

CHAPTER TWO

Women Under Pressure in the 1940s

Consideration of women's roles in the home in Queensland during the mid twentieth century is an important part of the thesis. The thesis maintains that considerable pressure was placed on all women during the Second World War and focuses on the contingencies with which they had to cope during that time. Women not only played the key role in the care of the home and children, they also bore most of the burden of coping with war time austerity measures imposed by both Federal and State governments. Moreover women were responsible for much of the care of disabled veterans on their return home from the war zones. Additionally most women were involved in voluntary work in the various patriotic organisations which were in existence during the war years, to raise funds and participate in any way possible to assist in the war effort.

Furthermore the thesis sustains the view that social change brought about by the exigencies of war time led to changes in social attitudes in the post-war period resulting from the realisation by women of their potential to contribute to the family economy. Thus women found time to avail themselves of the opportunities then accessible to them through adult education schemes, to raise their standard of

education and to learn new skills. Additionally, the thesis looks at differing views put forward in the population debate which raged during the 1940s, particularly as it applied to women in regional Queensland.'

There is no shortage of academic historical and sociological texts that examine women's unpaid work in the home from the perspective of the ruling social mores of the period which signified the man's role to be that of breadwinner, while a woman's place was in the home. The thesis supports the assertion of Lois Aspin,² that a large amount of academic work appeared in the 1940s and 1950s supporting the view that children needed full time care by their mothers. This was a continuum of the ruling social mores of the pre-war period, and as noted by Aspin occurred just when women were being urged to return to their homes after working in war time industry. She also records that many women had little choice as there were no creches or child care centres. The thesis asserts that such notions amounted to discrimination against women in an attempt to bring about a return of the male status quo of the pre-war period. Interviews conducted for the oral history component of the thesis indicate that, despite changes in women's roles during the war years, this social attitude was widely accepted in regional Queensland.

¹ K. Betts, "Population Policy in Australia", (No Ed. Cited), *Populate or Perish*, Melbourne, Fontana and Australian Conservation Council, 1984, pp.49-50.

² L. Aspin, *The Family: an Australian Focus*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1994.

Peter McDonald³ also confirms that pressure was exerted on women to comply with the principle of women's role as housekeeper and nurturer throughout the war years; and after the cessation of hostilities. The thesis concurs with his comments that in the main, any money the wife might earn prior to the 1970s was seen as supplementary to the main income provided by the male breadwinner. McDonald demonstrates that in the majority of families throughout the period of the thesis women continued to attend to the housework while men attended to the outside chores and household repairs.

Additionally from an historical perspective Michael Gilding⁴ gives invaluable insights into family structures over time, which controlled such things as the division of labour in the home, while documents published by Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane⁵ contribute to knowledge of social attitudes towards women's place in society during the 1950s. The thesis examines difficulties faced by women both in Brisbane and in regional Queensland with regard to the care of the family. Additionally, it considers the onus of care imposed on women in the care of disabled veterans on their return from armed service. This aspect of women's unpaid work has been almost completely overlooked by the secondary literature.⁶ Betty Peters has drawn attention to the

³ P. McDonald, "The Era of Familism: 1940-1970", R. Hartley (Ed.), *Families and Cultural Diversity in Australia*, St. Leonards, Allen and Unwin, 1995, pp.31-47.

⁴ M. Gilding, *The Making and Breaking of the Australian Family*, St. Leonards, Allen and Unwin, 1991 p.94.

⁵ K. Daniels and M. Murnane, *Uphill All the Way*, St. Lucia, UQP, 1980 p.135.

⁶ Knowledge of this aspect of unpaid work in regional Queensland stems from the author's personal experiences.

difficulties faced by partners of ex-Prisoners of War of the Japanese.⁷ However the partners of all disabled war veterans also were very often responsible for their care throughout the period of the thesis, and in many cases for many years afterwards.

As well as coping with the added difficulties in women's unpaid work in the home brought about by the exigencies of war, many women devoted a great deal of time and energy to voluntary work. Moreover it is asserted that women's unpaid voluntary work in Queensland has never received the recognition it deserves. In addition to massive fund raising campaigns, the unpaid work performed by members of the Queensland Country Women's Association in the manufacture of camouflage nets in Central Queensland alone amounted to a saving of many thousands of pounds by the government of the day. Another aspect of the voluntary war time work in regional Queensland was described by Hope who was the president of the Gladstone branch of the Australian Red Cross society. She testified that:

If there was a boat in with Americans on the Police used to ring me and say they wanted entertainment and I'd put a dance on. I'd get on my phone and ring up all the girls, the nurses at the hospital and...the Younger Set [CWA] and we'd run a dance and if there were just a few people I had a party at my house and they enjoyed that...The dances were special because they kept the boys out of mischief the Police said.'

Women's paid work, especially during World War Two and beyond, when women's efforts to obtain equal pay for equal work were constantly under public scrutiny, has

⁷ B.Peters, "The life experiences of partners of ex-POWs of the Japanese", *Australian War Memorial Journal*, Issue 28, April 1996, on line, ~awm/journal/j28/j28-petr.htm.

⁸ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with H.P. at Gladstone, 1 November, 1997.

rightly been the focus of a great deal of historical and sociological research. However women's voluntary work also merits consideration. They were frequently the quiet achievers. What they did was often seen to be aligned to their role as housewives, and much of what they accomplished was inconspicuous.⁹ Libby Connors states that women willingly responded to calls to show hospitality to both Australian and American troops camped in the vicinity of their homes, and to offer them personal, emotional, and material support.” The thesis concurs with Melanie Oppenheimer that the economic and social value of their contribution to the war effort still remains to be recognised. She states:

the importance of the voluntary worker in wartime Australia during the twentieth century has not been adequately acknowledged to date.¹¹

Additionally, the thesis looks at arguments put forward by Charles Handy¹² on the question of women's motivation to participate in voluntary work. It also considers differing points of view on the effects of voluntary unpaid work by women, and how this affected their roles in society

The call for women to volunteer, and thereby contribute to the war effort so that the defeat of Germany and Japan could be brought about as soon as possible, was to

⁹ M. Oppenheimer, “Volunteers in Action: Voluntary Work in Australia 1939-1945, Ph.D. thesis, Macquarie University, 1995. This thesis deals with unpaid voluntary organisations in Victoria and New South Wales. It is supplemented by information from Queensland primary sources presented in pictorial mode in *Brisbane Remembers” The Home Front 1939-1945*, A Brisbane City Council publication. This is one of the few publications which gives prominence to women's unpaid voluntary work in Queensland.

¹⁰ L. Connors, et. al., *Australia's Frontline*, St. Lucia, UQP, p.75.

¹¹ M. Oppenheimer, op. cit., p.3.

¹² C. Handy, *Understanding Voluntary Organisations*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1988, pp.27-37.

some extent due to Australia's shortage of manpower and to the high cost of war. In an examination of some of the arguments concerning the need for increased population to combat any further threat of war, publications referring to the question of the need for increased population put forward by Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake¹³ and K. Daniels¹⁴ will be discussed together with the views put forward by Lois Aspin.¹⁵ The thesis will also consider whether the events which led to social changes during the war years resulted in the deferment of marriage and decisions not to start families, during that time.

War time conditions

Unpaid work in the home had been most women's fate in the between wars period. During the 1940-1965 period, decision making in the family still rested ultimately with the male head of the family, unless the enlistment of men in the Services and posting for overseas duty placed women in a position of sole authority over the family. The father's autocracy was recognised by children in particular who, if they misbehaved, would frequently be told, "wait until your father comes home". Women had day to day authority over the children, especially girls, while the father was away at work, but the final say in most matters rested with him. As will be pointed out in Chapter three, as breadwinner he had control over the family income. In working class families women frequently managed the household finances, but as is also demonstrated most were expected to answer for the ways in which the money was

¹³ P. Grimshaw, M. Lake K. Daniels, *Creating a Nation*, Ringwood, McPhee Gribble, 1994, p.262.

