

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4919

Bain, Yvonne

(1929 - 2004)

Born 19290111, Brisbane Queensland Australia

Died 20040621, Brisbane Queensland Australia

Occupation Educator, Engineer, Women's rights activist, Women's rights organiser

Summary

Yvonne Bain was a woman who respected tradition while enjoying new challenges. She was passionate about education, for herself and for others. She was appointed to the governing council of Griffith University, and to a range of national and state advisory committees on aspects of education. Griffith University awarded her an honorary doctorate of the University in 1998. Bain was also passionate about the rights of women, working for decades in the Queensland National Council of Women and the National Council of Women of Australia. She served as the national president 1991-1994. In 1990, she was made a Member of the Order of Australia for service to women's affairs, particularly through the National Council of Women. During her presidency of NCWA, Bain persuaded the Australian Bureau of Statistics to include the categories of work in the home and volunteer work in the national census data, allowing the calculation of the value of unpaid work within national productivity. This is perhaps her most lasting contribution to the Australian women's movement.

Details

Yvonne Bain was born in Brisbane in 1929, the daughter of Jeffrey and Helen West. She was raised in Rainworth where she was the dux of the local primary school. At Brisbane Girls' Grammar School, she proved to be a good netballer, an academic prize winner, and dux of the state in history.

At her mother's insistence, she left school without completing her final year to join the Post-Master General's Department where her father worked. She enrolled in night classes at the Central Technical College and gained a Diploma in Civil Engineering, the only woman in her class. She met her husband, Thomas, in the drafting department of the PMG, and married him on 16 June 1951. The young couple lived in the Bain family home, Gowrie House, an old colonial mansion in the centre of Brisbane. Yvonne Bain turned the front wing into professional rooms, leased mainly to speech and drama teachers, and the ballroom into a space for amateur theatre. When the house was demolished for roadworks in the 1960s, Bain established a second Gowrie House nearby, allowing the speech and drama teachers to stay together.

Bain's two children, a son and a daughter, were born in 1955 and 1959. Bain served on the Parents and Citizens Association at their school, Brisbane Central, for 10 years, much of the time as president. She researched the history of the school and led a campaign to recover its original foundation stone. She was also actively involved with the Brisbane Girls' Grammar Old Girls and, in 1968, she was appointed to the school's board of trustees, serving till 1990, with 4 years as vice-chair. She was chair of the school's development fund and later its centenary building fund, negotiating grants from government and reviving her engineering skills. Brisbane Girls' Grammar named one of its new centres in her honour. It was as a delegate of the BGG Old Girls' Association that she joined the National Council of Women of Queensland.

In 1979, after her children had finished their schooling, Bain returned to study as a mature-age student at Griffith University. In the same year, she was appointed to the Queensland Planning and Finance Committee of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, serving until 1985. It was also in 1979 that she took up the twin roles of treasurer of NCWQ, and treasurer of NCWA on Laurel Macintosh's Queensland-based board. In 1980, Bain was appointed to the Australian Statistics Advisory Committee, and she gave a talk to NCWQ on the topic 'Statistics as a Means of Communication between Individuals and Public Authorities'.

Thomas Bain died in 1981. Thereafter, Bain's studies at Griffith University became more central to her life. She completed a Bachelor of Administration in 1983 and a Master of Philosophy in Administration in 1988. In 1994, her continuing interest in the university was recognised by her appointment to the university council, and she served there until 2000, chairing the

university's library committee and funds committee and assisting with the establishment of the university's eco centre and multi-faith centre.

Yvonne Bain continued to work with NCWQ, as vice-president and then as president from 1986-1990. A highlight of her presidency was the creation and furnishing in 1989 of Ballard Cottage, showing aspects of the history of Queensland pioneer women: 'a project which will enable children of the future to understand the life of our pioneers'. The project was developed in close co-operation with the Queensland Department of Education, a link that was strengthened in 1990 with Bain's appointment to the minister for education's Advisory Committee on Non-State Schooling and, in 1991, to the Advisory Committee on Gender Equity. On 26 January 1990, Yvonne Bain was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for service to women's affairs, particularly through the National Council of Women.

