

Susannah Catherine Campbell Sinclair (nee McKnight)



Class of 1922

This biography was collated by Rennae Taylor from secondary sources listed in the bibliography. The 6th form picture from 1895 was supplied from the Otago Girls High School archives.

Family Background and Childhood

Susannah Catherine Campbell McKnight was born in NZ in 1879 to Margaret (nee McDougall) and Gavin Campbell McKnight. Her parents were born in Scotland and emigrated to NZ prior to Susannah's birth. Her mother, who was eight years older than her husband, was 36 years of age at the time of her birth. He died in 1925 at the age of 74 years and her mother in 1931 at the age of 88 years. His Otago Daily Times death notice indicates he was living in the suburb of Mornington, Dunedin at the time of his death.

<u>Registration Number</u>	<u>Family Name</u>	<u>Given Name(s)</u>	<u>Mother's Given Name(s)</u>	<u>Father's Given Name(s)</u>
1879/3210	McKnight	Susannah Catherine Campbell	Margaret McDougall	Gavin Campbell

Susannah commenced her secondary school education in 1894 at Otago Girls High School (OGHS) and was dux in 1897. She gained a junior university scholarship with credit and ranked 6th in NZ. In 1901 she gained her Bachelor of Arts and in 1903 her Bachelor of Science.



Otago Girls High School 6th Form, 1895

Early Career Prior to Medicine

From 1903 to 1916, she taught science, mathematics and some botany at OGHS and during this time continued her studies and completed a Masters degree in Science in 1907 with honours in physics and mathematics.

Eileen Wallis's 1972 book "A Most Rare Vision. Otago Girl's High School - the first one hundred years" recounts that on commencement of her teaching career Susannah *"had been very young and inexperienced, with masses of blonde hair, and found discipline something of a problem."* Later she took over the role of senior Mathematics in the school, and it recounts *"With a fine appreciation of her own worth, while thanking the Board for the consequent rise in salary, she pointed out that it should have been greater. As a teacher, she was very thorough and was popular with the girls."*

Medical School

In 1917, Susannah enrolled at medical school alongside some of her former OGHS students. From her academic record it appears she did not have to complete the medical preliminary subjects as she had a M Sc degree. She completed her first professional exams in May 1918 with distinction in physiology, her second professional exams in June 1919, and her third professional exams in December 1922. During her medical training she attended a course in midwifery, working in the slums of London and Glasgow and while there married Robert Sinclair. She successfully completed her third professional exams graduating with her MB ChB in December 1922.

At the time of her graduation, she was 43 years of age.

Career

Little information is available on Susannah's life after graduation from medical school. Her graduation record indicates she was assistant to Professor Drennan at the Otago Medical School Dept of Pathology from 1923 to 1925. She was secretary of the Otago Medical Women's Association and corresponding national secretary for the NZ Medical Women's Association. She

was also an active member of OGHS Old Girls' Association and in Wallis's book she was described as "*always a willing helper in the kitchen at supper time*".

For the 13 years prior to her death, she was secretary-treasurer of the Otago Pioneer Memorial Association formed following the decision of the Dunedin counsellors to not allow women to be part of the organising committee for the 1948 NZ Centennial Celebrations.

*A meeting of indignation was arranged and the Town Hall in Dunedin was packed with both women and men who disagreed with this move. From this meeting, a committee of women was formed to do something about creating a legacy of women who had come to Otago. These women fundraised locally at a time when women were not allowed to hire a hall independently and needed their husbands' signature to do so. In October 1941, they purchased a building on Moray Place and formed the Otago Pioneer Women's Memorial Association. **Dr Emily Siedeberg-McKinnon** (New Zealand's first female medical doctor) was the founder. The principal aims of the organisation are to provide a building which acts as a memorial to the Pioneer Women of Otago and also to provide a space for hire to be used in the interests of all women in town and country for social, educational, recreational and general community purposes. As the Committee owns the building outright, the rooms are let for a reasonable fee, to reflect the idea that no one should be refused room hire should they require it.*

Susannah died in August 1953 at the age of 79 years and was buried at Anderson's Bay Cemetery in Dunedin. Her husband Robert, an engineer, survived her.



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