Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6015

Ivens, Kate Spencer

(1869 - 1942)

Born	18690910, North Canterbury New Zealand
Died	19420804, Christchurch Canterbury New Zealand
Occupation	Photographer

Summary

Kate Ivens was an early, amateur ethnographic photographer of Indigenous people. She also photographed flora and fauna.

Details

Kate Ivens was a deaconess as well as a trained nurse. In 1896 she travelled to Norfolk Island along with other female missionaries to join the Melanesian Mission there. Whilst on the island, she set up and managed the mission hospital.

Ivens took many photographs on the island, documenting everyday life there. Ivens's images document women doing the laundry and sewing, children playing, the surrounds of the mission settlement, the native islanders, as well as the local flora and fauna. The original motivation for Ivens to take these photographs is still uncertain. Richard Wesley suggests that '[i]f it was to demonstrate that the charges of the Melanesian Mission embraced their life on Norfolk with joy, she was singularly unsuccessful'; the life depicted in her photographs is far from joyous.

Ivens created 'makeshift studio backgrounds with sheets to emphasize and stylise her subjects' (Hall 133) and set up a darkroom in the outbuildings near the Barnabas Chapel, which was also used as the carpentry workshop and printery.

A retrospective exhibition of her work was organised by the Norfolk Island Museum in 1995, entitled *'In Gods Image': Miss Ivens and the Melanesian Mission*, which featured 28 of her photographs.

Collections

Anne Firmstone and Kate Ivens's work can be found in albums of the Collenso Collection, Norfolk Island Museum.

Events

1995 - 1995
Kate Ivens' work featured in *'In God's Image': Miss Ivens and the Melanesian Mission*

1981 - 1981
Kate Ivens' work featured in *Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950*

Published resources

Exhibition Catalogue
Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

Book
Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

Conference Paper
"Unpretending Labours": Julia Farr and the Melanesian Mission, Crawford, Janet, 2004,
http://anglicanhistory.org/oceania/crawford_farr2004.pdf

Thesis
Consuming Illusions: The Magic Lantern in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand 1850-1910, Hartrick, Elizabeth, 2003

Women Album Makers from the Canterbury region of New Zealand 1890-1910 and their Photographic Practices, Hearnshaw, Victoria Annabel, 2017,
http://hdl.handle.net/10063/6124

Resource Section
Kate Ivens,
https://www.daao.org.au/bio/kate-ivens/

Edited Book
Past Present: The National Women's Art Anthology, Kerr, Joan and Holder, Jo, 1999

Newspaper Article
Personal Items,
https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19080804.2.26

Journal Article
Exploring a Region's Social History, Wesley, Richard

Magazine article
A First For Women Photographers in Australia: Quick Thinking and Ladders Got the Top Shots, Bowen, Jill, 1981,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55457051

Archival resources

Archives New Zealand
New Zealand, Archives of New Zealand, Passenger Lists, 1839-1973 Kate S Ivens, 1908

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

Created 22 November 2016
Last modified 19 June 2026