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Love

Lucy's campaigns were never just about abstract principles. She seemed to others to be very single-minded: as Dymphna Cusack remembered her, Lucy was a tenacious battler for social justice. Faith Bandler laughed when she recalled Lucy in 1956, when Pearl Gibbs had asked her to chair the meeting that formed the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (AAF). Lucy, Faith said, 'was a woman who knew how to conduct a meeting. And how! She would rule with an iron rod'.¹

Yet for all her toughness, Lucy was a warm and good-humoured friend to those who got to know her in the 1920s, like her activist fellow teacher Sam Lewis and her old Sydney University lecturer Robert Irvine.² Lucy had certainly grown more reserved over time – and perhaps became more cautious when she had to take on the role of headmistress. Certainly the elderly men who had been small boys at Erskineville in the 1930s still remember Lucy as a formidable, authoritarian figure.³ But some students, particularly among the girls, became aware of Lucy's softer side. This chapter draws on their memories. Betty Makin was one student who got to know Lucy in the late 1930s, along with Ruth Fink about the same

1 Faith Bandler, interview with Carolyn Craig, 2016, Session 10, Transcript, State Library of NSW.

2 Sam Lewis, retirement testimonial speech, December 1953, UAW Files, AU NBAC Z236, Box 32, NBABL; Irvine in *The Midas Delusion* (Adelaide: self-published, printed by Hassell Press, 1933), 1–11; Michael Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought 1890–1960* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 275.

3 *Back to Erskineville*, video recordings, 2007, Sean Macken; Ruth Fink Latukefu, interview with Heather Goodall, 3 September 2015.

time, while Beverley Langley (now Bates) came into the school during the war years of the early 1940s, which for many like her family, with her father serving overseas, were just as hard as the Depression had been in the 1930s. Judith Mitchell (now Emmett) was there only a little afterwards, attending the Opportunity Class.

So this chapter is about Erskineville Public School and Lucy's 20 years there from 1933. It is a history of the affection and emotions that Lucy felt towards her students and their families – but seldom showed. This chapter also offers a glimpse of Lucy's private life, the side of herself that she sheltered so carefully.

Erskineville on the line

Lucy, as we have seen in the previous chapter, refused to leave Erskineville once she arrived as headmistress mid-year in 1933. Her experiences at Erskineville infused every public intervention Lucy made for those 20 years – and beyond. It was how she measured all the calls she made for educational and social reform. How would these work – she would ask herself and her audiences – in Erskineville? In the 1940s, when Lucy was more often speaking at national meetings of teachers, rather than to those within the NSW Teachers Federation, her public statements became broader and more applicable to both rural and inner-city schools – and sometimes to those overseas. So she mentioned the name of Erskineville less often, but the themes and principles about which she talked were all drawn from her close experience of the tough life of Erko.

Erskineville was not only a working-class school, which is where Lucy's interest lay, but it also came to fill an emotional gap for her. It was on tram and train lines linking her mother's home at Enfield, where she lived for much of the 1930s, with the flat Lucy had rented in the artists' block at 215A George Street, the block where her friends like Rah Fizelle, Robert Irvine and his daughter also lived. As an old friend, Lucy kept an eye on Irvine in his later years, until his death in 1941. This George St block contained the flats of so many members of the bohemian network with whom Lucy had become involved over her time at university that she

felt at home there.⁴ The Enfield family home had become increasingly empty. Lucy's mother died in 1941 and then her sister Jane died soon after, at just 46, in 1942. So, at the same time as Erskineville School was absorbing more of her time, the George St flat became her main home. This was where she met friends in later years and held meetings for the organisations she championed like the New Education Fellowship.⁵ It was here too, around Lucy's small kitchen table, that Pearl Gibbs gathered the activists like Faith Bandler to form the AAF in 1956.

While Lucy brought her experiences from London, Cessnock and Darlington, she learned much in Erskineville, particularly about the women in the working-class community who were struggling with severe overcrowding and poverty. She became aware of the exhaustion of many women – there seemed to be few reliable ways of controlling the arrival of babies. Making ends meet with large families was hard enough even when there was work – but in the Depression it was next to impossible. Poverty and its accompanying problems like illness, malnutrition and, in some cases, domestic violence stalked the families of Lucy's students as she was very aware. Teachers, if they are taking notice, have a bird's eye view not only of the young students in their classes but of the families in which they live. Lucy was taking notice.

Girls, pupils and mothers

There are few glimpses of any earlier interactions Lucy might have had with her pupils – just a fragment in a letter from a child at Lidcombe, another inner-Sydney suburb, where Lucy had taught in 1916. Ten-year-old Nora Dalton wrote her first letter to an editor, 'Uncle Jeff' of the children's page, in the *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* to which her own uncle subscribed. Nora wrote:

4 In the 1930s, 215A George St was a centre for Sydney artists including Grace Crowley, Rah Fizelle and the Hinders. Both Robert Irvine and his daughter Ysobel Irvine were artists, and Ysobel was also a voluntary worker with the Children's Library movement, connecting her with Elsie Rivett. Will Ashton, another co-signatory on the Erskineville lease with Lucy and Elsie, was also an artist, a Director of the NSW Art Gallery, and in 1944–47 was Director of David Jones Art Gallery. When Will was Director of the NSW Art Gallery, Jessie Street became president of the NSW Art Gallery Women's Auxiliary Committee (1937). Will Ashton also organised children's art exhibitions. Mary Alice Evatt took art classes with Grace Crowley and Rah Fizelle, and in 1943 became the first woman to become a trustee of the NSW Art Gallery.

