

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00290

Cooper, Leontine Mary Jane

(1837 - 1903)

Born 22 April, 1837, Battersea, London England

Died 12 March, 1903, Toowong Queensland Australia

Occupation Journalist, Scholar, Teacher, Women's rights activist, Writer

Summary

Leontine Cooper was Queensland's most significant writer addressing the rights of white women during the movement for woman suffrage in that state. By the late 1880s she had emerged as one of the key activists who contributed to progressive movements in Australian political life and Australian feminism. Cooper wrote short stories for the *Boomerang* and in the mid 1890s edited Queensland's only women's suffrage newspaper, the *Star*. For a short time she edited *Flashes*, a society newspaper, and for a while wrote 'Queensland Notes' for Louisa Lawson's feminist journal, the *Dawn*.

In 1889 Leontine Cooper led a breakaway group from the Woman's Equal Franchise Association, which became known as the Queensland Woman's Suffrage League. Cooper was concerned that the women's suffrage movement should not be 'captured' by the Labor Party, and become subject to party politics. Leontine founded and served as inaugural president of the Brisbane Pioneer Club in 1899 which, like its London namesake, was a progressive women's club.

Details

Leontine Cooper was the eldest child born to Frenchman Jean Francois Buisson and his English wife Dorothea (nee Smithers). She spent her early life living in the inner-London precinct of Battersea, and then at seaside Brighton, and married her husband, Edward Cooper (a surveyor), in London in 1866. She arrived in Brisbane on the 'Royal Dane' in November 1871, and during the 1870s worked briefly as a school teacher at Chinaman's Creek (now Albany Creek), and subsequently Brisbane Girls' Grammar School, where she taught French.

During the 1880s and 1890s Cooper became a prominent Brisbane literary figure, serving on the influential Brisbane School of Arts committee, and playing an active role within the Brisbane Literary Circle, where she mixed with a number of leading social and political figures within colonial society. It was also during this period that Cooper emerged as a social justice and women's suffrage advocate. She was, for many years, a member of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty, and in 1891 served as Queensland Government appointee to the Shops and Factories Royal Commission.

Leontine Cooper does not appear to have been related to pioneering medical practitioner Lilian Cooper who arrived in Brisbane in 1891, and who was also a significant 19th and early 20th century Queensland feminist figure.

Published resources

Journal Article

'There is no question more perplexing at the present time and more frequently discussed than women's place in society', Jordan, Deborah, 2004,
http://www.emsah.uq.edu.au/awsr/Act_Centenary/articles/09_Jordan.doc

Only a Woman, Cooper, Leontine, 2004

Emma Miller and the campaign for women's suffrage in Queensland, 1894-1905, Young, Pam, 2002

Resource Section

Cooper, Leontine, 2008,
[http://www.austlit.edu.au/run?ex=ShowAgent&agentId=A\\$IQ](http://www.austlit.edu.au/run?ex=ShowAgent&agentId=A$IQ)

Leontine Cooper, Ferrier, Carole, 2005,
http://www.emsah.uq.edu.au/awsr/Act_Centenary/whoiswho.htm

Book Section

Women's Suffrage Struggles, Ferrier, Carole and Jordan, Deborah, 2004

Book

Woman suffrage in Australia : a gift or a struggle?, Oldfield, Audrey, 1992

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details

Lee Butterworth

Created 22 June 2009

Last modified 19 February 2019