

SONYA JONES

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

THURSDAY 10 AM

ORAL HISTORY PAPER

AND

REGIONAL HISTORY PAPER

24 AUGUST 1989

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1989

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Signed B. Bushell

Date 3rd July 1989

Interviewer Sonya Jones

SUBJECT: SONYA JONES

The Country Women's Association built holiday homes for country women and children needing a rest. Newcastle Branch, with the aid of the Hunter River Group, established the Newcastle Seaside Home at Herewether in 1931. The home expanded in 1935. During the war years, servicemen were accommodated at the home and later servicewomen also used the home. After the war the home was used as an OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE. However, the building became shabby and it was decided to build a new, larger home. Ruth Fairfax House was opened in 1954. Student teachers boarded there. Eventually, holiday homes were no longer needed and the house was sold.

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RESEARCH PAPER

NEWCASTLE SEASIDE HOMES

24 AUGUST 1989

SUMMARY

The Country Women's Association built holiday homes for country women and children needing a rest. Newcastle Branch, with the aid of the Hunter River Group, established the Newcastle Seaside Home at Merewether in 1931. The home expanded in 1935. During the war years, servicemen were accommodated at the home and later servicewomen also used the home. After the war the home became increasingly popular. However, the building became shabby and it was decided to build a new, larger home. Ruth Fairfax House was opened in 1954. Student teachers boarded there. Eventually, holiday homes were no longer needed and the house was sold.

NEWCASTLE SEASIDE HOMES

The Country Women's Association was formed in April, 1922. The organisation aimed to improve the conditions of 'women on the land'.¹ The members were convinced that there was a need to establish holiday homes for country women. Newcastle Branch, with the support of the Hunter River Group, established the Newcastle Seaside Home in 1931. Ruth Fairfax House replaced the Newcastle Seaside Home in 1954. It was a state project in the care of the Hunter River Group.

The Newcastle Seaside Home was the project of the Newcastle Branch. Mrs J. Miller, of Scone, realised that there was a need for holiday homes for country women and children. Mrs Muriel Mackay, also of Scone, worked to stimulate public interest and to raise the necessary finance.² Mrs Mackay founded the Newcastle Branch in 1929. The principle objectives of the Branch were to establish a seaside home in the district and to form a committee to work for and manage the home.³ Most Branches began to raise funds in early 1930. The money was raised entirely by the Branches of the Hunter River Group. Mrs Mackay personally raised over 700 pounds by 1928 by selling flowers, jams and preserves. She also invented a lamp which she patented and demonstrated at country shows, raising more than 300 pounds.⁴

An old inn, in Frederick Street, Merewether, was bought for 750 pounds in 1930. It was renovated, redecorated and furnished for 300 pounds. Donations of equipment and furniture also came from Branches in the Hunter River Group. Newcastle Seaside Home was opened by the state President, Mrs M. Sawyer, on 14th February 1931. Although the home had cost 1,050 pounds, it was opened free of debt, despite the Great Depression.⁵ The home could accommodate 15 people. It was run by a matron-housekeeper, Mrs J. Rutherford. Mrs Rutherford gave the use of her own furniture, including an ice chest, piano and electric sweeper. These were accepted on condition she accept a small salary. Members of the committee relieved the matron on her days off and assisted during peak periods with the cooking and general duties. During the first year, 80 women and children holidayed at the home.⁶

The home soon needed to expand. In 1935 a cottage was built on the site. This increased the accommodation by five extra bedrooms and two sleep-out verandahs. The home could now accommodate 35 people. The cottage cost 850 pounds. Mrs Mackay personally raised 380 pounds towards the cottage. From 1936 the Mackay Cup was given annually to the Branch which raised the most money for the home.⁷ This money was for painting, repairs and maintenance which were needed to keep the home in good condition. In the first ten years, the home accommodated 1,584 women and 1,495 children.⁸

