

Rica Erickson  
AM, Hon Dlitt, Cit WA, FRWAHS

Rica was born Frederica Lucy Sandilands on 10 August 1908 in Boulder and was the eldest of the eight children of Christopher and Phoebe Sandilands. In 1921 the family moved to Kendenup, but Rica, who had won an entrance to the Eastern Goldfields High School, remained in Boulder to live with her much loved grandmother.

Always a curious and energetic child, Rica's childhood interests revolved around sports and outdoor games, music, photography, reading and exploring the countryside. Rica became a teacher and to gain further qualifications she chose to research native orchids and at the same time honed her skills as a botanical artist.

In 1934 she took up a position at the Bolgart School where she met and in 1936 married, Sydney Erickson (1908-1987). Rica retired from teaching and the young couple farmed 'Fairlea' and raised four children, Dorothy, John, Bethel and Robin. Rica became involved in community, historical, naturalist, and sporting activities and led a crusade to protect the local bush. She was instrumental in persuading Premier Sir David Brand to increase road reserves to preserve wildflowers. In 1951, *Orchids of the West*, the first of her many books, was published.

Rica and Syd retired from farming and moved to Nedlands in 1965 where she found more time to research and write her historical works, with the Drummonds of Hawthornden appearing in 1969 followed in quick succession by *The Victoria Plains*, *Old Toodyay* and *Newcastle*, and *The Dempsters*. Arguably, one of her greatest achievements was to gain the co-operation of historians, genealogists, and researchers to produce the *Dictionary of Western Australians 1829-1914*, which is still the single most valuable resource for early Western Australian family history.

Over the years she donated large collections of materials, including hundreds of her botanical art works to the Batty Library. A website, hosted by the State Library, was created in 2003 to honour her and can be accessed at <http://www.slwa.wa.gov.au/erickson/index.html>

A report of Rica's 100th birthday celebration, together with a short biography, appeared in the September 2008 edition of our Newsletter.

Rica received countless awards, honours and accolades, including an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of WA, Member of the Order of Australia, and became the Friends first 'Gem of Time' in 2003.

Her talents were formidable, yet Rica's keen intellect, coupled with her gentle humour and generosity of spirit endeared her to everyone she met. She was a wise mentor, an inspiring community leader, and a remarkable human being. For many of us involved with the Batty Library and the State Records Office, it has been a true privilege and a delight to have known her.

Our sincere condolences to Rica's much loved family and her many friends.

