Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0433

Australian Women’s Army Service Association (NSW)

(1948 -)

Born	19480101, Sydney New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Ex-Armed services organisation

Summary

The Australian Women’s Army Service Association (NSW) was established in Sydney, New South Wales, in 1948 for the purpose of organising an Australian Women’s Army Service reunion. This became an annual event held at various venues and organised by a number of committees over the years.

Details

The Association was born of an informal meeting held in 1948 for the purpose of organising an Australian Women’s Army Service reunion. This became an annual event held at various venues and organised by a number of committees over the years.

In 1950 it was proposed that any profit accruing from the reunion should be used to establish a fund with a view to forming an AWAS Association. At the final meeting of the 1954 Reunion Committee, it was advised that the AWAS Association was now a registered charity organisation and in future would be known as AWAS Reunions (NSW). It would work on behalf of the Women’s Wing of the War Veterans’ Home.

By 1956, due to lack of interest, the Chief Secretary’s Department was advised that it was impossible to convene an Annual General Meeting and suggested that the registration of the AWAS Reunions (NSW) should no longer be continued, as it was not possible to abide by the Constitution originally submitted.

Nonetheless, the annual reunions continued and were well attended. On 19 February 1960, a meeting was held and a draft of a proposed new Constitution was read. It was decided to circulate copies at the 1960 Reunion and, at a meeting held the following year, it was resolved that the Constitution or Rules of the Association, as circulated, would become effective as from 17 February 1961.

The reunions continued each year at the Anthony Horderns Gallery. 1962 was a special year, being the 21st Anniversary of the formation of the Service, and this engendered much interest amongst those who served in the AWAS. Over 200 ladies had to be turned away from the reunion due to lack of space. A new venue was needed.

Collections were always held at the reunion and over the years many needy causes benefited from the money given. As a special effort to mark the 21st Anniversary, a tree planting ceremony was arranged. An Australian Gum – Lemon Eucalyptus, was planted in Hyde Park on the western side of the War Memorial by Miss Joyce Whitworth (an AWAS Senior Officer), in the presence of Lt-General Sir John Northcott. A suitable plaque was placed beside the tree.

Former members of the AWAS had been marching since 1946 in the Anzac Day March, and activities on this day had been organised by Mrs Amy Taylor. Each year more joined the ranks and soon Anzac Day became the second big event on the ex-AWAS calendar.

In 1965 the format for the Annual Reunion was changed from a buffet meal to a sit-down dinner. This was a year of special interest to the AWAS Association, bringing as it did the announcement that Mr (later Sir) Roden Cutler had been appointed Governor of New South Wales. The AWAS were particularly pleased, as the Governor’s wife – Lady Helen Cutler (née Miss Helen Morris), had been a member of their organisation. Congratulations and good wishes were sent, followed by a letter asking if Lady Cutler would accept Patronage of the Association and attend the Silver Anniversary Reunion on 28 October 1966. Both requests were accepted.

1967 saw the introduction of the AWAS Association badge. An amendment was passed this same year at the Annual General

Meeting, altering the Constitution to include the words “(New South Wales)” in the Association title.

In 1962 the word “Anniversary” was used for the first time because it was the 25th year since the formation of the Service. Each subsequent Reunion has been known as “… Anniversary Reunion”, the 30th being held in 1971.

At the Annual General Meeting held on 23 March 1972, Miss Joyce Whitworth stood down as President after 13 years in the Chair and a new executive was elected with Mrs Amy Taylor as President. On 4 September 1972 the AWAS Association (NSW) was registered under the Charitable Collections Act and received a new Certificate of Registration under the title of AWAS Association (NSW). A Welfare Trust Fund was approved with administrators to be the President, Secretary and Treasurer of the Association, with any two of these as signatories on all Trust Fund cheques.

A new President, Miss Joan Lethbridge, was elected in 1974. Plans went ahead for a new Banner to be ready for the 1975 Anzac Day march. Miss Lethbridge remained President for four years. In 1978 Mrs Amy Taylor was again elected President and still holds this position.

The AWAS Association (NSW) has gone from strength to strength over the years. This is mainly due to the hard working ladies who have served on the Executives and Committees. With the membership over the 1000 mark, the Association is the largest ex-Servicewomen’s organisation in NSW. The Association was a foundation member of the Council of Ex-Servicewomen’s Assns (NSW) and supported this organisation with the Building of “Friendship Court”, 12 units within the complex of the War Veterans’ Retirement Village at Narrabeen. The money that was raised came from all centres of the State.

The magazine *Khaki,* which is posted to all financial members, has become a very popular means of communication with members, particularly those in country areas. *Khaki* gives the members a chance to share in the activities of the Association.

Welfare is a very time consuming job and the Welfare Officer, with a good knowledge of the numerous and frequently changing pension systems, ably attends to those who seek help. As members grow older, the burden on the Welfare Department increases, but committee members assist with hospital visiting, while numerous fund raising efforts over the years and donations from members have ensured that any call for welfare could be met without financial worry. The Association was able to finance the publishing of *Women in Khaki,* a book written by a member of the AWAS about the Service.

Membership is growing as ex-Australian Women’s Army Servicewomen seek the fellowship of their own kind: this spirit of friendship, born during the service days, has never died.

Published resources

Newsletter
Khaki / Australian Women's Army Service Association (NSW), 1977-

Book
Khaki-clad and glad : 30 years after, A.W.A.S. Association (N.S.W.), [1971]

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of New South Wales
Copy photographic prints of the Australian Women's Army Service Association (New South Wales) activities during World War II

Private hands (These records may not be readily available)
Australian Women's Army Service Association (NSW)

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