1 H. Townsend, Serving The Country, Moorebank, 1988, p.11.

2 G. Petersen and M. Rennie, The Silver Years, Sydney, 1947, p.36.

3 Ibid.

4 Townsend, Serving...., p.71.

5 Ibid.

6 Petersen and Rennie, The Silver...., p.36.

7 Townsend, Serving...., p.73.

8 Ibid.

During World War II, the home accommodated 7,000 servicemen on leave.⁹ In 1940 the problem of accommodating servicemen on leave was acute. The facilities of the home were offered to them. It was believed that the Country Women's Association was the first organisation to offer such a practical solution to the problem. The fee in 1940 was two shillings for bed, bath and breakfast.¹⁰ Newcastle Branch members provided breakfast each day. The Australian Comforts Fund showed their appreciation by donating 1,000 pounds to the home.¹¹ Early in 1946 the home was closed to the servicemen. However, as the hostel for servicewomen had closed, rooms in the cottage were reserved for the use of servicewomen. Eighty-four women used the facilities.¹²

After the war, the home became increasingly popular. Women and children from all parts of the state enjoyed a holiday there. It was said that they 'derived great benefit from a holiday away from the usual surroundings, embracing a change of air and environment.'¹³ Many women also brought their neighbours' children. Sometimes children came to the home unaccompanied. Groups from one-teacher schools were popular. When they arrived, some local members would move into the home to supervise their stay. A group of diabetic children holidayed there. A Country Women's Association leadership School was held at the home.

The home had become shabby, old and inadequate for the demand made upon it. The home was now managed by a small committee, elected from the Newcastle Branch by the Hunter River Group and a general committee, comprising representatives from various Branches in the Group. In 1944 it was realised a new, larger home was needed. Newcastle Branch negotiated for land in John Parade, Merewether. In 1946 the Country Women's Association opened a Seaside Homes Appeal to raise funds to replace Newcastle Seaside Home and another home. In 1947 Branches were asked to hold special Blue and Gold Balls, with the proceeds going to the Appeal.¹⁴ In 1947 the land was transferred to the Country Women's Association and the new home became a state project in the care of the Hunter River Group. Branches in the Group made donations. The Newcastle Seaside Home was sold in 1953. Plans were drawn up for a new building and tenders were called for its construction.

⁹ Petersen and Rennie, The Silver..., p.37.

¹⁰ Thurgar, The Golden Years, Hamilton, 1976, p.14.

¹¹ Petersen and Rennie, The Silver..., p.37.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Townsend, Serving..., p.78.

The new building was to have been called Hunter River House, Newcastle.¹⁵ However, Mrs Ruth Fairfax, who had been a state Secretary for many years, died in 1948. The new building was then named Ruth Fairfax House as a memorial to her. The 24 bedrooms were furnished by Branches of the Hunter River Group. Each Branch furnished one bedroom except Newcastle Branch, which furnished two bedrooms. There was a guest kitchen, mothers' kitchen, library, lounge room, large dining room and a children's rumpus room.¹⁶ The house was opened by the Governor of New South Wales, Sir John Northcott in 1954. It had cost 35,000 pounds and was opened free of debt.¹⁷ The house could accommodate more than 60 women and children.¹⁸

Ruth Fairfax House was at first well occupied. Times changed, however. Families had cars and caravans. They could travel and holiday anywhere.¹⁹ Eventually, Christmas was the only time the house was full. Revenue also declined. Some of the empty rooms were let to female students studying at Newcastle Teachers' College. The first women moved in as boarders in 1956. At holiday time members and their children used the house. At the Hunter River Group Annual Conference held on 24th October 1967, it was suggested that the house become a boarding house for young business women, a private motel or small units for young country women. The state President, Mrs W. Sharrock, felt that these were not the objectives of the Country Women's Association.²⁰ In 1970 it was finally decided to proceed with the sale of Ruth Fairfax House.

Newcastle Seaside Home and Ruth Fairfax House served the purpose for which they were built. They accommodated many country women and children in need of a holiday by the sea. However, times changed and seaside homes were no longer needed. Ruth Fairfax House eventually closed, ending an era.

¹⁵ Thurgar, The Golden..., p.19.

¹⁶ R. Smith and D. Baltzer, The Golden Years, Sydney, 1972, p.21.

¹⁷ Townsend, Serving..., p.78.

¹⁸ Smith and Baltzer, The Golden..., p.21.

¹⁹ Townsend, Serving..., p.78.

²⁰ Thurgar, The Golden..., p.39.

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SONYA JONES

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

THURSDAY 10 AM

ORAL HISTORY

TAPED INTERVIEW WITH MRS BARBARA BUSHELL

THE COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

24 AUGUST 1989

SUMMARY

Mrs Barbara Bushell has been a full member of the Country Women's Association since 1954. Before she was married, she was involved with the Country Women's Association Younger Set. Her parents were strict and she joined the Younger Set so she would be allowed to go to dances.

