

'Give a woman a Kodak'

The Doris McKellar Photograph Collection

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The early 20th century was a time of great social change in Australia, building in part on technological innovations of the late 19th century. The University of Melbourne was changing as well, since the admission of its first women students following the passing of the *University Act 1881*.¹ Women also began to enter the paid workforce in larger numbers in the late 19th century, including the medical profession. This trend spurred on the opening of the legal profession to women through the passing of the *Women's Disabilities Removal Act* in Victoria in 1903, which allowed women to practise as barristers and solicitors.

The growing popularity of photography was another significant development that influenced society around this time. Although photography had been invented in the mid-19th century, it was not until the late 19th century that Kodak introduced inexpensive personal cameras. The development of cheap and easy-to-use cameras led to the proliferation of amateur photography and photographers, many of whom were women. Amateur photographs from this time gave a different perspective from that of formal portraiture, offering insight into social relations. Contemporary advertising framed amateur photography



in gendered terms, with women responsible for documenting matters of domestic or personal significance, while men were expected to record more public and political events. The photographs of Doris McKellar (née Hall) offer personal views of everyday life in early 20th-century Melbourne. McKellar embodied many of the social changes mentioned above, being one of a new generation of women to pursue higher education and a profession.

Doris Winifred Hall was born in 1897, the eldest daughter of Melbourne solicitor Percival St John

Hall and Harriet 'Hattie' Louisa Hall (née Moore). Doris had a privileged upbringing; the family lived at 'Glenmoore', a spacious, two-storey villa in the south-eastern Melbourne suburb of Elsternwick, situated on a large block, complete with tennis court. Glenmoore had been built as a country house for the Moore family by Hugh Moore, Harriet's father, around 1868;² Harriet and Percival Hall probably moved there in 1895, following their marriage.³ Doris attended Cromarty School for Girls, a small, non-denominational private school in Elsternwick, which operated from 1897 to 1923.⁴ While at Cromarty, Doris took a keen interest in tennis, representing the school at the Kia-Ora Club matches against other girls' schools.⁵ She also showed great academic ability, and was dux of the school in 1912.⁶ In 1915 she sat her final exams and was accepted into the Bachelor of Arts course at the University of Melbourne.⁷

Although women were first admitted to the University of Melbourne in the 1880s, it was not without hesitation. While there was enough physical space on campus, 'intellectually the University's welcome was less assured'.⁸ Women students had traditionally gathered at the Princess Ida Club, formed in 1888 to provide 'a protected enclave,

Opposite: Attributed to Doris Hall, *D.W.H.* [Doris Winifred Hall], c. 1915, nitrate negative. NN295, reference no. 1975.0048, Doris McKellar Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

Below: Attributed to Doris Hall, *Glenmoore—Pollie & self*, c. 1915, nitrate negative. NN252, reference no. 1975.0048, Doris McKellar Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

Right: Attributed to Doris Hall, Doris Hall [McKellar] (left) and Pollie Turnbull, c. 1915, nitrate negative. NN448, reference no. 1975.0048, Doris McKellar Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.



a source of enduring friendships and collective identity' to early women students.⁹ Even by the time Doris enrolled, the student body was still male-dominated, many aspects of student life were segregated along gender lines, and the Princess Ida

Club was in its final days.¹⁰ Doris found a close friend in Mary 'Pollie' Turnbull, who started studying in the same year.¹¹ Doris took a wide range of subjects, including Latin, English literature, French language, and British history.¹²

It was around this time that Doris became interested in photography. Amateur photography had existed in Australia since the late 19th century, but it was not until the early 20th century that it became a popular pursuit. The Working Men's College Photographic Club, now known as the Melbourne Camera Club, was established in 1891 to allow students of the Working Men's College (now RMIT University) and others to develop their skills in photography.¹³ Despite the name, many women studied at the college and were active members of the club from its inception. Another significant event in the history of amateur photography was the emergence of the Kodak company. Eastman Kodak was founded in 1887 and soon led the way for amateur photography. Kodak quickly produced two inventions that revolutionised the medium. The first of these was roll film in 1888 and then lightweight, inexpensive cameras such as the 'Box Brownie' in 1900.¹⁴ Before the invention of roll film, photographers had to carry

around heavy glass-plate negatives and needed detailed knowledge of developing chemicals and techniques. Kodak aimed to simplify photography, and pioneered 'send away' development services.¹⁵ Such innovations allowed people to easily document their own lives through 'snapshots'.