5 Obituary, *New Era: The World Education Fellowship Journal* 49, no. 8 (September/October 1968): 229.

I go to school at Lidcombe and I am in the fourth-class. I like school very much and I will be ten in May. My teacher's name is Miss Woodcock and she is very nice.⁶

But for Betty Makin, who came to Erskineville in the girls' high school in the mid-1930s, Lucy offered constant support and encouragement. Betty remembered Lucy this way:

My teacher, Miss Lucy Woodcock, had a great influence on my life. In my first year of High School (around 1935) she was the Head of the Teachers' Federation in New South Wales. She taught us girls we must always stand up for ourselves. The greatest thing I remember is her saying that men were no different. In fact, they weren't as clever as us! That we were the ones who have the babies and rear them with no training and we are the clever ones. She used to instill that. She was a gorgeous lady. I think she got the idea by seeing so many downtrodden women in our area. Every woman you saw had a baby on her hip.⁷

Betty described her memories as an older sister in a family with nine children:

I loved where we lived ... you could never be lonely. We were all allocated our own babies. My eldest sister had the first boy and I had the next, and so on. We adored them ... When we played, we always had a baby on the hip, but it didn't matter because so did everyone else. That's how our mothers managed. They would never have been able to light their fuel stove or cook their tea with all those screaming kids around. When I was about thirteen or fourteen, Mum had the third youngest so I had to leave school and look after all the others ...⁸

As an adult, however, Betty had reflected on all the families she knew there:

When I was growing up, the average family was nine or ten. I don't know whether there was any contraception or not. People didn't talk about it. Even if they had known a doctor who would abort them, they didn't have the money. I'm not saying it wasn't going on but if they had it done, it would have been from a loan and by the time they'd paid it off, they'd be pregnant again.⁹

6 *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 21 April 1916, 12.

7 Betty Makin, quoted in Susan Mitchell, ed., *The Matriarchs: Twelve Australian Women Talk about Their Lives* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1987), 46.

8 *Ibid.*, 47.

9 *Ibid.*, 49.

Betty's experience reflected the lives of many of Lucy's students and the families she met as she got to know the area – and the need to put power over family planning into the hands of women became a continuing campaign for her. It was Lucy's immersion in the community life around Erskineville that lay behind many of her union speeches and media interviews over the next two decades. She tried to protect the education of older girls by calling for the state to raise the leaving age and increase child endowment so mothers could afford child care outside the family. Just as persistently, she demanded sex education for all children and especially for girls. As we shall see, this concern continued in very practical ways into the future.

Beverley Langley was born in 1942 and came to the school as a child much younger than Betty Makin had been. Beverley lived near the school in Lord Street and then in John Street, Erskineville. She was enrolled in the primary school in the mid-1940s and has warm memories of Lucy:

She was one of the kindest, most beautiful women and I'm not just saying that! A lot of kids don't like their teacher but she was loved because of her attitude and the help she used to give people. It was hard times, it was through the war and she was nothing to give kids a bit of fruit or bring them a banana ...¹⁰

Erskineville had residents of many different backgrounds with a number of Aboriginal families sending their children to the school, as can be seen from the year photos of the '30s and '40s.¹¹ One of Beverley's friends, for example, was Virginia Watton, photographed with Beverley in 1947. Beverley remembered Lucy's repeated teaching to all the children: 'Everyone's the same. You're born the same, you die the same and you don't have privileges of what colour your skin is.'¹² Beverley recalled that Lucy would encourage children to share lunches with any other child who needed extra at lunchtimes, including those from other cultures; where any child was in need, Lucy herself 'would slip a penny or a halfpenny for a piece of fruit'.¹³

10 Beverley Bates (née Langley), interview by the authors, 1 September 2016, Rathmines, NSW.

11 See Erskineville Public School Parents and Citizens's Association Facebook pages, especially the History of Erskineville Public School Facebook page, www.facebook.com/ErkoSchoolHistory/.

12 Beverley Bates, interview, 1 September 2016.

13 Beverley Bates, contribution to History of Erskineville Public School Facebook page, www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=History%20of%20Erskineville, accessed 11 August 2016.



Figure 4.1: Class 2C, 1947, in which Beverley Bates (née Langley) is front row (marked with cross) and Virginia Watton is in the second row, just behind and to Beverley's right.

Source: Erskineville Public School Parents and Citizens's Association and Beverley Bates's personal collection.

Lucy was involved with Aboriginal families as well as their children, as Jack Horner remembered. The relationships Lucy built up at Erskineville with Aboriginal adults were the foundation of her friendship with Pearl Gibbs, leading to Pearl's confidence in asking Lucy to chair the inaugural AAF meeting. Horner recalled that Lucy had assisted Aboriginal family members wanting to learn to read and other skills to go to the Cleveland Street school's adult education programs.¹⁴ Such a relationship is suggested in one of the few items that Lucy kept throughout her life: it was a Christmas card from 'the Watton family' in 1955.¹⁵

Beverley also appreciated Lucy's attention to the girls' sense of dignity:

As we got older and grew into young ladies she used to call us 'Miss' because by that time the boys were over in another part of the school. So I was 'Miss Langley' or the other one would be 'Miss Virginia Watton'. So it was really nice the things that she'd done for us.¹⁶

14 Jack Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice: An Insider's Memoir of the Movement for Aboriginal Advancement, 1938–1978* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 18.

15 Held in Lucy Woodcock papers, courtesy of Kit Edwards, who was tutored for his matriculation by Lucy in the last years of her life.

16 Beverley Bates, interview, 1 September 2016.

Learning, class and curriculum

As headmistress, Lucy's role included oversight of the Opportunity Classes (OC) for gifted children in years 5 and 6 (senior primary), which had started at Erskineville in 1932 under Harold Wyndham, for children 'who are specially picked by psychologists' (that is, with IQ testing), but 'only after qualifying in scholastic tests'. Lucy described Erskineville as an experimental school and publicly promoted the OC classes there, believing that there was no sign of the children being pushed or crammed, and that their keenness was greater through being trained in a group in which no one lagged behind. She saw cooperation as the aim:

With the abolition of competition as an important object, a new aim was a co-operation between the pupils for the betterment of the group, with each child striving for honours in subjects [for the whole group] instead of for top place.¹⁷

At the same time, Lucy was vehemently opposed to the tests known as the 'primary final', which all students had to take at the end of Year 6 before progressing to secondary school. These tests graded the children and determined which type of secondary school they could attend – an 'academic' school at which they could go on to matriculate for university or a 'technical' high school, from which graduates would go to apprenticeships (if they were boys) or vocational training. Optimistically, Lucy declared: 'We hope that 1936 will see the end of the primary final as we know it.'¹⁸

Throughout the 1930s, Lucy argued that changes needed to be made to the school curriculum to bring it more in line with modern educational theories and so better equip children for a changing world. She had developed her interests in emerging educational ideas in the 1910s as a new, young teacher. Her exchange teaching deepened her experience with progressive education – that is, 'child-centred' learning, led by the interests of the children who were pupils, rather than by a set curriculum. The London County Council, which managed the inner-city schools where she worked in 1927, had embraced progressive education and in their schools Lucy could explore how the methods worked. In London too she was able to see more of the New Education Fellowship (NEF),

17 'Women's World', *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 9 January 1935, 19.

