

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0975

Briggs, Louisa

(1836 - 1925)

Born 14 November, 1836, Preservation Island, Bass Strait Tasmania Australia

Died 31 December, 1925, Cummergunja Victoria Australia

Occupation Aboriginal spokesperson, Matron, Midwife, Nurse

Summary

Louisa Briggs, of Woiworong descent, was born on Preservation Island, Bass Strait. Around 1853 she and her husband, John, went to the Victorian goldfields. Then they worked as shepherds in the Beaufort district until 1871 when the family was admitted destitute to Coranderrk Aboriginal Station. There Briggs acted as nurse and midwife. In 1876 she was appointed matron and became the first Aboriginal woman to replace a European on salaried staff. She became the spokesperson for the residents and succeeded in securing the reappointment of the popular first manager. She fought the Aborigines Protection Board's plans to sell Coranderrk and remove residents to other reserves, and gave evidence to the 1876 inquiry but was eventually forced off the reserve and moved to Ebenezer Aboriginal Station. After yet another inquiry in 1881 she moved back to Coranderrk where she was reappointed matron. When her sons were forced off the reserve under the Victorian Aborigines Protection Act 1886, she moved first to Maloga Mission, and in 1889 to Cummergunja reserve. Late in life she moved to Barmah and finally to Cummergunja where she died in 1925.

Details

Louisa Briggs was a strong-minded, hard-working woman, a regular church-goer, remembered for her humour, audacity and courage.

Published resources

Resource Section

Briggs, Louisa (1836-1925), Barwick, Laura, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/AS10057b.htm>

Book

A life together, a life apart : a history of relations between Europeans and Aborigines, Bain Attwood ... [et al.], 1994

Book Section

This Most Resolute Lady: A Biography Puzzle, Barwick, Diane E, 1985

Edited Book

The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia : Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, society and culture, Horton, David, 1994

200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology, Radi, Heather, 1988

Newspaper Article

Plaque Honors Aboriginal Woman, 1986

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details

Leonarda Kovacic

Created 28 May 2004

Last modified 26 June 2009