By the early 20th century, many women became interested in amateur photography.¹⁶ As early as December 1914, Kodak advertisements in *Punch* magazine featured images of glamorous young women with their new cameras. The No. 3A Folding Pocket camera was marketed primarily to women, and it was probably around this time that Doris acquired one. The No. 3A was an expensive item, costing around £5 in 1914;¹⁷ although not portable by modern standards, it was considered to be pocket-sized and was designed to fit in a leather pouch, which could be ordered from Kodak (pictured on p. 31). It used cellulose nitrate film instead of glass plates, making it more portable and easier to use. Another advantage of the camera was that no darkroom was required to develop film. Ease of use was a key feature of Kodak cameras, with advertisements emphasising that 'you can learn to use a Kodak camera in half an hour'.¹⁸ The portability of the camera

allowed Doris and her friends to take a large number of photographs, both at home and abroad on summer holidays. The ability of the camera to take snaps of holidays and home life was a key selling point used in advertisements at the time, which claimed that 'a holiday without a Kodak is a holiday wasted'¹⁹ and 'Give a woman a Kodak and she will be able to make delightful pictures of all her home life, her family and her friends'.²⁰

Doris used her No. 3A camera to document her time at university, her friends, family and summer holidays. Unlike many of the studio portraits of the time, her pictures are playful and record everyday activities, rather than formal events. This playful tone also can be seen in her portraits of World War I diggers, taken in her backyard at Glenmoore and at the university. When Doris began university, the war was already well under way. The photographs show young diggers smiling and laughing, but of course behind this lighthearted surface the events portrayed have a serious side. Doris captured images of soldiers at ease, including her brother Hugh. Kodak also advertised the No. 3A camera for taking photographs to send to soldiers overseas, as a way of recalling domestic scenes. The role of women was seen as a spectator

to action, and as a memorialiser. Kodak advertisements from the time portrayed amateur photography in gendered terms: women documented events of personal significance on the home front, whereas men recorded the experience of war. This is reflected in one of the slogans used by Kodak in advertisements for the Vest Pocket Autographic camera: 'Send Autographic Kodak pictures to your soldier friend to cheer him up. And give him a Vest Pocket Autographic Kodak to take snapshots of his own personal share in this Great War'.²¹

Doris completed her studies in 1918, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts.²² This degree qualified her for membership of the Lyceum Club,²³ an exclusive club for women graduates and those who had distinguished themselves in the areas of philanthropy, community service, education, medicine, science or the arts, established in March 1912.²⁴ Doris also began studying law. In this she was following in her father's footsteps; Percival Hall had studied law at the University of Melbourne before being admitted to practise as a solicitor in 1889.²⁵ Doris's brother Hugh Hall also graduated with a law degree from Melbourne, in 1918.²⁶ Very few women studied law in Victoria at this time; Grata Flos Matilda Greig (1880–1958) had led

the way, becoming the first woman in Victoria to graduate with a law degree, in 1903.²⁷ But it was not until the passing of the Women's Disabilities Removal Act in 1903, which clarified that women could be admitted as lawyers, that Greig became the first woman in Australia to be admitted to the profession (in 1905).²⁸

Although women could now, technically, practise law in Victoria, in reality their opportunities were limited and, as Flos Greig explained, they were 'hardly likely to make fortunes. The pioneer never does'.²⁹ Although women had already established themselves in the legal profession overseas, female lawyers were 'still a novelty in the Commonwealth'.³⁰ Discrimination persisted well after Doris completed her degree in 1920. Enid Emmerson (née Druce) recalled her experience as a law student in the 1920s, explaining that, throughout her whole course, she was the only woman in her year.³¹ Success for women in the legal profession relied heavily on family connections. Enid described how she received support from her husband, Keith McLaren Emmerson, also a law student and later a solicitor, and her father, William Ernest Druce, a solicitor.³² Enid completed her law degree in 1926 and was able to do her articles at her father's firm,³³ although her experience there was far from

No. 3A Folding Pocket Kodak camera,
Model C, with leather case, c. 1910.
Reference no. 1975.0048, Doris McKellar
Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.