Mrs Bushell has belonged to a number of different branches. She has belonged to the Cowra Younger Set and helped form the Cootamundra Younger Set. She joined Moulamein, Ganmain, Goulburn, Yass, St. George, Eugowra and East Maitland Branches. She is also the patron of Maitland City Evening Branch.

Mrs Bushell was a member of the Younger Set at Cowra when the Japanese broke out of their camp. She lived at Moulamein during the western floods. The Country Women's Association catered for the people fighting the flood. At Eugowra, a man went missing and the Country Women's Association catered for the searchers.

Barbara Bushell has held important positions in the Country Women's Association. She has been a branch secretary, treasurer and president. She was president at Eugowra and East Maitland. Mrs Bushell has also been the secretary of a group, an international officer and a cultural officer. Currently, Mrs Bushell is a member of the State Executive. She is the Hunter River Group representative.

Mrs Bushell helped raise funds to build a unit for elderly ladies at Ganmain. While she was president at East Maitland Branch, she was on the catering side of the local State Emergency Service Committee. During the Bicentenary, she was a member of the Bicentenary Committee.

Mrs Bushell has a long service bar for twenty years service to the Country Women's Association. Last year she was nominated for the 'Woman in '88' and she received a medallion. She has won awards and prizes.

Over the years, Mrs Bushell has seen the Country Women's Association change from being just a friendship group to a more politically-active group. She feels the Country Women's Association has achieved a lot over the years that has been taken for granted. Mrs Bushell thinks there is still an interest in and a need for the Country Women's Association, since people are still lonely. The Country Women's Association has helped people over the years with school hostels and holiday cottages. The organisation is still working to improve conditions in the community.

Barbara Bushell is in her third and last term on the State Executive. She travels to Sydney for a week every three months. She has been involved with the decision-making and in the organisation of some exhibitions.

ORAL HISTORY

Interviewer: Sonya Jones
Interviewee: Mrs Barbara Bushell
Subject Of Interview: The Country Women's Association
Date: July 3rd, 1989

SJ: Good morning, Mrs Bushell.

BB: Good morning, Sonya

SJ: How many years have you been involved with the Country Women's Association?

BB: Well, as a full member, since 1954, when I joined in Moulamein, which is part of the Victorian CWA and before that, before I was married at Cowra, I was involved in the Younger Set. There's no Younger Sets anymore because there wasn't very much interest by the younger people. But we do have evening branches now and there is a new evening branch here in Maitland, the Maitland City Evening Branch.

SJ: How did you become involved with the CWA?

BB: Rather a funny story, the first one, because when I was in Cowra, as a young girl, there were two army camps in Cowra and my father and mother were very strict and Father wouldn't let me go to any of the dances that were in the town, except the one's that were run by the Country Women's Association Younger Set. So I joined the Younger Set so I could go along to the dances and be a hostess, with the other girls. Of course, they were very select dances in those days.

SJ: Have you belonged to many different branches?

BB: Oh, yes. Oh, the Younger Set was Cowra, then I helped form a Younger Set when we were at Cootamundra and then I joined at Moulamein, Ganmain and Goulburn, and Yass, St. George Branch in Sydney and Eugowra and East Maitland Branch.

SJ: That's a lot.

BB: And I am also patron of the new Maitland City Evening Branch.

SJ: Did anything interesting happen at any of these branches?

BB: Oh, goodness, now let me think. Well of course, I was a member of the Younger Set when the Japanese broke out of the camp at Cowra and although the Younger Set, the CWA didn't have anything to do with it, it was a very interesting time at Cowra and that's coming up to fifty years ago.

SJ: Really?

