



Nancy Millis

Born in Melbourne in 1922, Nancy Fannie Millis studied agriculture at the University of Melbourne, graduating with a Master of Agricultural Science in 1946. She spent a year studying agricultural methods in Papua New Guinea before travelling to the University of Bristol on a Boots Research Scholarship. It was here that Millis was introduced to fermentation, gaining her PhD in 1951.

Upon her return to Australia, Millis was appointed to a lectureship in the Department of Microbiology at the University of Melbourne. A Fulbright travel grant allowed her to visit the United States and Japan in 1954, spending time at the Hopkins Marine Station at Stanford and the Institute of Applied Microbiology at the University of Tokyo. Millis was involved in teaching one of the first courses in biotechnology in Japan and later co-authored a textbook based on the course, which was one of the earliest of its kind.

Millis pioneered the teaching of industrial microbiology at the University of Melbourne, instituting the applied microbiology course and concentrating on fermentation techniques and the physiology of microorganisms. She progressed to become the fourth woman appointed to a professorial position at the University when she was awarded a personal chair in 1982. Millis retired in 1987 and remains an Emeritus Professor in the Department of Microbiology.

Upon its establishment in 1980, Millis became chair of the Commonwealth Government Recombinant DNA Monitoring Committee (later the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee). Her ground-breaking research into water quality and long association with the water industry helped to improve water treatment. She chaired the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Quality and Treatment as well as serving on the board of the CRC for Freshwater Ecology and the Australian Water Research Council.

Millis was an important contributor to the Australian Society for Microbiology, becoming Secretary (1964–68), President (1978–80) and Rubbo Orator (1982). She played a valuable role over an extended period, contributing to the Society's growth and development, and was granted Honorary Life Membership in 1988.

Millis was Chancellor of La Trobe University from 1992 to 2006. For her service to science, particularly in the field of microbiology and its application to industry, she received a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 1990. Millis was also awarded the Centenary Medal in 2001 in recognition of her pioneering work in the study of fermentation technology in Australia, and was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1977. In 2002 she was featured on one of five Australian postage stamps that honoured prominent medical scientists who had become 'living legends'.

Sources

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