

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person

**Entry ID:** AWE0657

## McConnell, Joyce Marion

(1916 - 1991)

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**Born** 21 August, 1916, Wollstonecraft New South Wales Australia

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**Died** 15 August, 1991, Sydney New South Wales Australia

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**Occupation** Community worker, Women's rights activist, Women's rights organiser

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### Summary

Joyce McConnell was appointed to the Order of the British Empire on 12 June 1976 for community services. She was an active member of a number of national women's groups and Australian Capital Territory associations. McConnell was President of the National Council of Women of Australia, member of the National Women's Advisory Council, National Women's Consultative Council and the Federation of University Women. In 1976 McConnell was Australia's delegate to the International Council of Women conference in Vancouver.

## Details

Joyce McConnell represented Australian women to government with an even-handed professionalism that achieved lasting results. She was president of the National Council of Women of Australia 1973-1976 and a member of the peak national advisory bodies the National Women's Advisory Council and the National Women's Consultative Council from 1978-1986.

Joyce Marion McConnell was born on 21 August 1916 at Wollstonecraft, NSW, the daughter of L.J. Smith. She was educated at North Sydney Girls' High School and Sydney University. At the time of her marriage to Hugh McConnell on 31 August 1939, both she and her husband were studying economics as evening students, and both were active student politicians. Joyce served as a director of the Women's Union and vice-president of the Student Representative Council.

McConnell graduated with a Bachelor of Economics. Her husband's work as a teacher took the family into country New South Wales, and later to Canberra. The marriage produced two sons and two daughters.

McConnell became active in women's affairs in 1957, joining the Canberra Association of University Women and becoming its delegate on the National Council of Women of the Australian Capital Territory. As convenor for housing and civic affairs, she was responsible for the first 2 surveys carried out by the Council in Canberra, seeking information regarding government housing and consumer prices. She served as honorary secretary of the Council in 1957-1958, resigning to accompany her husband overseas. On her return, she held the presidency of the Council from 1962 to 1964, raising funds to establish the first Senior Citizens' Club in the ACT. Other voluntary work in community organisations at this time included chairing the Emergency Housekeeper Committee and the Anti-Litter Campaign, and helping found the Churchill Appeal.

From 1964 to 1969, Hugh McConnell was posted to Argentina. Joyce McConnell joined the local University Women's Club, and became a committee member of the Mission to Seamen in Buenos Aires.

In 1973, McConnell became president of the National Council of Women of Australia. Hers was the first National Board to be located in Canberra. McConnell predicted correctly that its strength would be 'in the very nature of Canberra-in the relative accessibility of those who sit in the seats of power and who are the architects of our national policy'. McConnell quickly established good working relationships with the emerging women's bureaucracy inaugurated by the Whitlam Labor government and, despite her active membership of the Liberal Party, communicated effectively with politicians on both sides of the parliament. She worked equitably with representatives of newly vocal groups like the Women's Electoral Lobby in planning for Women's Resource Centres and Rape Crisis Centres, and in preparations for International Women's Year.

McConnell was one of the delegation of 10 women sent by the Australian government to the International Women's Year Tribune held in association with the World Conference on Women in Mexico city in 1975. In 1976, she led the Australian delegation to the ICW Triennial Conference in Vancouver.

In 1975 McConnell, on behalf of NCWA, proposed to Prime Minister Whitlam that he establish a representative Women's Advisory Council. The suggestion was taken up by the Fraser government, and, in 1978, Fraser appointed McConnell to the newly constituted Council, reappointing her in 1982. When Prime Minister Hawke abolished the Council and replaced it with the National Women's Consultative Council in 1984, McConnell was again appointed: the only woman to serve both governments in this capacity. In 1979, as the NatWAC convenor in Canberra, she had to negotiate extreme opposition from right-wing radical women during the mid-decade consultations for the UN Decade for Women.

She continued to work with NCWA, becoming an honorary life vice-president in 1979 and accepting the national convenorship of the Economics Standing Committee in 1980. She also returned to the leadership of the Australian Federation of University Women, organising their national conference in 1981.

McConnell was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 1976 for service to the community, and awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal in 1978.

Joyce McConnell died of a massive stroke in 1991, a few days before her 75th birthday.

Prepared by: Jan Hipgrave, Marian Quartly and Judith Smart

## Events

### **1978 - 1980**

Member of the National Women's Advisory Council

### **1979 - 1979**

Honourary Life Vice-President of the National Council of Women of Australia

### **1973 - 1976**

President of the National Council of Women of Australia

### **1962 - 1964**

President of the National Council of Australian Capital Territory

**1957 - 1958**

Honourary Secretary of the National Council of Australian Capital Territory

**2039 - 2039**

Married Hugh McConnell and she bore four children

**1978 - 1978**

Awarded Queen's Jubilee Medal

**1984 - 1986**

Member of the National Women's Consultative Council

**1976 - 1976**

Member of the advisory committee on the Australian Government Contribution to the United States Bicentennial

**1976 - 1976**

Leader and Australian delegate to the International Council of Women conference in Vancouver

**1962 - 1964**

Chairman of the Emergency Housekeeper Service in the Australian Capital Territory

**1976 - 1976**

Appointed to the Order of the British Empire

**1980 - 1980**

Convenor of the Economics Standing Committee for the National Council of Australian Women

**1981 - 1981**

Council member of the Australian Federation of University Women

**1975 - 1975**

Vice-chair of the National Committee for the International Women's Year for the United Nations Association of Australia

**1975 - 1975**

Member of the delegation of ten women sent by the Australian government to the United Nations Tribune for International Women's Year in Mexico City

**1957 - 1957**

Member of the Australian Federation of University Women (ACT)

**1965 - 1969**

Member of the University Women's Club (Argentina)

**1976 - 1976**

Member of the Women's International Club (ACT)

**1964 - 1964**

Member of the First Garden Club (ACT)

**1973 - 1973**

Associate member of the Royal Canberra Golf Club

**1974 - 1977**

Vice-president of the Australian Pre-School Association

**1965 - 1969**

Committee member of the Mission to Seamen in Buenos Aires

**1964 - 1965**

Member of the Churchill Appeal committee in the Australian Capital Territory

**1982 - 1984**

Member of the National Women's Advisory Council

## Published resources

### **Newspaper Article**

Active life in women's affairs, 1991

### **Edited Book**

Who's Who of Australian Women, Lofthouse, Andrea, 1982

Who's Who in Australia, 1988, Cadman, Kerith A, 1988

Who's Who in Australia 1974, Legge, J. S., 1974

### **Resource**

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### **Site Exhibition**

From Lady Denman to Katy Gallagher: A Century of Women's Contributions to Canberra, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2013,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ldkg>

Stirrers with Style! Presidents of the National Council of Women of Australia and its predecessors, National Council of Women of Australia, 2013,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/ncwa>

### **Book**

Beryl Beaurepaire, McKernan, Michael, 1999

Capital women : a history of the work of the National Council of Women (A.C.T.) in Canberra, 1939-1979, Stephenson, Freda, 1992

## Archival resources

### **National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection**

[Papers of Joyce McConnell, 1960-1989 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Records of the National Council of Women of Australia, 1924-1990 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Records of the National Council of Women of Australia, 1936-1972 \[manuscript\]](#)

### **National Library of Australia**

[\[Biographical cuttings on Joyce McConnell, former president of the National Council of Women of Australia, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

### **Author Details**

Anne Heywood

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## Digital resources



**Title:** Joyce McConnell  
**Type:** Image  
**Date:** 3 May, 2023



**Title:** Begum1963.jpg  
**Type:** Image  
**Date:** 3 May, 2023