

THE VICTORIAN WOMEN GRADUATES' ASSOCIATION

The First Forty Years

A preliminary meeting of this Association was held on 25th September 1920, and the Victorian Women Graduates' Association was formed on 3rd November of that year. Dr. Georgina Sweet, the elected President, was ill, and Miss Jessie Webb took the chair. Since this is the year of our Ruby Jubilee, it seems fitting to take stock of what has been achieved, and to consider where we are going. This is a short survey - not a history - of those forty years.

Other early office-bearers were Miss Kathleen McNerny (later Mrs. Sherrard) as first Honorary Secretary, and Miss Ethel Bage as first Honorary Treasurer. They were succeeded by Miss Doris Hall (later Mrs. R. W. McKellar) and Miss Elinor Archer who each held office for over ten years as Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer respectively. Other women, prominent in public life of those times, who followed Dr. Sweet as President were Mrs. W. Thorn, Miss I. J. Macdonald and Miss Jessie Webb-but this encroaches on history.

MEMBERSHIP. The fluctuations of membership must be considered, bearing in mind the Association was started in a flush of enthusiasm after World War I and weathered the Depression of the 1930's and World War II. Another factor affecting membership adversely is the periodical necessity to delete from the mailing list the names of members who have been unfinancial for two or more years, and who have become a burden the Association is unable to carry. In the Annual Report 1923-24, membership stood at 298. Four years later it had risen to 400, one-quarter of whom were unfinancial. Membership remained at 400 throughout the Depression, with the proportion of unfinancial members increasing, until 1935-36 when the **Hamilton Branch** with 35 members was started, and total membership of the Association was 478 only 50 per cent. of whom were financial!

World War II next affected membership and intake of Graduands, and in 1942-43 membership had dropped again to 400, but with the formation of the **Geelong Branch** in 1943 it rose until in 1945-46, the year of the **Silver Jubilee**, it reached 600. The Association continued to increase, and with the establishment of the **Mildura Branch** in 1948-49, largely through the efforts of Miss Jean Alexander, there were 700 members, 70 being from the country branches. By 1950-51 with 750 members (one-fifth of whom were unfinancial) the V.W.G.A. was the largest association in the Australian Federation of University Women. There was an intake of 74 new members. The following year, due mainly to the enthusiasm of Mrs. Lyall, the **Ballarat Branch** was established, and numbers rose to 760, remaining at that figure until in 1953-54, through the help of Lady Paton, then President of the V.W.G.A., the **Bendigo Branch** was opened. In 1955 A.F.U.W. raised the capitation fee from five to seven shillings; the V.W.G.A. raised the subscription from fifteen shillings to £1 and membership fell from 760 to 700. There may be no connection, but 43 members resigned as against 21 the previous year. At the same time, however, there were 31 new members. This decade began with the opening of the **Peninsula Branch** and the demise of the Hamilton Branch, and membership has remained at approximately 700, with an intake in 1960 and 1961 of 51 and 45 new members. The significant fact is, however, that for the last twenty years total membership has remained stationary. The effect of the **Vocations Conference** on this **may** be felt in three or four years' time. Girls will start their University course remembering how the Association helped them with ideas on careers and they will take out a degree aware of the V.W.G.A. when they are guests at our Annual Commencement Meeting.

GENERAL MEETINGS. The vicissitudes of these - the lifeline of the Association - are many. The original Constitution stipulated that there should be at least two each year, in part of social character, one to be as near Commencement Day as possible, the other the Annual General Meeting in Third or Fourth Term. Later revision of the Constitution provided for "another meeting, having international features, to be anniversary of the foundation of the held preferably in July to commemorate the International Federation of University Women."

A table giving some figures may be of interest:-

Year	General Meetings Held	Average Attendances
1922-23	4	
1923-24	5	
1938-39	6	112
1946-50	6	
1951	Monthly	
1955	"Poor"	
1958-59	11	120
1960-61	11	100

The Depression years left their impact on meetings, but there was a boom in the immediate pre-war years. Then the War hit the Association badly, and only three General Meetings per annum were held until the end of the War when monthly meetings were resumed. After assessing attendances, the number of meetings was again cut to six. Growth of membership to 760 suggested a return to monthly meetings, commencing in March and with a Buffet Dinner in April. Attendances this year led the Committee to issue a Questionnaire to members to determine the kind of programme required, and four years later the result was marked.

