Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0173

Underwood, Erica Reid

(1907 - 1992)

Born	19070626, Albany Western Australia Australia
Died	19920201, Shenton Park Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Community worker, Radio Broadcaster

Summary

Erica Underwood was the first woman Deputy Chairman of Council at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, the first psychologist trained in Western Australia, an ABC broadcaster and a founder of the University radio station 6 NR. [1] She was appointed to The Order of the British Empire – Member (Civil) on 31 December 1977 for services to radio, education and the community.

Details

The daughter of William and Jessica Chandler, Erica's career ambition was to become a psychologist. As no course was available in Western Australia she accepted a teachers' college bursary and studied Arts at the University of Western Australia. After graduating, Erica became the first cadet in psychology at the Government Psychological Clinic for Children. The clinic closed during the depression and she completed her Teacher's Certificate and taught for four years at Collie. [2] In 1934 she married Eric Underwood (later Professor) and they were to have four children. Professor Underwood, an agricultural scientist, became Professor of Agriculture at the University of Western Australia, and is widely known for his work on the effects of trace elements in nutrition.

In 1949 Erica Underwood, along with two other women, was appointed to the Children's Court bench to assist the magistrate. During the late 1940s she joined broadcaster Catherine King, presenting one session per fortnight on the ABC radio programme "The Women's Session." The programme was broadcast throughout the State and included music, live interviews and discussion on subjects from science and arts to cooking and parenting. It was based on the premise that women who were not in the paid work-force were thinking people with wide interests and concerns. [3] Together Erica Underwood and Catherine King travelled in the ABC van meeting the country women who listened to the programme. In 1966 Erica became the sole broadcaster of the show.

Erica was involved in a variety of community activities. She was the first woman appointed to the Churchill Fellowship Award committee; the first woman government nominee on the Council of the Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University of Technology) and in 1977 became the first woman Deputy Chairman (now Pro-Chancellor); Deputy chairman of the Western Australian Arts Council; and member of the State Advisory Committee of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. She was an official visitor to the Riverback Boy's institution; a member of the Western Australian committee of the Silver Jubilee Appeal; and Chairman of the committee for the Citizen of the Year Awards.

In 1981 Erica Underwood became the first woman to be awarded an honorary Doctorate of Technology from the Western Australian Institute of Technology. [4] She passed away in 1992, aged 84.

Published resources

Book
Reflections : profiles of 150 women who helped make Western Australia's history; Project of the Womens Committee for the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of Western Australia, Popham, Daphne; Stokes, K.A.; Lewis, Julie, 1979

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

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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