Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0052

Stevenson, Hilda Mabel

(1893 - 1987)

Born	18930818, Ballarat Victoria Australia
Died	19870907, Toorak Victoria Australia
Occupation	Community worker, Philanthropist

Summary

In recognition of her philanthropy and social welfare work, Stevenson was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire on 31 December 1960, a Commander of the Order of the British Empire 8 June 1963 and a Dames Commander of the Order of the British Empire on 1 January 1968.

Details

Daughter of Hugh Victor McKay, the inventor of the combined harvester, Hilda Mabel was born at Ballarat and educated at Clarendon College and Presbyterian Ladies' College. Her first marriage was in 1916 to Cleveland James Kidd (deceased 1923), and in 1936 she married Colonel George Ingram Stevenson. They were to have one daughter.

Hilda Stevenson was for many years associated with the committee of management at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. Dates conflict but it is suggested that she was a member of the committee from 1938, and served as vice-president from 1951-73. In 1958, she donated £100,000 for the establishment of a Chair of Paediatrics at the hospital, to be administered by the University of Melbourne.

Dame Hilda was a generous benefactor. She was founder and trustee of the Sunshine Foundation, which she chaired after the death of her brother Cecil. She gave significant sums to her alma mater, PLC, and to the Victorian Arts Centre as well as to the Children's Hospital and the University of Melbourne. She was a member of the Alexandra and Peninsula Golf Clubs as well as the Lawn Tennis Association of Victoria. In recognition of her philanthropy and social welfare work, she was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire on 31 December 1960, a Commander of the Order of the British Empire 8 June 1963 and a Dames Commander of the Order of the British Empire on 1 January 1968. In 1973 she was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws by the University of Melbourne in recognition, according to the *Sun*, of her involvement with the institution for several decades and her gifts to university projects including the Florey Laboratories and International House.

An article in *Woman's Day*, 3 September 1979, quipped 'Dame Hilda's a Starter in a Race for Equality (but she doesn't want to be first across the line)'. Dame Hilda was, the magazine reported, the only woman member of the Victoria Racing Club to have full voting rights, but did not act on her entitlement to use the men-only bars and seating areas, saying 'I think the men deserve their domain': 'Equality is not one of her strong beliefs', said the magazine, '"Men are just born different", she says'.

Published resources

Edited Book
Who's Who in Australia 1983, Draper, W. J., 1983

Book
The Royal Children's Hospital: A History of Faith, Science and Love, Yule, Peter

The Alexandra Club : A Narrative 1903-1983, Starke, Monica, 1986

Thesis
In Her Gift: Activism and Altruism in Australian Women's Philanthropy, 1880-2005, Lemon, Barbara, 2008

Site Exhibition
Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html

In Her Gift: Women Philanthropists in Australian History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wiph/home.html

Newspaper Article
Dame Hilda's a starter in a race for equality (but she doesn't want to be first across the line), 1979

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

The University of Melbourne Archives
Person

Author Details
Anne Heywood and Barbara Lemon

Created 24 April 2002
Last modified 3 May 2026