Of the two meetings incorporated in the Constitution, the Annual General Meeting is the one gathering members endeavour to attend, but attendances at the Commencement Meeting have made this function a very real problem for successive Committees. The tradition, not only here, but in other States and in fact in other countries, of inviting Graduands as guests to this meeting, has been carried out in various ways. Perhaps tabulating the figures for the Commencement Party will prove illuminating:-

Year	Graduands	Members	Comment
1924	70	110	(One-third total membership).
1925-26	40	160	
1926-27	40	220	Held in the Union. Dinner @ 3/6 a head.
1927-28	58	248	Whole of financial membership attended.
1929-30	56	240	After dinner members adjourned to the Mathematics Lecture Room where tables were set with sweets and cigarettes.
1930-31	66	180	Beginning of Depression.
1933-34	-	170	Centenary of Victoria Dinner. In addition an experiment was made of inviting Graduands to the July Meeting, and a large cake was presented by the V.W.G.A. at "Stunt Night" in First Term, to inform Graduands of our existence.
1934-35			Graduands were sent congratulations from President and Association, invited to attend Dinner at the Union, paying their own 3/6, and offered 18 months' membership for one year's subscription.
1935-36			Members were asked to bring a Graduand as a guest, if possible, and Graduands were guests of the Association again at the July Meeting.
1941-42			Commencement Meeting: Late Afternoon Party.
1943-44			A Saturday Late Afternoon Party was attended by 60 people. All Graduands were notified but attendance was poor.
1945-46		150	Silver Jubilee-Members and Graduands at the first Commencement Dinner since the War.
1948-49			Committee only entertained Graduands at Janet

			Clarke Hall.
1949-50	50		Traditional, Commencement Dinner (Buffet) held at Janet Clarke Hall.
1952-53	47		Graduate-Graduand Dinner as first meeting of the year (March).
1954-55	80	80	As in previous year.
1955-56	64	76	As in previous year.
			This 50/50 attendance was becoming a financial problem.
1957-61			Welcome to Graduands was held in the Union from 5.30-7.30 p.m. In 1961 there were four times as many Graduands as Graduates.

The gradual decline in members' attendance and the very great increase in Graduands has raised a serious problem for the Committee. Greater support from members at this party would be much appreciated since it provides our principal chance to expand the membership roll.

HOSPITALITY SECTION. inaugurated in 1931-32 with Mrs. W. Thorn, ex-President, and Mrs. A. Mackenzie, ex-Secretary, of A.F.U.W. as organisers, gives practical expression to our aims. By 1934, instead of the previous A.F.U.W. Council forming a Committee, there was a register to which all members could send their names, I/- and particulars of address, telephone number, leisure times, and whether having a car, a spare bed or a cottage. Mrs. Mackenzie continued as Hospitality Secretary until 1940, when the advent of war necessarily changed the pattern again. Afternoon teas were mainly held, or trips to the hills. One hundred and fifty interested subscribers still paid a small additional sum to cover postage of notices, written and sent out by the Hospitality Secretary.

This system was continued until at the suggestion of our Present Hospitality Secretary, Mrs. J. R. Lyall, the scheme of including information about parties on monthly notices was adopted a year ago. This, of course, excludes contact with those who are here only a few days, except at the Executive level. Sending flowers or other greetings must suffice sometimes, and the practice adopted over the past of inviting visitors to our meetings is much appreciated. Nothing, however, is as good as the opportunity to meet and talk together at a specially arranged party.

So much for the pattern of the Association. What has been achieved?

SCHOLARSHIP AND APPEALS. The Endowment Fund is as old as the Association itself. Ever since its foundation in 1920, the V.W.G.A., inspired by its first Honorary Treasurer, Miss Ethel Bage, has put aside annually from every member's subscription, U- and since 1955, 2/-. This has formed the nucleus of a "Bursary Fund for Research-, later christened the -Endowment Fund". ' It had reached £600 before being added to by generous bequests from two foundation members-Dr. Constance Ellis and Miss Ethel Bage, in 1942-43. The Trustees of this Fund are appointed for life, or until resignation. Original Trustees were Miss Bage, Mrs. F. Thorn and Miss Annie Laing. Succeeding Trustees were Dr. Gwynneth Buchanan, Miss Helen Hailes and Miss Kathleen Syme. At present they are Miss Syme, Dr. Ethel McLennan and Miss Nell Cooper.

