

Biography - Annie Mabel Sandes

by Judith Biddington

Annie Mabel Sandes (1881-1966), technical-college superintendent, was born on 3 December 1881 at Cleveland, Brisbane, youngest of three children of Irish-born parents James Sandes, policeman, and his wife Annie Jane, née Goudy. [Francis Percival Sandes](#) was her elder brother. Sent to Sydney Technical College, Mabel studied art (1895-98), gained honours in advanced cookery (1901) and won numerous prizes. She undertook administrative work at the college, and taught (1903-05) in the department of domestic economy and cooking.

On 10 April 1906 Miss Sandes was appointed superintendent of the (Emily McPherson) College of Domestic Economy, Melbourne. In setting up the institution, she had to overcome problems that stemmed from inadequate funding, conflicting aims, ill-defined lines of responsibility and the selection of unsuitable premises. She oversaw the renovation of the building, purchased equipment, prepared the curriculum and timetables, selected staff and recommended fees. After the college opened on 1 October, she taught day- and evening-classes, set and marked examinations, and recouped costs by selling meals to the public. In addition, she accounted for all funds, supervised an increasing number of students and handled public relations. Although very young, she soon established herself as a forceful and efficient principal.

From 1911 the college helped to train domestic-arts teachers, who did their practical work at a new hostel under Sandes's management. Despite the increase in her duties and responsibilities, she was refused higher pay. She resigned in 1912, but withdrew her resignation when her post was reclassified from £200 per annum to the range of £240-£270. Her work expanded to include exhibitions, travelling demonstrations and specialist classes. The college council and Education Department officials asked each year that her services be fully recognized. Margaret Mountain, president of the council, asserted in 1914 that the college was 'fortunate in having a Superintendent like Miss Sandes . . . Her energy is unflagging'.

Announcing plans to marry, Sandes left the college in 1916: the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* noted the departure of a woman with 'truly Napoleonic characteristics'. At Holy Trinity Church, Launceston, Tasmania, on 30 September that year she married with Anglican rites Stanley Clifton Smith (d.1953), a schoolmaster; they were to have three children. He taught in Tasmania, New Zealand and New South Wales before being appointed boarding house master at Sydney Grammar School in 1926. His wife 'ably and indefatigably assisted him', combining her role as wife and mother with the task of overseeing the domestic staff to ensure that the daily needs of the boarders were met.

From 1938 Mrs Clifton Smith taught domestic science and dressmaking at St Catherine's School, Waverley. Troubled by increasing deafness, she retired in

1944. She spent her time with family and friends, enjoyed a game of bridge and showed a lively interest in current affairs. At the age of 78 she embarked on a world tour with her daughter Shirley, with whom she lived in Port Moresby from 1964. Survived by her son and two daughters, she died on 19 June 1966 at Korobosea and was buried in Hanuabada cemetery.

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