The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0013

Street, Jessie Mary Grey

(1889 - 1970)

Born	18890418, Chota Nagpur Bihar India
Died	19700702, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Feminist, Suffragette

Summary

Jessie Street was recognised nationally and internationally for her activism in women’s rights, social justice and peace. Street campaigned for equality of status for women, equal pay, the appointment of women to public office and the election of women to parliament. Co-founder of the New South Wales Social Hygiene Association (1916) and Co-founder (1928) and President of the United Associations of Women, she was the only woman on the Australian delegation to the founding conference of the United Nations in 1945 and established the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the Charter of Women’s Rights.

Details

Daughter of Mabel Ogilvie and Charles Lillingston, Jessie was born in India and moved with her family to Yulgilbar on the Clarence River, northern NSW, in 1896. She was schooled in England at Wycombe Abbey School, Buckinghamshire, from 1903, returning to Australia in 1906. She graduated in 1910 with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Sydney, and became a founding member of the Sydney University Women's Sports Association that same year.

From here, a long and active career began with attendance at the International Alliance of Women Conference in Rome in 1911, and Geneva in 1914. Jessie worked for the New York Protection and Probation Association in 1915. She joined the Feminist Club the following year, becoming President in 1928 and resigning in 1929. In 1916 she was Co-founder with Annie Golding of the NSW Social Hygiene Association. That same year she married Kenneth Street. The pair were to have four children: Belinda (1918), Philippa (1919), Roger (1921) and Laurence (1926).

In 1920, Jessie Street became Secretary of the National Council of Women, NSW, and founding member of the Australian League of Nations Union. She was a member of the Women's College Council from 1921-50; member of the Women's League of NSW after its formation in 1926; Foundation Vice-President of the Racial Hygiene Association of NSW in 1926 (renamed the Family Planning Association in 1961); Co-founder of the United Association of Women (UAW) in 1929; and President of the UAW from 1931-42. In 1936, Street was the NSW Vice-President of the Australian Federation of Women Voters. She formed the Council of Action for Equal Pay in 1937, and became President of the Australian Open Door Council the same year. In 1939, Street joined the Australian Labor Party. She was also Australian president of the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR. The following year she took an equal pay case to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court with Nerida Cohen on behalf of the UAW.

Jessie Street was a member of the NSW Committee of the International Peace Campaign throughout the 1930s-40s. In 1934 she was awarded the Victorian sesquicentennial prize for her song *Australia Happy Isle*.

Street founded and launched the *Australian Women's Digest* in 1941. In 1941 she was also Chair of the Russian Medical Aid Comforts Committee, and in 1942, formed the NSW branch of the Council for Women in War Work. She initiated the national conference which led to the Australian Women's Charter in 1943. The following year, as the NSW Chair of the Australian Women's Charter, she led a delegation of 13 women to present the Charter to Parliament.

1943 and 1946 saw two unsuccessful campaigns as Labor candidate for the seat of Wentworth in Sydney, but Street became President of the NSW Peace Council and was the sole woman in the Australian delegation to the founding Conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. She was the founder of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 1945, acting as Australian representative from 1945-47, and Vice-President in 1947. Between 1957-67, she campaigned for constitutional change to grant the Aboriginal population the right to vote.

Street travelled extensively between 1945-64, visiting Washington, London, Moscow (as an official guest of the Soviet Union), Paris (for the Women's International Democratic Federation Conference), New Delhi (as guest delegate to the All India Women's Conference, 1945), and New York (for the Status of Women Commission, January-February 1947 and January 1948). Street was invited to Britain to help organise the World Peace Conference in 1950. She travelled throughout Europe on World Peace business in 1951, attending the Women's Congress in Copenhagen in 1953. She travelled to Geneva to observe the United Nations; to Vienna for the World Peace Council; to China on the invitation of the China Peace Committee; to Madras in 1955 for the All India Congress for Peace and Asian Solidarity; to Helsinki for the World Assembly for Peace; and to New York to attend the UN General Assembly. She chaired a seminar on the Status of Women in London in 1956. Between 1958-59, Street attended peace conferences in Stockholm and New Delhi. She was involved with the UN Status of Women Commission in New York; the International Assembly of Women in Copenhagen; and the 6th World Conference against A & H bombs in Japan, 1960-61.