Last year our Treasurer put forward the suggestion of Dr. Nancy Millis, that members might like to build up this Fund by donations. This suggestion is still open. We have had this year one gift towards the Endowment Fund of twenty guineas, and our grateful thanks go to this anonymous donor.

The following awards were made to winners of Scholarships who applied by virtue of their membership of the V.W.G.A. Fulbright and British Council Awards, etc., belong to a history including personalities.

Firstly, Scholarships given by the V.W.G.A. or its benefactors:-

- 1924-25 Two Australian International Scholarships of £500 each offered through the generosity of Dr. Georgina Sweet.
- 1928 The Bursary Fund stood at £200. An effort was to be made to award a scholarship in 1930, and envelopes were given to each member who was asked to contribute threepence per week until next Commencement Dinner.
- 1930 Scholarship (£200) awarded to Miss Florence Cederholm (now Lady Giddy), who was unable to use it. It was held over and re-awarded the following
- 1931 year to Miss Elleen Fisher (now Dr. Fisher), who became the holder of

- the First Victorian Travelling Fellowship.
- 1933 There were further efforts to aid our own Fellowship Fund to make an award in 1934. Tennis parties, motor outings, and an Exhibition of Curios were held.
- 1934 Second Victorian Travelling Fellowship (£200) was awarded to Miss Mavis Freeman.
- 1937-38 It was decided at the Annual General Meeting that the income from the Endowment Fund for that year should be given to a fund for a scholarship, exhibition or bursary in memory of Miss I. D. Marshall, at University Women's College, and £34 was paid to the College Fund.
- 1949-50 The **CONSTANCE ELLIS FELLOWSHIP** was awarded by V.W.G.A. to Miss Betty Hunt, a British physicist, who used it for further research at Leyden.
- 1950-51 The **ETHEL BAGE SCHOLARSHIP** (£300) from the Endowment Fund was awarded to Mrs. Margaret Thom, who subsequently relinquished it.
- 1952-53 This was re-advertised and awarded to Miss ~4aureen Brunt, who also won the Elizabeth Car Agassiz Fellowship to Radcliffe College, U.S.A.
- 1954-55 **THE CENTENARY SCHOLARSHIP** (£300), celebrating the first hundred years of Melbourne University, was awarded by the V.W.G.A. to Mrs. June Philipp.
- 1958-59 The **ETHEL McLENNAN SCHOLARSHIP** (£530) was awarded to Miss Mary Johnson.
- 1960 The first **LADY LEITCH SCHOLARSHIP** (£700) was awarded to Miss Margaret Walters.

Over the next three years, the income from the Lady Leitch Fund is assessed as being able to provide two scholarships of approximately £730 each, and in the third year one will be offered from the Endowment Fund. This pattern could continue.

Endowment Fund Scholarships commemorate the names of distinguished women in our Association in a transient fashion. A scholarship from a large bequest, such as that of Lady Leitch, can perpetuate the pame of the donor.

In the international field the V.W.G.A. gained 12 or more awards. In 1925 Dr. Ethel McLennan was awarded the Scandinavian Fellowship offered through the I.F.U.M., coming first out of 28 applicants in a field covering 20 countries. Others who have been fortunate in obtaining the benefits of international awards include Miss Adele Ogilvy (Sara Smithson Scholarship, Cambridge, 1930); Miss Frances Penington (Smith College, Massachusetts, 1936); Miss R. Goldie (Amelia Henry Reinhardt, 1944); Miss Joy Mills (Helen Marr Kirby, 1946), who could not take it up at that time; four years later, as Mrs. Joy Parnaby, she was again awarded the Helen Marr Kirby; Miss Dorothy Adams (International Crosby Hall Scholarship, 1933); Miss F. Stephenson. (1945), Miss Margaret Thornas (1946), Miss Jean Mathieson (1947), I.F.U.W. Fellowships; Miss Elwyn Morey (University of California, 1945); Miss Barbara Bell (Caroline Spurgeon, 1949); Miss Margaret Mackay (Johnstone and Florence Stoney, 1953); Dr Nancy Millis (AAUW International Travel Grant, 1954). There could be others inadvertently missed in going through the Annual Reports.

