Entry type: Person
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Hamilton, Anne Dorothy

(1910 - 2002)

Born	19100622, Kerang Victoria Australia
Died	20020725, Jindalee Queensland Australia
Occupation	Campaigner, Dressmaker, Secretary, Women's rights activist, Women's rights organiser

Summary

Anne Hamilton was the second Queensland president of the Australian National Council of Women. She held office between 1964 and 1967, having already served as president of the Queensland Council from 1961 to 1964. Her period as state president was notable for successfully hosting the ANCW triennial conference and the International Council of Women regional seminar on international understanding in Brisbane in 1964. As national president in the ensuing 3 years, she set up the twinning relationship between the Australian and Thailand NCWs-a program initiated by the ICW to encourage ‘reciprocal relationships between N.C.Ws of contrasting economic patterns’. Her period in office also saw continuing lobbying of the federal government for the lifting of the marriage bar on the employment of women in the Commonwealth public service (achieved in 1967), for equal pay, and for seeking Australia’s re-election to the UN Status of Women Commission (achieved in 1967). As president, she also encouraged state NCWs to include welfare of Aborigines in the considerations of their standing committees, succeeded in persuading the government to include the portrait of an outstanding Australian woman on the new $5 note, and agitated for liberalising the means test for pensions with the aim of its eventual abolition. Hamilton represented the ANCW and the ICW at the International Federation of University Women conference in Brisbane in 1965, and led the ANCW delegation to the ICW triennial conference in Tehran in 1966.
Hamilton’s other major interest was the propagation and growth of Australian plants, and she served as president of the Society for Growing Australian Plants, Queensland from 1965 to 1966.

Details

Annie Dorothy Hamilton was born on 22 June 1910 in Kerang, Victoria, daughter of William James Norwood McConnell of Barham, NSW, hotel manager, and his second wife, Eliza Anne Hobbs of Strathbogie, Victoria. Anne (as she preferred to be known) was educated at Esperance Girls’ School in Victoria before embarking on a business course. She subsequently engaged in office work, apart from a short period as a dressmaker in partnership with an aunt in Swan Hill. On her return to Melbourne she met and subsequently married Charles A. Hamilton, architect, at the Gardiner Presbyterian Church, on 27 March 1936; they had 1 son, Peter (born 1938) and 1 daughter, Prudence (born 1947).

Anne Hamilton’s first public activism occurred in the immediate postwar period when, in opposition to continuing wartime rationing, she joined other women in campaigning to elect the first Liberal Party member for the Victorian federal seat of Balaclava in 1946. The family shifted to Brisbane in 1947 when Charles was appointed deputy city architect to the Brisbane City Council. To overcome her sense of isolation and constriction at home, she joined Forum, a group for encouraging women in public speaking. It was as this club’s delegate that she joined the National Council of Women of Queensland. Like many women leaders of her generation, Hamilton found the domestic routine unstimulating, and NCW activities provided a more satisfying outlet for her talents and energies. She was elected state president in 1960. Her desire for effective and meaningful work is evident in her summation of the role as ‘trying to stir NCW women to logical, informed mental processes and consequent action towards community welfare’, and ‘to attract women of spirit and intelligence to work with an organization of some significance … by persuading them that what they did had some real effect’.

Her energetic leadership was focused first on finding solutions to the parlous state of the Council’s finances, and, second, on shifting its headquarters from the ‘squalid rooms in Celtic Chambers’ to more comfortable accommodation in Ann Street. She was also responsible for beginning NCWQ’s news-sheet, *NCW News*, in 1961, for using NCW auspices to inaugurate the Children’s Film and Television Council and the Consumers’ Association of Queensland, and for establishing a Townsville branch of NCWQ.

The Council's new rooms were used to host the International Council of Women's regional seminar on international understanding in Brisbane in September 1964, and Hamilton's home and gardens in Bardon were made available for a luncheon for delegates both to the seminar and to the Australian National Council of Women triennial conference held in conjunction with the ICW meeting. It was at this ANCW conference that Hamilton was elected president for the ensuing triennium.