Jessie Street's autobiography, *Truth or Repose*, was published in 1966. In 1989 the Jessie Street National Women's Library was established in her honour in Sydney, New South Wales.

Events

2001 - 2001
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Published resources

Book

Truth or Repose, Street, Jessie M. G., 1966

Bird of Paradise, Devanny, Jean, 1945

50 years of feminist achievement : a history of the United Associations of Women, Mitchell, Winifred, 1979

Jessie Street: A Rewarding but Unrewarded Life, Sekuless, Peter, 1978

Getting Equal: the History of Australian Feminism, Lake, Marilyn, 1999

Uphill all the way: a documentary history of women in Australia, Daniels, Kay and Murnane, Mary, 1980

Jessie Street: A revised autobiography, Street, Jessie, 2004

Newtown Tarts: A history of the Sydney University Women's Sports Association 1910-1995, Lilienthal, Sonja, 1997

Edited Book
Worth her Salt: Women at Work in Australia, Bevege, Margaret, James, Margaret and Schute, Carmel, 1982

Women at Work, Curthoys, Ann, Spearritt, Peter and Eade, Susan Margaret, 1975

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988,
https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20071105022623/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/78644/20071105-1315/www.200australianwo

Biographical register : the Women's College within the University of Sydney, Annable, Rosemary, 1995

Book Section
Feminism and Class: the United Associations of Women and the Council of Action for Equal Pay in the Depression, Ranald, Patricia, 1982

Bessie Rischbieth, Jessie Street and the End of First-Wave Feminism in Australia, White, Kate, 1982

Jessie Street, Feminist, Wright, Andree, 1975

Jessie Street: individual rights and the national interest, Gorrell, Richard, Foster, Stephen and Hurford, Emma, c1998

Review
Jessie Street: A Rewarding but Unrewarded Life, Radi, Heather, 1979

Jessie Street: A Rewarding but Unrewarded Life, Ranald, Pat, 1982

Journal Article
Jessie Street: feminist and socialist, an enigma for her class, Searle, Betty, 1989

2001 Eldershaw Memorial Lecture : founding fathers, dutiful wives and rebellious daughters.[Lecture presented to a Tasmanian Historical Research Association meeting on 10 Apr 2001.], Lake, Marilyn, 2001

Newspaper Article
Dynamic Duo turned the tide on injustice, Tony, Stephens, 1997

Article
Jessie Street Annual Lunch, Bandler, Faith Dr, 1997

Resource
Who was Jessie Street?, Jessie Street National Women's Library,
http://www.nationalwomenslibrary.org.au/aboutus/who-was-jessie-street/

Guide to the Papers of Jessie Street, National Library of Australia,
http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-231546119/findingaid

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Resource Section
Street, Jessie Mary Grey (1889-1970), Radi, Heather, 2002,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160396b.htm

Jessie Street, National Archives of Australia, 2018,
http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/uncommon-lives/jessie-street/life.aspx

Site Exhibition

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection
Records of the National Foundation for Australian Women, 1988-2009 [manuscript]

Papers and objects of Bessie Rischbieth, 1900-1967 [manuscript]

Research notes: Notes for chapter on Warden of St Paul's College, 1916-44

Papers of Nancy Lutton, 1918-2007 (bulk 1960-2007) [manuscript]

Papers of Alexander Gore Gowrie, 1835-1987 [manuscript]

Papers of Kylie Tennant, 1891-1989 (bulk 1933-1988) [manuscript]

Essays on Jessie Street 1976 [manuscript]

Papers of Vivienne Newson, 1942-1971 [manuscript]

Papers of Australian Peace Council, 1949-1955 [manuscript]

Jessie Street

Papers of Shirley Andrews, 1917-2002 [manuscript]

Papers of Jessie Street, circa 1914-1968 [manuscript]

State Library of South Australia
Papers of Janine Haines AM

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Jean Thurlow interviewed by Peter Sekuless [sound recording]

Shirley Andrews interviewed by Peter Read in the Peter Read collection of interviews conducted for his book entitled, Charles Perkins : a biography [sound recording]

Jack and Jean Horner interviewed by Peter Read in the Peter Read collection of interviews conducted for his book entitled, Charles Perkins : a biography [sound recording]

Jessie Street interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection [sound recording]

