

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE6539

Walters, Anita

(1923 - 2020)

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| Born | 25 January, 1923, Rose Bay New South Wales Australia |
| Died | 10 October, 2020, Queensland Australia |
| Occupation | Attorney, Nutritionist, Supervisor |

Summary

Anita Walters (née Osmond) compiled the first Australian nutritional content of foods table. Called *Tables of composition of Australian foods, Special Report Series 2*, the report was published by the National Health and Medical Research Council in 1946.

After working in nutrition, Anita became Australia's first female supervising examiner of patents in the early 1970s.

Details

Anita Walters (née Osmond) was born in Rose Bay, Sydney in 1923. She attended primary school in Adelaide, high school in Canberra and the University of Sydney, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in 1942.

In her senior year, she was school captain and received awards in academic scholarship, community service, sportsmanship and a Public Service Board scholarship that enabled her to study at the University of Sydney.

Anita's summer job before starting university in 1940 was as a laboratory assistant with the CSIRO researching *Lucilia cuprina*, an introduced green blowfly that lays eggs on sheep, resulting in 'flyblow' or 'fly strike', a significant health risk to sheep.

After achieving her Bachelor of Science, Anita started work researching human nutrition at the Australian Institute of Anatomy (1931 – 1984), part of the Department of Health in Canberra, and located in the renowned art deco building now home to the National Film and Sound Archive.

In 1945, Anita compiled a monograph called *Tables of composition of Australian foods, Special report series 2*, published by the National Health and Medical Research Council in 1946. The publication, widely consulted by dieticians throughout Australian and New Zealand hospitals, is regarded as the first Australian source that identified the nutritional content of foods – protein, carbohydrate, calcium, iron, carotene, vitamin A, thiamin (B1) and vitamin C. It also included a ready-reckoner for the rapid calculation of recommended dietary allowances. Anita updated the booklet in 1948, and again in 1954, 1961, 1966 and 1968 with colleague, Winifred Ellen Wilson. The National Library of Australia holds copies of the books. Anita's well-loved copy has brown-edged pages, a faded blue cover and is practically falling apart.

During her time with the institute, Anita visited Northern Territory missions and primary schools from Darwin to Alice Springs including the Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission (125 kilometres west of Alice Springs) investigating blood vitamin C levels in boys.

She then became chief nutrition officer with the Public Health Department of Tasmania for four years in the early 1950s. She visited Flinders, King and Cape Barren Islands and the West Coast including the abandoned mining town of Gormanston as part of Tasmania's goitre prevention scheme. She also travelled through North-West Tasmania presenting demonstrations on preparing wild rosehip syrup as a source of vitamin C for babies and children because orange juice was considered expensive.

Anita eventually left the Public Health Department: 'I was paid women's wages, which were less than men's wages, but I did the same work!', she said. She went into patent law where, said Anita, 'there was equal pay for men and women!' She qualified as a patent attorney but did not practise. Later, she was appointed to the Attorney-General's Department after achieving Office of Examiner of Patent, Grade 2.

After Anita married, she moved with her husband to Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Her husband, who worked in the statistician's branch, Bureau of Statistics and Economics and was 'on loan' from the Australian government to the New Guinea government, assisted in setting up the first census program.

Anita was one of the few Australian women in Port Moresby who did not work or have children to care for, so she joined the Port Moresby CWA and was president for two years. The CWA supplied lunches for the local primary schools and provided four rooms in the guest house for women going into hospital to have their babies in Port Moresby or Australia.

The couple moved back to Canberra and Anita resumed working at the Patent Office and became the first female supervising examiner in the early 1970s. She worked as a patent examiner until she retired in the mid-1970s.

The Walters had a holiday home on the Gold Coast, Queensland, which eventually became their permanent address. 'I feel very blessed to have done the things in my life that I have,' said Anita.

Author Details

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