

# THE PEOPLE AND THE TIMES

## Founding of the Australian Association of Social Workers in 1946

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To mark our 70th anniversary, Jane Miller AM, outlines the events leading up to the foundation of the Australian Association of Social Workers and its early years, and profiles the people who shaped the course of our history.

The 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1946 was a memorable day for Australian social work. On that day, in the offices of the Royal Society for the Welfare of Mothers and Babies in Sydney, the Australian Association of Social Workers' first Federal Executive Committee was elected. Norma Parker (NSW) became the inaugural President; Vice Presidents were Lyra Taylor (Vic.), Kate Ogilvie (NSW), Dorothy Sumner (NSW/USA) and Amy Wheaton (SA). Margaret Grutzner (Qld), was elected Honorary Secretary with Viva Murphy (NSW) as Assistance [sic] Secretary.

These seven women, mainly ranging in age from mid 40s to mid 50s and most already respected public figures, went on to make extraordinary contributions to the social work profession (see '[Our founding executive](#)' profiles online). Alison Player, one of the Victorian representatives who voted at the 14<sup>th</sup> of December meeting, was to take over the presidency seven years later, with Parker becoming Vice-President. The new association had approximately four hundred members (AASW Qld, 1947). This achievement had not come about overnight.

### Social work's international context

Social work had become an international phenomenon well before it started in Australia. Professional education had started in England and the USA in the late nineteenth century. When the first International Conference of Social Work was held in Paris in 1928 it was attended by 2,481 delegates from countries as diverse as India, Japan, Russia and Chile (ICSW, 1928, p. 6).

An American Association of Social Workers was founded as early as 1917 and by 1955 (Social Welfare History Project, n. d.) it joined with other professional social work groups to form the National Association of Social Workers, which now has more than 130,000 members (NASW, n. d.). In Britain a comparable national social work association was not established

until 1971, well after Australia, when the British Association of Social Workers was formed. The BASW currently has approximately 14,000 members (Hitchcock, 2011).



The AASW's first president, Norma Parker, aged 25, photographed in 1931 after gaining her American social work qualification and before moving East to find work. (The West Australian July 1, 1931:16, National Library of Australia. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.newsarticle32530361>)

### Early professional organisation in Australia: Almoners and generic social workers

Fortuitously social work training started almost simultaneously in Sydney and in Melbourne in 1929 (Miller, 2011). In Melbourne a course in 'almoner' (medical social work) training was started at the Melbourne Hospital and in Sydney a general social work course was established. Laurie O'Brien and Cynthia Turner (1979) and Elspeth Browne (1996a) have written accounts of early almoner education. Interestingly the AASW was not the first national social work association in

Australia. The Australian Association of Hospital Almoners ran from 1934 to 1959 (Lawrence, 1965) when it closed its doors and amalgamated with the AASW. By early 1940 it had approximately forty members. The majority of almoners belonged and in the view of John Lawrence, it was a tightly-knit group (1965).



Isabel Hodge, who was in the first group of Victorians to complete the local almoner training and founded the Almoner Department (now a large and thriving social work department) at the Children's Hospital. She is pictured with polio patients during an epidemic in the 1930s. Almoners played an important role in following up discharged children in their homes, monitoring ongoing recovery and ensuring families had what was needed for the care of the child. (Royal Children's Hospital Archive)

Lawrence's recently re-published history, *Professional Social Work in Australia* (1965) summarises the way in which Australian social workers had started to organise professionally in the 1930s. While the Victorians concentrated on forming their professional almoner association (founded in 1932), New South Wales social workers formed the first

association of general social workers in Australia, the Social Workers' Association of New South Wales. In 1935 Victoria followed along the same lines with the Victorian Association of Social Workers. These associations met regularly. Lawrence concludes:

*“The social work associations at this time were embryonic full professional associations. Their sole income was the few shillings of each member's subscription, the numbers were small, and their officers had little time to give to association affairs, but they were important. They set a pattern of educational activity and at least some social action, and they assisted the community's acceptance of trained social work. Perhaps most important of all for the recognition and development of a responsible new occupational group, they held together the products of the Australian training movement. (1965, p. 81)”*

Why was there a move to form the original state-based social work organisations at this time? John Lawrence considers that the reason was that local social workers found they were facing similar problems across various fields of practice and a formal association offered opportunities for communication, joint educational activities and social action (1965).

