

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE1071

Archer, Caroline Lillian

(1922 - 1978)

Nationality	Australian
Born	1 January, 1922, Cherbourg Queensland Australia
Died	31 December, 1978, Narrabri New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Aboriginal rights activist

Summary

Caroline Archer was born in 1922 and is best known for her leadership in the 1970s of the One People of Australian League (OPAL), an organisation that sought to promote the interests of Aboriginal people. She was appointed executive officer of OPAL in 1972, becoming the first Aboriginal person to hold the position.

Details

Caroline Archer was born at Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve, where she received poor education and suffered from malnutrition. After working as a domestic servant at 'Whetstone' station near Inglewood, she moved to Brisbane, working first in a private home and then at the Canberra Hotel (1935-49), where she learnt to operate the switchboard. In 1950 she was employed as a PMG switchboard operator. On 29 December 1951 she married Fredrick Archer, a photographer; they had two daughters and a son. She opened an Aboriginal art shop, where she gave training to Aboriginal women.

In 1972 she was asked to run the Miss OPAL quest and was subsequently appointed the first Aboriginal executive officer of OPAL (the One People of Australia League). As State president of OPAL she travelled interstate to federal conferences and to lobby politicians. She was also nominated for election to the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee but failed to win election.

Caroline spent much of her time teaching Aboriginal culture to children all over Queensland and in Canberra. She died at Narrabri on her way back to Brisbane on 8 September 1978.

Published resources

Resource Section

Archer, Caroline Lillian (1922-1978), Ballard, B. A., 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A130077b.htm>

Edited Book

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

Newsletter

Death of two OPAL workers [Joyce Wilding and Caroline Archer of One People of Australia League], 1979

Newspaper Article

My people - my life's work, Archer, Caroline, 1978

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

Archival resources

AIATSIS Books and Printed Material Collection

[AIAS newspaper clippings](#)

Author Details

Leonarda Kovacic and Nikki Henningham

Created 21 September 2004

Last modified 12 February 2019