

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00401

Dare, Zara

(1886 - 1965)

Born 18860523, Shoalhaven New South Wales Australia

Died 19651001, Scarborough Queensland Australia

Occupation Missionary, Policewoman

Summary

Zara Dare was 45 years-old when she applied for a position as a Queensland police officer. She had previously worked in China for the Salvation Army and, upon returning to Australia, she was an organiser of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

Zara and her colleague, Ellen O'Donnell, commenced at the Roma Street Police Station in 1931. Neither of the women was sworn in and therefore did not receive the same pay allowances and privileges (including superannuation) as male officers. Zara's work within the police force was restricted to looking after lost children, escorting female prisoners, and working with victims of domestic and sexual violence. Nine years after joining the police force, Zara retired to marry. It was not until 1965 that Queensland police women were officially sworn in and therefore entitled to some of the privileges enjoyed by men.

Details

The National Council of Women of Queensland (NCWQ) in 1911 drew attention to the need for women and girls in Queensland to be better served in matters of crime. There were no female police officers in Australia at the time and the NCWQ called for women, experienced and educated in social work, to be given the status of police officers. The appointment of two female police in New South Wales in 1915 was not enough to encourage the Queensland Commissioner of Police William Cahill to follow suit. By 1917 Queensland was the only state without female police. Newspapers and community groups began asking why. The Queensland Country Women's Association (QCWA), the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, James Duhig, the NCWQ and the Queensland Women's Electoral League (QWEL) all called for the appointment of women in policing.

It was not until Irene Longman was elected to State Parliament in 1929 that the opposition to female police began to be broken down. As past president of the NCWQ and a member of the QWEL, Irene made a submission to cabinet in 1930, outlining the necessity for women to handle sensitive cases such as children, girls and women who have been involved in sexual assault cases. Although the decision was not unanimous, Cabinet consented to the appointment of women in the police force.

Zara Dare, along with Ellen O'Donnell, accepted the offer of positions and the women were based at the Roma Street police station. When the time came to review their appointments and make them permanent, the Police commissioner William Ryan stated that they were well paid for the job they were doing, and although there was nothing under the *Police Act* 1898 to stop them from being sworn in, he considered that their swearing in would reduce the number of male police constables by two. Zara kept her job by agreeing not to be sworn in. She never received the pay allowances and privileges of her fellow police, nor superannuation.

The NCWQ continued to lobby to have Zara and Ellen made permanent, but Police Commissioner Ryan made it clear that if they were not satisfied, they were free to resign at any time. When Zara resigned from the police force to marry, the *Queensland Times* noted her departure with a small article, headlined "Policewoman Wanted". A women's police unit, attached to the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB), was established soon after Zara's resignation.

Published resources

Resource

50 Firsts: Queensland Policewomen at Work, Queensland State Archives, 2009,
http://queenslandfirsts.org/01_cms/details.asp?ID=39

Zara Dare (1886 - 1965), Grant, Heather, 2009,
<http://www.women.qld.gov.au/q150/1930/index.html#item-zara-dare>

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book Section

Ellen O'Donnell and Zara Dare: Queensland's first policewomen, Grant, Heather, 2005

Book

Journey to equality: an illustrated history of women in the Queensland Police, Prenzler, Tim, Jones, Lisa, Ronken, Carol, 2001

Archival resources

Queensland State Archives

[Police Service File](#)

Author Details

Lee Butterworth

Created 22 June 2009

Last modified 3 May 2026