The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0005

Henderson, Beryl

(1897 - 1990)

Born	18970118, Hampstead London England
Died	19901214, Jerusalem Jerusalem District Israel
Occupation	Women's liberationist

Summary

Beryl Henderson set up the Abortion Law Reform Association in Canberra. She was an active member of Canberra Women’s Liberation, and translated the French book *Abortion: the Bobigny affair: law on trial*. The first women’s refuge in Canberra was named after her and in 1987 the Beryl Henderson foundation was established.

Born in England, she arrived in Australia via Israel, to settle in Victoria in 1965. She eventually made Canberra her home until the end of the 1970s when she returned to Israel.

Details

Beryl Henderson was born in Hampstead, London, England, in January 1897 and died in Jerusalem, Israel in December 1990, a month before her 94th birthday.

Although she gained entry to university, the economic circumstances in her family prevented her from taking up her place. She won a scholarship to the Diocesan Training College, Lincoln, and became a primary school teacher.

Early in life, Henderson became interested in political and social issues, associating with Fabian Society members and the Pankhurst family. She attended suffragette meetings with her mother and at the age of 16 was a founding member of the British Abortion Law Reform Association, along with Dora
Russell and other prominent women.

Henderson belonged to that generation of British women whose fiancés were killed in World War I and who never married. A feminist activist, Beryl became a councillor on the Extra Metropolitan London Borough Council, 1929-32, a member of the first Committee of the Abortion Law Reform Association in England in 1936 and a member of the Progressive League.

Henderson left England to teach languages in an Israeli Kibbutz in 1960-64. Answering an advertisement in an English newspaper, she then came to Victoria as a housekeeper in 1965. She visited Canberra on holiday and decided to make it her home. Renting a room in Ainslie she started her first job in Canberra, undertaking housecleaning and general domestic work.

Beryl Henderson found employment in Canberra Hospital in 1969, teaching English to migrants. She taught classes in 1969-73, forming many friendships in the migrant community. Volunteers from Women's Liberation helped by minding the children to enable migrant mothers to attend classes.

Henderson was responsible for setting up the Abortion Law Reform Association in Canberra. She also became active in the Family Planning Association (Life Membership in 1979) and the Humanist Society. As an active member of Canberra Women's Liberation, Henderson performed the official opening of the first Women's Refuge in Canberra (1975), now named after her.

In 1974 Henderson translated from the French the book on the Bobigny Trial in France, Abortion: the Bobigny affair: law on trial, which was published by Wild and Woolley, Sydney 1975. Gisele Halimi, the French Arab lawyer who conducted the defence in the famous trial and wrote the book, expressed her great satisfaction with the standard of Henderson's translation when she launched it in Sydney during International Women's Year, 1975. The Women's Movement in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra contributed to the cost of the publication.

At the end of the 1970s Henderson returned to Israel. Soon after her ninetieth birthday, at the suggestion of her friends in Australia, she agreed to set up the Foundation in her name. The Beryl Henderson Foundation was established in May 1987 by eight of her friends. It offers an annual prize for an essay of no more than 5000 words on a topic relevant to women's studies or to the status of women. Eligible entrants must be enrolled in an undergraduate course in a post-secondary public education institution in Australia in the year preceding submission. The inaugural prize was presented in 1998.

Events

1929 - 1932
Councillor, Extra Metropolitan London Borough Council

1974 - 1974
English translation of *Abortion: the Bobigny affair: law on trial*, (Wild and Wolley 1975)

1987 - 1987
Establishment of the Beryl Henderson Foundation, it offers an annual prize for an essay on a topic relevant to women's studies or to the status of women

1979 - 1979
Family Planning Association Life Membership

1965 - 1968
Housekeeper, Victoria and then Canberra, Australia

1936 - 1936
Member of first Committee of the Abortion Law Reform Association, England

1975 - 1975
Officially opened the first women's refuge in Canberra, named after her

1979 - 1979
Returned to Israel

1969 - 1973
Taught English classes to migrant community

1969 - 1969
Taught English to migrants, Canberra Hospital

1960 - 1964
Taught languages in an Israeli Kibbutz

Published resources

Finding Aid
Guide to the Papers of Beryl Henderson - MS 9360, National Library of Australia, 2017,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-299073938/findingaid

Journal Article
Testimonial: Beryl Henderson's Legacy, Oswald, Jenny, 1998

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

Book
Abortion: the Bobigny affair: a law on trial: a complete record of the pleadings at the Court of Bobigny, 8 November 1972, Chevalier, Michele, 1975

Archival resources

ACT Heritage Library
Beryl Henderson at the women's 'tent embassy' today

Beryl Henderson, Maureen Worsley and Liz Goldring at the Women's Embassy at Parliament House protesting against abortion laws

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Papers of Beryl Henderson, 1973-1992 [manuscript]

National Library of Australia
[Biographical cuttings on Beryl Henderson, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details
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