### Moves to co-ordinate education

Interestingly the three Australian schools of social work of the time, Sydney, Melbourne and the smaller Adelaide, also saw an urgent need to take a national rather than state-based approach. In a three-day meeting convened by the University of Sydney in 1938 (Miller, 2015), attended by representatives from Sydney and Adelaide as well as distinguished American academic Gertrude Vaile, an Australian Council of Schools of Social Work was established. As its first chairman, Melbourne's Dr John Newman Morris candidly remarked to The Argus newspaper this association would 'be able to ensure common methods of training [and] guard against the risk of reduced standards' if the smaller states started social work education (Miller, 2015, p. 149). This was a prescient remark and eventually it became the job of the AASW to attempt to ensure these uniform Australian standards. Unfortunately this council did not survive the war. After

the war, and the formation of the AASW the association's national conferences provided a convenient opportunity for the three schools of social work to meet.

### The Second World War: The young profession had arrived

By the beginning of World War II (WWII) the three schools of social work had been taken over by their local universities (Sydney and Melbourne in 1940 and Adelaide in 1942). The war provided great opportunities for professional social work to demonstrate its worth on a national stage. The universities of Sydney and Melbourne made a significant contribution to the war effort by providing, at the request of the Commonwealth Department of Labour and National Service, a number of intensive six-month welfare training courses (a truncated social work education) to people who already held university degrees.

These industrial welfare officers played an essential role on the home front through their support of the women forced to put aside their domestic obligations and go to work in factories (such as the munitions and clothing factories) so that Australia could keep up essential war production. In 1942, R. Baxter, Director of its Industrial Welfare Division, wrote:

*It is clear that the industrial welfare supervisors [trained by Sydney and Melbourne universities] are playing a most important part...Without trained people the situation will probably get worse each month...we should have successive drafts [of industrial welfare officers] emerging as rapidly as possible (Baxter, 1942).*

Then, as part of the post-war reconstruction strategy, Dr H. M. L. Murray, the controller of the Factory Welfare Branch, started negotiations with the University of Melbourne for establishment of 'some kind of industrial welfare training course especially designed for ex-servicemen and women to undertake after war service...giving them a chance to adjust to civilian life' (Murray, 1944). Social work had come to the attention of the national government which was very keen to harness and extend its expertise. But this did place a heavy burden on a very small profession. The profession's resources were to be further stretched towards the end of WWII when the Australian Red Cross Society (ARCS) demanded a large cohort of social workers to staff its new

rehabilitation hospitals nationwide, and not only in the three eastern states where social work was taught.



Red Cross social workers in Victoria in the 1940s, Margaret Grutzner second from left. Red Cross played an important role in the national dissemination of social work. (Author's collection)

ARCS provided a considerable number of scholarships both to enable people to undertake the qualifying social work courses. It also sent four social workers to Britain to undertake specialist psychiatric social work training at the London School of Economics and Politics (LSE). ARCS also recruited more than a dozen social workers from Britain and the USA to strengthen the small Australian workforce (Miller, 2015). Of equal importance to the introduction of social work in all Australian states was the national social work service established towards the end of the war by Lyra Taylor in the Commonwealth Department of Social Services.

One other arena in which Australian social workers made a significant contribution was to post-war Europe, with several Australian social workers going to Europe to work for UNRRA (United Nations Refugee Relief Administration). The story of these women, which included Betty Dow and Nancy Vercoe (Miller, 2015) among others, is yet to be told. However, once again this demonstrated the esteem in which Australian-trained social workers were held internationally as well as at home.

