

# A VERY FULL LIFE: THE LATE PERSIA CAMPBELL

by Thalia Elwell

This article first appeared in the March, 1984, issue of EAR to EAR Magazine.

**A**mongst the files held by the Moruya and District Historical Society is one on the late Professor Emelita Persia Campbell, who first saw the light of day on 15th March 1898, at Nerrigundah.

From this simple beginning she rose to the very top of her profession as an academic and economist in the U.S.A.

Her father, Rudolph Campbell, was the Principal of the Nerrigundah Public School. Her mother, Beatrice Hunt, whom Randolph Campbell met and married after advertising in a Sydney matrimonial column, became the Sewing Mistress at the school. As a baby, Persia used to take fits. Mr. Campbell, who was an intellectual, and not very practical, would become agitated and have to be kept out of the way when women neighbours came to put the baby into a mustard bath. According to a note, dated 1972, from Miss D. M. Richards of Nerrigundah, he feared they would drown her.

The Society has many old photograph albums recording local history. One photo is of

the children at Nerrigundah Public School in 1899, with Mr. Campbell at the end of the back row, holding the year old Persia. The lady in black, sitting at the end of the second row, is her mother, the Sewing Mistress.

Persia would have received all her primary education from her parents, at Nerrigundah Public School; from there she went to Fort Street High School, in Sydney, for her secondary education. She graduated from the University of Sydney in 1918 with a double first class honours degree, in English and History, and won two scholarships that enabled her to gain her M.A. in December 1919.

She then turned to economics which she studied with high distinctions. She took up a two year fellowship at the London School of Economics, where she completed her M.Sc. in 1923, and published her first book, *Chinese Coolie Emigration*. The following year was spent at Bryn Mawr, studying American immigration problems.

She returned to Australia in 1924 to become assistant editor of the Australian Encyclopedia; following that she assumed the role of research economist with the Industrial Commission of N.S.W., a wage-fixing tribunal. At the

same time she began teaching university extension courses in economics to working men and women in co-operation with the Workers' Education Association, and simultaneously involved herself in the N.S.W. branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, then in its infancy; being the first woman elected to its committee.

In 1930 she moved to Harvard University with a Rockefeller International Scholarship. There she studied U.S. agricultural policy and its effect on rural living conditions; the result being a second book, *American Agricultural Policy*, published in 1933.

During the 1930's Persia Campbell became increasingly interested in all aspects of consumerism. She examined the first attempts made by government to consider the consumer's point of view in her doctoral dissertation, *Consumer Representation in the New Deal*, published in 1940. She worked in this area as adviser to government organisations at all levels, giving special attention to the views of low income groups. It was during this period that she helped to establish the Consumer's National Federation.

During the second World War she directed the Con-

sumer Services Civil Defence Voluntary Organisation, which administered a broad educational programme. She helped found the National Association of Consumers in 1947, and the Consumer's Federation of America in 1960. She wrote books, pamphlets and articles to alert consumers to their rights. She conducted weekly radio broadcasts—*Report to Consumers*, also the first consumers' rights T.V. series—*You, the Consumer*. In 1954 she was appointed the first consumer counsel for New York State, and she promoted legislation in that State to curb bait and-switch selling, to eliminate fraud in T.V. and radio repair services, and to regulate general instalment buying. She then helped to frame similar legislation in California and Massachusetts. In 1962 she was appointed by President Kennedy to the President's Council of Economic Advisers; and was re-appointed to that body by President Johnson.

Apart from all the foregoing, she married in 1931, Edward Rice Jnr., an electrical engineer, retaining her maiden name for her professional life. In 1936 she became an American citizen. In 1939 her husband died, leaving her with a six year old son, Edward Boyden, and a five year old daughter, Sydney. She joined the Economics Department of the City of New York University, where she remained until 1965, having risen to full professor of



the Department of Social Science in 1960.

As if she had not done enough for one life time, she concerned herself with international programmes in SE Asia and the Pacific. She was a member of the US delegation to international conferences of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation. She chaired for some years the Pan-Pacific and South-East Asia Women's Association, which had consultative status in the UN.

In 1959 she was appointed director of the Consumers' Union. Much of her time was spent representing the International Organisation of Consumers' Unions (IOCU) at the UN in New York. Furthermore she was interested in women's affairs; the American Association of University Women and the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) being two of her interests. It was in the IFUW where the

writer's and Persia Campbell's paths crossed. In fact, representing both IOC.U. and IFUW at the U.N., her biographer remarked, "... always wearing one of her collection of hats, Campbell almost lived at the UN!"

She died on 2nd March 1974, and a letter from the Provost, and Professor of Economics, at Queen's College, City of New York University, to the Moruya Historical Society, stated that, as a much loved and respected member of the faculty, a college dome building had been dedicated to her memory.

#### The Dripping Pan Memorial, Wood Ditton, Cambridgeshire

The following illustrated epitaph appears on a headstone in the churchyard at Wood Ditton:

**TO THE MEMORY  
of WILLIAM SIMONDS  
WHO DIED MARCH 1. 1753,  
AGED 80 YEARS.**

HERE LIES MY CORPSE WHO WAS THE MAN  
THAT LOV'D A SOP IN DRIPPING PAN.  
BUT NOW BELIEVE ME I AM DEAD.  
NOW HERE THE PAN STANDS AT MY HEAD  
STILL, FOR THE SOFT TO LAST I CRY'D  
BUT COULD NOT EAT AND SO I DIED  
MY NEIGHBOURS THEY PERHAPS MAY  
LAUGH  
NOW THEY DO READ MY EPISTAPH