18 *Newcastle Sun*, 16 December 1935, 7.

about which there were regular reports in the Teachers Federation journal *Education*. The NEF had been founded in 1921 by Beatrice Ensor, a Theosophist and public school inspector, and the NEF exhibited the Theosophical interest in cultural openness as well as the student-centred and experiential learning advocated by Dewey and others. The NEF nurtured many of the innovative educational approaches influential in later decades, including A.S. Neill's *Summerhill*. Ensor's own and Theosophy's international interests ensured the organisation expanded; it later became known as the World Education Fellowship.¹⁹ In the London working-class schools in which Lucy taught in 1927, it was the attention focused on the needs of each child – whether they were from impoverished families or were gifted or had disabilities or other special needs – which she had praised and hoped to replicate.

Lucy's interest in progressive education had motivated her on her return from the United Kingdom. For many in Australia, however, the expression of 'progressive education' was most evident in private schools, such as Frensham, an innovative but expensive school set up in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. At Frensham, Winifred West and Phyllis Clubbe were able to explore ideas about creative, child-centred education that drew heavily from the NEF and other movements of progressive education in the UK. Winifred West was aware that one of the strong influences in the NEF was that of Theosophy, with its interest in Indian religion, and one of her closest lifelong friends was Pramila Chaudhuri (née Bannerjee), whom she had met at university, then visited in India in 1921 and 1931, travelling with her to Russia in 1935. Lucy, too, would have been aware of the strong links that the NEF had with Theosophy and with India. Throughout the 1920s, the NEF had had a regular column in *Education* in which Theosophists like George Arundale wrote frequently about India.

But unlike the private school site chosen by West and Clubbe for their exploration of progressive education, Lucy was primarily interested in how all of these ideas might be enacted in public schools, catering for children from all social sectors, but particularly for those from working-class communities.

19 Christopher Clews, 'The New Education Fellowship and the Reconstruction of Education: 1945 to 1966' (PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, 2009).

Lucy felt that ‘children were not being given their rights. Education had not made any great progress in the last 50 years, except in the case of a privileged few’.²⁰ She argued that curricula should be child-centred rather than subject-focused, providing continuous growth for children to develop. She also believed that there should be more art, music, hand-work and literature in the public school curriculum.

At the same time, Lucy wanted schools to teach children to recognise and analyse the contemporary realities of their everyday world. So she argued that the school curriculum should set out key facts and interpret the chief features of Australian life, its resources and industries, but it also needed to provide opportunities for critical thinking. Politics, international history and elementary economics should be included. She believed that education should not stop once a student left school, therefore government commitment for training schemes for unemployed youths and the introduction of a scheme for adult education were essential.

What was so unusual about Lucy’s position was that she insisted that such education initiatives should be applied to schools with working-class as well as more affluent populations. It was her trenchant defence of the right of working-class children to have access to the most advanced education that makes such a startling difference from the most usual application of ‘Progressive’ educational principles. She expressed her frustration to the students and their families, as Betty Makin has remembered:

We knew that none of us could ever go to university – there was no subsidy then. Miss Lucy Woodcock said at a Mothers’ Meeting one day that we were the brightest children and it was a tragedy that we wouldn’t be able to advance ourselves through education. The brains were there but not the opportunities. I knew that you didn’t have to just accept everything. You had to learn to ask the reason why.²¹

20 *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate*, 11 January 1935, 12.

21 Makin, in Mitchell, *The Matriarchs*, 50.

Progressive education in practice

Lucy was just as unusual in that she had a vision of how learning could take place in many venues and support many aspects of community life. She saw education in a holistic way, for the whole suburb, welcoming ventures that would offer support far beyond the school fence. In 1944, for example, an Erskineville YWCA Girls Club was established, the first decentralised YWCA club in Sydney, in the community hall of the Lady Gowrie Pre-school Child Centre. Lucy welcomed the club because it would ‘provide a place where the girls could work together in a spirit of comradeship’. She was no doubt proud that many of the YWCA girls who organised the club had attended Erskineville Public School. Support came from the local mayor and council and the club organised physical culture classes and bushwalks.

She was still only new to the role as a headmistress when she arrived at Erskineville but it allowed her to consider how these ideas might be used to shape public education. At Erskineville Public School her determination to change educational practice could be united with her commitments to working-class education and to fostering girls’ education and women’s rights.

If children were to be encouraged to explore ideas and seek information by following their own interests it was necessary in the 1930s that they have access to books. The Children’s Library and Craft Movement was the materialisation of this idea, first initiated in 1924 by Mary Matheson and her sister Elsie Rivett with a Children’s Library in Surry Hills. Mary and Elsie were among the seven children of the Rev. Albert Rivett, a pacifist in World War I who had written often for the *Australian Worker*. All of the siblings were socially active, including the eminent scientist David and the teaching missionary Eleanor, whose work in India had moved her far closer to Indian nationalists and feminists than to her European missionary colleagues.²² Elsie never married, remaining at Gordon in the family home, but spending much of her time in voluntary

22 Margaret Allen, ‘Eleanor Rivett (1883–1972): Educationalist, Missionary and Internationalist’, in *Women Leaders in Twentieth Century Australia*, eds Fiona Davis, Nell Musgrove and Judith Smart. Australian Women’s Archives Project (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2011), 45–63. Also at www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/fff/pdfs/rivett.pdf.

social work. While Mary was often a spokesperson for the Children's Library, their father regarded Elsie as the key mover in establishing the movement. In 1939, he wrote about Elsie as his 'talented daughter':

whose activities on behalf of the mostly slum children of Surry Hills has been so fine that she is regarded as a fairy godmother. She is responsible for the establishment of the Children's Library, with its Art and Craft Club, at 119 Devonshire Street — a club that is unique because it is the first of its kind in Australia. In this club, week by week, hundreds of youngsters are creatively busy, and their work is both constructive and educative. In connection with this library there is a Children's Holiday Home, 'Popoorokh,' at Point Clare, in which many a Surry Hills boy and girl has spent a never-to-be-forgotten holiday-time.²³

Despite their interest (and the family resources), the Surry Hills Library languished through the 1920s and all but disappeared as the Depression took hold.