### Founding the national association

Today's social workers would scarcely recognise the Australia of 1946. Looking back when the AASW reached its fiftieth anniversary in 1996, Elspeth Browne wrote an evocative article for *Australian Social Work* (Browne, 1996b), in which she recalled the Australia of 1946 immediately after WWII. Australia was a parochial country that was yet to be enriched by massive post-war migration from Europe. There was a housing shortage and petrol rationing; the life expectancy for men was 66 years and for women 77. Infant mortality was 29 per thousand. At the time of the 1946 election a referendum was held. The 'yes' vote resulted in the Commonwealth Government taking over 'much of the social security system and federal funding of health care...' (Browne 1996b, p. 57) which had previously been state concerns. Of interest to the social work profession was the fact that at last the beginnings of our national income safety net, which we take for granted today, could be put in place. As part of this change it became necessary for there to be national provision of social work services in Commonwealth Government departments, which was spearheaded by Lyra Taylor.

### Why a national association was needed

In 1961 Sydney's Kate Ogilvie recalled that, 'First tentative moves towards forming the Australian Association were discussed in Adelaide during the war, at an interstate refresher course in Social Casework arranged by Mrs Wheaton and the South Australian Social Workers'. She goes on to add, 'Our contribution was a little blurred by the effect of sitting up for two nights in a war-time train, fortified by one precious bottle, which we managed to procure in Melbourne', giving some picture of the difficulties under which the pioneers laboured as well as Ogilvie's dry sense of humour (Ogilvie, 1961, p. 1).

Apart from the value of coordinating efforts, the driving forces for establishing a national professional association at that time were the need to be able to negotiate with one voice with the federal government and the need for international representation.

In relation to the first point, Browne (1996b) points out social workers from the state associations and the Australian Association of Hospital Almoners had made representations to the Commonwealth Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security, established in 1941, but were hampered

by the lack of a unified national approach. It was clear that for social workers to have a significant say in national policy they had to have a single national association (Browne, 1996b). They were aware that negotiations with ARCS and the Commonwealth Government's manpower planning authority during WWII had been unduly cumbersome as these national organisations had to deal with six state representatives individually.

The second important concern was Australia's formal connections with social work colleagues internationally. In correspondence with Member of Parliament, Dame Enid Lyons, Norma Parker discussed a need for a national body to advise the Australian government on welfare representation in the United Nations Organisation (1946).

the AASW at discussions regarding the International Federation of Social Workers which took place in Paris. In addition to discussing the above, in her President's Report in 1950 Norma Parker also alluded to the interest of Australian social workers in welfare programs in South East Asia and expressed a hope that the AASW would be able to send 'a large contingent' to the next International Conference in India (Parker, 1950). By 1950, the establishment of a single national social work association was bearing fruits in international communication.

By December 1946 there had been several drafts of the constitution and it had been agreed that it would not be finalised until 1948. At the meeting where the first Federal Executive Committee was elected, two representatives voted from each of the states that had existing state



Unknown social workers in Paris in late 1940s/early 1950s. Australian social workers were keen to learn from the practice of colleagues overseas. England was a popular destination in the 1940s and 1950s despite the major influences on Australian social work being American. (Author's collection).

A national association would also facilitate communication with international colleagues, such as the International Conference of Social Work (Lawrence, 1969). At the first meeting of this international conference held after the war in Brussels, Jean Robertson (a Scottish social worker who had been the second staff member appointed in the University of Melbourne social work course (Miller, 2015)) represented Australia. Later Amy Wheaton and Helen James represented

social work associations. The early constitution of 1946 listed the objects of the Association as:

1. To promote and develop professional Social Work throughout the Commonwealth;
2. To act in a representative capacity for the Social Work profession in matters pertaining to the Commonwealth as a whole;
3. To educate and inform public opinion as to the aims and objects of social work;

4. To promote and maintain standards of professional training and practice;
5. To promote professional status and ensure good conditions of employment;
6. To co-ordinate the activities of Social Workers' Associations in the various States of the Commonwealth and to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas between them. (Draft Constitution of the AASW, n. d.)

