

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE0880

Benevolent Society of New South Wales

(1813 -)

Born 1 January, 1813, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Welfare organisation

Summary

The Benevolent Society of New South Wales was the first charitable organisation to be established in Australia. Its aims were 'to relieve the poor, the distressed, the aged, the infirm,' to discourage begging and to 'encourage industrious habits' among the poor and to provide them with religious instruction. In 1820 a Ladies Committee was established to attend cases of poor married women during their confinement. This service marked the beginning of the District Nursing service in Australia. In line with the changing needs of pregnant women, the Benevolent Society built and opened the Royal Hospital for Women in 1905 and was responsible for its administration until 1992 when it handed it over to the state government. The Society continues to work in the field of social welfare in New South Wales.

Details

In 1823 the initial Ladies' Committee severed its connection with the Benevolent Society and continued to operate as a separate society. By 1878 the Benevolent Society had appointed a Ladies' Committee to assume responsibility for interviewing all applicants for admission to the Asylum, which had been established in 1821.

After incorporation of the Society in 1902, the first board of directors included three women, the first to be elected to the Board of Management. They were Mrs Binney, a subscribers' representative, Mrs Buzacott and Mrs Cruickshank, government nominees. Lady Renwick was president of the Ladies' Committee while her husband, Sir Arthur Renwick was the president of the Benevolent Society.

The Ladies' Committee had suggested the name of Royal Hospital for Women and had been responsible for furnishing the new hospital together with funds from individual donors. Nevertheless, by 1913 the Society decided to disband the Ladies' Committee believing it had outlived its usefulness. The official reason for its demise was that the executive powers that the Ladies' Committee sought were not provided for under the Act of Incorporation. The real reason appeared to be their interference in the day to day operation of the hospital, which had caused tension between the matron, the medical staff and the Committee. The longest serving member of the Committee, Mrs N Paton was co-opted on to the Board of the Society as a director.

Published resources

Book

A very present help: caring for Australians since 1813: the history of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales, Rathbone, R. W. (Ronald, William), 1994

Guide to the records of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales, 1813-1995, Scifleet, Paul, 1996

The development of the Benevolent (Sydney) Asylum, 1788-1855, Cummins, C. J. (Cyril Joseph), 1971

Poverty's prison: the poor in New South Wales 1880-1918, O'Brien, Anne, 1988

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Benevolent Society of New South Wales records, 1813-1995](#)

[Dr Ian Cope papers relating to the history of the Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington, the historical committees of the Benevolent Society of New South Wales and the Royal Hospital for Women, and the Benevolent Society of New South Wales, 1964-1997](#)

State Library of New South Wales

[Benevolent Society of New South Wales - Records, 1813-1995](#)

Author Details

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