

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE0803

Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia

(1909 - 1997)

Born 1 January, 1909, Perth Western Australia Australia

Died 31 December, 1997, Perth Western Australia Australia

Summary

Founded 25 March 1909 the Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia formed a core feminist connection for the exchange of feminist strategies and ideas with international feminism for much of the twentieth century. While typified as conservative, the Guilds anticipated many radical trends and were at the forefront of activism which challenged the political and social boundaries that excluded from participating fully in society. They worked to raise the status of women and improve the welfare of children, primarily through legislative reform and initiated a wide range of campaigns on local, national and international levels.

Details

From its inception the Women's Service Guilds shared interests, and in many cases memberships, with other key Western Australian women's organizations agitating for women's rights. The Guilds saw the education of women as the most effective way to improve women's legal status and give them entry into the public sphere. At the local level they lobbied for the direct representation of women in politics, the appointment of women to the judiciary, better conditions for female prisoners, and for women to take key positions in the courts and in welfare work with girls and prostitutes. After many battles they secured the establishment of a maternity hospital that admitted single and married women. In the 1920s the Guilds began a long association with Aboriginal Affairs and campaigned relentlessly to end the injustices experienced by Aborigines, particularly in relation to equality before the law. The Guilds insisted on having a say in shaping government policy and one outcome of many years of political activism was the opening of the first Western Australian Women's Parliament in 1946. Their interests in environmental preservation pre-dated the conscious raising campaigns of the 1980s and 1990s by more than 60 years. The Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia affiliated with many international feminist organizations and acted as a conduit for the dissemination of ideas and information coming into Australia.

Published resources

Book

Women on the warpath : feminist of the first wave, Davidson, Dianne, 1997

Sixty years of progress : highlights of the history of the Women's Service Guilds of W.A. Inc., 1909-1969 : as presented on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations, Greenwood, Irene, 1899-1992. (compiled by), [1969?]

March of Australian women : a record of fifty years' struggle for equal citizenship., Rischbieth, Bessie Mabel, 1875-1967., 1964

Women's Service Guilds of W.A. : founded 1909 and incorporated 1924 (non-party) : golden jubilee 1909-1959 : digest of growth, activities and achievements, milestones in 50 years of community work., 1959

Journal Article

With Ready Hands and New Brooms : The Women Who Campaigned for Female Suffrage in Western Australia, 1895-1899we, Reekie, G, 1981

War, Sexuality and Feminism: Perth's Women's Organisations 1938-1945, Reekie, Gail, 1985

Book Section

Greenwood, Irene, Caine, Barbara, 1998

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of Western Australia

[Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia records](#)

[Papers, 1909-1991 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Miss Sheila McClemons \[picture\]](#)

[Isabel Johnston \[picture\]](#)

[Dame Florence Cardell-Oliver \[picture\]](#)

[Papers, 1876-1985 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Papers, 1920-1944 \[manuscript\]](#)

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