In 1946 there were associations of social workers in all states except Tasmania. It was to be many years before branches were established in the Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory. When the national AASW was formed the state associations became its branches. Four years after the commencement of the AASW, in her 1950 Presidential report to the Federal Council of the AASW, Norma Parker explained that:

“*The states gave up to the federal body the power to determine membership of the association and to act on behalf of the social work groups in the Commonwealth in relation to social work, in the federal and international spheres. Otherwise they retained complete control of their constitutional change.* (Parker, 1950, p. 142)

The early association's model was very much that of a federation of state associations, not as today a centrally driven national organisation with major policy making and fee-setting powers.

Parker went on to explain that ‘Membership of the Association is now limited to persons holding a professional qualification in social work from an approved School of Social Work or equivalent training body’ (1969, p. 142). She elaborated the difficulties faced by the young association. The high cost of travel around Australia was a problem; planning at a federal level was complicated by the different stages of development of social work in the various states; the turnover of office bearers, partly due to the movement overseas of experienced social workers to further their education and experience, added to their woes;

and lastly, there was an ‘overwhelming’ volume of work for the voluntary office bearers.

The appointment in 1949 of a paid secretary ‘made all the difference to the effective working of the Association’ (Parker, 1950, p. 144). In her report Parker referred to the ‘enthusiastic interest and support of the Director General of Social Services (F. H. Rowe) and the ‘keen interest’ of the Minister for Health and Social Services (Senator McKenna) and the discussion and consultation of these men with Lyra Taylor, the chief social worker of the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (Parker, 1950, p. 144). She noted the work of the Association in relation to the government’s (post-war) migration program and the pleasure of the association with the appointment in 1948 of a social worker to organise a Social Welfare Service in the Department of Immigration.

Another initiative of note had been work with the Commonwealth Employment Service and the establishment of a social work program in its Physically Handicapped Division (Parker, 1950). The early AASW leaders were well connected in senior government circles, working effectively on a range of fronts and clearly carried an immense burden of work in addition to their demanding jobs.



Amy Wheaton with Dr H. V. Evatt, Labor Leader, and Judge and Dr. G. V. (Jerry) Portus, Academic and ABC Broadcaster, undated, 1940s. Like Lyra Taylor and Norma Parker, Wheaton rubbed shoulders with national leaders. (Courtesy Archives, University of Adelaide).



The first object of the AASW, according to the initial constitution, was to ‘promote and develop professional social work throughout the Commonwealth’. The first four schools of social work collaborated with each other and ran courses of similar standard. For this reason a formal standard-setting function was not required of the AASW – this matter came to a head in the 1970s with new courses in South Australia and Western Australia (Lawrence, 1976). However, there was a major emphasis on improvement of social work standards through education, particularly through the national conferences and, to a lesser extent, the Association’s journal.

### Achievements of the first decade

The AASW immediately set about providing education and networking for its members through the establishment of a national conference and a national journal.

### National conference series

Less than a year after its founding the AASW held its first national conference in Sydney, 5-7 September 1947. It was attended by over 200 social workers (Lawrence, 1976), representing 50 per cent of the membership. As its title ‘The Place of Social Work in Australia Today’ suggests, this conference outlined the state of play of the profession at that time. Norma Parker said in her presidential address:

“*Social work has developed so quickly in this country that it has been impossible for us to keep pace with happenings... We think we have a great deal to gain from meeting together, sharing our thinking and experience and viewing together problems common to all. This clarification of our own ideas is a necessary preliminary to getting together with other groups. Later conferences will cover a wider field.* (Parker, 1947, p. 7)

In addition to Parker, the keynote speakers were Lyra Taylor (Vice-President) who spoke on ‘Social Work and the Statutory Agency’.

