

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5971

Driver, Ada Annie

(1868 - 1954)

Born 18681112, Queensland Australia

Died 19541231

Occupation Photographer

Summary

Ada Driver was one of the most successful woman photographers working in Brisbane in the early twentieth century. She owned her own studio, producing high-class portraiture and illustrative work. Driver used the latest processes, adding artistic colouring to produce soft-toned photographs, as well as producing images for magic lantern slides and stereoscopic photographs.

Details

Ada Driver was considered one of the most successful woman photographers working in Brisbane in the early twentieth century. She owned her own studio and was known for her high-class portraiture and illustrative work.

Driver was born into a large family of eight children on 12 November 1868 in Queensland. Her father was Charles Driver, who had worked as a cane cutter but then opened a shop, and her mother was Harriett Howe. Driver was trained by Poul C. Poulsen, a Danish-born photographer who was the most prominent photographer in Queensland at the turn of the century. He had arrived in Sydney in 1876 and moved to Queensland in 1882, setting up a studio in Brisbane at 7 Queen Street in 1885. Although known today for his scenes of Queensland's early development, his studio also produced many portraits and it was in this photographic genre that Driver was trained.

In 1906 when Driver was in her late thirties, she established her own studio at 51 Queen Street, which she called Miss Driver's Studio. She placed advertisements in *The Brisbane Courier* highlighting her studio's use of 'the latest processes.' She added that 'artistic colouring to life and other special features are obtained. A speciality is made of postcards and children's portraits. A special department for the sale of artistic postcards has also been opened' (*The Brisbane Courier* 12 Aug 1907).

Her work was soon in high demand as a result of the praise she received from the press. For example, *The Brisbane Courier* wrote that her photographs are 'noted for a softness of tone, a fine finish, and delicate shading' (Dec 1907). As a result of her success she was able to employ studio assistants, most of whom were women. She was known for 'playing the violin [in the studio with these women] during the lunch breaks' (Kerr 396). Among her staff were her sister Lucy (who took over the Ada Driver Studios in Fortitude Valley) and the photographer Elsie Lambton, whom she trained.

Driver's work was published in a number of Queensland newspapers including *The Brisbane Courier*, *The Week*, *The Queenslander* and *The Telegraph*, all of which featured her portrait shots as well as some of her illustrative pieces. In addition to portrait work Driver was attributed with producing a number of magic lantern slides and stereoscopic photographs that were bequeathed to the State Library of Queensland.

On the 31 December 1913, Driver, who was aged 45, married William Ellis Evans, the Queensland manager of Kodak; they did not have any children. The fact that there are no known works by her after this date suggests that she may have retired at this point in her career, although her studio as such continued to operate until 1919.

Collections

Coffs Harbour Regional Museum

John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

Collection of family photographs, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

Powerhouse Museum

Events

1906 - 1913

Active as a professional photographer

Published resources

Book

Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

Newspaper Article

Ada Driver, 1911,

<http://nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/176685486>

The Ada Driver Studio, 1907,

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article19396492>

Miss Ada Driver's Studio, 1907,

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article19386920>

Author Details

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

Created 28 September 2016

Last modified 2 November 2016