BB: Yes, they broke out in 1944, I think. And in Moulamein, when we lived out there, of course that was during the western floods. The 1955 floods here in Maitland but it was nearly 1956 when they got to Moulamein. And apart from helping to feed the people who were fighting on the levee banks and things like that, it was fun afterwards to see the ladies coming to our meetings. They might have to come on a trailer behind a tractor and they'd have a case with all their fancy clothes in and they'd be walking down the street in gumboots and hanging onto their very nice high heel shoes to go to the meetings. And in Eugowra there was a gentleman lost in the bush and we did the catering for three days for the searchers while they were looking for him and it was in the middle of summer and a very, very difficult job and unfortunately the man had taken his own life when they found him. I wasn't here in East Maitland during the 1955 floods but I know the CWA were very much involved there. And then during the Bicentenary time, I was on the State Bicentenary Committee for their Bicentenary celebrations and helped to get the murals going. We had a fabulous fashion award and the big zone judging was here for this, for three groups. And also we had our Bicentenary Scholarship which was finalised at the last State Conference, which was wonderful and that was a scholarship in the arts and there was a prize for instrumental, a prize for piano and a prize for vocal and three young people will have a trip overseas, imagine that.

SJ: What positions have you held in the CWA?

BB: I've been a president, I've been a secretary, I've been the secretary of a group. I was secretary of Southern Tablelands Group. I've been a branch treasurer, though not for very long because I'm not a very good treasurer. I only did that here in East Maitland when there was no one else to carry on for a few months when our treasurer got sick and I've been an international officer and a cultural officer and while I was cultural officer at East Maitland Branch we twice won the award for the best cultural report. So I was very proud that. And now I'm on the State Executive. I'm the Hunter River Group Representative to the State Executive.

SJ: Where where you president?

BB: I was President at Eugowra and here at East Maitland.

SJ: What type of projects have you been involved with?

BB: Well, the most exciting, as I said, was the Bicentenary one but I've helped at Ganmain. They had space at the back of their rooms and they were intending to build a unit for elderly ladies. Well, I wasn't there when it came to fruition but I helped raise funds for that one and unfortunately after it had been built, it stayed in the hands of the Country Women's Association for some time but then they had another big retirement village run by, I think, the Methodist Church there and they combined them all. And while I was President at East Maitland Branch, I

was on the State Emergency Committee, on the local one, on the catering side and found that was very interesting. And we used to have special days, you know, when you practise what you do if anything happened and the local flood, the last flood, the flood they had here last week was rather like one of the scenarios we had for that. Particularly when Hinton was cut off, because we had one that Hinton was cut off and were given the scenario of finding a way to get medical supplies to somebody who was sick there.

SJ: Have you received awards for your work?

BB: I've got my long service bar, which is for twenty years of service to CWA but that's the only one though for last year, I was nominated for the 'Woman in '88' and I received a medallion a few weeks ago for that.

SJ: What changes have you seen in the CWA over the years?

BB: Well, I think when I first went to CWA, it was more or less just a friendship thing, apart from a few things but now we are very definitely, the Country Women's Association has the ear to all the different political parties. We are non-party political and if there is anything we can do and it is amazing the number of things that we take to politicians and just the amount of interest that is taken in our conferences and things like that. Some of the resolutions that come in, we're now working to improve road conditions and not only the road conditions in the far west but trying to help prevent some of the terrible accidents. All of these things we're involved in, whereas before we were just trying to make things easier for women in the country. We're still trying to make it because in the far west it's very difficult. We've always been interested in education but this time, in these days, we've had input to the government's education with the rural education. Country Women's Association have had quite a lot of input in that and I think were still, we are getting more and more involved in the everyday type of things that are happening right throughout the country.

SJ: What do you think the future holds for the CWA?

BB: Will, I think there is as much need for it now as there ever was because people, no matter what, people get lonely and although people sometimes say, 'oh, well, there's nothing much when you're going to a meeting', meetings aren't the only thing. There are other involvements and it's a friendship thing and getting to know people and we still like to feel that when people come into an area, you know, the CWA are there to help them. And in the smaller places, there's no doubt the CWA room is the Mecca. I mean, we're the only hall in the town and anything that goes on there everyone takes a part in it and I think there's still an interest because people will be lonely, no matter what.

SJ: How has the CWA helped country people?

BB: Well, as I say, friendship first and foremost. I mean, particularly young people going out to live in the country for the first time. It doesn't quite so much do these days because, we've got cars and most people have got the telephone or the access to the telephone but we still like to feel that we help people and we're helping over the years, there have been school hostels. Well, those are not quite so needed now and there were holiday cottages. There's still holiday cottages, still got a holiday cottage at Bermagui and there's still another one at Batlow. So they're holidays for people and, of course, the more recession there is, the more that these things are needed because they're not glamour places. They're just very nice, homely places to go and have rests and things like that.