¹⁴ K.Daniels, op. cit., pp.135-136.

¹⁵ L.J. Aspin, op.cit., pp.42-47.

spent. During an interview Edna pointed out that women in rural areas were in a rather different situation:

[In] the 1940s you'd find that very few women had their own bank accounts. Anything they happened to get, for example, egg money, was given to Dad and Dad banked it, and when it came to the bills, Dad sat down and went through them and 'Oh gee here's a bill for ten pounds, what would you have spent ten pounds on, and mother was expected to say what she had spent the ten pounds on.'¹⁶

When men enlisted in the armed forces, the demands of being solely responsible for the well being of the family, the management of the family finances, having to deal with wartime austerity and constantly rising prices until these came under price control, made life very difficult for many women. Not only were they unused to making decisions with regard to the family, but throughout Queensland some women had the added responsibility of the management of a family business, while in rural areas they were sometimes called on to take over the running of the family farm.

In addition to the extra work load placed on them throughout the war years, transport restrictions were imposed which made life difficult, especially for women with small children. This was exacerbated by the black-out imposed throughout Queensland which affected vehicular traffic¹⁷. McBride and Taylor cite an excerpt from an interview in which it was stated:

Dad was away at the war. I remember that Mum and I were the ones that did for the blackouts [sic]. I remember putting the paper up and taping it around.¹⁸

¹⁶ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with J.B. and E.S. at Bundaberg, 11 May, 1998.

¹⁷ F. McBride and H. Taylor, *Brisbane Remembers*, Brisbane City Council, 1995, p.v.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.47.

In Brisbane and those towns such as Townsville and Rockhampton, in which American troops were billeted, transport facilities became very overcrowded. It was also very difficult for people in regional towns all over Queensland to travel to Brisbane, or even neighbouring towns because of the restrictions on travel.

Throughout Queensland under Air Raid Precautions regulations communities were subjected to mock air raid warnings, so that in the case of a real air raid they would know what to do. After the immediate threat of invasion had receded air raid drills were still carried out, often to people's annoyance. In the wet season air raid trenches became water logged and in regional Queensland the trenches became occupied with toads, snakes and mosquitoes. However conditions were not without their moments of humour, as demonstrated by Connors et al¹⁹ They relate how at Charleville:

One interviewee remembered that when the air raid sirens sounded out at Charleville a member of the VDC [Voluntary Defence Corps] yelled at her[sic] neighbour: "Quick! Quick! Jump in your bloody air raid shelter!", to which the neighbour replied. "Yes and swim for me bloody life!"²⁰

Mock air raid alerts often caused problems. Few facilities were available to help women who were responsible for seeing that elderly and/or incapacitated people in their care, and/or small children, would know what to do in the event of a real air raid. Fortunately for Queensland, real air raids by the Japanese occurred only in Darwin, Townsville, Wyndam and Katherine, but with the threat of invasion in Townsville and Cairns many women and children were evacuated to southern areas of

¹⁹ L. Connors, et.al., op.cit., p.65.

²⁰ Ibid.

this state. Here their presence added to problems associated with the acute housing shortage which lasted throughout the war and the post-war period, making it difficult for women on their own, or with children in their care to find suitable accommodation.

Austerity measures became more stringent as the war progressed. Civilians were issued with ID cards which had to be carried at all times. The Queensland print media issued statements similar to one which appeared in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* which stated that

Failure to produce an identity card on the demand of civil authorities renders an offender liable to immediate detention until the person's identity is established. The power of the manpower officers to demand the immediate production of civilian identity cards would be tightened.²¹

Identity cards also needed to be produced to obtain new ration books when these were issued to replace old ones. Rationing created more work for women, particularly those left to run the home and care for the family by themselves, after the enlistment of their husbands in the armed forces. Many of these women were engaged in paid work of some sort, to help eke out the allotment paid to them by the Army. Clothing, including shoes, was rationed, as was tobacco and petrol, while sugar, tea, meat and butter were the main food items placed on the rationed list. Some other items were only available at certain times. This accounted for long lines of drinkers queued outside hotels at opening times. Other commodities such as eggs were often in short supply.

²¹ Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, 5 June, 1943, p.4.

Food rationing and shortages meant that food preparation sometimes presented problems. To preserve fuel for stoves, be it electricity, gas, or wood, women were asked to prepare no more than one hot meal per day. It was also widely advertised that to provide meatless meals and eggless cakes was their patriotic duty²² (Illustration 2.1)

Illustration 2.1: “Modification of the cookery section of the 1941 RNA Exhibition to reflect austerity demands for patriotically austere food.



*.Source: Brisbane Remembers*²³

Housewives were urged, when preparing the family meals, to use recipes substituting readily available products for those in short supply. This involved coping with ration coupons which was a further chore for the sometimes harassed housewife. Public

²² F. McBride and H. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p.43.

²³ *Ibid.*

transport services were cut, and petrol rationing prevented those women who could drive from using this mode of transport except in times of absolute necessity. Telephones were in short supply, and waiting times for connections on trunk line (STD) calls were often for several hours.

It was a time of austerity. Hem lines became shorter and full skirts disappeared “for the duration”. A reporter for *The Gladstone Observer & Port Curtis Advertiser* in August 1942 bemoaned the total ban on the manufacture of swim suits:

Latest on the list of “mustn’t haves” is bathing togs, and all Australia will join in a wail as the pursuit of this cheapest of sports disappears in a collection of moth holes.²⁴

The fact that clothing was rationed did not mean that women were able to go to the shops they normally frequented to purchase what they wanted, albeit with the use of clothing coupons. Very often the goods they wanted were not available. Thus a great deal of time would need to be spent going from place to place to find what they required. Even then it was sometimes impossible to get exactly what was wanted, and an alternative product which might not be so satisfactory, would have to be purchased. Many women resorted to making their own clothes using materials which were not rationed, such as curtain fabrics or tulle, and sometimes parachute silk if they were lucky enough to obtain this

Silk stockings worn pre-war became unavailable. Nylons were not yet on the Australian market, and were unknown until the Americans arrived and having

²⁴ “Mustn’t haves”, *The Gladstone Observer & Port Curtis Advertiser*, 28 August, 1942, p. 1.

established bases here, became aware that a gift of a pair of nylons to any Australian woman was always very acceptable. Many women painted their legs with a preparation called liquid hosiery, and painstakingly used an eyebrow pencil to draw a straight line up the back to represent the seam. (Illustration 2.2) One young woman stated that when she was attending Teacher's Training College in Brisbane:

Mr. Robinson, the Principal, announced on parade one day that "young ladies will now be excused from wearing stockings to College. The silk is needed for parachute making."²⁵

Theoretically, shops were supplied on a population basis so that regional towns would receive comparable supplies to Brisbane. Nevertheless Saturday morning shopping on 8 May 1942 was extremely busy for all retailers, after the announcement that clothes would be rationed as from the following Monday. The *Central Queensland Herald* reported that panic buying led to a rush to purchase clothing items in excess of what customers would normally buy. Mr. RT Lucas of Messrs. E S Lucas Pty. Ltd. commented to the reporter that in Rockhampton:

People who in ordinary circumstances made their purchases rationally seemed to be frightened into buying all they could.²⁶

²⁵ Libby Connors, et.al., op. cit., pp.72-73.

²⁶ Central Queensland *Herald*, 14 May 1942, p.21.

Illustration 2.2: Demonstration of Liquid Hosiery 1941.



