**Entry type:** Person
**Entry ID:** PR00351

# Smith, Celia

(1911 - 1980)

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| **Born** | 19110324, Beaudesert Queensland Australia |
| **Died** | 19801223, Brisbane Queensland Australia |
| **Occupation** | Aboriginal rights activist, Community worker |

## Summary

Celia Smith was one of the unsung heroes of the early Aboriginal rights movement, helping hundreds obtain their social welfare rights, taking up their cases with politicians and bureaucrats. As an early member of the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (QCAATSI), Celia took over from poet Kath Walker as its honorary secretary. She was also a delegate to its federal counterpart, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI).

From 1970 Celia wrote a regular column in the QCAATSI monthly newsletter in which she discussed issues of land rights, conditions on reserves, wages, and housing for Aborigines. She campaigned vigorously for a ‘yes’ vote in the successful 1967 referendum to empower the commonwealth government to legislate on Aboriginal affairs. She was often ‘on duty’ at the ‘tent embassy’ set up in 1974 at King George Square, Brisbane, to publicise the need for more Aboriginal housing in the city and to protest against the State’s repressive Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander Affair Act in 1965. In the 1970s Celia belonged to the Queensland branch of the Union of Australian Women, and kept the organisation informed of matters affecting Aborigines.

This entry has been made in accordance with the appropriate family protocols.

## Details

Celia Hatton was one of five children of Aboriginal parents William ‘Pompey’ Hatton, an initiated man, and his wife Dorothy ‘Dolly’ Tate, one of the Stolen Generation. Dolly was taken from her family in Tambo when only five years old to be trained as a domestic in a Brisbane Catholic girls school. Celia grew up in Dalby and at 18 gave birth to Charles, the son of Charles Banks, however they never married. In 1932 she married Ernie Smith and the couple moved to Toowoomba, a town steeped in racism at that time. Celia and Ernie separated after 8 years of marriage, leaving Celia to raise four children on her own.

Celia and the children moved into a house in Fortitude Valley, where Celia eked out a living on a deserted wife’s pension, supplementing her income with sewing. Well loved and widely known, ‘Aunty’ Celia helped the growing urban Aboriginal community in practical ways with fundraising, food, shelter and clothing. Celia Smith spent a lifetime giving and her home was always open to those in need. She died of renal failure in Brisbane on Christmas Eve 1980.

## Published resources

**Book**
Talking about Celia: community and family memories of Celia Smith, Bell, Jeanie, 1997

**Book Section**
Celia Smith (1912 - 1980): Aboriginal rights activist, Grant, Heather, 2005

**Resource**
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

**Newspaper Article**
Sunday Mail: 28 December 1980, 1980

**Resource Section**
Smith, Cecilia (1911-1981), Best, Ysola, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160318b.htm

## Archival resources

**National Library of Australia**
U.A.W. news / Union of Australian Women

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