APPEALS. The Association has always rallied to help appeals in University circles. As early as 1922 it gave £10 towards Crosby Hall.

- 1923-25 AX.U.W. needed to raise £1,000 towards the Crosby Hall Fund. The V.W.G.A. raised its quota, one effort being the production of "Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire" in Melba Hall.
- 1925-26 £170 was required as our quota of £400 promised by A.F.U.W. towards a £6,000 I.F.U.W. Fellowship. This was done with the help of the Dramatic Circle of the Lyceum which presented ---TheLiars" (£65), and by holding a Lantern Lecture (£35), and a Bridge Party (£49).
- 1927-28 The Bursary Fund nucleus stood at £200. A special Bursary Week raised £65.
- 1930 During the Depression, Bridge Parties were held in aid of Girls' Week for unemployed girls.
- 1934 The plight of lighthouse keepers, their loneliness and isolation, next led to an Appeal for Books, which continued for six years.
- 1935-36 A Stall was stocked at the Fete in aid of University Women's College, and

there were Group efforts in aid of Union House. During the War years Food Parcels and other activities filled our spare time.

- 1945-46 Fortunately our SILVER JUBILEE YEAR came at the end of the War, and at the International Meeting food and wool for overseas graduates and £55 in cash were donated. The Association presented the Queen Victoria Hospital with four stainless steel Breast Trays, and made a gift of money to the University of Melbourne with which electric clocks were provided throughout the Medical School in memory of Dr. Constance Ellis, who died in 1942. Individual members contributed to the Lady Masson Fund and the Helen White Memorial Fund.
- 1948 Crosby Hall launched an appeal for further funds to which we responded. An Australian Fellowship Fund was started and by
- 1949 we had completed our quota of £200 for AX.U.W. and in the following
- 1950 year sent a cheque for £140/2/- to Crosby Hall.
- 195.1 The STAINED GLASS WINDOW FOR WILSON HALL next appears on the scene. In June of this year the Appeal was launched, and at the Annual Meeting the following year £2,346 had been raised, largely through the efforts of Miss Joske, whose inspiration it was, by appealing to all women who had attended the University, and their friends and relations.
- 1952 £400 was raised for International House by a Book Stall.
- 1955 The year of the Melbourne University Centenary. £365 was raised by a Film Night (Back of Beyond), a Book Carnival and a Cake Stall at the University Fair.
- We also helped to the extent of £100 in financing the visit of a Filipino Graduate after the Manila Conference.
- 1959 £265 towards the expenses of the Sixteenth Biennial AF U.W. Conference in Melbourne (January, 1960) by holding a film night (Antarctic Crossing), and by direct giving.
- 1960 £100 sent through AF.U.W. to IF .U.W. for relief of graduate refugees, £40 of which had been a gift to the V.W.G.A. from AF.U.W.

What lies ahead? For 1962, firstly the Building Appeal for St. Hilda's College for Women, University of Melbourne. Then it is hoped that for the GOLDEN JUBILEE in 1970-71, our membership will be well over 1,000! In two or three years from now the numbers of the V.W.G.A. will be augmented by graduates of Monash University. Some future President may visit Warrnambool, or Gippsland, and endeavour to establish Branches there. Most of all, we need a permanent office, a permanent telephone number, an address where overseas visitors can contact us on arrival in other words, a home of our own.

It is always apt to end with a quotation, so from "The Melbourne Graduate," monthly newsletter, 1st December, 1961:

"FUTURE DEVELOPMENT (of Gladstone Terrace, Leicester Street, Carlton, property owned by the Graduate Union) - The site of the three houses on the Grattan Street corner has been earmarked in development plans for the erection of a multi-storied building to provide central dining accommodation for residents, for members themselves, for offices for the Graduate Union and affiliated bodies, meeting rooms, theatre . . ."

The V.W.G.A. is one such affiliated body, Presidents of which are members of the Graduate Council. There is some hope, therefore, that in the next ten years we may achieve at least our own office.

PHYLLIS G. ASHWORTH, President
20th December, 1961