Source: John Oxley Library.²⁷

Bundaberg also felt the effect of rationing, Alban Boch, in a story based on letters from his mother in Bundaberg, received during the war, wrote:

Thank goodness that Bill doesn't smoke. The queue[s] at the tobacconist's shops are always long. We trade his ration ...for clothes. ...Clothing coupons are my biggest worry with my brood 6-8-10-12. The boys are wearing their older sister's cast off singlets but won't have a bar of girl's pants.²⁸

²⁷ John Oxley Library, Neg. No. 164143.

²⁸ A.Boch, "Bundaberg 1941-1942", *From All Walks of Life*, Rockhampton, CQUP, 1993, pp.70-71.

Government propaganda was widely used during the war years to build morale, and to mask the fact that sacrifices women were called on to make under wartime restrictions and regulations were forced on them by state control,

Human interest stories in all forms of the print media, particularly women's magazines, radio and cinema newsreels, not only portrayed the efforts of Australian men fighting in defence of their country, they also praised the performance of women called on to work in non-traditional occupations. The catch-cry of "they also serve who only stand and wait", was popularised to assure women whose husbands, fathers, and other close family members were posted to war zones, that they too, were playing an important part in the war effort. At the same time all women were pressured to conform to what Helen Pace has described as the "nice girl ideology".²⁹ Pace is correct in maintaining that this ideology was equated with patriotism. It was also aligned to the concepts of motherhood and morality according to pre-war social mores, many of which still had roots in the outdated but still firmly entrenched morals of the Victorian era.³⁰

Despite extensive research very little historiography has been located which considers problems faced by women who had to bear the burden of caring for incapacitated war veterans. As it is considered that this too is an important facet of women's unpaid work, especially in the light of the attention given to carers by state welfare in the

²⁹ H. Pace, "All the Nice Girls,": A Case Study in the Social Control of Women, Melbourne, 1942" *Hecate*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1992.

³⁰ D.G. Forstell, cited in G. Johansen, op. cit., p.36.

1990s, it comes under scrutiny in this chapter. Throughout Queensland one aspect of governmental neglect of women's difficulties was that very few care facilities were made available for disabled veterans so that the women who were their carers could feel free to go out to do the shopping, attend school functions with the children, or even just have a few hours relaxation away from home.

Even prior to the end of hostilities female members of families of disabled veterans were, in many cases, called on to devote their lives to the care of these men after they were discharged from service. In regional Queensland isolation, a paucity of medical specialist services and distance combined to make this task even more difficult. The firmly held belief in the social mores which were influenced by the assertion made by Lord Nelson that "England expects that every man will do his duty",³¹ was echoed by Australian society towards women whose husbands were repatriated from the war fronts, wounded or perhaps blinded in action, or who had been interred in prisoner of war camps. Most women were only too happy to take on this task, but even with the best will in the world the added burden was frequently a very heavy one.

The Repatriation Department, as the Department of Veterans' Affairs was known at that time, did do its best in the provision of facilities in the home, but with so many on the waiting list it all took time. As Allport³² has demonstrated women were made to feel obliged by the government, the media, the church, and society at large, to do

³¹ This assertion was originally made by Lord Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar.

³² C. Allport, "Left off the Agenda: Women, Reconstruction and New Order Housing", *Labour History*, No.46, 1984, p.18.

what was considered to be their “duty” and nurse their menfolk back to health. The fact that many men never recovered, but lived for many years requiring intensive care was completely overlooked. Not all women had the fortitude to meet the demands made on them. The means used “to make women aware of their obligations” were predictable, as shown by this excerpt from the *Australian Women’s Weekly* cited by Allport:

riches are being restored to him, children’s laughter and the sight of a small sleepy head upon the pillow - an armchair by the fire and clean sheets - tea in the kitchen and a woman’s tenderness no longer edged by unspoken fears.³³

Perhaps this was not designed make women feel guilty if they did not submit to social demands regarding the care of their husbands, but it certainly could be construed as emotional blackmail. **An** excerpt from a letter to his local returned soldiers association, written by an incapacitated ex-serviceman of World War One, but could well have been written by a disabled ex-serviceman of World War Two, stated:

I have tried to be independent until 2 years ago of the pension hoping that I would get better but now I seem to have lost all hope and courage. I feel I am a bore to my dear wife and children, she having to do much of the home work that a man should do and it[s] upsetting her nerves. I feel that if a change some way or another doesn’t come soon - well, I’m afraid to say. I am afraid of myself sometimes.³⁴

Frequently in Central Queensland as in other regional areas within Australia, caring for her husband involved being with the veteran 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, as there was no-one to take over. In rural areas in Central Queensland, and elsewhere, where ambulance services were not readily available, a woman might be called on to

³³ *A WW*, 25 August 1945. Cited in Andree Wright, ‘The Women’s Weekly’: Depression and War Years Romance and Reality’, *Refractory Girl*, No.3, Winter, 1973, p.19.

³⁴ J. Bourke, “Amputation, Artificial Limbs and the Great War in Australia”, *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol.29, No.110, April, 1998, p. 58.

drive over unsealed roads to obtain medical help for her husband/son/father while he sat beside her, perhaps in heart failure, or suffering some other condition needing urgent medical treatment. Additionally there were no day hospitals providing respite care in Central Queensland until very recently. In practice some local medical officers would hospitalise the veteran to give his wife or other carer some relief, and things did improve over time.

An article by Betty Peters ³⁵ published in the *Australian War Memorial Journal* explores the experiences of women who were married to Prisoners of War of the Japanese during World War Two. Peters states that these women also suffered in the aftermath of the war. It was difficult for them to understand what their husbands had been through, and this led to feelings of rejection after the years they had waited for their return home. Sudden mood changes meant that many things women said or did were misconstrued. Some men could not cope with children, and this resulted in family arguments. **TO** avoid a confrontation women had to learn to let them get over the difficult times by themselves. In many cases they also had to learn how to cope with urgent medical problems.

Voluntary Unpaid Work

There are many facets to the argument surrounding voluntary work, and it is not the purpose of the thesis to examine these fully, but rather to look at events which gave rise to the development of voluntary work during the 1940-1965 period. This thesis maintains that the ideal of full governmental provision for all social requirements

³⁵ B. Peters, *op.cit.*, no page numbers.

during the 1940s could not be met, and that therefore from the point of view of welfare and the economy, there was a need for work done by voluntary organisations. It is also contended that voluntary work, performed by women in organisations throughout Queensland, resulted in a sense of civic pride. Moreover it provided a social outlet which helped housewives cope with war time shortages and other problems. In addition the thesis demonstrates that from a regional perspective there are no grounds for the concept that voluntary work was not as important as paid work during World War Two and beyond.

When events signalled the possibility that a second world war was soon to erupt, Australian women formed paramilitary units, and the Women's National Voluntary Register (WVNR) was established to record details of those women who were prepared to work for national defence. The Queensland State Council of the WVNR, an initiative of the Federal Government, was established with the Lady Mayoress of Brisbane installed as President on 26 April 1939. The purpose of the register was to record the names of all women over 17 years of age who were prepared to volunteer their services to the state should the need arise. As its name implies it was not envisaged that state power would be used to enforce women to support the war effort in any other than a voluntary capacity. However, as demonstrated by events in 1941, women were called on to mobilise to serve in the armed services, and to release

men for enlistment by engaging in work previously deemed to be within the male province, in food production and a great variety of voluntary work.³⁶

One of these paramilitary units was the Women's National Emergency Legion (WNEL). This body was very active in both Gladstone and Rockhampton. In a special edition of the Gladstone *Observer* to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two it was reported that training in the WNEL "included first aid, home nursing, morse-code, flag signalling, car mechanics and driving lessons". An ambulance officer who conducted the first aid classes stated that:

they attended victims of mock air raids, bringing some down ladders on stretchers. Victims bore tags indicating their supposed injury to be treated. One man had a tag to say he had a broken humerus. He was a very worried young ~~man~~ until his arm was bandaged.³⁷

The local newsagent taught morse code, and another Gladstone resident conducted driving lessons. (Illustration 2.3). During the war there was no weekend sport so the time was devoted to training sessions. Classes were also held at night during the blackouts. A room was made available at the Grand Hotel for meetings and was also 'used to entertain service personnel. Members also attended visiting troop trains and troop vessels.

