Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0789

The South Australian Country Women’s Association Inc.

(1929 -)

Born	19290101
Occupation	Lobby group

Summary

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

The State association was formed in 1929. The first branch of the Association in South Australia was actually formed in 1926 at Burra by Mary Warnes. By 1988, nearly every small settlement in South Australia had a CWA branch and the Association comprised 270 branches with 7,500 members (at its peak in 1956 the Association boasted 277 branches and 14,000 members).

The Association has engaged in an enormously diverse range of service and lobbying activities since its inception – from the provision of rest rooms and holiday houses for members, and handicraft and homecraft instruction, to the provision of health services in rural areas. Much of the Association’s energy has been directed towards providing relief in times of recessions, droughts, floods, war and disasters. Its size and scope made it one of South Australia’s most significant women’s organisations.

Archival note:
It is the policy of the headquarters archives to call in all paper-based material relating to all branches when no longer required. For many years the South Australian Association was also responsible for branches in the Northern Territory.

Details

The first moves towards forming a state-wide Country Women's Association in South Australia actually took place in 1926 when Mrs T. Bowman, then president of the National Council of Women of South Australia, called a meeting of all country Mayoresses and wives of chairmen of district councils. No one replied. However, Bowman held an informal afternoon tea of country women which inspired Mary Warnes, of Koomooloo station, to establish the first CWA branch in Burra. Warnes saw the need for country women's rest rooms, where children could be fed and tea made when women from rural areas had to visit town, and for the need to reduce the isolation experienced by women in the country. A Metropolitan branch formed in Adelaide in 1928,with a Metropolitan Younger Set forming soon after.

By late 1931 there were8 branches and by 1937 there were 51 branches and six 'Younger Sets', totalling 3000 members. By 1946 this increased to 141 branches and by 1956 there were 277 branches with 14,000 members. By the 1970s members decreased to around 10,000, declining to 7500 by 1988.

The early activities of the Association included the establishment of rest rooms in regional centres and the creation of a circulating library by the Metropolitan branch. They provided relief to rural families during the Depression and droughts of the early 1930s. From the 1930s they ran a kiosk and rest room at the annual Royal Show in Adelaide. In 1932 they also assisted with the establishment of the Baby Health Train, which provided much needed health services to remote areas, and worked with the Mothers and Babies Health Association.

As in other states, handicrafts have featured prominently in the Association's activities, and they have also produced numerous cookbooks and local histories. They also supported 'Wool Week' by holding exhibitions of woollen articles made by members. Many branches devoted their time to fundraising and organising social events. From the mid-1930s, several holiday homes for members were also purchased.

During the war years, much energy was directed towards supporting the war effort, although normal Association activities were also continued. They assisted particularly with the Women's Land Army, the nationwide CWA camouflage net making contract (of which 20,000 were made). Thousand of pounds were raised and donated to purchase medical equipment for the army, a trainer plane for the RAAF and to provide meals and other 'comforts' for soldiers in training camps, as well as large donations to the Red Cross. Almost every branch had an Emergency World Circle which made up various woollen garments and other items, as well as sheepskin vests. They also supported 'Food for Britain

One of the most immediate postwar developments was the flowering of music, drama and graphic art under the direction of the Combined Arts Advisory Committee for in 1947. Handicrafts activities also expanded – with numerous courses being held in branches across the state. The association also took an interest in new migrants and supported the work of the Good Neighbour Council. From 1957 they also held an annual Homemakers' School at their headquarters and club in Adelaide as well as in regional centres.

From 1934 the CWA was allocated a page in the Rural Review to report on its activities. From 1953-1971 they produced their own weekly newspaper, The South Australian Countrywoman. From 1971 this appeared as weekly segment of the Farmer and Grazier and from 1975 this became a monthly newsletter.

Published resources

Book
150 plus far west favourites, Country Women's Association of South Australia, Far Western Group, [1987]

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

Kimba CWA, 1931-1981, Golden Jubilee, Kimba Country Women's Association, 1981

Fifty years of CWA at Tarcowie, 1988

So We Grow, 1954

The Passing Years, Snashall, Evelyn, 1946?

Carinya 1956-1989, Ashby, Marjorie, 1989

In Their Own Words: History of the South Australian Country Women's Association from 1979 to 1999, Zabukovec, Victoria, 2000

The First Fifty Years: Golden Jubilee History of the South Australian Country Women's Association, Parker, Heather, 1979

A Continuation of the History of the CWA on Eyre Peninsula, Beard, Mary, 1985

Melrose CWA: 50 Years of History, Bishop, Jennette, 1989

The History of the Geranium CWA Branch 1946-2000, Hughes, Ann, 2000

Newsletter
South Australian Country Woman, 1953-1971|| 1975-

Report
Annual Report, South Australian Country Women's Association, 1949-1981|| 1996-

Journal
The rural review: A weekly journal published in the interests of primary producers in South Australia, 1934-1953

Edited Book
Musing and Amusing, Parker, Heather, 1981

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

NULL
Country Women's Association of South Australia

Australian Historic Records Register
Minnipa Branch, Country Women's Association

State Library of South Australia
Interview with Mary Martin [sound recording] Interviewer: Neil Baron

Interview with Kay Harding [sound recording] Interviewer: Neil Baron

S.A.C.W.A., Kyancutta Branch : SUMMARY RECORD

Interview with Joyce Candy [sound recording] Interviewer: Neil Baron

Interview with Lorna Adams [sound recording] Interviewer: Neil Baron

Interview with Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Walsh [sound recording] Interviewer: Margaret Allen

Interview with Martha Kernich [sound recording] Interviewer: Neil Baron

Interview with Valmai Webb [sound recording] Interviewer: Neil Baron

Interview with Mavis Dawn Cooper [sound recording] Interviewer: June Donovan

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