When Lucy Woodcock arrived at Erskineville in 1933, she surveyed the school's resources. There was little enough at the school and, in the poverty of the Depression, the surrounding community would struggle to nurture the imagination of the area's many children. Lucy saw the potential of the Surry Hills Library to offer the resources her Erskineville pupils – and indeed all working-class children – needed. The library would be separate from the NSW Government school system, but available to the whole community. With a vision very close to Lucy's own, Mary Matheson and Elsie Rivett had written about their hopes for the Children's Library in 1926:

We are of no sect or creed, or perhaps, of all sects and creeds. Protestants, Catholics, Jews, children of any or no persuasion, and of as varying race, meet on the common basis of childhood's need. And that need is surely for conditions in which the inner promise of each may be so nurtured as to unfold most perfectly.²⁴

23 'Rev. A. Rivett: 75th Birthday', *Australian Worker* (Sydney), 21 May 1930, 7, Point Clare was on Brisbane Waters, near Woy Woy.

24 Elsie Rivett and Mary Rivett, 'The Children's Library, Surry Hills', signed and handwritten summary, 1 March 1925, in Ida Brown's compilation of Rivett Family papers, SLNSW.



Figure 4.2: Elsie Rivett c. 1926, co-founder of the Erskineville Children's Club and Library and long-time Peace activist.

Source: Mitchell Library, SLNSW, Creative Leisure Movement papers, VII: History Files 1920–1991, MLMSS 7550/18/4, Photo album, File 3.

So Lucy made contact with the Rivetts, seeking not only for a new library to emerge at Erskineville, but also to strengthen the existing but moribund Children's Library organisation as a whole. In December 1934, the Children's Library movement was restructured to set it up more formally as the Creative Leisure Movement and to register it as a charity. Lucy became a Trustee, with Elsie Rivett and Charles Bertie, the Librarian of the Sydney Municipal Public Library.²⁵ In reaching out to the Rivetts, Lucy made another discovery. She met Elsie.

25 *SMH*, 12 October 1936, 8; 12 November 1936, 22. Bertie was appointed in 1909 as the Librarian of the Sydney Municipal Library, establishing there the first public lending library for children as well as his support as Trustee for the Children's Library service. He retired in 1939 and died in 1952.

Her posting to Erskineville had given Lucy a role not only in the school but also among the wider Depression-hit families of the suburb. And in Elsie, Lucy had found a partner for all her later work. Over many years, Elsie shared Lucy's passion for child-centred learning, for working people's rights and for the Peace movement. They worked together, first to find the location for what they called the 'Children's Library and Club', in a disused factory building at 16–20 Rochford St, Erskineville, which had a large area around it that could be turned into a playground. Lucy and Elsie leased the building together, with Charles Bertie formally involved although he was seldom there in person. The library was just a few blocks away from the public school – close enough to be handy for after-school activities, but deliberately very separate from the school environment. The library opening in October 1936 and its rapidly expanding membership of children over the next few months were featured in a number of newspaper articles with photos not only of its children but also of the murals donated to the new library by design diploma students from East Sydney Technical College, who painted in modernist style – and often with Australian Aboriginal themes.²⁶ When the third and fourth children's libraries were established in Phillip Street in the city and then in Woolloomooloo, the photographs were often still taken at Erskineville Library. A spread in the 29 November 1947 issue of *Pix* featured a marvellous photograph of Beverley Langley reading a Girls' Annual, with other photographs of her friends including Virginia Watton.²⁷ Beverley remembered the library as a place to which the children would enjoy going after school and at which many of the activities she loved at school, like making up and performing plays, were continued, with puppets and lots of dressing up as well as making and decorating boxes for the puppet shows:

That was one of our favourite things, the paper mash puppets, to paint them and then they'd let you take them home when they were all dry, you know ... [We did] plays and they had boxes with clothes or curtains draped over them and that, you know, whatever they could, and decorate it and you got behind and you made up your little things. Oh yes, my word!²⁸

26 *SMH*, 9 October 1936, 12 October 1936, 12 November 1936, 13 February 1937, 16 June 1937, 2 November 1937, 1 June 1944, 20 December 1951; *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 30 December 1936.

27 *Pix* (Sydney), 29 November 1947, 3–5; Photo of Beverley reprinted, with slightly wider crop, in the *Sun* (Sydney), 13 March 1950, 10.

