

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0586

Downing, Cecilia

(1858 - 1952)

Born 13 January, 1858, Islington London England

Died 30 August, 1952, Ivanhoe Victoria Australia

Occupation Community worker, Women's rights activist

Summary

Cecilia Downing was a leading figure in the Victorian women's movement in the early twentieth century, spreading her activities and influence over an enormous range of organisations. The daughter of Isaac and Mary (née Morgan) Hopkins, Downing was born in London and came to Australia in 1858. She obtained her Teaching Certificate from the Training Institution in Carlton and taught at Portarlington before marrying John Downing in 1885. The couple returned to Melbourne in 1901. Although she had seven children, Cecilia became heavily involved in women's groups and welfare work. She was one of Victoria's first child probation officers (1907) and was an officer bearer with both the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Australian Women's National League. From the 1920s, she devoted her energies to the Housewives Association (having become one of its earliest members in 1917) and served as its federal president from 1940-45 and Victorian president from 1938 until her death in 1952. On 8 June 1950 Cecilia Downing was appointed a Member of the British Empire for social welfare services in Victoria.

Details

A member of the Collins Street Baptist Church for 46 years, she helped establish their Women's Guild in 1910 and the Victorian Baptist Women's Association in 1926. In 1935 she was elected foundation president of the Women's Board of the Baptist Union of Australia. She was also honorary secretary of the National Council of Women of Victoria (1928-1935) and foundation president of the National Travellers' Aid Society (1944), having been an executive member of the Victorian Society since 1920. During WWII she was also involved with the Australian Comforts Fund, the Victorian Council of Women's Emergency Service and the War Loan and War Savings Certificates Committee.

Events

1912 - 1915

President of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union

1932 - 1941

Secretary, Baptist Women's Association, Victoria

1934 - 1943

President, Collins Street Baptist Women's Guild

1935 - 1938

President of the Australian Baptist Women's Board

1928 - 1928

Australian Delegate to the Baptist World Alliance Conference in Toronto

1928 - 1928

Australian Delegate to the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Lausanne

1941 - 1942

President, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

1970 - 1970

Married John Downing, they had seven children

1909 - 1909

Recording secretary of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Victoria

1911 - 1911

Founding superintendent of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's immigration department

1907 - 1907

One of the government's first child-probation officers

1906 - 1906

Joined the Collins Street Baptist Church

1917 - 1917

Vice-president of the Housewives' Co-operative Association (later Housewives' Association of Victoria)

1928 - 1936

Honorary Secretary, National Council of Women of Victoria

2040 - 1945

President, Federated Association of Australian Housewives

1920 - 1932

Executive Member, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

1945 - 1945

President, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

1944 - 1944

President, National Travellers' Aid Society

1938 - 1952

President, Housewives Association of Victoria

1947 - 1947

President, National Travellers' Aid Society

1949 - 1951

President of the Federated Association of Australian Housewives

1932 - 1940

Junior Vice President, Travellers' Aid Society of Victoria

Published resources

Resource Section

Founder of the Women's Board - Cecilia Downing, Baptist Union of Australia, 1987,
<http://www.bwa-baptist-heritage.org/bua-bio.htm#downing>

Downing, Cecilia (1858 - 1952), Smart, Judith, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A140031b.htm>

Edited Book

Who's Who in Australia 1950, Alexander, Joseph A, 1950

Australian Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, Dickey, Brian, 1994

Journal Article

A sacred trust: Cecilia Downing, Baptist faith and feminist citizenship, Smart, Judith, 1995

'For the good that we can do': Cecilia Downing and feminist Christian citizenship, Smart, Judith, 1994

A Mission to the Home: The Housewives Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Protestant Christianity, 1920-1940, Smart, Judith, 1998

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of Victoria

[National Council of Women of Victoria](#)

[Minute books, 1850-1983. \[manuscript\]](#)

[Records, 1939-1985. \[manuscript\].](#)

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Minutes \[1904-1960\] \[microform\]](#)

The University of Melbourne Archives

[Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria](#)

Australian Historic Records Register

[Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria Inc. : community organisation records](#)

Author Details

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