³⁶ Women's Voluntary National Register, Queensland State Council, Rules, pp. 1-2 and Regulations, pp. 1-3, Held at John Oxley Library, OM72-57/1.

³⁷ Gladstone *Observer*, Special edition, 12 April, 1995, p.11.

Illustration 2.3: Gladstone sisters Sybil and Mavis Barker at the time of their enlistment in the Women's National Emergency League.



Source: Gladstone *Observer*, 12 April, 1995

In Rockhampton the inaugural meeting of the WNEL was held on 13 October, 1939.³⁸

The minutes of the meeting for 3 March 1941 noted the plans for training in the various sections of the Branch, first aid, home nursing, transport (driving), shooting, and signalling. It was also reported that a quantity of materials had been purchased and packed into parcels for members of the armed forces. The report stated that 122 parcels had been distributed in February. At this meeting it was also decided to buy an electric fan for their rooms if "the girls were prepared to pay a levy of 3d. (2.5 c) per week".³⁹ It became obvious throughout the minutes that the organisation was run by mature aged ladies, mostly married. The minutes for 30 March 1942 showed that the organisation had adopted the nomenclature used by the army to denote rank for

³⁸ Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the WNEL, Rockhampton Branch. 13 October, 1939. Copy held at CQU collection Rockhampton.

³⁹ Minutes of WNEL meeting, 30 March, 1941. As shown by the minutes training programmes were

use by its members. Thus recruits became privates, women in charge of the various training functions became lieutenants, and the officer in charge commandant.⁴⁰

It is evident from the types of training carried out by the WNEL in Central Queensland that the young women who had trained in these units would have been equipped to perform useful functions, had the threat of invasion by Japan become a reality. As it was, mention was made throughout the minutes of members who resigned and joined the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) and the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS). Shute states that the Women's Air Training Corps formed the basis of the WAAAF, while signallers from the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps initially comprised the entire enrolment of the WRANS.⁴¹ However not all activities of women's paramilitary organisations were useful. In an interview conducted by the author with ex-AWAS, as mentioned previously, one informant came from a NSW country town. "In retrospect she saw her experience in the WANS as mostly playing at war games, since "very old-fashioned methods of training were used".⁴²

The usefulness of the women's paramilitary units varied from place to place and organisation to organisation, demonstrating a lack of co-ordination in training

⁴⁰ Ibid, 30 March, 1942.

⁴¹ C.Shute, (2), "From Balaclavas to Bayonets", E. Windschuttle (Ed.), *Women, Class and History*, Melbourne, Fontana, p.368.

⁴² Group interview conducted by G. Johansen at the home of T. Goodstate, at Birrong, NSW, 10 July, 1994.

procedures. Additionally, some units, for example a cavalry corps established by the Australian Women's Legion and the Women's National Emergency Legion,⁴³ seemed to owe their existence to romantic fantasy. They did not relate to conditions of war in the mid twentieth century, despite claims made by the organisers to the contrary. A report in the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, in September 1942 demonstrates the continuing interest in Rockhampton by women in the WNEL. However, the report also stated that when the annual meeting of the national body of this organisation met in Brisbane, Rockhampton was the only branch representative present.⁴⁴

Women's organisations such as the Queensland Country Women's Association, the Australian Red Cross (ARC) churches, schools, and of particular significance during World War Two, the various patriotic organisations such as the Comforts Fund, were prominent in fund raising for the war effort. There were many others too numerous to mention, but that does not demean their importance, nor the effort put into them by their members. The Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* proudly announced after the cessation of hostilities in 1945 that the public of Rockhampton had donated to the local branch of the ARC the sum of 97 000 pounds (\$194 000).⁴⁵ Other women's organisations which provided support of a voluntary nature for the war effort were the Catholic United Services Auxiliary (CUSA) Mothercraft Association Auxiliary War Fund, Girl Guides and others.

⁴³ C. Shute, (1), "The Second Line of Defence: Women's Voluntary War Work, 1939-1941", Women, and Labor Conference, Macquarie University, May, 1978, p.57.

⁴⁴ Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, 29 September, 1942, p.6.

⁴⁵ Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*, 21 September, 1945, p. 12.

Oppenheimer argues that the voluntary principle is an integral part of democratic society that depends on the collective actions of its members for the common good, and supports the state or private economy.⁴⁶ She points out that de Tocqueville noted that the political process which takes place in local voluntary bodies, is often more significant than national political proceedings. Furthermore she asserts that the motivation of voluntary groups are “civic pride, civic virtue or a duty to one’s community”, and include the concepts of self-help and mutual aid. Her statements are supported by the available evidence, but she has omitted to mention that in the case of housewives and mothers who devoted time and energy to work in voluntary organisations, there was also a social aspect which attracted membership of these associations.

This social aspect was in itself an added perspective of the value of these organisations to women. It was particularly important to women in regional areas in the State, where most of their social life depended on entertainment organised by voluntary groups, attending meetings, and working with others whose interest lay in the same area. Additionally by the very nature of their unpaid work within the home, women were isolated from social contact with others. In rural areas with no near neighbours this isolation was exacerbated to an even greater degree.

⁴⁶ M. Oppenheimer, *op. cit.*, p.5.

The question of women's motivation to join voluntary organisations has been addressed by psychologist Charles Handy.⁴⁷ He maintains that in a cooperative contract between the individual and the organisation, the individual is there because he/she sees that the goals of the organisation are worthwhile, and other members are agreeable company. Viewed in this way attendance at meetings becomes a social contact for women who otherwise would be denied contact with people with similar interests. Moreover to some extent it takes them out of the private sphere of the home and into the public sphere. Additionally Handy asserts that in the pursuance of voluntary work within organisations, members can only be asked to perform tasks and have the right to refuse. In other words his/her individual needs are met, and they cannot be forced to perform tasks they have no wish to undertake. Items Handy lists as being key points in the motivation of individuals are things such as, "people like targets, "without something to aim for, work is just a job"; "if individuals feel good about themselves they work better; and because people are different they want different things out of life".⁴⁸

During both the First and the Second World Wars, Handy's key points were the basic ingredients behind the patriotic desire of women to play some part in the war effort in various organisations which worked in support of the war effort. They are also basic to membership of any voluntary group during times of peace. To some degree this answers Oppenheimer's question, "what relevance does a study of voluntary work in

⁴⁷ C. Handy, op. cit., p.31.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.30.

wartime have to a society not at war?” Additionally, particularly during the Second World War, voluntary activity from all sections of the community, even children, was called for by the state for the war effort.

Oppenheimer’s extensive research into wartime voluntarism has been very thorough, and many of her findings apply equally to both city and regional centres. She also raises the question as to whether voluntary work in wartime was “more focussed and therefore easier to identify?”⁴⁹ The simple answer to this is that, in addition to widely publicised state calls to participate in voluntary organisations to meet wartime needs, society was more aware of the work performed by these organisations in war time than in peace time. More people were involved, and achievements of voluntary work were made visible by publication in all forms of the media.

At the local level in an interview conducted for the *Australia Remembers 1945 - 1995* celebrations in Gladstone Julia Wedge, who was a member of the Patriotic Fund in the Boyne Valley, testified that:

The Patriotic Fund was sending canteen orders to each and every one of the 74 servicemen and women [from the Boyne Valley]. Everyone who went overseas received a wallet, a pair of socks and five pounds. On some occasions, the Patriotic Fund would get letters back from the men and women overseas. “We would also send them cakes and Christmas parcels and clothing”, Mrs. Wedge said.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ M. Oppenheimer, op. cit., p.3.