Taylor counselled that in the new statutory sector:

*“At the moment, a decent humility, a playing down of too-ambitious claims for social work, and a steady getting on with the job as we see it, is called for rather than much talk about what has been effected or what it is hoped to accomplish. (Taylor, 1947, p. 28)”*

She emphasised cooperation between sectors, the chronic problem of under-supply of qualified social workers and she also tackled some prejudices such as: ‘Of course you can’t do real casework in a Government Department’ or ‘Government Departments are all festooned with red tape’ (Taylor, 1947, p. 34).

Dorothy Sumner (Vice-President), an American social worker who was a personal friend of Norma Parker and was then working at the University of Sydney, spoke on ‘Social Work in the Voluntary Agency’. She began ironically talking on the motivation for becoming a social worker,

*“Is it the great prestige which the profession confers upon members? Possibly the handsome salaries are a drawing card. Perhaps we need to expiate our own guilt about something, or we enjoy seeing that there are others suffering more than we are? (Sumner, 1947, p. 46)”*

She went on to discuss various social work methods and the common base of social work in different fields. These papers were followed up by presentations on social work education from the heads of the three schools of social work: Amy Wheaton (Vice-President) from Adelaide, J. A. Cardno from Sydney and Ruth Hoban from Melbourne. The discussion of the papers was recorded in full. Recurring themes that resonate today are the need for research, for prevention rather than cure and the need for cooperation between sectors and for social work unity.

Conferences continued biennially. The Second Australian Conference on Social Work was held in the Braille Hall, Tyrone Street, South Yarra, Melbourne on 26 and 27 August 1949 attracting approximately 200 social workers (Lawrence, 1976). Of particular importance was a post-conference ‘refresher course’ on casework run by Norma Parker (AASW, 1949).



Social workers attending the Second National AASW Conference in Melbourne, August 1949. The photo depicts visitors to Victoria from the five other Australian states. Life was much more formal with hats, gloves and ‘costumes’ as women’s suits were then known. (*The Argus*, Melbourne Monday 29 August 1949: 6, Trove, National Library of Australia)

The third conference, held from 24 to 28 August 1951 in Adelaide, was entitled ‘Social Work at Home and Abroad’. It was attended by 90 social workers (Lawrence, 1976). Back in Sydney in October 1953 with 145 attendees the fourth conference title was ‘The Contribution of Social Work to the Study and Meeting of Family Needs’ (Lawrence, 1976).

The fifth conference, held in Victoria on 12-16 August 1955, had 174 registrants (Lawrence, 1976) and was titled ‘The Contribution of Social Work in the Field of Mental Health’. The sixth national conference held in Adelaide, was attended by 86 (Lawrence, 1976) social workers and had as its theme ‘Education for Social Work’ (AASW, 1957).

These early conferences had a strong emphasis on discussion groups, sharing of ideas and discussion of AASW issues as well as issues related to professional service. It was the AASW rather than the universities that took the major responsibility in the provision of continuing professional education. Because the AASW at that time ran on a federation model, each state took major responsibility for its conference – all work was done by members on a voluntary basis. The report of the planning committee of the

1955 Victorian conference explained this voluntary commitment, which included hospitality and home stays with members. It suggested that in future at least out-of-pocket expenses for activities such as meeting overseas visitors or the use of social workers’ cars to take visitors on picnics could be reimbursed (AASW, 1957).

These national conferences played a crucial role in welding together the small number of social workers who were scattered across Australia. They promoted the development of professional networks, offered professional development, disseminated knowledge about social work and were valuable forums for sharing ideas. The development of a national journal was to play an equally important role in the creation of a strong profession.

#### *National social work journal*

In 1951 *Forum*, which had started life as a Victorian social work journal, expanded to become a national publication. In her foreword to the first national edition Norma Parker remarked on the ‘solid achievement’ of Australian social work (Parker, 1951, pp. 1-2).