Attributed to Doris Hall, Doris Hall throwing a snowball, c. 1917, nitrate negative. NN242, reference no. 1975.0048, Doris McKellar Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.



ideal at first, and she was not taken seriously. She recalled being given tasks such as ‘delivering letters and going to other firms with documents, and going up to the Titles Office—I learnt a lot about probate and conveyancing work, but I really think it was difficult for my father to feel he could give me work of any substance’.³⁴ This did not change when she completed her articles, and she only found success after starting a firm in partnership with her husband, Keith.³⁵

Although Doris’s father was also a solicitor, it is unclear whether she received similar support and opportunities. Percival St John Hall was still practising at this time, in the National Mutual Life Association Building at 395 Collins Street, Melbourne,³⁶ but we do not know whether Doris served her articles with him. Percival served in a number of prominent public service roles, including as the mayor of Caulfield (1910–12) and on the Metropolitan Board of Works,³⁷ and perhaps he

used his influence to get a firm to hire his daughter. Whatever the case, Doris was finally admitted as a barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria in October 1922.³⁸

In 1921 Doris had joined the Victorian Women Graduates’ Association (VWGA),³⁹ which was formed in November 1920 at the Lyceum Club. She was involved in advocacy, promotion of research, facilitation of communication, and ‘stimulat[ing] the interest of women in municipal and public life’.⁴⁰ Many

Attributed to Doris Hall, Students of the English 3 class outside old Wilson Hall, University of Melbourne, 1917, nitrate negative. NN194, reference no. 1975.0048, Doris McKellar Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.



leading academics were members, including Jessie Webb, Dr Georgina Sweet and Flos Greig. It was not long after joining that Doris became involved in the committee of the VWGA, first as assistant honorary secretary, then as honorary secretary and later as president.⁴¹ The VWGA also aimed at ‘uniting the educated women of different countries’⁴² and in 1923 helped with the appeal to buy Crosby Hall in London to use as accommodation for women university students.⁴³

On 26 November 1925 Doris Hall married Rolfe Warren McKellar (son of John Denis McKellar, an influential figure in the publishing industry, who later succeeded his father as managing director of *Stock and Land* journal).⁴⁴ Soon after her marriage, Doris’s legal career came to an end and, in her own words, ‘household duties claimed her’.⁴⁵

Doris and Rolfe moved into ‘Carramar’, a house built on some land near Glenmoore, given to them by her father. In 1932 Doris

gave birth to a son, Ian Campbell McKellar.⁴⁶ Doris continued to participate in the VWGA as honorary secretary for many years, and was also on the council of University Women’s College (now University College).⁴⁷ During World War II she assisted with the management of Stockland Press, and was chairman while her husband was away on military service.⁴⁸

In 1975 Doris donated her collection of photographs and camera equipment to the University of



Attributed to Doris Hall, Doris Hall and Pollie Turnbull with two soldiers in front of old Wilson Hall, University of Melbourne, c. 1915, nitrate negative. NN213, reference no. 1975.0048, Doris McKellar Collection, University of Melbourne Archives.

Melbourne Archives. The collection includes four Kodak albums of prints, around 500 negatives, a Kodak developing tank and her camera (see p. 31). The photographs in the collection depict the University of Melbourne campus, Glenmoore, trips to rural Victoria (farm, beach and snow scenes at places including Doreen, Trafalgar, Lorne and Wilson's Promontory), and her family and friends. Doris McKellar died in 1984.

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- 4 Barbara W. Milne and Doris W. McKellar, *Cromarty School for Girls, 1897–1923*, Melbourne: Stockland Press, 1972, p. 2.
- 5 Milne and McKellar, *Cromarty School for Girls*, p. 67.
- 6 Milne and McKellar, *Cromarty School for Girls*, p. 18.
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- 8 Frances Thorn and Doris W. McKellar, 'University women', in Frances Fraser and Nettie Palmer (eds), *Centenary gift book*, Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens for the Women's Centenary Council, 1934, p. 117.
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- 10 Farley, *Degrees of liberation*, p. 69.
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- 15 Hall and Mather, *Australian women photographers*, p. 157.
- 16 Hall and Mather, *Australian women photographers*, p. 156.
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- 19 'Don't waste your holidays this year'.
- 20 *Punch*, 17 December 1914, p. 16.
- 21 *Punch*, 9 March 1916, p. 27.
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- 30 Greig, 'The law as a profession for women', p. 147.
- 31 Oral history of the Lyceum Club—interview with Mrs K. Emmerson, 12 December 1986, p. 5. MS11270, Lyceum Club Collection, State Library of Victoria.
- 32 Interview with Mrs K. Emmerson, p. 6.
- 33 Interview with Mrs K. Emmerson, p. 6.
- 34 Interview with Mrs K. Emmerson, p. 7.
- 35 Interview with Mrs K. Emmerson, p. 7.
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- 37 'Death of Cr. P. St. J. Hall, of Caulfield: A record of faithful public service', *Prahran Telegraph*, 28 March 1929, p. 2.
- 38 'Local lady barrister', *Prahran Telegraph*, 6 October 1922, p. 9.
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- 48 Milne and McKellar, *Cromarty School for Girls*, p. 19.