28 Beverley Bates, interview, 1 September 2016.

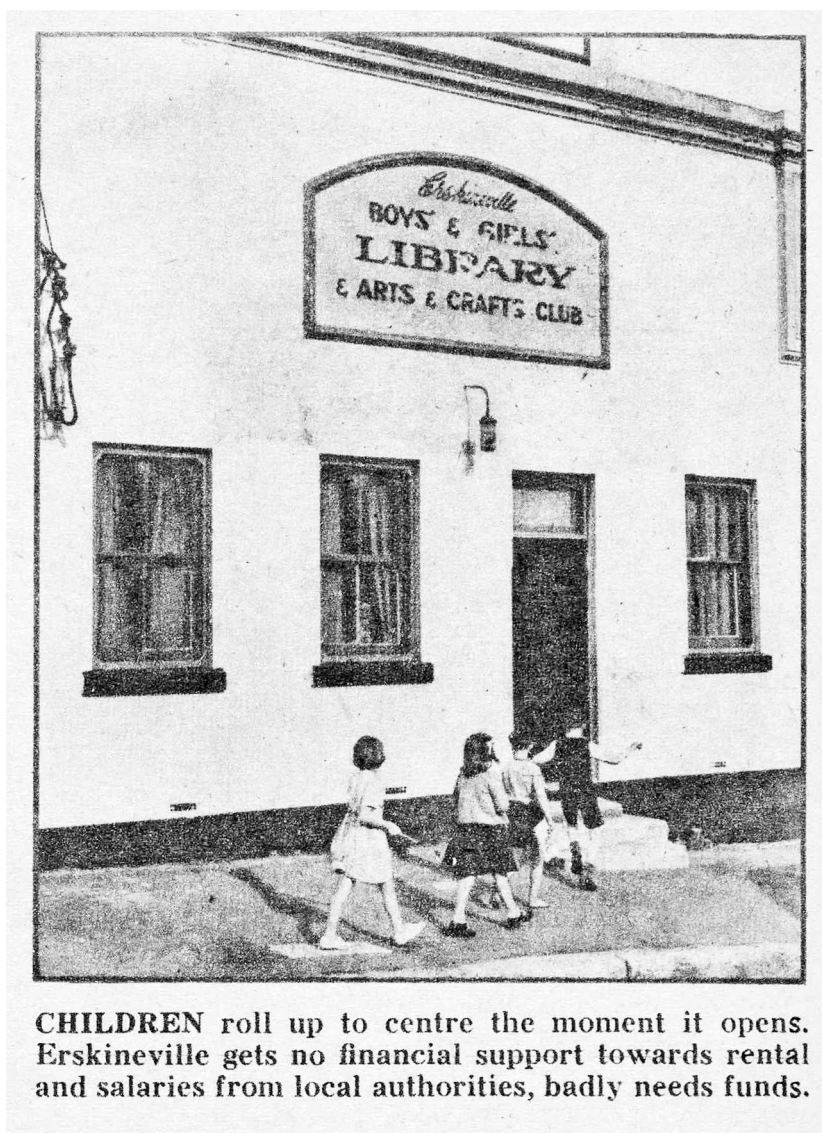


Figure 4.3: The Children's Club and Library on Rochford St, Erskineville, which Lucy helped to establish and of which she was a co-director.

Source: *Pix*, 19(48), 29 November 1947, p. 4. Trove, National Library of Australia.



NEW MEMBER Dick Innes seems doubtful about something as Mrs. P. L. Renton "signs him up" at Erskineville centre, where these pictures were taken. Children attend library in age groups — boys 6-14; girls 6-14; boys and girls 12-15.

Figure 4.4: Children at the Children's Library, including Beverley's friend Virginia Watton in the middle.

The Watton family sent Lucy a Christmas card in 1955.

Source: *Pix*, 19(48), 29 November 1947, p. 4. Trove, National Library of Australia.



Figure 4.5: Beverley Bates from the *Pix* story about the Children's Library.
Source: *Pix*, 19(48), 29 November 1947, p. 3. Trove, National Library of Australia.

Mary Matheson explained to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in November 1937 that:

The club is in no sense a school. Children go there with a sense of freedom and as individuals. They go into an atmosphere of freedom and mutual consideration in which the heavy hand of the school has no part. They read the books which would never have found a way into their homes, play games, listen to stories being read and gather in small circles to learn useful crafts ... some of the older children who have been attracted to the clubs by the arts and crafts activities, and would ordinarily never read, have developed a genuine taste for reading.²⁹

Drawing a very direct link with the NEF, which had brought a number of overseas speakers to contribute to a major conference in Australia earlier in the year (see Chapter 6), Matheson said:

The Clubs supply the things which are so much a part of their [the children's] need. We are providing an essential service – not a charity. We are giving the children of poorer people the things which are theirs by right, but which are denied them by circumstances. Mrs Beatrice Ensor, when she was here for the Education Conference, declared that the movement provided exactly the type of new education in which she believed.³⁰

Lucy and Elsie went on to share many interests over the years, including in particular the Peace movement's organisations. The series of meetings held to prepare an Australian Convention on Peace and War in 1953 was one example, where Elsie was a convenor and where Lucy took a key speaking role.³¹ The NSW Peace Council, in which they were both involved, presented Lucy with an award at the end of that year for her tireless Peace work.³² Although Lucy saw Elsie less often after her retirement in December 1953, they continued to work together in organisations such as the Australia–New Zealand Congress for International Cooperation

29 *SMH*, 2 November 1937, Women's Supplement 13.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *SMH*, 28 September 1953, 4; *Cessnock Eagle and South Maitland Recorder*, 17 November 1953, 3; Convention Flyer, for Elsie's and Lucy's roles. Reproduced at 'Australian Convention of Peace and War (1953)', *Reason in Revolt*, last modified 12 February 2007, www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/biogs/E000493b.htm, accessed 18 November 2018.

32 Unidentified and undated newspaper clipping (probably *Tribune* late 1953 or early 1954 as it refers to Lucy's retirement), Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 1, f 120, A6119, 2030, NAA.

and Disarmament, where in 1959 Lucy was on the Education Committee and Elsie was on the Women's Committee.³³ Until her death in 1964, Elsie continued to be closely involved with Lucy in the activities that were central to Lucy's life, including those of International Women's Day.³⁴

* * *

Lucy took the children on excursions to museums and art galleries, but she was particularly eager to encourage drama, despite the limited resources of the school. When Beverley remembered the children writing and performing their own plays, she pointed out that Lucy would often be directly involved:

When we put on plays, there was one room up near the front of the school and all the old boards you'd get splinters off! It did have desks and that in there but that's where we went, sometimes all the desks would be put around in a circle at the end and you did your plays beside it, dress up in old clothes and whatever they could find in the toy box ... We were taught to make up if we could but sometimes they'd be written down and you took from there but you were allowed to express yourself with it within a certain limit of course, but yeah she used to really like that. We used to do a lot of plays in one of the rooms there and she'd often come in and sit there and watch while we're practising or doing things. She loved seeing our school plays.³⁵

Discipline and beyond

Ersleville Public School, like any public buildings, had no luxuries in the 1940s. It was heated by coal fires and Beverley remembered the daily routine of trying to make the rooms warm:

33 See letter from Elsie to Lucy, 8 February 1954, one of the few papers that Lucy kept until her death, Lucy Woodcock papers, courtesy Kit Edwards; Press Statement by Rev. A.M. Dickie, 4 June 1959, Victorian Peace Council Collection, Box 6, Folder 3, UMA/SC.

34 Joyce Stevens, 'The Nineteen Fifties and Sixties', in *A History of International Women's Day in Words and Images* ([Pennington, SA]: IWD Press, 1985), 15–26, and for Elsie's role as Guest of Honour at the 1957 IWD meeting, 20; *Tribune* (Sydney), 13 March 1957, 9.

