Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0042

Coleman, Marie Yvonne

(1933 -)

Born	19330101, Dubbo New South Wales Australia
Occupation	Educator, Feminist, Journalist, Medical Social Worker, Public servant, Researcher, social activist, Statutory Office

Summary

Marie Coleman was the first woman to head a Commonwealth Government statutory agency, and the first woman to hold the powers of Permanent Head under the Public Service Act. She was founding Secretary of the National Foundation for Australian Women, one of the NFAW Board of Directors who worked to establish the Australian Women's Archives Project (AWAP), and remains active in community organisations and public life in her retirement. She was awarded the Public Service Medal in 1989 for contributions to public administration. In 2001 she was awarded the Centenary Medal. In 2011 she was appointed Officer of the Order of Australia.

Details

Marie Burns was an only child, born in Dubbo, New South Wales (NSW) in March 1933. Her father John Alexander Burns (Alex) was at that time a porter with the Railways Commission of NSW, and the family lived at Nevertire, a small railhead west of Dubbo. Her mother, Kathleen (Nunan) Burns was a former shop assistant with Western Stores, Dubbo (where she had been apprenticed), and her maternal grandmother, Annie Klintworth (formerly Nunan, nee Manners) lived in Dubbo with her second husband Samuel Klintworth.

The small family moved around remote and rural NSW as Alex pursued promotion. Marie's initial experience with education came through boarding at the small Hunter Valley town of Singleton for six months, to attend pre-primary school; thereafter until a move to Nimmitabel on the Monaro of Southern NSW in 1940 she was educated by correspondence through the NSW Government Education Department's Blackfriars Correspondence School. She was subsequently educated at Dubbo Primary School, Orange Primary School, Orange High School, and Lithgow High School.

She entered the University of Sydney in 1950. She studied Economics and Philosophy for an Arts degree, followed by a Diploma in Social Studies. From 1950-1952 she was a resident of the Women's College, University of Sydney. During her University career she was a member of the Student Representative Council, the Board of Manning House, and editor of the student newspaper *Honi Soit* – at that time only the second woman to hold that position. She represented the University in district women's cricket and Inter-Varsity women's cricket; she represented the University in Inter-Varsity and international debating.

After leaving University she worked briefly as a society page reporter for the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* and for the Royal Empire Society as publicist. In January 1954 she traveled to the USA and then the United Kingdom where, after a period teaching for the London County Council, she married James Harry Coleman, of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, in 1956. The couple returned to live in Melbourne. She became a scriptwriter for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, in both radio and early television, and then established her own public relations business.
Three daughters were born, Carolyn Margaret Coleman, Susan Dinah Coleman, and Elizabeth Burns Coleman.

In 1964 Coleman became medical social worker at the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital and subsequently Social worker for the Asthma Foundation of Victoria, before joining the Victorian Council of Social Service as Director. Following the (Federal) election in 1972 of the Whitlam Labor Government she was invited to head the newly created Social Welfare Commission.

In 1976, following the election of the Fraser Liberal-National Coalition Government, she was appointed Director of the Office of Child Care. During this period the Commonwealth commenced support for Aboriginal Child agencies, expanded provision of full day care services, before and after school care and school holidays programs, and created a system of child care in women's refuges, and of youth refuges. In 1982 she became Special Adviser in the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat. This

entity was subsequently re-formulated and renamed several times.

In 1983, at the invitation of the Government of South Australia, she carried out a review of Early Childhood Services in that state, which was followed by the re-structure of public administrative arrangements in that field. In 1989 she became a foundation member of the National Foundation for Australian Women. In 1990 she accepted a posting as Senior Visiting Fellow at the Australia New Zealand Studies Centre at Pennsylvania State University in the United States of America. During this period she represented the Australian Government at the meeting of the United Nations final Preparatory Committee for the 1993 Rio “Earth Conference”. In 1994 she returned to Australia as Acting Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies in Melbourne, Victoria. In 1994-5 she returned as First Assistant Secretary to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Community Services to review funding for family planning services.

She retired from the Australian Public Service in 1995, recommencing journalism as a regular columnist with the *Canberra Times*. This continued through to 2003.

She was a consultant and subsequently Director of the Indigenous Social Development Institute, working in Cape York communities in Far North Queensland on adolescent indigenous family development. This continued until 2003. She was appointed as first Chair of the Management Assessment Panel for the Australian Capital Territory, and subsequently in addition as the Alternate Chair of the Care Coordination Panel.

During the celebrations marking the Centenary of Federation of the Commonwealth of Australia, she was awarded the Commonwealth Honours System’s Centenary Medal for services to public administration, the Centenary Medal of the Australian Institute of Public Administration for services to public administration, and placed on the Victorian Parliament’s Honour Roll of Women, in recognition of services to Victoria and the Nation. In 2006 she was placed on the ACT Honour Roll of Women and awarded an EDNA. This award was created in 1998 to honour the life and work of Edna Ryan and is awarded to feminists whose activity has advanced the cause of women.

In 2003 she became Chair of the Advisory Board to the Hindmarsh Education Centre, at the Quamby Youth Detention Centre, Australian Capital Territory. She retired in 2007.

In 2011 she was appointed ACT Senior Australian of the year and appointed Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia ‘for distinguished service to the advancement of women, particularly through the National Foundation for Women and the Australian Women’s Archives Project’.

In 2012 she continues to work for the Australian Women’s Archives Project and for the Social Policy Committee of the National Council for Australian Women. She is also Chair of the Management Assessment Panel and the Care Coordination Panel of the ACT.

Events

2001 - 2001
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Published resources

Book
The Black Grapevine: Aboriginal Activism and the Stolen Generations, Briskman, Linda, 2003

Edited Book
Who's Who in Australia 1999, 1998

Who's Who of Australian Women, Lofthouse, Andrea, 1982

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Newspaper Article
Tireless activist for women's movement, Coleman, Marie, 2001

Web-Savvy and wired into the women's movement, Coleman, Marie, 2001

Site Exhibition
From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg

Archival resources

Private hands (These records may not be readily available)
Papers of Marie Coleman

AIATSIS Pictorial Collection
Burns Family Portraits

Early scenes from Roseby Park and Brewarrina

National Library of Australia
[Biographical cuttings on Marie Coleman, former head of the Federal Office of Child Care, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

National Archives of Australia, National Office, Canberra
Papers of Marie Yvonne COLEMAN AO

Author Details
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Digital resources



Title: Celebrating Marie Coleman's paternal aunt's 100th birthday.
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