

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE0791

The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc.

(1928 -)

Born	1 January, 1928, Victoria
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Occupation	Community organisation
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Summary

The Country Women's Association of Victoria was founded in 1928. It is a non-sectarian, non-party-political, non-profit lobby group working predominantly in the interests of women and children in rural areas. It's first president (1928-1932) was Lady Mitchell.

The Association was formed partly in response to the formation of similar groups in other states. A major objective since its foundation was to 'arrest the [population] drift from rural areas'-a problem which persists today. Its major activities have revolved around the provision of services to its members and the improvement of amenities in rural areas.

Details

The formation of the Victorian Association was prompted by a meeting organised by Lady Somers (wife of the then state governor) in March 1928. It was quickly strengthened by proliferation of local branches and the decision of the seven Victorian Women's Institutes (the first of which had been formed in 1926) to join the new Association. By 1929 it boasted twenty branches with 1700 members.

Since its foundation the Association has been involved in an enormous range of activities. The early influence of the Women's Institutes ensured a strong emphasis on Homecrafts and Home Industries within the Victorian Association-a Committee was formed devoted to arranging classes and demonstrations in these areas. In 1932 the Committee established a scholarship to enable a country student to attend the Emily McPherson College of Domestic Economy. In 1935 over 900 members from 71 branches sent 3000 entries to the its Handicraft Exhibition. During the WWII the Committee coordinated much of the Association's war work and in the 1950s they organised craft classes for women prisoners.

One early initiative was the formation of 'Younger Sets' – for girls and young women. By 1932 there were 28 of these groups-increasing to 97 by 1949. They engaged in fund raising and community work as well as holding crafts classes and lectures on numerous topics including home economics, travel and literature. Other early activities included the provision of 'rest rooms' in regional centres (to provide facilities for visiting farm women) and the purchase of a holiday home at Black Rock (which extended over the years into a large complex)-to provide members with affordable holiday accommodation. They also helped establish a bush 'Dental van' in the 1930s, ran a 'Home Help Scheme' from 1940-70 and established numerous welfare, relief and scholarship funds. During WWII the Association devoted much of its energy to assisting with the war effort. They made over 150,000 camouflage nets, as well as sheepskin vests for flight crews, numerous other woollen garments. They also established a 'Comforts Fund' for soldiers and sent clothing and bedding to women and children in London.

In 1929, the Country Women's Association of Victoria was one of the 23 rural women's organisation which attended a meeting in London, organised by the Marchioness of Aberdeen, to discuss the formation of an international rural women's association. The meeting led to the formation of the Associated Country Women of the World in 1932. From 1945 it became affiliated with the newly formed Country Women's Association of Australia.

As of 1978, the organisation's primary aim was 'By community service to improve conditions in the country more especially as they affect the welfare of women and children.'

Over the years the Association's branches have produced numerous cookery and handicraft books as well as local histories.

In 2004, the Association's website described its purpose and activities thus:

'The Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc. is an organisation based on friendship and self-development opportunities for women of all races, religions or political beliefs. It is an organisation where women from rural and urban areas can meet as one, as the Women of the Country.

The CWA of Victoria is unique in that it does not have charitable status, is not totally a service club, nor a philanthropic organisation. It supports numerous charitable causes, particularly as they concern women, children and families.

The CWA of Victoria is involved with Government departments in several programs including Wise Women Working and Diversity Victoria, which aim to bring together different cultures for a better understanding across racial borders. It also has input through the Victorian Women's Summit conferences which reflect women's opinions.

The Social Issues Committee's role is to research issues which effect women and children in our community, to lobby State and Commonwealth Governments to change things for the betterment of women and to keep members informed through "The Country Woman" magazine.' (Issues it has considered include: Problem Gambling, Farm safety, Workcare, Aged Care, Medical indemnity crisis, Shortage of obstetric specialists in rural areas, Funding for Breast Care Nurses, Suicide, Domestic violence, Privacy Laws, Child Employment). It makes submissions on behalf of Members to Government, and recently conducted a survey of issues to concern to Branches across the State.

'The CWA of Victoria is undertaking an adventurous program of establishing an Internet Branch to give women the opportunity to communicate with like-minded persons.

Crafts are taught and encouraged at Branch, Group and State levels and choral and drama groups thrive at some Branches. A Statewide public speaking competition culminates with the final at the State Conference each year.

A Scholarship Fund has been set up to assist with tertiary education for Member's children. Scholarships for non-members are also available.

The Welfare and Emergency funds are used to help people in with household and personal items in time of disaster.

A medical research program is the recipient of the Thanksgiving Fund each year.

Many weary Royal Agricultural Show patrons enjoy the CWA hospitality in the cafeteria at the Royal Melbourne Show.'

They continue to hold regular craft schools.

Published resources

Book

Twenty-one Years: A Brief History of the Association Since it was Founded in 1928, Country Women's Association of Victoria, 1949

Handicrafts of the Country Women's Association of Victoria, Hamer, Janet, 1968

The History of C.W.A. in Wedderburn, Curnow, D. M., 1984

Tapestry of Achievement: 60 Years of the South Western District of the Country Womens Association, 1988?

Through the Years 1934-1988, Central Wimmera Group, 1989

Murray Valley Group, CWA Victoria, 1934-1984, 1984

Brave days : pioneer tales, Clegg, Mary A., 1962

Constitution, rules and aims, Country Women's Association of Victoria, 1938

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

Years of adventure, 1928-1978 : fifty years of service by the Country Women's Association of Victoria, Country Women's Association of Victoria, 1978

Companionship, Welfare and Achievement of Cowes Branch of the Country Women's Association of Victoria: The First Fifty Years of C.W.A. on Phillip Island, Cutter, June M., 1985

The history of Drysdale C.W.A. (Incorporated) 1948-1988, 1988

60 years of service: Bruthen Country Womens Association, Sievers, Pat, 1994

The Briagolong Branch Country Women's Association Golden Jubilee 1951-2001, Watt, Dorothy B, 2001

Sixty years of Sharing 1931-1991, Terry, Lorraine, 1991

A Touch of Time :Wangaratta C.W.A., 1929-1994, 1994

Thesis

The Politics of Influence: The Work of the Country Women's Association of Victoria Incorporated in the Public Sphere, Crook, Karen, 1997

Journal Article

Tea, Scones and a Willing Ear: The Country Women's Association of Victoria, 1928-1934, Roberts, Pam, 1984

Report

Official Annual of the Country Women's Association of Victoria: Annual Report and Balance Sheet, 1939-

Newsletter

Victorian Country Woman, Country Women's Association of Victoria, 1989-

Country Crafts/New Country Crafts, Country Women's Association of Victoria, 1930-88

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Australian Historic Records Register

Country Women's Association, Merbein Branch

Country Women's Association of Victoria Inc.

Country Women's Association, Robinvale branch

State Library of Victoria

[Papers], ca. 1928-ca. 1975. [manuscript].

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

Mildred Mattinson interviewed by Helen O'Shea for the Helen O'Shea collection of Australian folklore in its social context. 1989-1990 [sound recording]

Phyllis Oldfield interviewed by Helen O'Shea for the Helen O'Shea collection of Australian folklore in its social context. 1989-1990 [sound recording]

Author Details

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