

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

The first Branch was formed in this State in 1926 — only 46 years ago — by Mrs. I. J. Warnes in an endeavour to overcome the loneliness of the country woman. Mrs. Warnes, later our first State President, lived on a sheep station where she rarely had contact with another woman. Following the formation of two more Branches, the Association came into being in 1929. As word of the work of the Association spread, country Branches were formed and in many townships C.W.A. was the sole means of social contact. Being a non-sectarian and non-party political organization made it possible for all women to become members.

As the years have passed and with the introduction of better means of transport, the mass media, improved educational opportunities and living conditions, needs of the country woman have changed and the Association has tried to meet these needs as they arise. Now more emphasis is placed on cultural activities and schools of short duration in handicraft, choral, drama, painting, floral work, home decorating, writers and reporters, International Affairs etc. give members lasting enjoyment and an incentive for further knowledge. State Choral and Drama Festivals are annual events. Leadership schools too are conducted for the correct administration of Branches.

There are just over 300 Branches with 13,000 members — the Association is divided into Divisions and the Divisions into Groups and Groups into Branches. There are 17 Branches in the Metropolitan area. There is a State Conference, 2 State Executive and 2 State Council meetings each year. Groups also have an annual Conference. Branches have general meetings monthly, with usually a separate day for Handicraft and other cultural pursuits. The agenda of the Branch meeting contains business, educational and social items. There are some evening Branches to cater for local conditions. The Postal Branch and Branches of the Air have a distinct air of romance about them and the Postal Branch is unique. Most of the far outback properties have the radio equipment necessary for contacting the Royal Flying Doctor Service and through the courtesy of this Service, air time is allotted for the conduct of meetings of the Branches of the Air at Alice Springs and Port Augusta. These Branches form a link with women in widely separated areas in the north and west of the State. Meetings are conducted in the usual manner but when a proposition is before the chair the Chairman will say —

“Those in favor, please keep quiet.” Members become firm friends even though they may never see each other. The Postal Branch serves another group of lonely women who are not within the orbit of the Air Branches — boundary riders' wives, isolated stations, mining areas, lighthouses etc. A Round Robin Letter keeps them in touch with one another while our weekly newspaper “S. A. Countrywoman” gives them current news of the Association. The officers of this Branch live in the city. South Australia is the only State with a Postal Branch and members are scattered all over the continent.

On a part of the land in Adelaide where the C.W.A. members residential Club stands, the fine State Offices were opened in 1963. Holiday Homes are situated in the city and suburbs and throughout the State while over 100 Rest Rooms have been erected for the comfort of members. Two highly successful Homes for the Aged are conducted in country areas. There is a State Housekeeper Scheme providing reliable help in homes in times of sickness and other difficulties.

Each year there is a State Objective to which all Branches are invited to subscribe. Over the years these Objectives have covered a very wide field and help to alleviate current pressing needs. Because of prevailing drought and economic conditions in many country areas, the present Objective is “Rural Aid” whereby practical assistance is given to those whose way of life is threatened.

Friendship between Branches is engendered by the Home Link Scheme operated from State Office. Branches link with one another with visits and letters learning more of the Association, the State and themselves. A Scrap Book containing highlights is encouraged and the two year period suggested gives time for lasting friendships to be established.

November is International Month — a country is taken for study and you will be pleased to know that this year the country is Canada. A State International School with good speakers, films and discussion greatly assist the Branches to successful meetings. This State contains many areas more or less denuded of trees and tree-planting has been a feature of our work throughout the lifetime of the Association.

Our aim is the promotion of any work which makes for Improvement in rural life and members are happy to use their talents in any community work where the main objective is to the benefit of women and children.