SJ: What have you been involved with in recent years?

BB: Oh, the State Emergency was one of them and the cultural side, as I said. We did very well with our branch cultural reports and I also last year won the trophy, the encouragement award it's called and I don't know whether I need any encouragement to go on talking but I did a talk. I spoke as a first fleeter, I and my forebears, at our last cultural day and that's the encouragement award I got and the little one, the little plaque is for my third prize in the photographic competition a couple of years ago. I think I said about the cultural side of things. We have a handicraft side of Country Women's Association and we have a handicraft exhibition every year at the State Conference, which next year will be either held in Dubbo or Coonabarabran. This 1989 Conference was held in Sydney and the handicraft exhibition is a most delightful thing for anybody. I'm not a handicrafter but I'm interested in going and having a look and I'd love to be able to be interested. The cooking exhibition, which is all The Land cookery exhibition because for years The Land Cookery did run it completely but we have our own committee now. We have an Ampol art award and the funding, the prizes come from the Ampol company and some of the artists that have come through from there are absolutely wonderful. They're all amateurs and all of them are members of the Country Women's Association. We also have, and I've been involved in, the photographic one, the one that I won third prize. We have a beautiful trophy that goes from one year to another and you just hold it for a year and you get a little plaque to say that you have won it. Some of the work we've had in the last three years has been absolutely superb. It's really wonderful and anytime wherever there is a CWA State Conference, anybody I recommend have a look at all those. And although I'm not involved in a lot of them, I've been involved in the organisation of some of them because it takes a lot of organising and on our State Executive Committee, the Executive help run those, though the State Executive Committee, we virtually do what the members tell us. Nothing is done in the CWA by the state president or the Executive Committee until the members ask for it to be done and everything starts at the members. As one past resident, Mrs Thelma Bate has said, everything that has ever become part of our policy was one woman's idea originally and it's come from that. And we have a lot of things that over the years we've achieved that people take for granted

and one of the most important, I think, the dividing lines on roads, that was a suggestion that first came through a CWA conference, I think roundabout the 1950's and in 1936 was the first time ever there was a resolution on CWA agenda that women be paid the same as men for equal jobs, so we go back a long way in working for things that are better for women.

SJ: Have you anything else to add?

BB: Just, I think the bits about the State Executive. I'm in my third term. We have a twelve month term and three consecutive terms are the most at any one time and I'm in my last term. Its been very exciting, its been very, very busy and you certainly don't go onto State Executive and go to Sydney for a week every three months and sort of do nothing, you really work. It's four days of meetings and some of the things we cover are very, very important and its very rewarding and I've thoroughly enjoyed my time on it. And it's unfortunate that not everybody can be on State Executive because there's only one member from each group. The State's divided into thirty groups and there's one person representing their own group, so when we have a meeting it means there are thirty ladies there from all over New South Wales. Every part of New South Wales is represented. And then we have our state president, state honorary secretary, state honorary treasurer and four vice presidents and our international officer. And in our international work, each year we study one country. Last year, because it was the Bicentenary year, Australia, of course, was our country for study. This year, it's Wales. And we receive nominations from the branch international officers. The branches nominate who they would like to study and we vote on those at Executive. And each October we're told what is the next country of study and they're all very, very interesting. And with our international work, we have an international scholarship and New South Wales sends a young lass from Papua New Guinea to the Pacific School of Study at Suva in Fiji and she studies there for twelve months then goes back to her village in New Guinea and takes all the information she's learnt back. She learns about nutrition and crafts and how to make things work in a primitive way in some of the primitive villages. And at last State Conference we had one of our lasses, I can't remember her name, I should be able to but she was our scholar in 1986 and she has been sent back to Australia to study with the ABC. To study communications because a lot of these women in the villages are, of course, illiterate but they can be taught through television and many of them have the television and that's why this lass is there for. And she spoke for about ten minutes and she was a most charming speaker and nobody could ever say that she was from a backward country because she was a delightful person. And with our international work, we are also affiliated with the ACWW, which is the Associated Country Women of the World and that is thirty different nations of the world that all have women's organisations, like England's Women's Institute and New Zealand's Farmers' Associations and such like. And they're all joined together and there are nine million women in that. Through that we work for water for all and nutrition for all and try to help the women, particularly of the developing countries.

SJ: Thank you for your time.

BB: Thank you.