As national president in the ensuing 3 years, Hamilton extended her interests into the international arena and was responsible for overseeing the setting up the long-mooted twinning relationship between the Australian and Thailand NCWs-a program initiated by the ICW to encourage 'reciprocal relationships between N.C.Ws of contrasting economic patterns'. As Hamilton reported to the 1967 ANCW conference, the 'joint association was a bit slow to get off the ground' owing to communication problems, but face-to-face meetings helped overcome initial difficulties. In 1965, Hamilton's ANCW Board set up a fund to help the Thai Council with developmental education programs enabling small numbers of village children in the north of the country to be brought to the city for a course of training at the University of Agriculture, so they could take necessary skills back to their communities, and for 40 village women to be taught to sew to provide school children with uniforms, among other things. Both programs were supervised by project committees established in the village, thus providing their members with administrative skills and experience. Hamilton visited the Thai NCW in 1966 and reported back that, as a result of these initiatives, the idea of education had been encouraged, and also the development of 'self respect, independence and cooperation'. ANCW would continue to provide funds, she said, including for a scholarship to educate a Thai student in her own country. ANCW also hoped to continue its participation in UNESCO's Study Tours for Women Educational Leaders and Leaders of Women's Voluntary Organisations, having in 1965 sponsored a 3-month tour of Australia by Mrs Tameno, a teacher and member of the Kenyan NCW.

Hamilton represented the ANCW and the ICW at the International Federation of University Women conference in Brisbane in 1965, and led the ANCW delegation to the ICW triennial conference in Tehran in 1966, where she attended the seminar on literacy held in conjunction with the conference. The main message she brought back to ANCW was that 'the true development of nations depends on the state of advancement of women and their participation in their communities', and that literacy, understanding and skills of communication formed the bedrock of the ability to participate. Like her predecessors, she had come to see support for the work of the United Nations as crucial for women everywhere, and her Board lobbied the federal government to seek Australia's re-election to the UN Status of Women Commission (CSW), achieved in 1967. She also put consideration of CSW's Draft *Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* on the agenda for discussion at the 1967 ANCW conference in Melbourne.

At the national level, Hamilton, like her predecessor Dorothy Edwards, was concerned to 'to streamline methods of working'-'If A.N.C.W. is to tackle social problems, our lines of communication have to flow still more smoothly, administration has to be firmer'. But she was forced to admit, as other Boards had also found, that progress was 'slow and difficult', largely because of the limitations on continuity imposed by reliance of voluntary workers and the inevitable high turnover of personnel.

On policy matters, Hamiltons's period in office saw continued lobbying of the federal government for the lifting of the marriage bar on the employment of women in the Commonwealth public service (achieved in 1967) and for equal pay. As president, she also encouraged state NCWs to include the welfare of Aborigines in the considerations of their standing committees, succeeded in persuading the government to include the portrait of an outstanding Australian woman on the new $5 note, and agitated for liberalising the means test for pensions with the aim of its eventual abolition.

Her term in office is also notable for the evidence it provides of anxieties about changes taking place in social mores; in her 1967 presidential address, Hamilton expressed concern about an apparent growth in 'selfish egoism', reckless self-indulgence' and 'callous disregard for human life and for the rights of others', reflected in problems as diverse as the rising road toll, offences against girls and women, and 'the rising rate of illegitimate births'. Conference resolutions and standing committee reports also reflected this anxiety, protesting against smoking in public places, lowering of censorship standards, and an evident rise in 'sexual promiscuity' and venereal disease. These and other matters were the focus of a seminar, *Ethical Standards for Modern Living*, which followed the 1967 conference and at which it was admitted that: 'Uneasiness and concern had been felt by NCW about the changing pattern of society'.

Participants in the end fell back on old verities in confirming 'the importance of the family unit for stability in society and the principle of one moral standard for both men and women'.
In the years following her national presidency, Anne Hamilton began to withdraw from NCW activities as a consequence of a series of family crises including hospitalisation of her daughter for several months after a car accident in 1967, her own increasing incapacity from an old back injury and arthritis, and husband Charles's severe heart attack in the mid-1970s. She focused her activities more on the Society for Growing Australian Plants (of which she had been president from 1965 to 1966, at the same time as she presided over ANCW) and, after Charles's recovery, on the investment portfolio she started as part of the family company Charles set up to fund their retirement.

After Charles's death in 1986, Anne was able to continue living at home with the support of her daughter and son and their families until the mid-1990s. When the level of care she required increased beyond what the family was able to provide, she agreed to sell up and move to a retirement village at Taringa, then, as she deteriorated further, to the Tricare Nursing Home at Jindalee where she was still able to maintain a modicum of independence. She died there, aged 94, on 25 July 2002.

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

Edited Book
Who's Who in Australia 1965, 1965

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]

John Oxley Library, Manuscripts and Business Records Collection
7266 National Council of Women of Queensland Minute Books 1905-2004

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Digital resources

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