Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6119

Ryan, Ellen

(1851 - 1920)

Born	18510101, London United Kingdom
Died	19200528, Wayville South Australia Australia
Occupation	Businesswoman, Publican

Summary

Ellen Ryan held licences for hotels in the Northern Territory from 1878, becoming a wealthy and successful business woman in her own right. She had a reputation as one of the Northern Territory's best hostesses, organising a variety of entertainment for her hotel patrons and local residents.

Ellen was one of the 82 Territory women who enrolled to vote after the franchise was granted to South Australian and Territory women in 1894.

Details

Ellen Ryan travelled with her parents and two siblings to Western Australia in 1853, moving on to Adelaide in 1856.

In 1867 Ellen married Irish immigrant labourer William Ryan and six years later they moved to the Northern Territory, seduced by news of gold discoveries. They arrived in Palmerston on 12 July 1873 and soon travelled on to Yam Creek. Within a few weeks Ellen had leased the first hotel in the area, the Miners' Arm Hotel, where she quickly developed a sound reputation.

In the late 1870s Ellen returned to Palmerston and after a short stint at a local hotel, Ellen moved on to Southport where she took a lease on the Royal Hotel. In 1877 Ellen left her violent husband, taking out a formal protection order in May 1881 wherein she sited cruelty and drunkenness.

With the news of a railway to be built between Palmerston and Pine Creek in 1884, Ellen moved her hotel to Port Darwin Camp. By the following year she had made enough money to expand her business. Ellen purchased more land on the goldfields and in Palmerston, and became involved in mining leases near Pine Creek. By 1885 Ellen and Eliza Tuckwell were the only two territory women listed on land tax statistics as earning more than 300 pounds per year. Ellen was a generous woman and donated money to many worthy causes. She even came to the aid of the Red Cross during the First World War, helping to raise fund and supply equipment to the front.

In 1888, after a trip to Adelaide where she had consulted various architects, Ellen returned to the Northern Territory with fresh ideas of expanding her business. She began building hotels at Union Reef and on the Palmerston to Pine Creek railway line, and had plans for a grandiose hotel in Palmerston. After selling her Union Reef hotel in c. 1890, she focused her attention on her new hotel in Darwin. The 4000-pound North Australian hotel was opened in Palmerston in 1890.

After six years of ownership, Ellen sold the North Australian and concentrated on running the Palmerston Club Hotel, which had been built in 1883 by Edward and Margaret Hopewell. However, in 1901, Ellen came to an agreement with the owners of the North Australian (now known as Hotel Victoria) that they would swap leases, with the pair taking over her lease of the Palmerston Club Hotel.
Ellen was practically forced out of her hotels in 1915 when the Gilruth administration took over the wholesale and retail sales of liquor in the northern part of the Territory. Now in her sixties, Ellen moved to Adelaide, where she spent her remaining years in a home she fondly called The Shackle. Ellen passed away in May 1920 and, with no remaining children, her estate was split between her nieces and nephews.

Archival resources

State Library of South Australia
Darwin

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