ABSTRACT

Archibald Meston invites attention as a leading contributor to the Aboriginal Protection Act of 1897, the law which regulated Queensland’s indigenous people into the 1970s. As Southern Protector from 1897 to 1903 he helped to establish the system of reserves provided for by the Act. Meston had earlier worked as a sugar boiler and farm manager in northern New South Wales and southern Queensland. From 1878 to 1883 he represented Rosewood in a brief tumultuous career in State Parliament. Following editorial appointments with the Ipswich Observer, the Toowoomba Chronicle and the Townsville Herald, he came to Cairns early in 1882 as editor of the Cairns Chronicle. He was aged thirty-one and the father of a growing family. This was the beginning of a six-year tropical interlude in which he sought to further his career through regional politics and investments in the sugar industry, then undergoing its major expansion in the north. Meston’s public life in Cairns began promisingly when he led the lobbying to secure the rail connection to the Tableland for the Barron Valley route and was elected Chairman of the Divisional Board. His reputation languished soon afterwards, but revived again in the two years preceding his departure. However local rivalries and the community’s feeling that he was unreliable finally thwarted his hopes of returning to Parliament.

FULL TEXT:
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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.25120/etropic.2.1.2003.3445

REFBACKS
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