

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0896

Colton, Mary

(1822 - 1898)

Born	18221206, London England
Died	18980728
Occupation	Philanthropist, Suffragist

Summary

Mary Colton, née Cutting, arrived in South Australia from London in 1839. She was closely associated with the South Australian Boarding out Society and the Adelaide Children's Hospital. In 1879 she formed a city club for young women which became the Young Women's Christian Association in 1884. She served as president until her death in 1898. She also worked with Mary Lee and others to form the South Australian Women's Suffrage League and became its president in 1892.

Details

Mary Colton, née Cutting, was born in London, December 1822 to Hannah and Samuel Cutting. In 1839 she emigrated to South Australia with her newly widowed father and in 1844 she married John Blackler Colton. Between 1848 and 1865 she bore nine children, several of whom died in infancy. Her husband became Mayor of Adelaide (1874-75, a Member of Parliament (1862-1887) and twice Premier of South Australia. Both of them shared a keen interest in the well-being of society. They worked together in the Benevolent and Strangers' Friend Society and in organisations for the blind, deaf and dumb. Understanding the situation for poor people in the city, Mary Colton worked to house elderly women by joining a cottage homes committee in 1871 and later, the Lady Kintore Cottage Homes Trust. She was one of the principal founders of the Adelaide Children's Hospital in 1876, an organisation she served for the rest of her life. In 1879, concerned at the problems faced by young women, she began a city club and in 1880 they were housed in the Pirie Street Wesleyan Methodist Church in Adelaide. In 1884 it expanded to become the Young Women's Christian Association affiliated with its international counterparts. She remained its president until her death. An indefatigable worker she also worked on the Boarding-Out Society with Catherine Helen Spence and others concerned with the plight of orphaned and neglected children. It was through membership with the Ladies' Committee of the Social Purity Society that Mary Colton became involved in the campaign for women's suffrage. Recognising the urgent need for suffrage after being involved in the campaign to raise the age of consent to sixteen in 1885, Mary Colton joined with Mary Lee to organise the South Australian Women's Suffrage League in July 1888. Other members included Rosetta Birks, Elizabeth Nicholls, Serena Thorne Lake, Augusta Zadow and the League was later supported by Catherine Helen Spence. In 1892, Lady Mary Colton became president of the League. As a member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union she was able to forge links with between it and the League which greatly assisted the suffrage campaign. During this incredibly busy period, she also found time for other duties, becoming foundation president of the Women's Auxiliary of Foreign Missions in 1893. Mary Colton continued her rigorous schedule of work until her illness and subsequent death on 28 July 1898.

Published resources

Book Section

Mary Colton (nee Cutting), 2001

Mary Colton, Jones, Helen, [1988]

Two Englishwomen, Miss Emma Robarts and Lady Kinnaird, laid the foundations of the world's largest international women's movement in 1855. In 1877 they named it the Young Women's Christian Association. The South Australian story of the YWCA is told by Lola Bray., Bray, Lola, 1986

Book

In her own name : women in South Australian history, Jones, Helen, 1926-, 1986

Edited Book

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

<https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20071105022623/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/78644/20071105-1315/www.200australianwo>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Resource Section

Colton, Mary (1822 - 1898), Jones, Helen, 2006,

<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/AS10093b.htm>

Archival resources

State Library of South Australia

[Young Women's Christian Association of Adelaide : SUMMARY RECORD](#)

[Woman's Christian Temperance Union of South Australia : SUMMARY RECORD](#)

Author Details

Robin Secomb

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