

## Crouch, Richard Armstrong (1868 - 1949)

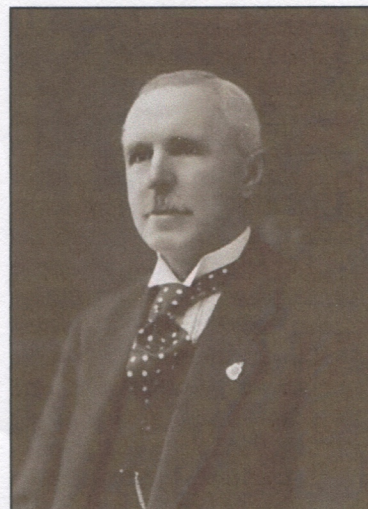
CROUCH, RICHARD ARMSTRONG (1868-1949), politician and soldier, was born on 19 June 1868 at Ballarat East, Victoria, son of George Crouch, miner, storekeeper and later a wealthy boot-retailer from Tottenham, London, and his wife Selina Durham, née Marks, from Aberdeen, Scotland. The family was Congregationalist. Richard, from the age of 6, attended Mount Pleasant State School under the brilliant headmastership of W. H. Nicholls. In 1885 his father moved the family to Melbourne. In 1887 Richard began the two-year articled clerks' course at the University of Melbourne, winning the Bowen Prize for an essay on economic co-operation in 1889. He was awarded the Supreme Court Judges' prize in 1891; next year he was admitted as a barrister and solicitor and commenced practice as a solicitor in the city. He was both a member of the burgeoning Australian Natives' Association and an executive member of the waning Imperial Federation League, but after 1893 he gave firm support to 'Advance Australia', the motto of the A.N.A.

At the first Federal election in 1901 Crouch as a Protectionist won the seat of Corio in the House of Representatives. Only 32, he was the youngest government member and was obliged to second the adoption of the address-in-reply. At this time he was a friend of Alfred Deakin. He retained his seat with good majorities in 1903 and 1906 but was defeated in April 1910 along with other supporters of Deakin. He had served briefly as a chairman of committees, gained recognition as a wit and a radical, and once was outspoken on the delicate matter of lavish allowances for the governor-general.

Crouch enthusiastically supported new trends in Australian defence policies. He had been commissioned in April 1892 in the 2nd Infantry Battalion. From July 1903 he was a captain in the 6th Australian Infantry Regiment and commanded the Prahran Infantry Militia. He approved of the Australian National Defence League which advocated compulsory military service and while overseas in 1911-12 contributed an important article on national service to the official British *Army Review* (1912). On his return to Australia his many articles on defence included warnings on the military might of Germany.

Crouch was promoted major in 1908 and in July 1912 commanded the 56th Infantry Battalion (Yarra Borderers). Promoted lieutenant-colonel in February 1913, on 16 March 1915 he was given command of the 22nd Battalion, Australian Imperial Force. The battalion landed at Gallipoli on 5 September 1915 but early in December Crouch was transferred to command the Base Camp at Mudros. He was compelled by illness to return to Australia in March 1916 and on 13 April his A.I.F. appointment was terminated.

Crouch, whose support for national service had stopped short of advocacy of compulsory overseas service, now set his mind to opposing conscription. As Victorian branch president of the Returned Soldiers' No-Conscription League he worked against W. M. Hughes during the referenda campaigns of 1916 and 1917. Encouraged by J. H. Scullin, he joined the Labor Party and in 1924 was chosen to represent Australia at the International Federation of Trade Unions Education Conference in Oxford. On his return he became an active leader of the Labor



Richard Armstrong Crouch (1868 - 1949), by Johnstone O'Shannessy & Falk, c1928, courtesy of National Library of Australia. nla.pic-an24081560.

Image Details



movement in Victoria. His presidential address to the 1928 Easter conference of the Victorian party was a plea for national unity and a restatement of the concept most dear to his heart, 'Australia for the Australians'.

Crouch won the Federal seat of Corangamite in October 1929 but lost it in the resounding defeat of Labor in 1931. He decided to forsake politics for philanthropy, travel, writing, and encouraging Australians to take a greater interest in their history. A member of the (Royal) Victorian Historical Society, he was an executive-member from 1926 to 1935, and until 1940 contributed articles to the society's journal. He wrote a largely autobiographical novel, *The Prime Minister*, published in 1937 under the pseudonym 'Richard Greenhill', but it was not a success.

In 1926 Crouch began a long and generous sequence of gifts to Ballarat institutions and sporting clubs. These included bequests to the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery for awards in memory of his father and sister: the George Crouch prize for oils and sculpture (1926) and the Minnie Crouch Prize for watercolours (1944). His most generous benefaction to the gallery was also in 1944 when he presented his superb collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts. At the Ballarat Botanical Gardens he initiated the avenue of sculptures of Australian prime ministers and bequeathed funds for maintaining the project.

In his later years Colonel Crouch lived with his sister Gertrude at Point Lonsdale, where his father had built a house in 1882. He never married. He died on 7 April 1949, leaving an estate valued for probate at £43,490, and was buried at Point Lonsdale.

### Select Bibliography

*Biblionews*, 3 (1969), no 3, 4 (1970), no 1; *Punch* (Melbourne), 4 Oct 1906; *Labor Call*, 28 May 1925; *Australian Worker*, 18 Dec 1929; *Ballarat Courier*, 9, 11 Apr 1949; *Geelong Advertiser*, 9, 11 Apr 1949.

**Author:** Austin McCallum

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