35 Beverley Bates, interview, 1 September 2016.

The old coal bins were under the school down where the infant school used to be, underneath the floorboards. You'd crawl in there and you fill up the little buckets. It took two to carry them and you'd take them up to the classroom so they could get the fires going. They had a chimney and like a grate-thing, some of the classrooms had the old fireplaces.³⁶

It was not just the conditions that were hard. Lucy was strict – Beverley remembers that she would tell people 'quick smart' if they were doing what they shouldn't be doing, 'but she was still good. She wouldn't blame someone without getting to the bottom of the situation and she would look into it'.³⁷

Teachers, however, regularly used the cane, which was then an expected form of discipline. Some were worse than others – one teacher who always had a reputation for painful canings eventually became severely disturbed. It was Beverley who caught the worst of it. She suffered a terrible beating from this woman who smashed her head against the blackboard. Beverley did not report the incident immediately, she was so injured she just tried to get home. She collapsed, however, on the way and had to be taken to hospital, where she was ordered to have complete bedrest for three months but then to return only to part-time schooling.

Beverley remembers that when Lucy had been informed, she had ensured the teacher was dismissed:

She got expelled, when Miss Woodcock found out, I think it was only a few days and she got the education department and they'd come and expelled her for doing it. So I never, ever seen her again, that teacher.

And after that, Miss Woodcock gave up her time of a day to come around home – she'd walk up despite her bad feet and her walking stick! – and sit on the side of my bed for a little while on the lunch hour.³⁸

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

Beverley remembers Lucy to have visited frequently, indeed ‘every couple of days’, and then, when the child could return to school, Lucy had her sit in the head’s office rather than in a classroom:

When I went back to school she used to let me go up to the office and do my work up there. She caught me up for what I had missed while I was off. And she used to let me answer the phone, and that was a big privilege, you know! Or ‘Go and make a cup of tea for the teacher’, that was lovely! And she had a good sense of humour – sometimes she’d get really cross and in the middle of it she’d look over to me and give a little smile!³⁹

Jobs

From the time of her appointment at Erskineville, Lucy foregrounded local interests in her public statements. Employment was the most urgent of these issues for her students and their families in Erskineville so that Lucy raised it repeatedly. The survey Lucy and the Erskineville staff had done in 1934 had demonstrated that 60 per cent of the parents were dependent on the dole and that many of the children at the school were malnourished and without adequate clothing.⁴⁰ As she described it, Erskineville was an area ‘in which casual labourers lived, and since the Depression, conditions had grown steadily worse. The older girls were kept from school, to look after the smaller ones while their mothers went to work’.⁴¹

In 1934, in protesting against the Public Service Salaries Reduction Act,⁴² she reported to the national teachers’ union, the Federated State School Teachers’ Association (FSSTA) that schoolteachers at Erskineville Public School were already on miserable wages: ‘I have girls on my staff living away from home who draw £3/18/ a fortnight! A waitress gets more.’⁴³

39 Ibid.; Beverley Bates, contribution to History of Erskineville Public School Facebook page, www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=History%20of%20Erskineville, accessed 11 August 2016.

40 *Mercury* (Hobart), 11 January 1935, 11; *Northern Miner* (Charters Towers, Qld), 11 January 1935, 4. Both were quoting Lucy’s speech at the FSSA Annual Conference Brisbane.

41 ‘Peace Depends Upon Children’, *SMH*, 13 August 1936, 17.

42 *Public Service (Salaries Reduction) Act 1930* (NSW).

43 *Glen Innes Examiner*, 16 August 1934, 10; *Daily Advertiser* (Wagga Wagga), 27 March 1936, 5.

She argued too that the government's economy measures were so severe that teachers were forced to buy materials for schools out of their own pockets.⁴⁴

She saw the question of raising the school-leaving age again in terms of the local conditions, which were those faced not only in Erskineville in the 1930s but across Sydney. With a low school-leaving age, children were leaving school with little hope of finding long-term employment. If they got a job at all, they found they were badly paid as 'juniors' and then sacked as they grew just a few years older. Lucy argued that the goal of educational policy was the future well-being of the individuals and society, so that the cost of long schooling was not a problem if the outcome was a better-trained population. 'Cost alone', she told the FSSTA Conference in Brisbane, 'should not be considered so much as the right of the child'.⁴⁵

Beverley Langley was one of the girls who saw Lucy put this concern into practice:

Now when she got me my first job, I'll never forget it! I was at school and a lot of the children were leaving at 15, unless you were really clever and you wanted to go to another school. But otherwise you stayed there 'til, you know, 'til you finished. A couple of them were leaving and then also now I've got this idea. But she said, 'No, not unless you do something.' So she spoke to my mum and she said, 'Well leave it with me'. Then she came back one day and she said, 'I want you to come tomorrow for an interview to a shop in Newtown.' And Mum got ready and Miss Woodcock was there and we went up to this place, and I got a start within a few days. She gave me a lovely reference and I think Mum still had my reference. Yeah, even in that she put Miss Langley in the reference and, yeah, so it was lovely. And then after that I made quite a career in shopping. I worked at all those shops down there and I did a junior buyer's course, in those days you just didn't go and get behind a counter, you had to treat the people right, you know? So she gave me my first start as that.⁴⁶

44 *SMH*, 2 April 1935, 11.

45 *Ibid.*

46 Beverley Bates, interview, 1 September 2016.



Figure 4.6: Beverley Bates (centre) shared her memories of Lucy and Erskineville in an interview for this project.

She is shown here with co-authors Helen Randerson and Devleena Ghosh.

Source: Heather Goodall.

Lucy had influenced the way young women saw themselves in the workplace, as Betty Makin remembered. As Lucy had said to the Mother's Club meeting mentioned by Betty Makin, there were few possibilities for young people in Erskineville or the suburbs around it. Betty remembered her first job, in a local factory, which was not so different to many other people's experiences:

When I first went to work we weren't allowed to talk. And you weren't allowed to go to the toilet unless you asked the forelady who sat up in a box that was like a stage in the middle of the floor, looking over all of us all day. You had to ask her if it was all right to turn the machine off if you needed to go to the toilet. And on Friday, we had to scrub around the wooden floor where our machine was in our lunchtime which was half an hour.

