

Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0787

The Country Women’s Association of the Northern Territory

(1961 -)

Born	19610101
Occupation	Lobby group

Summary

The Country Women’s Association of the Northern Territory is a non-sectarian, non-party-political, non-profit lobby group and service association working in the interests of women and children in rural areas. Although ostensibly non-party-political, in practice the group has tended to bolster conservative politics.

The Association was officially formed in 1961, although the first branch had been formed in Alice Springs in 1933, with branches in Tennant Creek, Darwin and Katherine following soon after. The southern branches were originally affiliated with the South Australian CWA, while those in Darwin and Katherine were connected with the Queensland CWA.

Archival Note: Since, prior to 1960, the Tennant Creek and Alice Springs Branches were managed by the South Australian CWA and the Darwin, and the Katherine and Darwin Branches were managed by the Queensland CWA, some records relating to these branches will be contained in the archives of those state organisations.

Details

The first branch of the CWA in the Northern Territory formed in Alice Springs in 1933. The branch was initiated by a meeting organised by Mrs J. A. Perkins, a member of the CWA of New South Wales. Mrs V. Carrington was elected as first president. Its early activities focussed on building up a library – with books and periodicals being sent out to members on distant stations. By 1936 they had also began handicraft instruction, leading to a weekly craft market by 1960. During WWII, like most other branches, energies were redirected towards supporting the war effort, through fund raising and supporting groups such as the Red Cross, the Australian Comforts Fund and Food for Britain. In 1947 they purchased a hall, which was also used for a range of community activities and briefly as a pre-school.

The main early activities of the Tennant Creek branch revolved around organising social activities – Christmas parties, dances, bridge evening and the annual children's fancy dress ball. During WWII they regularly organised entertainment and served refreshments to troops stationed in the area and raised fund to improve their accommodation. During the 1950s virtually every woman in town was a member of the group.

The Darwin Branch was formed in 1937 – although various individuals had been suggesting such a move for the previous decade. Its early activities included cooking and craft classes as well as fund raising stalls and raffles. Since almost all women and children were evacuated from Darwin soon after Japan entered the war, the branch ceased operations for the duration. In the postwar years the branch concentrated on philanthropic endeavours – supporting the leprosarium, visiting patients at the hospital, providing giving gifts of Aboriginal children. They also took an interest in issues relating to the lack of facilities in Darwin, particularly in the areas of health, education, housing and food supplies, as well as the need for welfare officers. In the 1950s the group concentrated more projects for its own members – particularly the building of rest rooms and organising social events and fundraisers. They also established the Outback Mothers Hostel in 1953 – for expectant mothers from remote areas to stay in town in close proximity to the hospital and to provide accommodation for rural women and children visiting or convalescing in Darwin.

The Katherine branch also formed in 1937. Despite the multiculturalism of the local population, almost all members were white. The major early achievements of the branch were the establishment of a free lending library and the organisation of an annual Christmas tree for children. They also organised numerous social events. Women and children were also evacuated from Katherine in 1942 and the CWA did not reform until 1948. Their first efforts then were directed at fund raising to build a rest room and hostel – which was not realised until 1956. Racial issues were of acute concern to the group in the 1950s – with letters being written asking that 'natives' be separated from 'whites' on trains and in hospitals and schools. They also opposed the employment of married women in government service.

The initiative to form a separate Northern Territory organisation came from the Darwin branch. This had been mooted since 1947, with periodic discussions among the existing CWA branches in the territory continuing throughout the 1950s, which were eventually successful in 1951.

Territory-wide, from 1960-1990, much of the Association's energy was taken up by property management. However, handicrafts were also promoted, and organisations concerned with children's welfare and education were particularly assisted – including schools, pre-schools and crèches as well as clubs such as the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. In the 1960s, considerable energy was devoted towards trying to recruit Aboriginal women, or to teach them domestic skills, with little success. Aboriginal women largely resisted these attempts at assimilation. The expansion of health services was also an issue of concern. Charitable activities too increased in the 1970s. Committees were also formed to investigate current issues – including child abuse, affirmative action, euthanasia, the environment and taxation. The writing of local histories has also featured prominently in the activities of members.

By 1970 membership was 450 in 11 branches. This however, declined to 250 by 1980 and 120 by 1990.

Published resources

Book

The Many Hats of Country Women: The Jubilee History of the Country Women's Association of Australia, Stevens-Chambers, Brenda, 1997

Getting things done : the Country Women's Association of Australia, Country Women's Association of Australia, 1986

Our First Forty Years: The South Australian Country Women's Association, Inc. Willunga Branch, 1947-1987, Young, Bertha, 1987

Country women : [history of the first seventy five years : the Queensland Country Women's Association], Pagliano, Muriel, 1998

Women in Isolation: A History of the Country Women's Association in the Northern Territory, 1933-1990, Doran, Christine, 1992

Fifty years: 1922-1972, 1972

The Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory: What it is, its purpose, membership, activities, history, Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory, [1985?]

Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory: Information and history, Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory, [1994]

Constitution and rules of the Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory (Incorporated), Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory, [1960?]

Journal Article

More than scones and tea: the CWA in the Northern Territory, Doran, Christine, 1996

The CWA -Country Women's Association- in Darwin after World War II, Doran, Christine, 1991

Report

Annual Report/Country Womens' Association of the Northern Territory, Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory, 1959-

Newsletter

C.W.A. Calling, 1962?-

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

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[Country Women's Association of Alice Springs](#)

[Country Women's Association of South Australia](#)

[The Country Women's Association of the Northern Territory](#)

John Oxley Library, Manuscripts and Business Records Collection

[3282 Queensland Country Women's Association Records 1923-2002](#)

Northern Territory Archives Service

[NTRS 2323 Letter books](#)

[NTRS 2321 Administration and correspondence files](#)

[NTRS 2322 Building and Building Finance Committee files](#)

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