

Three Australian missionaries from Victoria were honoured last week.

On the centenary of national independence in Korea their service of three women was recognised by the government of the Republic of Korea.

They were awarded the Medal of Honour of the Republic of Korea in recognition that their service contributed to the independence movement in Korea in 1919.

The women honoured are Isabella (Belle) Menzies, founder of the Busanjin Ilsin Girl's school (now Dongrae Women's High School), Margaret Davies, then principal of the school and Daisy Hocking, a teacher at the school.

In 2021 the Korean government awarded each of these women the 'Award for Persons of Distinguished Service to National Independence'. The medals were presented at an official ceremony in Korea on the 1st of March 2022.

However, as no Australian representatives were able to attend, these medals were presented to representatives of the families of these women by the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea at a function in The Scots' Church Melbourne on the 3rd of May 2022.

I want to focus on one of these three women, Belle Menzies the aunt of Sir Robert Menzies.

Following the untimely death in 1889 of the Rev Joseph Davies, the first Australian missionary to Korea, the women of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria banded together in 1890 to form the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Union of Victoria (PWMU).

In 1891 the PWMU sent the first of the many missionaries it would send to Korea in the years thereafter – including Belle Menzies.

Belle Menzies served in Korea for 33 years from 1891, performing local missions, children's education, care of orphans, relief work, and more – but perhaps her most significant contribution to Korea and Korean culture was in the realm of women's education.

At that time the education of women in Korea was downplayed or neglected, and Belle, a great believer in the uplifting of women by education, and in education as a means to furthering the gospel of the Lord Jesus, established the Busanjin Ilsin Girl's School and became its first principal.

Belle later wrote of her belief that 'to elevate a nation the wives and mothers must be educated'. It was in fact the first girls' school in Busan. By 1905 there



Korean Ambassador to Australia (above) speaking in Scots Church, Melbourne, May 3 2022.



Belle Menzies with Korean child (above), Margaret Davies, Principal, (left) and (below) Daisy Hocking, teacher at Busan Girls High School. All were detained during the 1910 Japanese occupation of Korea.



were 85 girls enrolled in the school.

Today, a plaque for 'Busan Monument No. 55' outside a two-storey Western-style brick building constructed in 1905 (which replaced the original straw-thatched house) records the school's foundation and history.

So a century on these women are being remembered and honoured.

On this Mother's Day let us remember that there are many women who care for younger people who are not their children, and let us thank God for them.

Christine Bradbeer