⁵⁰ “Gladstone and District Commemorates the end of WW 11”, *Gladstone Observer*, undated newspaper cutting, p. 13.

Moreover most families had family members or friends enlisted in the forces, and the human interest stories published by the media about the assistance they were giving to the war effort made people feel good about themselves.

The Australian Comforts Fund (ACF) was formed early in the First World War, and after disbanding following the cessation of hostilities, came into existence again at the outbreak of war in 1939.⁵¹ It was the largest organisation of its kind in Australia and was widely supported by other organisations. In the Sixth Annual Report of the Queensland Division of the ACF it was noted that there was very little realisation by the general public that this organisation entirely financed the war time services of the YWCA and the YMCA. It was also pointed out that it supported the Salvation Army by donating 70.5 per cent of the finance needed by that organisation to meet its war time service needs. As well as assisting with the spiritual needs of the members of the forces, the YMCA and YWCA provided rest and recreational facilities from Brisbane to as far North as the islands of the Torres Strait and Dutch New Guinea.⁵²

The Salvation Army men and women also helped with the spiritual needs of members of the forces. Additionally any soldier who served in the front lines in any theatre of war, as well as those who provided backup services, highly regards the work of the “Salvos”. As could be expected there was a division of labour within the ranks of the

⁵¹ M. Oppenheimer (2), “‘Working for the Duration?’ Aspects of Voluntary work in Queensland during World War Two” in *Queensland Review*, Vol.3, No.1, April, 1996, p. 74.

⁵² Australian Comforts Fund (Queensland Division), Sixth Annual Report, p.4, held at John Oxley Library, Brisbane, SVF 940 003.

Salvation Army according to the hierarchical organisation of that religious denomination. However it should be noted that the convenor of every aspect of work undertaken by the ACF was female. When it is realised that this organisation handled receipts of 3 13 969 pounds (\$626 930.00), a very large sum of money in 1945, and organised its distribution over the costs of services, it makes a nonsense of the belief of the time that women were unfitted for this type of work.

Members of the QCWA also showed that women could be capable organisers and managers. They devoted many hours throughout the whole state to giving assistance to the war effort. Their efforts included the making of sandbags for civil defence organisations. The manufacture of field dressings for the armed forces was also undertaken, as well as the weaving of camouflage nets. Clothing was collected and sorted for distribution and Red Cross and Prisoner of War funds were supported. Additionally food parcels containing tins of jam and honey, cakes and puddings, and boxes of gifts for children, many of which had been made by members in their leisure time, were packed and sent to Britain and war torn European countries to relieve food shortages, and give some pleasure to children who often had nothing.⁵³

Throughout regional Queensland members would gather at QCWA centres to work on these projects, thus relieving the isolation of those in outlying districts. The Bundaberg Branch prepared a statement about the uses to which their rooms were put during the war years.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 113.

[In] the rest rooms 10,800 camouflage nets were completed. Branch members made cakes and packed food parcels to be sent to England. Members donated 650 cakes of soap for Britain. They collected and packed parcels of honey, jams and fats. Paper Mache bowls were made for military hospitals. The rest rooms were used by any patriotic committee - free.⁵⁴

At Calliope a few kilometres west of Gladstone the CWA Branch was also active through most of the period of the thesis. During the war the Branch went into recess and members devoted their time to fund raising and making camouflage nets. Brisbane women also participated in this voluntary **work**. (Illustration 2.4)

Illustration 2.4: Women making camouflage nets for the Allied War Effort at the Trocadero Ballroom, South Brisbane.



Source: John Oxley Library.⁵⁵

Other forms of fund raising were dances and debutante balls, and hall rental. As well as assisting the ACF the QCWA helped the Australian Red Cross (ARC) and other patriotic bodies, also undertaking their own projects to assist with the war effort.⁵⁶ A

⁵⁴ Typescript supplied to author by President of the CWA Bundaberg Branch, J.Buddle, 1997.

⁵⁵ John Oxley Library, Neg. No. 102815.

⁵⁶ M.J. Pagliano, *Country women*, No publication details, p. 112.

sheep skin vest appeal was launched and the garments were distributed through the Naval Depot at Garden Island in New South Wales to Naval, Army and Air Force stores personnel.⁵⁷ In all, the members of the QCWA made “32 800 sheepskin vests, 3 487 pairs of gloves, 2 706 pairs of mittens, 2 450 pairs inner soles, 4 365 pairs slippers, 1 148 pairs wristlets, 680 pairs children’s slippers (bombed victims), and 30 wheel chair rugs.”⁵⁸ Troop trains were met at the various railways stations with hot tea and food, clothing was collected and sorted for distribution, and huge amounts of knitting and sewing were completed and sent overseas.⁵⁹ The work of the QCWA in Central Queensland, was consistent with that carried out in other States by the State Branches of the Association. Branches existed in most towns in Queensland and were coordinated through the establishment of various districts.

The Australian Red Cross was also very active during the war years in patriotic endeavours.⁶⁰ In the local branches the work undertaken varied from place to place according to what assistance was needed. In Gladstone, in addition to providing assistance in hospitals, they met troop trains carrying injured members of the forces as they passed through on their way to military hospitals in the South.⁶¹ On one occasion, the then president of the local branch, said that a boatload of wounded soldiers came into Gladstone due to cyclonic conditions which prevented it berthing

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.115.

⁵⁸ Australian Comforts Fund (Queensland Division) Sixth Annual Report 1945, op. cit., p.24.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.113.

⁶⁰ A. Gillespie, “Brisbane Women’s Voluntary Work in World War 11” in *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Vol.15, No.2, May 1993, pp. 109-113.

⁶¹ Interview conducted by G. Johansen at Gladstone with HP, 1 November, 1997.

in Townsville. She was requested to get her helpers together and help in any way possible while they were entrained to go on to Brisbane. She said:

Everyone went down and they found the boys didn't have breakfast so they came up and raided their larders and took breakfast in tins down to them to eat. When I came back my larder was bare of everything. Everything had gone to the boys. No-one minded.⁶²

Additionally women performed voluntary work on an individual basis such as the growing of vegetables in backyards which were sold to raise money for patriotic funds or hospitals. Home hospitality was offered by women to servicemen and servicewomen.⁶³ Oppenheimer has estimated that there were over 8 000 patriotic funds Australia-wide.⁶⁴ Some of these organisations continued to work in the interests of women throughout the post-war years. Additionally, associations such as The War Widows' Guild, The Queensland Women's Historical Association, various women's sporting organisations and many others were formed in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶⁵ Their contribution to society in the difficult reconstruction years has much to recommend it but they were never as numerous as during World War Two.

A feminist view of voluntarism between 1939 - 1941 was presented by Carmel Shute⁶⁶ at the Women and Labour Conference in 1978. Shute's comments about the nature of voluntary work by women in this early stage of the Second World War,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ A. Gillespie, op. cit., p.110.

⁶⁴ M. Oppenheimer (2), op. cit., p.58.

⁶⁵ A. Wood, "The Evolution and Growth of Women's Organisations in Queensland 1859-1958, *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, Vol.6, No. 1, September, 1959, pp. 204-213.