... My Dad was a real conservative. The boss could have stood on his neck and he would have said 'That was very nice of you to do that'. He called me a communist when I was thirteen because my ideas were different to his.

... If the Union people came around they were told to get out. If anyone spoke to them, they'd be sacked. There would be three or four waiting to step into your job. I used to say to the other girls, 'We shouldn't have to do this'. I wanted to join the Union but if I'd been sacked, then Mum would have suffered. Miss Woodcock told me that Russia was a beautiful country and not to believe what I read in the papers. She said things weren't as bad in Russia as they wanted to you to believe. I knew things weren't too good where we were!⁴⁷

From Betty's retelling of this story in the 1980s, it may have been that she had consulted Lucy after she left school when she was on her first job. Or perhaps this was something Lucy had said while Betty was still enrolled. But in any case, Betty had embedded Lucy's words within her memories of the job. What had shaped Betty's working life had been Lucy's attitude to asserting workers' rights and to unions, in Australia as well as to Russia.

Lucy's interest extended even further. She was determined that girls get proper training and she had been concerned since her time at Grafton that girls did not receive the vocational training that boys received. Lucy's

47 Makin, in Mitchell, *The Matriarchs*, 49–50.

awareness of the very high rate of youth unemployment in Erskineville led to her increasing her efforts through the NSW Teachers Federation to lobby for more flexibility in available apprenticeship training. In the late 1930s, Lucy's efforts, together with Federation colleague Zillah Bocking, meant that the NSW Government finally introduced the Subsidised Apprenticeship Scheme for Unemployed Youths (19–25 Years) in February 1938. The government agreed to extend the age limit so as to allow young people in their 20s to gain an apprenticeship.⁴⁸

Lucy was particularly concerned about young women's training in vocational and industrial skills. She spoke at the FSSTA conference in Melbourne in January 1934 of the importance of girls being able to access the equivalent of boys' training. Her comment that young girls were hired as waitresses without being able to balance a tray or remember two orders – since they were chosen, she said sarcastically, because of their 'physical qualifications' (that is, whether they were attractive) – caught the eye of journalists and so that became the headline. In fact, however, her main demand was for thoroughgoing training for girls in all trades, including those involved with waitressing like the sciences of hygiene and the crafts of cooking in restaurants:

nothing had been done to train girls on a skilled basis for industrial and process work in factories. A man, she added, had five years' apprenticeship as a hairdresser, but for a girl only six months' training was necessary. Pre-vocational training at present was inadequate.⁴⁹

Her role went further still. Lucy had first known Judith Mitchell, who grew up in Erskineville, when she became an OC student at Lucy's school in 1950. Judith had gone on to a selective secondary school in 1952, the same year the family moved from Chippendale to Belfield. At the end of her secondary schooling, Judith had won a highly competitive Teachers' College scholarship, which would have allowed her to attend Teachers' College, although the attached bond would be a formidable repayment if the student did not go on to teach. At the same time, Judith was offered an office job, an option that Judith's parents preferred, so she was not able to take up the scholarship.

48 *Catholic Press* (Sydney), 3 February 1938, 26; *Lithgow Mercury*, 21 February 1938, 2; *Singleton Argus*, 19 June 1939, 2.

49 *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 8 January 1934, 4; Melbourne Annual Conference of FSSTA.

At Belfield, Judith had met Isobel and Richard Woodcock, Lucy's brother. They invited Judith to visit their home during one of Lucy's visits because Lucy wanted to meet her again. Judith approached this meeting with uneasiness – long before, as a pupil at Erskineville, she had found Lucy an intimidating figure. During the visit, Lucy quizzed Judith about what she was doing now she had completed her Leaving Certificate. When Judith told her she was working in a shop, having not been able to take up the teaching training scholarship, Lucy snapped: 'That's nonsense!'

Judith wryly observed that Lucy 'had not lost any of her zing!'

Distressed to hear that Judith's opportunity would be lost, Lucy stepped in. Judith recalled her saying, 'Bring me the papers and I'll sign them and I'll pay the bond!' It was Lucy's sponsorship, along with the support of the Althorps, a couple whom Judith recalls had 'adopted' and mentored her over many years, that allowed Judith to study and work as a teacher. She went first to teach in the country, then later enrolled in university studies, by correspondence, and then graduated to a further long teaching career in adult education. Judith remembers Lucy – and the Althorps – to have been communists because of their strongly held left-wing views. Judith sums up Lucy overall as having 'always had a willingness to stand up for things that were not popular!'⁵⁰

Lucy kept touch with many of her former students, not only Beverley and Judith. As late as 1959, she was writing to Rewi Alley asking him to look out for – and hopefully to employ – a young woman called Bonnie McDougall:

She was at Erskineville and did very well in her Primary School and then obtained an excellent leaving certificate. She decided to go to Peking and I understand from folks that she is studying Chinese and hoping to attend University. She is really a fine lass and should be able to help you Rewi for she writes splendid English and has some imagination that should be a help.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Judith Mitchell, now Judith Emmett, phone interview, 31 July 2017. Judith was – and remains – a very active Christian and she met Isobel and Richard Woodcock, and their son Barry, in the Belfield church after the family had moved from Chippendale to Belfield in 1952.

⁵¹ Lucy Woodcock to Rewi Alley, 3 April 1959, Rewi Alley Papers, MS-Papers-6533–307, NLNZ.

Erskineville after the war

In keeping with the high local birthrate, the numbers of children attending Erskineville Public School continued to grow during Lucy's time there. When she arrived in 1933, Lucy had been in charge of 400 girls – but by the late 1940s, she was supervising around 750 girls in her capacity as headmistress.

In an interview with a journalist from the *Tribune* in 1946, Lucy described her ideal school. This was 'a community centre type of school which would include a recreation hall, theatre, gymnasium, swimming baths, library and facilities for arts and crafts. Trained after-school staff would be needed to lead the children in their activities'. She added that:

Child endowment stopped at 16, just when it was most needed by parents who wished to give their children added years at school. Organised nursing help for mothers was absolutely necessary if older children in large families were to be given a fair chance of extra schooling. Nursery schools for all children between two and five would also assist to free the older child, as well as benefiting the small children themselves.

Lucy noted that there were five hotels within a mile of Erskineville School, 'but in all Erskineville there is not a single building to provide club facilities for adolescents'.

