

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE1058

BPW Melbourne

(1925 -)

Born 1 January, 1925

Occupation Lobby group, Professional Association, Women's Rights Organisation

Summary

The Business and Professional Women's Club of Melbourne was founded in 1925 – the first such Club in Australia. Miss Nellie C Martyn, Managing Director of the Steel Company of Australia (later to become BHP Billiton) was elected Inaugural President. Membership was open to women holding a responsible position in professional, business, industrial or educational organisation, and to women giving distinguished service to the community. The initial purpose of the Club was to 'give business and professional women the opportunity to meet in a friendly way and discuss questions of general interest to the community. Its more specific aims were soon defined as:

- a) to develop a wider acquaintance between members of the community and to facilitate the exchange of ideas
- b) to secure the recognition of the value to the community of women's work and service
- c) to obtain the active interest of women in the civic, social, political and moral welfare of the community.

It was explicitly founded to provide a space for (largely elite) women's networking, and to work for their professional interests. Subsequently it devoted itself more specifically to issues relating to the status of women, particularly in employment. The Club continues to work to elevate the status of women generally, remove discrimination and to present the views of business and professional women to government. It still also operates to provide a space for women's networking.

Details

In April 1925, fifty leading business and professional women held a meeting in the Young Women's Christian Association in Russell Street Melbourne. Margaret Cuthebertson, (Welfare Officer at Myers) chaired the meeting, while Alice Henry addressed the group on the importance of women's organisations. The result was the establishment of the first Australian BPW Club on 15 July 1925. Nellie Martyn (managing director of the Steel Company of Australia (now BHP Billiton)) was elected as founding president.

The group established its first Club House in 1929. This served meals and formal lunches and dinners were held with lectures and discussions. Other social and fundraising events were also organised. When the International Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs was formed in 1930 the Melbourne Club immediately affiliated with it. The Melbourne Club was also instrumental in establishing the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs in 1947. By this stage membership of the Club was 225.

Over its history, the Club has been involved with the Good Neighbourhood Council, UNICEF, the Traveller's Aid Society and the United Nations Association of Australia Status of Women Committee.

Published resources

Book

The first 25 years, B.P.W. Australia: The History of the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Thoms, Patience R, comp, 1972

From Vision to Reality: Histories of the affiliates of the National Council of Women of Victoria, 1987

Newsletter

Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. Victorian Division. Newsletter, Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. Victorian Division, 1969-1977[?]

Australian Federation of BPW: Victorian Division news, 1977[?]-1985[?]

Edited Book

A history of the clubs of the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Eagle, Vera J., 1976

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University

[Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women Victorian Division deposit](#)

[Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women deposit](#)

Author Details

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