⁶⁶ C. Shute, (1), op. cit., p.47.

prior to Australia's greater involvement following the entry of Japan into this conflict in 1941, are not without foundation. She states that although all women responded to the ideology of voluntarism, the character of the work in its "aims, modes of operation, leadership and the composition of the women involved", were mostly petit-bourgeois/bourgeois.⁶⁷ Shute has also stated that women in paramilitary organisations purchased their own uniforms and met incidental expenses associated with membership, and that the cost of uniforms was often beyond the means of working class women.⁶⁸ However an interviewee stated that the Women's Australia National Service (WANS) uniform only cost about five pounds, (\$10.00).⁶⁹ Nevertheless this was a value statement. She had stated earlier that at the time she had been employed as a cashier. In this position she would have received a higher wage than a woman employed in the textile trade or in domestic work. Shute also stated that voluntary work undercut wages, conditions and the general bargaining position of women workers and furthermore:

...subjected the interests of women to the 'national cause' and thereby influenced the parameters in which the battles for equal pay, conditions and opportunities were waged, especially during the period of "total war"(1942-1945).⁷⁰

While this may have been true as far as women in the suburbs were concerned it was a harsh judgement to make about women in regional Queensland where job

⁶⁷ This is supported by the author's BA Honours thesis which demonstrated that initial officers selected for the Australian Women's Army Service on the advice of Lady Wakehurst, wife of the Governor of New South Wales, were former members of the Women's Australian National Service (WANS), a paramilitary organisation organised by women from the upper strata of society. Others who were selected were also nominated by the WANS.

⁶⁸ C. Shute, (2), op. cit., p.379.

⁶⁹ Group Interview conducted by G. Johansen at Birrong, NSW, 10 July, 1995.

⁷⁰ C. Shute, (1), op. cit.

opportunities were limited, and the social needs of women were met to some extent by their participation in voluntary work.

Shute's statement is representative of the seventies feminist theories in its emphasis on unionism and capital city developments. It also overlooks the needs of those women who were full-time wives and mothers, wanting to give something of themselves to the common cause, and by doing so make social contact with others. Nevertheless Shute rightly points to the stereotypical approach outlined in government propaganda and articles in women's magazines, of the sorts of voluntary work which were suitable for women. Although she does not support her argument that voluntary work affected women's work opportunities, she does point out that voluntary work was not seen as being as important as paid work. Much of the voluntary work of the types she mentions, darning and mending clothes for soldiers, setting up hostels, canteens and rest-rooms for men in uniform, was actually done by older women whose families had grown up leaving them with time on their hands. By the mid twentieth century the time of condescending "lady bountifuls" was long past, but there was, and still is, a need for voluntary assistance, in the fields of caring for socially or mentally handicapped people, sporting bodies, support for the work of the churches and many other social needs.

Another organisation listed with the WVNR was the Dig for Victory Movement. Groups were established at various places in the Brisbane metropolitan area including Chelmer, East Brisbane, Holland Park, Bulimba and other suburbs on vacant lots.

(Illustration 2.5) Men as well as women were enrolled by this organisation to grow salad vegetables, fruit and flowers for members of the armed services recovering in hospitals and convalescent homes.⁷¹ According to the *Courier Mail* as cited by McBride and Taylor:

The 'Dig for Victory' movement was one of the great patriotic successes of the war. It initially involved community participation in converting public land such as parks into vegetable plots to supply military hospitals. But soon many backyards and school plots were given over to vegetable growing.⁷²

Illustration 2.5: Digging for Victory.



Source: *Brisbane Remembers*.⁷³

During the war period changes in family living, freedom to handle the family income unhindered, and abrogation of the division of labour in the home, together with both paid employment and unpaid work in voluntary organisations, brought the realisation to all levels of society that women did have the ability to play a role in public life.

⁷¹ WVNR papers, Held at John Oxley Library, 72 - 57/2.

⁷² *Courier Mail* as cited in F. McBride and H. Taylor, op. cit., p.40.

⁷³ F. McBride and H. Taylor, *Brisbane Remembers*, op. cit., p.40.

This led to inevitable social change in family relations in the reconstruction period in the latter half of the 1940s. For men, there was a return in many cases to the jobs that had been held open for them when they had enlisted in the armed forces. Others took up the opportunity offered by the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme to learn a new trade or profession, but the majority of ex servicemen were disinterested in what was offered them, or for some reason as will be discussed in Chapter Seven, were not accepted to train under the CRTS scheme. Nevertheless some did take advantage of this chance to take up training for employment which was more interesting, and more remunerative, than they had been able to obtain pre-war. Many happily took the step back into their pre-war role as mothers and housewives, but as will be discussed in Chapter Three, rising prices in the latter half of the 1940s and the 1950s, and the demands of the growing consumer culture resulted in a strong movement back into the work force.

Reconstruction : The Population Debate

Not only were many men repatriated to Australia permanently and totally incapacitated, many others were incapacitated to a lesser degree. There were also many men who lost their lives. As defeat of the Japanese forces became more likely, “populate or perish” began to be the catchcry in Australia, Australians had always been aware of the possibility of attack by Asian nations, so it was not unexpected that the concept that Australia needed to increase its population to be able to defend itself gained impetus during the latter part of the conflict in the Pacific and post war period. If the war impinged in no other way on the Australian psyche, it did produce an awareness of Australia’s vulnerability to defeat by aggressor nations. One

consequence of this was that discussion of means of increasing population was placed high on the list of priorities during the 1940s. In the terminology of the period it was believed that Australia must “populate or perish”.

This premise, promulgated by most sections of the community, gave strength to their own particular interests, which relied on the idea that “a woman’s place was in the home”. As pointed out previously, this seminal phrase implied that not only should she be confined to a private role in society, but that she was unfitted to play a role in the public sphere. Moreover, as demonstrated by Aspin,⁷⁴ it was not until the second half of the twentieth century, when legal, political, educational and economic reforms which proscribed discriminatory practices against women were introduced in Australia that the concept of “women’s place” began to be phased out. As she pointed out, “the alternatives to marriage for women were spinsterhood, prostitution, or work for very low wages”. Status gained by women through participation in the work force during World War Two was therefore a major step towards egalitarianism, despite a retrogressive step in the immediate post-war period which was not entirely phased out until the 1960s.

As early as 1943, the notion that Australia needed to increase its population was being advocated by politicians and national leaders. However the Australian Association of Women convened the Australian Women’s Conference which met in November of that year to draw up the Australian Women’s Charter. As pointed out

⁷⁴ L. J. Aspin, *op. cit.*

by Grimshaw et.al., several groups including clergymen, doctors, the army and feminists put forward possible solutions to deal with single women participating in sexual activity.⁷⁵ This behaviour was seen as being caused by the “social and moral chaos unleashed by war”. Despite all the disapproval of single pregnancies, officially documented figures of pregnancies among unmarried Australian Women’s Army Service ex-servicewomen, and estimated figures for the Women’s Australian Auxiliary Air Force ex-servicewomen, totalled 1.7% of enlistments.⁷⁶ Additionally records in *Commonwealth Year Books* suggest a similar number of pregnancies among single civilian women.⁷⁷ Constructing their argument from a feminist perspective which stressed the belief that women should have the same sexual freedoms as men, Grimshaw et. al. indicated their belief that popular culture in the fields of advertising and cinema, redefined femininity as equivalent to sexual attractiveness. Thus with the growth of consumerism in the post-war years, and the progression of greater sophistication for women, these changes to the notion of femininity became accepted. These views conflicted with those held by Dame Enid Lyons.

In 1944 in the ABC programme, *National Forum of the Air*, conflicting views were put forward on how increased population in Australia could be achieved. Dame Enid Lyons, the eldest of eleven children, made the assertion that the standard of beauty set by magazines should be based on “the soft roundness of a young matron”. She

⁷⁵ P.Grimshaw et. al., *op. cit.* pp.262-263.

¹⁶ G. Johansen, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43.

