



Caroline Chisholm A Sainly Model

reducing the squatters' powerful hold and allowing small farms. Her advocacy consisted mainly of writing letters to newspapers and speaking at meetings. It was, in essence, involvement in politics. She also proposed, but did not develop or complete, plans to meet social needs she had identified in Melbourne, affordable boarding houses for young women being one of them.

The onset of a kidney disease in 1857 badly impaired Mrs Chisholm's health, and she moved with her husband and the younger children from Melbourne to Kyneton, where the two older sons already ran a store. When relocation to Sydney was suggested for medical reasons, she and Archibald and the younger children went there in early 1858. Her health and the family's financial situation were in a dire way, though both improved modestly over 1859. Mrs Chisholm returned to lecturing on the familiar topics of emigration and promotion of family life, but her other public contributions were more overtly political. She again advocated easier access to land, to allow more families to have small farms, albeit with sharper criticism of the squatters' opposition, and began to advocate shorter hours of opening for shops, so to enhance family life for shop workers. To assist the family's finances and to educate her own daughters, Mrs Chisholm established a fee-paying school in mid 1862 in Newtown, which was continued at Tempe, possibly into 1864. With her health worsening, she slowed and then ceased public pursuits; and, in mid 1866, she left for England, Archibald and the three younger children having gone ahead.

Caroline and Archibald lived out their remaining years quietly and privately and in relative poverty. They carried the sadness, too, of two adult sons predeceasing them and, earlier, of three of their nine children having died as infants or soon after birth. They had never owned their own home, and they did not amass savings or spend on their comfort the money Archibald earned or that otherwise came to them. Rather, while raising and educating their children and meeting their own living costs, they returned the major share to the Lord through their good works. Caroline Chisholm died in London on 25 March, 1877, having been bedridden for the last few years, and Archibald died five months later. They lacked wealth and material possessions but left a legacy of reformed and changed lives, united families, happy homes and, especially for Caroline, a saintly model of Christian commitment and untiring, resourceful service.

For further information, refer to www.mrschisholm.com and Rodney Stinson's *Unfeigned Love: Historical Accounts of Caroline Chisholm and Her Work*, a reference book published in 2008. This pamphlet is based on a chapter in *See, Judge, Act: Caroline Chisholm's Lay Apostolate*, a resource booklet published in May, 2009.

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On 30 May, 1808 Caroline Jones was born in Northampton, England. She was a likeable, inquisitive and sometimes serious child who became, like her parents, a faithful Anglican who reached out to those in need locally and had a keen interest in the wider world. A French émigré priest, rescued from a mob by Caroline's father, stayed with the family for a time. He was an influence, she later said, in her decision to enter the Catholic Church, but the proximate cause for that was her marriage in 1830 to Archibald Chisholm, a Catholic Scot, thirteen years her senior and a Captain in the East India Company Army.

Before Caroline accepted Archibald's marriage proposal, she sent him away for a month to think over the condition that he agree to her undertaking the public charitable work which she understood to be her special vocation. Archibald agreed, and he fully co-operated with the work throughout their married life. Caroline's special vocation began in 1834 in Madras, where she started the Female School of Industry for orphaned and illegitimate daughters of British soldiers and local women. She successfully ran it for four years, the latter years when she had two children. Archibald's failing health took them on sick leave to Australia.



The Chisholms arrived in Sydney at the end of 1838. They soon recognized the problems facing many assisted emigrants in the Colony. In particular, unscrupulous older males and brothel proprietors preyed on single emigrant girls, going aboard newly arrived ships and intercepting young women in the township. Mrs Chisholm saw that reliable information, accommodation and worthwhile employment, in addition to a government ban, were essential if those practices were to be stopped.

Caroline Chisholm: portrait by Thomas Fairland (1804-1852). Reproduced with the permission of The National Library of Australia. nla.pic.an9267591

Assisted by Archibald, she was able to help an appreciable number of individuals by providing shelter in the family's home, obtaining work for young female emigrants, and in other ways. When Archibald returned to his regiment in early 1840, Mrs Chisholm increased her private efforts to assist disadvantaged and poor emigrants. However, she judged that something more organized was necessary, especially as large numbers of new emigrants were arriving into an already oversupplied labour market.

