The Australian
Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6030

Andrews, Caroline

(1847 - 1925)

Born	18470816, Frimsley Hampshire England
Died	19250801, MorningtonMornington Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Boarding house keeper, Homemaker, Mother

Summary

Caroline Andrews came to public notice in 1900, when she took her husband to court in Albany, Western Australia, and won a judicial separation with maintenance for their children. The case was heard under an 1896 act which provided that judicial separation was summarily available to a woman whose husband had been convicted of assault against her. A close reading of the court records suggests that she provoked her husband's assault in order to win the judicial separation. Her aim was to prevent him from returning to England with the profits of their joint business ventures, without making provision for his children.

Recent biographical projects have tended to focus on leading women whose activities had some impact on politics or society. Caroline Edwards' work was always within the frame of family, whether in family businesses or in care for her 13 children. The wealth of online resources now available for family history research makes it possible to tell the stories of women like Caroline Edwards whose victories and defeats were mostly private.

Details

Caroline Andrews was born in Frimsley, a small town in Hampshire on the coach-road between London and Southampton, where her father, John Thick, owned a hotel. He was born near Frimsley to a farming family, but somehow acquired enough capital to be living in London and styling himself a ‘gentleman’ when he married Caroline’s mother, Caroline Lucas, in 1845. Caroline Lucas described herself as a servant, and her father as a post-chaise driver. John Thick was a widower, 16 years her senior. She bore John Thick 11 children, of whom Caroline was the eldest. Caroline Andrews was to repeat some of the patterns of her mother’s life.

When Caroline Thick married Edward Andrews in March 1865 she was 17 years old and he was 29. They married in haste, by licence in London; Edward was contracted to sail to Perth as warder on a convict ship. Caroline’s father John was present and signed as a witness.

Edward Andrew’s mother’s family were chapel people from in and around Godshill on the Isle of Wight. His father Joel Andrews worked as a post office messenger; in 1848 he was appointed ‘messenger from Romsey to Sherfield Hatchett on the recommendation of Viscountess Palmerston’. Edward was the youngest of his parents’ children. After his father’s death in 1858 he continued to live with his widowed mother Thirza; the 1861 census shows them in Eling, Hampshire, just outside Southampton. His mother died in 1864.

A son remembered that Edward Andrews trained in the Royal Navy as carpenter and shipwright, and these were skills that he practiced in later life. In the 1861 census he is listed as a police constable, and on his marriage licence in 1865 as a ‘Warder in the civil service’. In May 1865 he set sail from Portland as warder on the convict ship Racehorse.

The appointment put the 29-year old Edward in charge of 278 convicts and 50 pensioner guards, retired military men who were mostly a good ten years older than he was. The ship’s manifest also lists 31 pensioners’ wives, 78 children, and the seventeen year-old Caroline Edwards.

After the Racehorse docked in Fremantle in August 1865, Edward Andrews was sent with a contingent of convicts to upgrade the track that ran from Perth to Albany. Caroline and the families of some of the pensioner guards were shipped to Albany on a small coastal vessel which in family folklore took six weeks to arrive, having been blown about 60 kilometers past their destination.

Caroline travelled by bullock cart to join her husband at his work-camp about 40 miles along the Perth Road. When work was completed on the track Andrews took up a farm outside Albany, working it with convict labour, and Caroline’s first child was born here in 1868. In the next 10 years she gave birth to 5 more children.

Farming did not suit Edward Andrews. In the early years he did various building jobs, including reroofing the Anglican church, before settling in to a position as overseer at the P.& O. coaling station. When that operation closed in 1877, P. & O. paid for the family’s relocation to Adelaide, where Andrews went into business as a green-grocer and fruiterer.

Caroline gave birth to 4 more children in Adelaide, but lost her 2 eldest sons. In February 1879 Albert Andrews aged 11 and Arthur Andrews aged 9 drowned in the River Torrens in Adelaide while wagging it from school. Edward Andrews told the inquest that only the day before the accident his wife had forbidden the boys to bathe in the river, knowing they could not swim.

By 1886 the family was back in Perth, having prospered sufficiently to establish ‘a superior boarding house’. Caroline ran this business, often in her husband’s absence, and bore 3 more children, 13 in all. Andrews tried a range of other ventures including a butcher’s shop, a bakery, and a general store and a newsagency, together with trading in local goods such as kangaroo skins. He was a constant applicant for council and government tenders, from small construction jobs to supplying bread for the military. He invested the profits in the purchase of small lots of land and cottages to rent.