Mary Wright interviewed by Richard Raxworthy in the Labor Council of New South Wales oral history project [sound recording]

Ruby Rich interviewed by Hazel de Berg for the Hazel de Berg collection [sound recording]

State Library of New South Wales
Jessie Street, ca. 1910 / photograph by L. W. Appleby

Irina Dunn further papers, 1943-1994

Photographs relating to the United Associations of Women including portrait of Jessie Street, 1936-1949

National Library of Australia, Pictures Collection
Mrs Jessie Street at the United Women's Conference in San Francisco, 19 May 1945 [picture] / photo by Sam Rosenberg

[Portrait of Jessie Street] [picture] / Falk

Waverley Library
Lady Jessie Street

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra

General Social Insurance Scheme. "Jessie Street"

(Mrs.) Street Jessie M G Plan for community migration

Mrs Jessie Street to the Status of Women Commission, New York

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin] Correspondence 'S' [Jim Spain - John Symons, includes representations from Mrs Jessie M Street and 'Thumbs up' Horse Gymkhana poster]

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Holt: Volume 3 of press cuttings as Minister of Immigration, Labour and National Service, includes articles on migrants, employment, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Mrs Jessie Street, Mrs Zara Holt]

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin] Correspondence 'S'

Status of women - General - Mrs Jessie Street's co-ordinating agency

Status of women - General - Mrs Jessie Street's co-ordinating agency

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Chifley] Correspondence 'S', Part 4

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Chifley] Correspondence 'S', Part 5

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Chifley] Correspondence 'S', Part 2

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Chifley] Correspondence 'Gr-Gz'

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Chifley] Correspondence 'Stew-Sull' [J Stewart - Mrs Vera Sullivan, includes representations relating to Alfred Stone, 430523 Flight Sgt R S Strickland, letter from Mrs Jessie Street]

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin] Correspondence 'S'

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin] Correspondence 'S'

Co-operative immigration from Great Britain - Proposals by Mrs Jessie Street

STEET Kenneth Whistler; STREET Jessie Mary Grey; LILLINGSTON Evelyn Mabel Constance versus ARMSTRONG Tancred de Carteret; BUNDOCK Charles Slade; CLARENCE Percy Charies

ASIO surveillance photograph of Jessie Street

[Personal Papers of Prime Minister Holt] Articles and press statements prepared by Minister prior to 1954

Mrs Jessie M G Street - Departure from Australia

STREET, Jessie Mary Grey

OSW - [Office of the Status of Women] - Third National Women's Consultative Concil - Jessie Street, Trust - 1989

Talking History [Episode 2] - [Part 2] Jessie Street: The Disappearing Heroine

Talking History [Episode 1] - [Part 1] Jessie Street: The Disappearing Heroine

Life Matters - International Year of the Family Report; Home Economics; Jessie Street; Parenting Plan

Jessie Street: The Disappointment Heroine [Part 1]

Jessie Street: The Disappointment Heroine [Part 1]

Interview with Lady Jessie Street by Norma Ferris

Street, Jessie Part 1

Street, Jessie Part 2

Street, Jessie Part 3

Street, Jessie Part 4

National Archives of Australia, Melbourne Office
Mrs. Jessie Street [Forum of the Air] [SZ/21/1]

National Archives of Australia, Perth Office
Passports of Australian Delegates returning from Warsaw [Communist backed] peace Congress

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library
Records of Jessie Street.

Fryer Library, The University of Queensland
Bill Morrow Papers

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
Australasian Book Society -- records, 1949-1975

Feminist Club of New South Wales records, 1928-1973

Series 01: Street family - papers of Sir Philip Street, 1890-1938

United Association of Women - Further Records, 1930-1978

Jean Fleming Arnot - personal and professional papers, 1890-1995

United Association of Women - Records, ca.1930-1970

Florence James - papers, 1890-1993

William Morrow - recordings of addresses given by Jessie Street, and interviews with Jessie Street, 1953-1960

Ros Bowden - interviews conducted for radio programs and documentaries, ca.1975 - 1989

State Library of Western Australia
Records, 1960-1991 [manuscript]

The University of Melbourne Archives
Pethybridge, Eva

University of Sydney, Archives
Papers of the Sydney University Women's Sports Association

Author Details
Elle Morrell and Nikki Henningham

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Digital resources



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