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Baker, Euphemia Eleanor

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Effie Baker typified the Australian female who sacrificed the path of marriage and family to pursue her love of art and life. She was born 25 March 1880 in Goldsborough near Ballarat, to parents whose immigrant British families had been drawn by the excitement and promise of prospecting on the Victorian gold-fields. Her grandfather, Henry Evans Baker, who had left his native Kent for North America as a young man and met and married a Scottish girl, EuphemiaMcLeash, in New York, captained a sea-collier into Melbourne in 1852 and had been unable to muster a crew with which to depart. Sensing adventure, Baker sold his boat and joined the rush. EuphemiaMcLeash's brother William subsequently joined Baker, and with partners Robert Dodd and Samuel Crozier the four discovered the Bealiba Reef, also known as the Queen's Birthday Reef, and registered their claim on the last day of 1863.

Effie's maternal forbears were also British. Her mother's father, James Cully Smith, arrived in Australia aged eighteen, and married Eliza Ball in Adelaide in 1845. Having for a time worked a bullock team in South Australia James brought his family to Goldsborough, where the Ball's daughter Margaret married John Baker, son of Henry and Euphemia, in December 1879.

Effie, the first of their eleven children, was born the following year. As the family expanded she was sent to live with her grandparents in Ballarat. It was here during the formative years 1886-1890 that grandfather Baker imparted to Effie a life-long fascination with scientific instruments, an aptitude for creativity, and

a sense of inquiry. She attended Mount Pleasant State School, Grenville College, Ballarat East Art School, Carew-Smyth's Art School, and finally Beulie College. After receiving a thorough grounding in colour and composition, Effie became increasingly interested in the new science of photography. With a quarter-plate camera given to her by an aunt, she took photos while on holidays in Perth in 1898 and around the Ballarat district in 1899, which she developed, printed, and presented in photo albums as gifts to her parents.

In 1900 Effie moved to Black Rock in Melbourne, to live with Henry Baker's sister Euphemia, a school headmistress, and one of the first women to obtain entrance to the civil service university course in Victoria. Undoubtedly, aunt "Feem"'s independence and success in her career left a lasting impression on Effie. In 1914 Melbourne printers T.H. Hunter published a booklet of seven of her photographs as *Wild Flowers of Australia* which proved immediately successful and went into second (1917), third (1921), and fourth (1922) printings. The booklet, among the first of its kind in Australia, was bound with green ribbon, and the mounted photographic plates (5&3/4 inches x 4 inches) were interleaved with tissue paper. A Melbourne newspaper said the colours were "faithfully reproduced with exquisite softness through the medium of hand-coloured photographs" and recommended the booklet as an ideal Christmas gift. In addition to this colour photography, Effie sold intricately worked wooden "Australian toys", made doll's houses for charities, and depicted Australian wild-flowers in water-colours. While living at Beaumaris in 1922 Effie and her good friend Ruby Beaver began attending meetings of a "New Civilisation Centre" based on New Thought, a philosophical and mental therapeutics movement that had evolved in North America that was being promoted in Australia by a Californian medical doctor, Dr Julia Seton Seers. Although inspired by Christianity, New Thought was a philosophic rather than a religious movement, the appeal of which lay in its emphasis on the power of constructive thinking, on the imminence of a "new age", and in its free discussion of religious ideas. Effie and Ruby first heard of the Bahá'í Faith at Dr Seer's Centre, and Effie was the second in Australia, after Sydney optometrist Ostwald Whitaker, to become a Bahá'í.

Both had met Hyde and Clara Dunn, an English-Irish couple who had become Bahá'ís in California and had arrived in Australia in 1920 to promote their religion, which had its origins in Nineteenth Century Persia. Effie found Hyde's address to the Melbourne New Thought Centre captivating. He spoke of the need at this time for world unity based on racial equality and inter-religious understanding, and for individuals to investigate religious truth for themselves rather than be led by tradition; and referred to such fundamental teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í religion, as the equality of the sexes, and the essential complementarity of the great religions. Effie was convinced by the "humble sincerity and faith" with which Hyde spoke, and her acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith rapidly changed the direction of her life's work.

In 1923 she travelled with the Dunns to Tasmania and to Western Australia, and in 1924 visited New Zealand with internationally renowned Bahá'í teacher and

Esperantist Martha Root. Effie learnt while in Auckland that four New Zealand Bahá'ís were making a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í holy shrines in Haifa, Palestine, and accepted their invitation to join them. She was suffering lead poisoning as a result of many years of wetting her paint-brush with her tongue rather than in water, and this proposed three-month journey was an opportunity to take a curative sea-voyage, as she had been advised. The pilgrims departed Adelaide in January 1925 and it was eleven years before Effie returned.

When she re-visited Haifa, following pilgrimage and then several weeks holiday in England, Effie accepted the invitation of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, to remain there to act as hostess of a newly completed pilgrim hostel for Western Bahá'ís. She had made firm friends with the women in Shoghi Effendi's family and had no major commitments waiting in Australia, and residence in Haifa brought the opportunity for practical service to her Faith (for she did not regard herself as a public speaker like Hyde Dunn, or Martha Root), as well as the opportunity to meet fascinating people from the East and the West.

Within a short period Shoghi Effendi came to appreciate Effie's talents as photographer and model-maker. Her good fortune was to commence residing in Haifa when he was preparing the first Bahá'í Yearbook, a publication chronicling Bahá'í activities world-wide which continues to the present time as the Bahá'í World. Early volumes include numerous of her photographs of the Bahá'í monument gardens on Mt. Carmel, widely regarded as the most beautiful in all Israel. Also, Effie made models of landscapes to assist Shoghi Effendi in his planning of new sections of the gardens.

Her hardest assignment came late in 1930, when Shoghi Effendi was urgently seeking a photographic record of numerous locations associated with the origins of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions. Haste was required to photograph many towns and buildings which were being razed in the Persian government's rapid modernisation program. Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi was nearing completion of his translation of Nabíl's Narrative, an epic account of the religions' origins, and required the photos to accompany the first edition.

At a time when European women could find little protection in the region, Effie travelled by train and car through 'Iráq to Persia, where living conditions swung from the brief luxury of Tīhrán Hotels to bitterly cold night-riding on heavily laden mules across steep and stony terrain. A three month commission extended to eight as she moved between locations, keeping well hidden her No1 A Kodak, and her half plate clamp camera with triple extension, and often herself completely covered in a black "cuddor".

The complete lack of photographic supplies in the country, and her need to check her work before leaving each location, tested Effie's photographic abilities to the full. In the absence of dark-room or running water, she developed film at night, ensuring that she had at least one good print from the snaps of various apertures taken at each site before moving on. She returned to Haifa with above

one thousand good prints, some 400 of which have been published.

Effie returned to Goldsborough in February 1936, where she remained until moving to Sydney in 1963. She constantly shared with friends prints of her photos and art-works, although she shied from publicity and from any celebration of her unique life experience and achievements. In the remaining years of her life she enjoyed the love of the growing Australian Bahá'í community, and especially of children who received from her undeserved gifts and tales of adventure. She died in January 1968, her photographic accomplishments little-known beyond her circle of acquaintances. In 1981-82 her work was included in a national exhibition, Australian Women Photographers 1890-1950, and it has since begun to attract wider attention.

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