Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0121

Coffey, Essie

(1942 - 1998)

Born	19420101, Near Goodooga Queensland Australia
Died	19980103, Brewarrina New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Actor, Community worker, Filmmaker, Singer

Summary

Essie Coffey was a Muruwari woman born in southern Queensland. She was co-founder of the Western Aboriginal Legal Service and served on a number of government bodies and Aboriginal community organisations.

Details

Born at Essiena Goodgabah in southern Queensland, Essie Coffey and her family were fortunate to avoid forced relocation to a reserve. Instead they lived on the move, following seasonal rural work.

Coffey went on to be co-founder of the Western Aboriginal Legal Service and the Aboriginal Heritage and Cultural Museum in Brewarrina, serving on several government bodies and Aboriginal community organisations including the Aboriginal Lands Trust and the Aboriginal Advisory Council. She was an inaugural member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Coffey was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) on 10 June 1985, for service to the Aboriginal Community. She was nominated for an MBE but refused it, explaining “I knocked the MBE back because I’m not a member of the British Empire”.

With Martha Ansara, Coffey made the award-winning film *My survival as an Aboriginal* (1978), which she gave to Queen Elizabeth II as a gift at the opening of Australia’s new Parliament House in 1988. The sequel, *My Life As I Live It*, was released in 1993. Coffey also appeared in the film ‘Backroads’.

Essie Coffey and her husband, Doc, had 18 children, 10 of whom were adopted.

Published resources

Edited Book
The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia : Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, society and culture, Horton, David, 1994

Newspaper Article
Building bridges of hope for blacks, Plater, Diana, 1988

Resource Section
Memorial to a great woman,
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/car/2000/4/wtpage28.htm

Australia looses Essie Coffey, Bush Queen of Brewarrina, 1998,
http://www.atsic.gov.au/News_Room/ATSIC_News/March_1998/bush_queen.asp

Book
My life as I live it [videorecording], Coffey, Essie, Ansara, Martha and Guyatt, Kit, 1993

My survival as an Aboriginal [videorecording], Coffey, Essie et al, 1979

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
Earthworks Poster Collective silkscreen posters, 1974-1980

Ros Bowden - interviews conducted for radio programs and documentaries, ca.1975 - 1989

National Film and Sound Archive
My Life As I live It

Big Girls Don't Cry

My Survival As An Aboriginal : [NFSA Restores]

[Coffey, Essie : Interviewed by Martha Ansara, 1992 : Oral History]

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection
Essie Coffey interviewed by Hazel de Berg in the Hazel de Berg collection [sound recording]

National Library of Australia
[Biographical cuttings on Essie Coffey, Aboriginal activist and country and western singer, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Author Details
Clare Land

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