In 1889 he took 2 of his sons, 14 year-old Frederick and 13 year-old Thomas, to collect salt on Middle Island, an uninhabited island off the South coast. Thomas’ reminiscences, held in the Battye Library in Perth, tell how his father returned to Albany with a sample of salt ‘to test the market’, leaving the boys to keep working on their own. It was 5 months before he came back. In his absence the well they dug for drinking water was slowly contaminated by salt, so slowly that the boys did not realise why they were falling sick. If Caroline had not asked a party of sealers to visit the boys and check on their welfare they well may have died.

In 1897 Caroline Edwards inherited £470, a substantial legacy. She told the court that the money came from her father’s estate. It probably came via her mother. After John Thick’s death in 1877, Caroline Thick took possession of a group of cottages and apparently lived on the rents until her death in 1897. Caroline Edwards used the legacy to buy property in Albany in her own name, a house and 2 cottages.

In 1897 her husband ‘turned out’ his three eldest sons and forbade his wife and daughters to see them. Caroline continued to support her sons. Edward Andrews was infuriated because, in his words, ‘his wife persisted in succouring the elder boys who were able to keep themselves, at [his] expense’.

Late in 1899 one of the older boys was lying ill with influenza in a boarding house. Andrews told his wife that ‘if she went to see the boy or gave him anything she would have to leave home’. Influenza was ‘an infectious disease, it might do his

business harm'. Fear of an influenza pandemic was rife in Australia at this time. Caroline defied him, going to care for her son and leaving home and husband the same evening, taking with her the 3 youngest children.

Caroline Edwards put up the cottages for rent, and opened a boarding house in competition with her husband. She told the magistrate's court in November 1900 that 'Her husband had told her during the 12 months that he did not want her back. He only wanted to visit her occasionally, and that she would not allow.' For his part, Edward Andrews claimed that at first he tried to 'heal the breach between them', but when he realized 'they could not make it up, he decided to sell his business and get out of her way. He wanted to go away because he felt he could not trust himself in her presence'.

In mid 1900 Edward Andrews put up his properties and businesses for sale, and announced his intention to return to England. Caroline asked him for £300 to raise the youngest children. He refused.

On Monday 26 November 1900 Edward Andrews was charged at the Albany Police Court with aggravated assault on his wife. Caroline Edwards told the court that on the evening of previous Wednesday she visited her husband, accompanied by her daughter Adelaide. She said in evidence that 'her husband would not speak until the girls had left the room. She and the girls were afraid, but the defendant said he would not hurt her. They had been talking a few minutes with the door shut when her husband rose from the chair and struck her in the face while she was sitting down knocking her head against the wall. He struck her repeatedly and she fell to the ground where he kicked her. Her daughter came to her assistance and helped her out'. Edward Andrews did not deny the assault.

On Wednesday 28 November Caroline Andrews again brought her husband before the Police Court, seeking an order for judicial separation, and maintenance and custody of her children. She made the application under the Summary Jurisdiction (Married Women) Act of 1896, which provided that any woman whose husband was convicted of assault against her could summarily be awarded such an order. Edward Andrews did not contest the application, and his wife was awarded a judicial separation with 10s. a week maintenance.

The award was a triumph for Caroline Edwards and her family. They celebrated with a group portrait: Caroline with her eleven living children, plus several grandchildren.

Edward Andrews died in England in 1907. He must have come to a legal and financial agreement with his wife before leaving Western Australia. Caroline continued for some years as a boarding house keeper, interspersed with periods of living with children and grandchildren. The last years of her life were spent at Mornington Mills in the south-west of the state, with the family of her eldest daughter, another Caroline who went by the name of Nell. She died at Mornington in 1925.

Published resources

Article
Marital Separation and Family Heroines, Quartly, Marian, 2016,
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Report
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https://www.slp.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_9909_homepage.html

Newspaper Article
Local News: Aggravated Assault, 1900,
http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/69919307

A Heartless Father and Husband: Andrews V. Andrews, 1900,
http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/69919331

Inquest at the Destitute Asylum, 1879,
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Created 30 November 2016
Last modified 30 November 2016