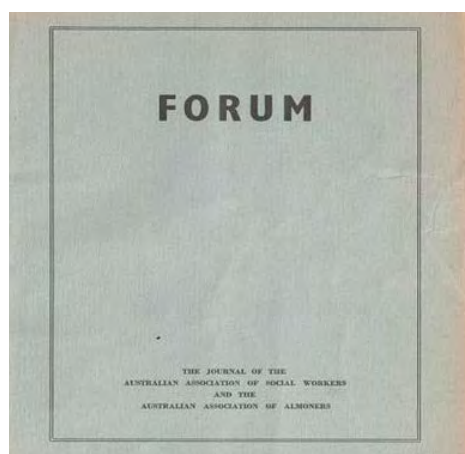
Parker also threw out a challenge to members in the foreword:

*“Is our professional thinking keeping pace with all this activity? Are we giving enough attention to careful evaluation of what we are doing and to the continuous appraisal of changing needs? Are we devoting sufficient thought to the contribution we should be able to make from our experience to community planning and organization? ... Are we adding anything to the general store of knowledge about life and people in Australia to-day? (p. 1)”*

She goes on to challenge members:

*“When we look at that aspect of particular interest to us here, the written record, we find that there is not a great deal to show; in fact there is an almost complete absence of anything which might be called professional literature. A few papers written for special occasions and published in pamphlet form, a few projects undertaken in the Social Studies Departments of the various universities, an occasional article in a general publication... (p. 2)”*

These remarks have an oddly contemporary ring. Finally she exhorted members to provide ‘a keen and critical body...willing to participate in written discussions and to help the Editorial Committee with ideas’ (p. 2).



The national journal, *Forum*, 1954, no. 2. This issue had 45 pages, was roneoed and bound with a printed cardboard cover (Author’s collection).

*Forum* promoted international and interstate networking, ran articles about innovations, discussed social work practice, carried news on staff changes and the travels of individuals, as well as book reviews and job advertisements.

It was a lively little journal, more like a newsletter. It was not printed but typed and roneoed and cost four shillings per year (post free), to be paid for in addition to membership. Fortunately the journal has now been digitised and these early *Forums* can be accessed *Australian Social Work*.

### New social work courses

The national AASW and a handful of members of its Queensland branch (initially seventeen members in all (AASW Qld, 1948)) worked hard to establish the first social work course at the University of Queensland, which commenced in 1956 and was the fourth school in Australia (AASW Qld, 1947). While on visits to their Queensland offices Lyra Taylor, Chief Research Officer in the Commonwealth Social Service Department, and Marion Urquhart, National Director of Social Service with the Australian Red Cross Society, offered support and advice. In 1951 Lyra Taylor discussed training for social work with the University of Queensland on behalf of the branch (AASW Qld, 1951). By 1954 the Annual Report of the Training Sub-Committee was able to advise members that ‘the long arduous task of this Committee’ appeared at last to be nearing completion, when the University decided to establish a Department of Social Studies (AASW Qld, 1954, p. 3). In 1956 the Annual Report announced the appointment of Hazel Smith, the Branch President who was to start the social work course (AASW Qld, 1956). Clearly the national AASW and a committed local branch played a key role in establishing the course at the University of Queensland.

It was not until 1964, beyond the scope of this article, that the University of Western Australia started social work education. But the value of the opportunity for discussion on a national level afforded by the biennial conference is illustrated by a paper presented at the 1955 conference by E. Williams (1955), President of the Western Australian Branch, on ‘Developments in Thinking of Those Concerned with the Subject of Professional Education in Western Australia’. After outlining the urgent need for trained social workers in the

West and efforts made to establish training at that stage she concluded,

*“It is our desire to establish on a firm footing, a University post graduate course. It seems to us the need requires our urgent attention, for we may otherwise find that Social Workers will be trained to a professional status, whether we agree that the desirable standard is maintained or not, if in reasonable time we cannot do something about it ourselves. (Williams, 1955, p. 32)”*

