Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0586

Downing, Cecilia

(1858 - 1952)

Born	18580113, Islington London England
Died	19520830, 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

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

1920 - 1932
Executive Member, Travellers’ Aid Society of Victoria

1911 - 1911
Founding superintendent of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s immigration department

1928 - 1936
Honorary Secretary, National Council of Women of Victoria

1906 - 1906
Joined the Collins Street Baptist Church

1932 - 1940

Junior Vice President, Travellers’ Aid Society of Victoria

1885 - 1885
Married John Downing, they had seven children

1907 - 1907
One of the government’s first child-probation officers

1935 - 1938
President of the Australian Baptist Women’s Board

1949 - 1951
President of the Federated Association of Australian Housewives

1912 - 1915
President of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union

1934 - 1943
President, Collins Street Baptist Women’s Guild

1940 - 1945
President, Federated Association of Australian Housewives

1938 - 1952
President, Housewives Association of Victoria

1944 - 1944
President, National Travellers’ Aid Society

1947 - 1947
President, National Travellers’ Aid Society

1941 - 1942
President, Travellers’ Aid Society of Victoria

1945 - 1945
President, Travellers’ Aid Society of Victoria

1909 - 1909
Recording secretary of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Victoria

1932 - 1941
Secretary, Baptist Women’s Association, Victoria

1917 - 1917
Vice-president of the Housewives’ Co-operative Association (later Housewives’ Association 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

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