In 1991, Bain became the president of the National Council of Women of Australia. Her presidency was distinguished by her exceptional ability to advance the interests of the Councils-and of Australian women-through close co-operation with politicians and bureaucrats. Bain and her fellow Board members became expert at writing submissions, winning grants, and delivering the outcomes bureaucrats wanted. Thus a seminar in February 1993 on *Women and Ecologically Sustainable Development* presented the results of 2 major research projects carried out by NCWA in co-operation with the National Women's Consultative Council. Another important submission came out of a national seminar on *Care for the Carers*, NCWA's principal activity for the International Year of the Family.

Women's unpaid work was also a major concern of Bain's presidency. It was Bain's lobbying that persuaded the Australian Bureau of Statistics to include the categories of work in the home and volunteer work in national census data, allowing a degree of systematic assessment of the value of this work to the community and the economy. It was at the end of her presidency in 1994 that the necessity to re-incorporate NCWA to conform with new federal legislation about liability saw a rewriting of the national constitution, which resulted in the omission from the articles of membership of the clause providing for one constituent council only for each state or territory. In by-law C7 of the 1994-1997 constitution, it seems that Launceston appeared for the first time as a constituent council rather than simply an autonomous one. This compounded the 'Tasmanian problem', which had been festering since 1946.

In the international sphere, Yvonne Bain and her Board produced a series of well-researched and well-written submissions for International Council of Women committees and enquiries, with the effect of strengthening NCWA's international profile. The ICW 1994 Paris conference, which Bain attended, adopted an Australian resolution that rape should be recognised as a war crime, a formulation later included in the UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) and other UN instruments. Bain served the ICW as the International Convenor in Economics, enabling her to take her campaign for the recognition of women's unpaid work to a global audience.

Yvonne Bain contributed to a wide range of community activities beyond the National Councils of Women. She worked as president and chairman of the Queensland Arts Council and director of the Arts Council of Australia. She was also a senior associate of the Australian Institute of Management and an active member of the Australian Federation of University Women. She continued her long association with Anglican education by serving on the council of the All Saints Anglican School at Mudgeeraba from 1987 to 1989. From 1990 to 1999 she served on the Anglican Schools Commission, and from 1988 to 2000 on the Anglican Schools Systems Council.

In April 1999, Griffith University conferred on Yvonne Bain a doctorate of the university for her services to education. She also received a medal from the retiring archbishop of Brisbane, Peter Hollingworth, in recognition of her services to the archdiocese in education. Yvonne Bain held a firm faith, and was a traditionalist who loved the liturgies of the church. She died in Brisbane in May 2004.

Retiring as NCWA president in 1994, she welcomed the future as 'a time for the formulation of positive plans and strategies to cope with future changes, future technologies and the future multiple roles women will have opportunity to fulfil in the next century'.

Events

1968 - 1990

Brisbane Girls' Grammar School Board of Trustees

Published resources

Site Exhibition

Stirrers with Style! Presidents of the National Council of Women of Australia and its predecessors, National Council of Women of Australia, 2013,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ncwa>

Book

The National Council of Women of Queensland: The Second Fifty years 1955 - 2005, Buckley, Daphne M., 2005

Journal Article

Yvonne Bain, Pickers, Georgina, 1980

Newspaper Article

Pressman's L5161, Unknown, 1949

Weekend Weddings, Unknown, 1951

Women's rights advocate tireless behind the scenes, McNamara, Cecelia, 2004

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Records of the National Council of Women of Australia, 1924-1990 \[manuscript\]](#)

[NCWA Board Minute Books and NCWA Papers](#)

John Oxley Library, Manuscripts and Business Records Collection

[7266 National Council of Women of Queensland Minute Books 1905-2004](#)

Author Details

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Digital resources



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