¹⁷ G. Johansen, *op. cit.*, pp.42-43.

maintained that the present standard based on sexual attractiveness at that time was a deterrent to having many babies. Furthermore she sustained the view that magazines should refuse articles “that exalt sex as an end in itself”.⁷⁸ This opinion was repudiated by Dr. Norman Haire, an Australian who ran a birth control clinic in London. He was the youngest of eleven children, and stated it was more important to bring children into the world who could become healthy and useful adults. He asserted too frequent child bearing undermined women’s health, and children suffered from competition for food and lack of time by the mother to give her children necessary individual care.⁷⁹

The Director of the Bureau of Industry, Queensland, Colin Clark also participated in the programme and voiced his opinion.” His remarks supported the orthodox view of the Roman Catholic Church on the sanctity of life from the moment of conception. He also supported the Catholic belief in the sexual immorality of contraception. He maintained that when people pleaded their inability to afford more children it did not necessarily mean they were short of the necessities of life, but that they could not afford to maintain their present comforts!⁸¹ As will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, women in the Central Queensland region interviewed for the oral history section of the thesis testified that they had to manage their finances very carefully in

⁷⁸ “Population Unlimited?”, discussion broadcast on the Nation’s Forum of the *Air*, ABC, 23 August, 1944, K. Daniels, *Uphill All the Way*, pp.135-136 and Holmes & M.Lake, *Freedom Bound II*, St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995. pp. 100-101

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 101-102.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 102-103.

⁸¹ *Ibid*.

order to pay their way during the 1940-1965 period. This contradicts Clark's statement that it was not a shortage of money which induced controlled fertility. He concluded with the argument that unless the birthrate radically improved the country could be taken over by violence. Clark overlooked essential factors such as the geography of Australia, and the size of the population increase, which would be needed to ensure an invasion action would not be successful. In the 1990s despite a greatly increased population, due to both an immigration programme and natural increase, Australia's independence could not be maintained without help from an allied nation.

Concerned by the highly controlled fertility rate, the 1944 National Health and Medical Research Council's interim report's recommendations looked at the question of welfare needs to alleviate poverty and social insecurity, the housing shortage, home help, child care and other such issues.⁸² At the 1946 Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science, which addressed 'Australia's Population Problem', Grace Cuthbert spoke about the difficulties women had in combining personal interests with child rearing.⁸³ Also at this conference, AP Elkin argued that the unequal situation of women in society, forced them into marriage as no other real alternative existed, "there to bear children through 'carelessness or bad luck'".⁸⁴

⁸² K. Betts, "Population Policy in Australia", in (No. Ed. Cited) *Populate or Perish*, Melbourne, Fontana & Australian Conservation Council, 1984, pp.49-50.

⁸³ Ibid, p.50.

⁸⁴ A.P. Elkin, cited in K. Betts, p.50.

Fifteen years later in 1959, an editorial in the *Gladstone Observer* stated that Queensland's annual birth rate was the lowest of all the states. In Australia it was only in the Northern Territory that the birthrate was lower.. It was further stated that for the year ended 31 December, 1958 the Australian population increased by 204 147 with Queensland's share of that figure being 23 611. Of this increase in Queensland, the population increase in Brisbane accounted for 12 000.⁸⁵

The outstanding feature of all the recommendations made in the 1940s was that none of them was put in place. Instead, the solution was found in the notion of mass immigration, put forward by Arthur Calwell and implemented in 1947. Calwell's intention was that migration would be limited to Europeans and thus maintain the White Australia Policy.⁸⁶ In the event this did not occur, and Calwell using the catchcry "populate or perish" had to work to sell his immigration programme. His success led to Australia becoming what is popularly known as a multicultural society in the 1990s. Despite the fact that Australians were slow to accept the new ideas displaced persons and other migrants brought with their cultural baggage, the migration programme brought an important cultural change in the Australian way of life. Food preparation alone, using European recipes, accounted for much of the change as over time eating and drinking habits changed considerably. The idea of eating out altered from going to the local cafe and ordering steak and eggs to

⁸⁵ *Gladstone Observer*, 15 July, 1959, p.2.

⁸⁶ J. Collins, "Migrant Hands in a Distant Land, in G. Whitlock & D. Carter, *Images of Australia*, St. Lucia, UQP, 1992, p. 104.

booking a table at a restaurant offering a wide and varied menu which included continental dishes as well as traditional Australian food.

Migrants

Not all Australian states received the same proportionate increase in population. Queensland did not receive the same number of migrants as did the other eastern states, as most immigrants were landed at either Melbourne or Sydney. Central Queensland received even less. Thus there was a slower increase in the population rate in regional Queensland than elsewhere. This was due to the lack of industries with suitable employment opportunities for migrants. Sandra a British migrant told of the difficulties her family faced when they came to Central Queensland, and after staying a short time with relatives they moved to Childers, south of Bundaberg:

Dad...was very lost because he'd been a commercial artist and he got into this country community. He should never have come to Queensland. We should have gone to Sydney for his occupation and because of this he was never able to get back into his job and he ended up getting a job in Childers at the hospital. Later he did cane cutting and physical work which he'd never done before. My brother was six years older than me and he'd been to Arts School in England and when we came to Childers he had to take a job as a shop assistant.⁸⁷

Difficulties relating to employment for migrants will be pointed out in Chapter Three with regard to German migrants in Bundaberg. Moreover, at a meeting at the District Employment Exchange Board in Bundaberg it was stated there was no room for absorption of immigrants in the Bundaberg area.⁸⁸ This statement was the result of discussion on a letter from Colin Clark asking for a survey of spheres in which immigrants might be absorbed. It was further asserted that such absorption would not

⁸⁷ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with S.N. at Gladstone, 29 September, 1998.

⁸⁸ Bundaberg *News-Mail*, 30 October, 1947, p.3.

be possible without expansion of secondary and rural industry.” The following table shows the allocation of migrants for the year ended 31 March, 1959, Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Allocatin of Migrants in Australia for the year ended 31 March, 1959.

New South Wales	17 769
South Australia	10 206
Western Australia	2 113
Tasmania	1 719
Australian Capital Territory	3 080
Victoria	70 284
Northern Territory	291
Queensland	1 130

Source: Compiled from figures in the *Gladstone Observer*, 15 July, 1959.

Immigration in the post-war period was introduced by the Chifley Labor Government in 1947. The first intake consisted of displaced persons and refugees, most of whom were homeless. Nevertheless because of racist attitudes and a dislike of foreigners, Australians’ preferences were for English or Irish Immigrants while Germans were preferred over southern Europeans. Bolton suggests that it was through Calwell’s support for the White Australia policy that he was able to persuade Australians to accept European immigrants.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Gladstone *Observer*, 15 July, 1959, p.3.

⁹⁰ G. Bolton, “1939-1951”, F. Crowley, (Ed.), *A New History of Australia*, Richmond, Heinemann, 1974, p.482.

Dislike of newcomers was usual in most regional areas of Queensland and also to a lesser degree in Brisbane. From the time of settlement Australia has had a mostly urban population, most newcomers preferring to work in the city rather than trying to eke out a living on an isolated property. Most immigrants to Australia after World War Two came from industrialised areas in Britain and Europe, and as pointed out by one interviewee, there was no opportunity in rural Queensland for them to use the skills they brought with them. Italians from Southern Italy were among those who settled in Queensland agricultural areas most readily. Helped by their women who worked beside them in the fields they worked hard, and many like those in Bundaberg became respected citizens in the community.

A Bundaberg *News-Mail* feature issue for Agro-Trend 1989, honoured the Italian community with stories of some of the Italian settlers, many of whom had worked at the Fairymead Mill. Later they bought their own cane farms.” Although Italian immigration to this region of Central Queensland began early in the century, Italians who bought land in the post-war period in the Bundaberg region mostly grew tobacco, until about 1953 when new cane assignments became available. They then turned to the production of sugar cane.⁹² Unlike Italian settlers who arrived in Australia from Italy at this time most of these people were of Italian descent, who came to Bundaberg from other areas in North Queensland where Italian migrants had been engaged in growing sugar cane for many years. Tina, an Italian interviewee

⁹¹ *Agro Trend 89*, Bundaberg, *News Mail*, May, 1989, pp. 13-17.