### Registration under the Arbitration system

Another important matter which the AASW addressed was a serious undersupply of social workers coupled with inadequate wages and conditions (possibly a circular situation). To solve this problem, the Association started a campaign to register itself under the arbitration system to achieve an industrial award for social workers. It was decided that rather than split the membership by creating a separate union the AASW should become a registered body in the Arbitration Court (Parker, 1950). Not all social workers agreed with this move (some being uncomfortable with the idea of being trade unionists), but ultimately it was agreed by a 93 per cent vote to go ahead with this approach (Ogilvie, 1961). In Kate Ogilvie’s words:

*“The Association had achieved legal status as the body representing Social Work in this country; members were formally recognised as a distinct professional group and protected from compulsion to join other unions, though they might still choose to belong to more than one. (Ogilvie, 1961, p. 4)”*

Thus a very important step in improving social workers’ wages and conditions had been achieved. It probably also strengthened the profession’s sense of identity. Social workers interested in knowing more about the early industrial situation should read John Lawrence’s (1976) introduction to *Social Work in Australia: Responses to a changing context*, edited by Phil Boas and Jim Crawley of the Preston Institute of Technology in 1976. While Lawrence found that twenty years later a federal award had not been sought for a range of reasons there was positive industrial activity in the 1960s.

While this falls outside the timeframe of this article, it is of interest that an industrial case:

“...pursued through the Commonwealth Professional Officers' Association, but with active AASW assistance was seen as an industrial milestone. The starting salary of a male social work graduate was better than that for an engineer; the salaries for higher grades were clearly aligned with other professional salaries and were shaken clear of their previous alignment with so-called medical technologists such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and radiographers; and equal pay was to be phased in by January 1972. (Lawrence, 1976, p. 30)”

In 1976 the handing of the hard-won industrial function of the AASW to the newly created Australian Social Welfare Union (ASWU), which it was hoped would then represent both social workers and the emerging associated welfare professions industrially, was agreed to by a narrow majority of members and is still a matter of controversy. Ultimately social work wages and conditions lagged under the management of the new union. This is one of many professional issues that would benefit from further historical

study, particularly while some of the protagonists are able to give their versions of events.

### Where to now?

Looking back, one advance seems to neatly follow another but on many occasions the cards could have fallen another way. Choices were made for better or worse and battles were won or lost. For example, we might ask what would have happened if the Almoners had refused to cooperate with the general social workers and there had been two associations claiming to represent the profession? There were many turning points of this nature.

The Australian Association of Social Workers has had many ups and downs since 1946, and doubtless not all its decisions have been perfect. Overall it can be said that the basic model for a national association put in place by the founders has provided a guiding light for the profession in Australia. The national communication strategy from the earliest days has ensured a unified understanding of the profession and its key tenets. Australian social work owes a debt of gratitude to the small band of women and later men who worked with extraordinary commitment and intelligence to found this national body.

Understanding our history is essential in helping us to understand the profession

in the present day. The same issues arise over time. Past debates can throw light on present dilemmas. In doing the research for the writing of this history, it has been disturbing to find how difficult it is to locate primary source material. For example, the minutes of the AASW's federal executive committee appear to be unavailable. We do not have a listing of all the national presidents, the state presidents, the honorary life members and so on. Because of the dearth of archival material, I could not have written this article without the assistance of John (R. J.) Lawrence, Honorary Life Member and distinguished social worker, who guided me through his extensive personal archive.

Nevertheless, the AASW is to be congratulated in this seventieth anniversary year on its historical initiatives including re-printing Lawrence's *Professional Social Work in Australia* (1965) and commencing work on a project to compile profiles of its Life Members. But we cannot rest on our laurels. Far more needs to be done to preserve the archival documents that remain and we need to urgently undertake concerted historical research on Australian social work.

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