestine Hill Papers

Letters, 1971-1972: to the University of Queensland.

Louise Campbell Papers

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Typescripts and photographs [ca. 1947] [manuscript]

Author Details
Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

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