

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE1145

Chisholm, Caroline

(1808 - 1877)

Nationality British

Born 1 January, 1808, Northampton England

Died 25 March, 1877, Highgate London England

Occupation Philanthropist

Summary

Caroline Chisholm was famous for her work with new immigrants to New South Wales during the 1840s and 1850s, and later in the goldfields region of Victoria. She lobbied to ensure these people were provided with adequate accommodation and personally organised the often destitute young women to journey to rural areas in order to secure employment. Her benevolent crusade to better the lives of immigrants earned her the title 'The Immigrants' Friend'.

Details

Caroline Chisholm arrived in Sydney, Australia from India with her husband Archibald in 1838. Reared in a tradition of evangelical philanthropy, Caroline was deeply moved when she observed single girls being dumped on the wharves in Sydney with nowhere to go. On one occasion, she found a group of 64 girls sheltering in the Rocks area with only 14s 3d amongst them. Caroline set up the Female Immigrants Home with the support of the clergy, the Governor's wife and finally the Governor himself.

Through her work at the Female Immigrant Home, Caroline gave protection and shelter to hundreds of young women, some of whom she accompanied into country areas where she found employment for them. Caroline was also concerned for families who, having migrated in the hope of better things, found themselves destitute.

In 1846, Caroline returned to England and became the publicist for Australia. She formed a society to send out groups of families to Australia and succeeded in despatching some 3,000 persons in five years. Caroline agitated for and achieved better conditions on the vessels carrying the immigrants. As well as free passages for emigrant's wives and children, she established the Family Colonisation Loan Society. When she first chartered a ship, *Slains Castle*, which sailed in 1850 from England to Australia, she personally supervised the embarkation and appointed a reliable surgeon to control rations.

In six years Caroline assisted 11,000 people to settle in Australia. Her activism, energy and experience contributed to changes in the migrant selection process, the treatment of migrants on the voyage out and their reception in the colony. She was worried by the news of the discovery of gold in Australia, fearing that the great influx of migrants such rushes resulted in would cause instability in such a fragile society.

In 1851 Caroline's husband, Archibald, went to Australia to work as her colonial agent while she continued to send out families and girls from Britain. In England, Caroline continued to agitate for lower colonial postal rates, for the introduction of colonial money orders and for better shipboard conditions. To this end, she ensured the passage of the *Passenger Act (1852)*.

Now famous and supported by many powerful figures, including the writer Charles Dickens, Caroline returned to Australia in 1854. She was imbued with the optimistic idea that the wealth of a society lay in the settling of many small farmers and she worked for the unlocking of the lands.

Caroline continued to work despite illness and needy circumstances. She and her husband lived on a pension in Liverpool and then in Highgate, London. Caroline died in poverty and obscurity in England in 1877 – the inscription on her grave at Northampton reads "The emigrant's friend".

According to her biographer, Caroline Chisholm 'began her work accepting established conventions, but when she encountered the obstruction and indifference of officialdom, her attitude began to harden and she became an uncompromising radical'.

She was a devoted wife and mother, who helped to give dignity to women and families in a harsh environment. She was able, idealistic, charming and supported unwaveringly in her work and achievements by her husband.

Events

2001 - 2001

Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Published resources

Resource Section

Chisholm, Caroline (1818-1877), Iltis, Judith, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010208b.htm>

Ten Victorian Women: Caroline Chisholm, Public Record Office Victoria, 2005,
<http://womenustralia.info/exhib/fl/flten01.htm>

Ten Victorian Women, Public Record Office Victoria, 2005,
<http://womenustralia.info/exhib/fl/flten06.htm>

Book

Caroline Chisholm, Kiddle, Margaret, 1957

Edited Book

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

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of Victoria

Papers, 1841-1855 [manuscript].

Papers, [not after 1969] [manuscript].

Collections held by London University Library relating to Australia and New Zealand [M2289], [19--] [microform]

Scrapbook relating to Caroline Chisholm, [18--]-[19--]. [microform].

Papers, [not after 1958]. [manuscript].

Papers [M976], [19--] [microform]

Public Record Office Victoria, Victorian Archives Centre

Inward Registered Correspondence

Royal Historical Society of Victoria Inc

Caroline Chisholm (1808-1877) - friend of destitute immigrant girls

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

Miscellaneous papers re Caroline Chisholm and Dame Nellie Melba, c1833-c1953 [microform]

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Collection of pamphlets containing souvenir concert programmes and Australian biographies.]

Author Details

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