She lobbied the Governor and the newspapers and attempted to galvanize general support during 1841, but often met inertia and sometimes opposition, including from fellow Catholics who thought she should only look after Catholics. Mrs Chisholm was determined to work "for the good of all". In her Easter vow of 1841, before the high altar at the old St Mary's Cathedral, she dedicated herself to helping poor emigrant girls, particularly those being approached by predatory men. She vowed "to know neither country nor creed, but to try and serve all justly and impartially". Finally, in October, 1841, she was able to establish the Female Immigrants' Home in Bent Street, Sydney. It provided accommodation and an employment registry. She obtained favourable wages and conditions for young female job seekers, unemployed males and family groups, and made more than a thousand contracts between masters and servants (only a handful of which were ever challenged in court). From the Home, Mrs Chisholm set out on her many bush-journeys by dray to the inland districts and by steamer to the more distant, or less accessible, coastal areas [refer to map on www.mrschisholm.com].

By the end of 1842, the crisis in accommodation and unemployment had eased, and the Home was closed. Mrs Chisholm reported on its operation and what else should be done in her *Female Immigration Considered* book. She also described in the book her richly Christian motivation and faith [the book is reproduced in the recently published *Unfeigned Love*]. With the book and firm newspaper support, she convinced the Governor, Sir George Gipps, to reform the reception arrangements for new emigrants, not just those who were young and female, and to improve dispersal arrangements for those seeking work in the country, the latter benefiting from accurate labour market information and the creation of district depots. Much was achieved in 1843 and 1844. Over the course of 1845, Mrs Chisholm and the recently returned Archibald gathered hundreds of "Voluntary Information" statements, which were later used to promote the advantages of emigration for the less well-off and those with limited prospects in England, Ireland and Scotland. They also obtained information from illiterate ex-convicts and bounty emigrants that helped in locating separated wives, children and aged family members in the old countries and initiating their re-union in Australia. From 1841 to 1845 Mrs Chisholm settled 11,000 people, a third of all assisted emigrants in the period.

1846 to 1854, the third phase of Mrs Chisholm's public charitable work, was mainly directed at achieving social reforms and structural changes in the emigration field, but attention was still given to assisting numerous individuals and families wanting to migrate for a better life. Mrs Chisholm was based in London for all of that time, while Archibald was there until early 1851. He then returned to Australia as an agent for the Family Colonisation Loan Society, which had been formed at Mrs Chisholm's instigation in 1849. Intending emigrants or their colonial relations gave their savings to the society, which lent them the rest of the passage cost. Loans were repaid in installments to the Australian agents. This form of family-based, mutual-help emigration was a real boon, and a related innovation was having specific families accept responsibility for the care of specific young females during the voyage and for a time after embarkation. Following Mrs Chisholm's advocacy, groups of wives and children separated by transportation and the bounty system of migration had been reunited, as planned.

In addition to using her London home as an information centre for emigration, she met and advised many thousands of prospective emigrants and answered, with her husband and sometimes their older children, an average of 140 letters a day. Mrs Chisholm also advocated ending transportation as a plank of the criminal law, criticism of the Wakefield land system, the high cost of bank remittances from Australia, inadequate safety provisions, accommodation and medical care for emigrants aboard ship, and unaffordable postal rates between overseas colonies and the United Kingdom. For almost all of these, her advocacy was influential – for example, the Passenger Act of 1852 came into law, the Coutts & Co. bank accepted from 1852 the Society's remittances for a fair fee, and the ocean postage rate was (later) reduced.

The fourth, and final, phase of Mrs Chisholm's public undertakings occurred from 1854 to 1866, but there was a tapering off a few years into this period. In fact, Margaret Kiddle, one of her main biographers, suggests that Mrs Chisholm, once in Melbourne, "probably intended, as her husband hoped, to retire from public life . . . but the troubles of the gold diggers and her own inclinations proved too much for her" [cf. *Caroline Chisholm*, page 202]. By the end of 1854, she had visited the goldfields in Victoria and soon determined on what was required. At her instigation, a special society was established. It organized government funding for a series of depots – called shelter sheds or shake-downs – that were built at distances of a day's march between Melbourne and Castlemaine. These provided economical food and lodging for families and others travelling to the goldfields or to settle inland. Mrs Chisholm's desire was to have families settle on their own, away from cities, and to that end she was among those who campaigned for the government to "Unlock the Lands!" by