

Meroula (Mollie) Frances Fellowes Lukis
OBE, OAM, BA Hons & DipEd (UWA), FLAA, Hon. D. Litt. (Murdoch).

Mollie was born on 13 August 1911 in Donnybrook. She lived on a farm at Balingup, being privately tutored until completing her junior certificate, after which she attended St Mary's Church of England Girls School West Perth. She went on to The University of Western Australia and completed a BA Honours degree in 1932 and Diploma of Education in 1933.

She commenced a teaching career in mathematics and taught in Melbourne, overseas and at St Hilda's. From 1941 to 1944 she worked in Metrology at the Defence Research Laboratories at Maribynong Victoria. Late in 1944 the WA Government was persuaded to officially create a government archives collection and to appoint a person to undertake this work.

The appointee was a surprising choice: a young woman with math's training and no library or history experience. This was Mollie. She started in March 1945 in one room with an operating budget of 250 Pounds. She confessed later that when she read that advertisement she had not known what an archivist was. She studied all the literature she could find on the subject, visited South Australia where a State Archives was already functioning and gradually built up systems and policies, some of which are still in place today. Mollie travelled overseas on a number of occasions, once on a Carnegie grant and another time with a group sponsored by the German Government and brought back ideas suitable to be put into practice here.

Through her great energy and organisational ability by the time of her retirement in 1971 the State Archives and J S Battye Library of West Australian History were an acclaimed world class Library and prime resource on WA history. She herself was a tremendous resource for researchers as having built up the collection she knew its contents and could guide people to the information they were seeking. In the days before computers she was the key.



I give two quotes here:

One is:

"All researchers who have been associated with her benefited from her breadth of knowledge, untiring enthusiasm, her unassuming nature and never failing courtesy in assisting all who have sought her help for their historical research."

And another quote about her:

"I recollect my somewhat nervous dealings, as a thesis writer, with an authoritative and articulate Battye Librarian who ran a tight ship and was not to be trifled with, but who always delivered a thoroughly professional service"

Mollie was generous with her support for, and input to, a number of community organisations, mainly in the fields of Western Australian history and the promotion of education and opportunities for women.

I have talked about her pioneering work in creating and building up the State Archives but she also played a wider role in the library sphere with her membership of the inaugural Library Board of Western Australia in 1952-55 and 1974-77. She was awarded a Fellowship of the Library Board in 1989. She was also a member of the Library Association of Australia and in 1963 was awarded a Fellowship of that organisation in recognition of her work with archives.

Mollie played a major role in support of the Western Australian Museum, most notably on the Maritime Archaeology Advisory Committee in 1965-71, for a time as its Chairman. This was a critical time when the 17th century Dutch shipwrecks were being discovered along the Western Australian coast and Commonwealth and State legislation was being formulated to deal with the situation.

Her support for women's rights was demonstrated in her active membership of the WA committee for Equal Opportunity, 1958-73, culminating in the achievement of their purpose.

She was a member of the Australian Federation of University Women (WA Branch) from 1947. This committee worked towards the goal of establishing a purpose built University Women's College, achieved in 1960 under the name of St Catherine's College. She was a member of the St Catherine's College Council in 1964-82 and its Chairman from 1979-82. She was awarded a Fellowship of the College in 1986.

Miss Lukis has been a strong supporter of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society ever since taking up her position of State Archivist in 1945. She advised the Society on the formation of its collection policy and had the Society's records in her care at the Archives from 1955 onwards. She was a member of the Society's Council from 1953-59 and was created a Fellow of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society in 1971. She has remained a staunch promoter of the Society and was always willing to assist with its activities. She was often called upon as a source of information concerning Western Australian people and history or professional matters. She had built up a vast network of people she knew or had been associated with in one way or another.

One of her favourite activities was regular attendance as a member of the Karrakatta Club which she joined in 1948. In the 70s she chaired the Current Affairs committee jointly with Noel Stewart. She strongly promoted the work of the club in enlisting new members.

At the formation of the National Trust of Australia (WA) in 1959, Miss Lukis became a Foundation Member and during the ensuing years she gave this organization unstinting and constructive service. She was awarded honorary membership in 1994.