⁹² Interview conducted by G. Johansen with T.D., at Bundaberg, 12 May, 1998.

testified to a number of issues of interest to this thesis concerning the life style of the Italian women.

Tina was born at the Tully hospital which was the closest hospital to El Arish, where her parents had a cane farm. She grew up to become a teacher, and after getting married and going to live in the Bundaberg region, she conducted adult education classes for migrants. She said she did not receive a great response from the men because as farmers they worked very hard and had very little time to go out at night. It was the men who did most of the business and so they learned to be reasonably efficient in English quite quickly. However in the case of the women it was rather different. They helped their husbands in the fields during the day, and at night they had to do their household chores so it was not until their children started school and they had to help their children learn to spell that they learned very much English. Tina remarked that it was the problems associated with language that women found the most difficult.⁹³ She remarked that:

Once they grasped the language their freedom seemed to have been a bit better because the problem brought all sorts of other problems. Not only in the shopping area but also when they had to go to hospital to have babies [or] to go to the doctor. A lot of them took their school age children with them to interpret and that was a bit difficult especially when there were feminine problems that a child can't understand.⁹⁴

The depth of the difficulty was endorsed by Jean who was a doctor in private practice in Bundaberg. She explained that:

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Because my name was Italian they [mistakenly] thought I was Italian and of course what they [the men] would do was just leave their wives at the surgery door and go. In self defence I had to learn Italian, enough to be able to communicate with them and tell them what dosage of medicines to take and when they were in labour to push down and ail that sort of thing. We sort of struggled along with symptoms and signs.⁹⁵

Both Tina and Jean were in accord in their belief that the work performed by Italian women on the tobacco farms was very laborious. Tina stated that they helped in nearly all aspects of the farm work, planting, chipping, harvesting and the work in the drying sheds. In the evenings the men would not give any help in doing the household chores, although Tina did say that most could turn on a very good meal. Socially, after the founding of the *Across the Waves Club* by the Italian community in 1959 they all gathered there, men, women and children. Tina testified that:

A family is a unit and you don't break it up at all...When this Club started the funny thing about it **was** [that] when it began certain members of the Australian community who were friends of the Italians were invited into the Club so it was assimilation in reverse. Instead of the Australians bringing the Italians into their activities it was the other way round.⁹⁶

As pointed out by Betts, by the time of the election of the conservative Menzies government in 1949, immigration was an accepted ideological solution to what was seen as the 'population problem' in Australia.⁹⁷

Adult Education

In the post-war period, both migrant and Australian born women not only felt the need to earn extra money to purchase consumer items for the home, but as time passed many found that their war time experiences had broadened their outlook.

⁹⁵ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with J.P. at Bundaberg, 14 May, 1998.

⁹⁶ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with T.D. at Bundaberg, 12 May, 1998.

⁹⁷ K. Betts, *op. cit.*, p.51.

While not many were prepared to return to full time study, or to take on a career, they did feel they wanted something more out of life than remaining “tied to the kitchen sink.” Evidence which supports this statement is to be found in the annual report of the Board of Adult Education for 1949⁹⁸ as shown by Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Summary of Queensland Adult Education Attendance 1949.

District	Towns Within Each District	Number of Meetings	Total Attendances
Metropolitan	1	847	29 982
Toowoomba	11	298	12 180
Maryborough (incl. Bundaberg)	18	414	10 322
Townsville	8	304	9 113
Cairns	9	380	10 253
Rockhampton (incl. Gladstone)	9	301	7 302
Totals	56	2 550	79 152

Source: Annual Report of the Queensland Board of Adult Education 1949.

The continued growth of participation in these classes in the Rockhampton district during the period of the thesis and beyond is reflected in summaries in the Annual Reports for 1958 and 1968. In the Rockhampton district in 1958 there were 1 427 activities with a total attendance of 31 398. In addition it was stated that eleven clubs of an educational nature had their headquarters at the Adult Education Centre in Rockhampton.⁹⁹ In the 1968 Report it was stated that in the Rockhampton district the number of lectures and classes outside this city had increased by 260. It was also

⁹⁸ Annual Report of the Board of Adult Education 1949, held at Rockhampton and District Historical Society p. 15.

⁹⁹ Annual Report of the Board of Adult Education 1958. P. 10, held at Rockhampton and District Historical Society.

stated that pottery classes had been introduced at Gladstone, while chess, a new activity, began in Longreach, and a crochet class was set up in Barcaldine.¹⁰⁰

Unfortunately the reports gave no indication about the numbers of women who attended these classes but Marilyn, an interviewee for the thesis, said that in the pottery and painting classes which she and another woman conducted there were very few men. Marilyn testified that:

At my first class 35 turned up. That's a lot. I think there were a couple of fellows but they were mainly females and mainly new people to the town. The next year Jenny , who conducted the pottery classes, mostly had CWA and Red Cross women who were long term residents of Gladstone.¹⁰¹

Ken who was in charge of the Rockhampton district from 1965 was of the opinion that adult education programmes in 1945 were mainly directed towards women's interests such as pottery classes, sewing classes and child care. However subjects on various forms of horticulture attracted both male and female students. Nevertheless as he pointed out that right from the beginning all activities were open to everyone. He stated:

I feel that in our classes in 1965 the majority of students were women, particularly in the daytime classes, but there was no exclusion clause for anyone over the age of 15. There were some similarities between them [the classes] and the first ones...We were involved with the critical development of children for instance.¹⁰²

When asked if classes in Brisbane attracted similar interest to those in Cairns and

¹⁰⁰ Annual Report of the Board of Adult Education, 1968, p.7, held at Rockhampton and District Historical Society.

¹⁰¹ Interview conducted by G. Johansen with M.H. at Gladstone on 16 April, 1999.

¹⁰² Interview conducted by G. Johansen with K.S. at Emu Park on 23 April, 1999.

Rockhampton districts, he replied that attendances tended to be much higher in towns and suburbs in which there was an affluent retired population than in working class areas. He said his opinion was that working class people “didn’t have the time and they were so busy with their own lives that they didn’t come.”¹⁰³ Because of the lack of job opportunities for women in Central Queensland this could have accounted for the development of Little Theatre, Musical Groups and the Visual Arts in which women were enthusiastic participants as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

Ken remarked that in 1965 television reached the Rockhampton area and television drew many people away from the adult education programmes. However the evidence put forward does seem to support the assumption that, although many women were happy to return to the role of housewife and mother after the end of the war, they also felt the need to mix socially with other women and to become involved in creative pursuits. Nevertheless television also had an effect on women’s lives which was not always beneficial. It did not however impact on family life in ways that it was thought it might in the 1940s, when Australians were debating ways and means of increasing the population.

Women’s unpaid work as housewife and mother was under-valued in an economic and social sense throughout the period of the thesis, and because of this their social status did not rank highly. However, it has been shown that although coping with war conditions at home made life difficult for women with families, in many cases it also

¹⁰³ Ibid.

gave them confidence to enter the public sphere. This confidence was boosted in the post-war period through their participation in Adult Education classes. Additionally, another group of women, whom society mostly disregarded, were the women who nursed family members who were incapacitated veterans. The War Widows Association and Legacy did some wonderful work helping war widows, but the women who cared for veterans, particularly in rural and sometimes regional centres, often slipped through the net.

During the war women's unpaid voluntary work gave them recognition through war time propaganda which stressed the need for patriotic endeavour if the Japanese forces were to be defeated. This chapter has demonstrated that this was soon forgotten at the end of the war, when women who had participated in both paid and unpaid work for the war effort were expected to devote their energies to care of the home and family. It has also discussed the debates on what was seen as a low population crisis during the war years from the point of view of the social mores of the 1940s which were based on the patriarchal perception that child bearing and home care were the chief functions of women. Additionally the chapter considers the introduction of the immigration programme introduced by Calwell which met with the approval of all parties, even though this further exacerbated the severe housing shortage.