The *Tribune* journalist observed that:

A morning spent in Erskineville School was enough to show that in spite of its manifest handicaps of space and equipment and the usual dreariness of a school, it was already a worthwhile force in the community. The children were well and quietly spoken. During play-time there was noise, of course, but none of the yelling and bawling which could often be heard in the streets and in some homes. The school has its own library, which the parents have helped to build, and its own puppet theatre, for which the children write plays.⁵²

Although Lucy contrasted the vast amount spent on alcohol with the inadequate amount spent on the education budget, she was broad-minded on a range of social issues, consistent with her continuing bohemian

⁵² *Tribune* (Sydney), 1 November 1946, 6.

interests. She had no objection to drinking in itself and she herself both drank alcohol and smoked. In 1946, long before the 1965 protest where women chained themselves to a bar to demand access to public bars in hotels, Lucy had demanded equality of opportunity in drinking for women. She had argued that women were either denied a drink or segregated in pokey and degrading ‘Ladies Lounges’.⁵³

In the 1940s, Lucy continued to promote progressive education reforms and the importance of education as a key to encouraging personal development, international cooperation and avoidance of war. In 1949 she commented:

‘If civilisation is to be preserved and the present chaotic situation solved, education must play the leading role in society ... In the past education has been allowed to take an insignificant part in human affairs. Education must take its part as the most powerful weapon man can devise to grapple with the situation. ... The magnitude of the task should not daunt a society which could provide funds for the most deadly weapon ever invented – the atom bomb. The present age demanded that education must be provided, and that it be geared to meet modern requirements.’

‘The school began its life cheaply, and unfortunately we have not yet emancipated ourselves from the tradition of educating “children on the cheap”,’ she continued. ‘From an economic point of view this is short-sighted; for education, properly financed, is one of the most productive of all human activities and one which repays handsomely in dividends.’⁵⁴

Throughout her time as headmistress at Erskineville, Lucy continued to advocate publicly for her local community and for a greater government commitment to education, while at school she tried to put into practice many of her strongly held ideas. She paid individual attention to students’ needs and encouraged them according to their abilities, whether they were primary students, OC students or home science secondary students. If a child was not a native English speaker, Lucy provided additional assistance to help prepare them for high school.⁵⁵ When a child needed

⁵³ *Tribune* (Sydney), 11 June 1946, 6.

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Advocate* (Tasmania), 12 May 1949, 5.

⁵⁵ Dr Ruth A. Fink Latukefu, pers. comm. to Heather Goodall, 1 September 2015. Dr Latukefu was the child of German Jewish refugees and her story will be told in more detail in the following chapter.

a reference to help find employment in a local factory, Lucy hand wrote a reference for them.⁵⁶ Where a child's handwriting was illegible and the child had a talent for writing, Lucy recommended the use of a typewriter.

One of the children for whom she did this was the brilliant investigative journalist Murray Sayle (1926–2010) – Lucy may have kick-started his career! Sayle's report 'Did Hiroshima End the War?' in the *New Yorker* magazine in 1995 on the 50th anniversary of the decision to drop atomic bombs onto Hiroshima and Nagasaki would have made Lucy very proud.⁵⁷ Gloria Phelan recorded in 1981 that local Erskineville residents who remembered Lucy characterised her as 'a fund of humanity but no nonsense'.⁵⁸

In 1953, at Lucy's retirement, the Minister for Education Mr R.J. Heffron paid tribute to her work at Erskineville:

The other night I was invited to go to Erskineville to a send-off Miss Woodcock was being given by the school in which she had laboured for 22 years. The greatest tribute of all was the large number of people assembled there. Miss Woodcock was not only an outstanding teacher, and outstanding headmistress; but her work did not end when the classes ended. During the dark days of the depression she built up a great reputation as a humanitarian, because many of the children living in that under-privileged area were very poorly fed and scantily clothed, and the local residents will tell you what she did by way of the provision of meals at the school, the provision of clothes to give some of the children something in addition to the education they were getting at school. No one will ever know how much came out of Lucy's own pocket to help the children of Erskineville at the time. Indeed her self-sacrifices did not stop here. Never a person to speak about her own troubles she was always ready to give of her time and experience to help others in their difficulties.⁵⁹

56 Lucy G. Woodcock, reference written for Donna Hayward, 8 August 1952, reproduced for Erskineville School Parents and Citizens Association, at History of Erskineville Public School Facebook page, www.facebook.com/ErkoSchoolHistory, accessed 10 May 2016.

57 Ruth Fink Latukefu, pers. corr. to Heather Goodall, 1 September 2015. 'I know that Lucy rescued other young people, one of them a brilliant journalist Murray Sayle, who was allowed to use a typewriter because his handwriting was illegible.' Sayle, 'Did Hiroshima End the War?', *New Yorker*, August 1995; Hendrik Hertzberg, 'Remembering Murray Sayle', *New Yorker*, 23 September 2010.

58 Gloria Phelan, *Women in Action in the Federation: A Series of Articles* (Sydney: NSW Teachers' Federation, 1981), 8.

59 R.J. Heffron, retirement testimonial speech, December 1953, UAW Files, AU NBAC Z236, Box 32, NBABL.

When Sam Lewis spoke at Lucy's Teachers Federation testimonial, he also recounted the poignancy of that farewell at Erskineville School. Over 200 ex-students had attended but he had been most moved by seeing the students' mothers. Despite their severely limited financial means, the women of Erskineville had collected enough to give Lucy a beautiful pair of suitcases and a travel rug – symbolic both of their affection for her and of their insight into her intentions for her active future life. Sam continued:

these things came from the people of Erskineville and this is because in her teaching career in Erskineville, and elsewhere, she has never been neutral. She has always been positive in her approach to education and other questions ... She has always held up the lamp of education to the people of Erskineville and to the children wherever she has been. She has worked to raise the material and cultural standards of the people of Australia, including in the first place its children. She has striven for the organised action of teachers and people right to the end of her teaching career. She has been true to herself, her profession, her professional organisation, the Trades Union movement, the people of her district and to humanity itself!⁶⁰

60 Ibid.

This text is taken from *Teacher for Justice: Lucy Woodcock's Transnational Life*, by Heather Goodall, Helen Randerson and Devleena Ghosh, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.