Entry type: Person
Entry ID: PR00479

McConnel, May Jordan

(1860 - 1929)

Born	18600906, ? Queensland Australia
Died	19290428, ? California United States of America
Occupation	Nurse, Suffragist, Teacher, Union organiser

Summary

May Jordan McConnel was the first paid female union organiser in Queensland, elected Secretary of the newly-formed Tailoresses Union on 5 August 1890. The Brisbane Women's Union met for the first time on 27 August 1890 and discussions focused on securing fair wages, fair hours and equitable conditions in the workplace for women. In Brisbane on 17 December 1893, May delivered an address to suffrage supporters, celebrating New Zealand women's success in attaining the right to vote. In February 1894, a public meeting was held and the Woman's Equal Franchise Association, a strong supporter of women's suffrage, was founded. May was elected as Treasurer. In 1910, the McConnel family left Brisbane for the United States, leaving their Indooroopilly house, 'Robgill', as a gift to Queensland. This house became the Methodist Church's first institutionalised home for orphans in the state – the original Queen Alexander Home for Children. The family never returned to Australia and May died in California in 1929.

Details

Mary Emma (May) Jordan was the eldest daughter of Henry Jordan, a medical missionary and dentist who became one of Queensland's first parliamentarians. May was qualified in both teaching and nursing. She taught at Petrie Terrace and South Brisbane state schools, both of which were attended by children from working class families. May's decision to fight for the rights of the working class is thought to have emanated from her teaching experiences.

May was the driving force behind the formation of the Brisbane Women's Union. It was founded among growing outrage over unsatisfactory working women's conditions and as a result of the intense lobbying of high profile supporters such as Emma Miller and William Lane, editor of the *Worker* newspaper. Unionism was a new concept and the advantages of fighting as a group, as opposed to one-on-one, was stressed to working women.

Due to increased criticisms of unsafe workplaces and poor treatment of workers, the Queensland Government called a *Royal Commission into Shops, Factories and Workshops*. May, now married, was included as a representative on the commission. The commission's report, of which May was a signatory, put forward a number of recommendations, but sadly no action was taken as far as implementation until 1896.

May married into the pioneering McConnel family of Cressbroke on 24 December 1890. The McConnel family moved to the United States, relocated to England, and then returned to California during World War I. May spent the rest of her life in California.

Published resources

Book Section
May Jordan McConnel (1860-1929), Grant, Heather, 2005

Resource Section
May Jordan McConnel (1860 – 1929), Grant, Heather, 2009,
http://www.women.qld.gov.au/q150/1890/index.html#item-may-mcconnel

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

John Oxley Library, Manuscripts and Business Records Collection
May Emma McConnel (nee Jordan)

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Author Details
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