

BRIEF

A LOT ON HER HANDS

– the lives of Australia's Working Women

an exhibition for

The Australian Workers' Heritage Centre, Barcaldine

3 March 2002

CONTENTS	2
SECTION 1	
Exhibition purpose	4
Policy	4
Context	5
Total budget	5
Environmental constraints	5
Criteria for success	5
Life of exhibition	5
Audience profile	6
SECTION 2	
Curatorial vision	7
<i>Striving and achieving</i>	7
<i>Making and producing</i>	8
<i>Caring</i>	8
<i>Communicating</i>	9
The nature of the approach	9
Intellectual structure	9
SECTION 3	
Educational vision	11

Educational factors influencing design	11
SECTION 4	
Design vision	13
APPENDICES	13
Support materials	14

SECTION 1

Exhibition purpose

The central focus of the “History of Australia’s working women” project is the historical experience of Australian working women.

The project is informed by a sense of women’s work as crossing the kind of occupational boundaries that have traditionally defined work done by men. In women’s lives, paid work and unpaid work tend to exist together, and women’s experiences are less easily defined by the nature of their participation in the paid workforce. This is a significant issue, given the importance of work in defining personal identity. Women’s work, both generally and in terms of work done by individuals, can be paid or unpaid, commercial or domestic, private or public, or any combination of these. Our sense of women’s work is therefore that “you are what you do”.

This is Stage 1 of a three stage project. Stages 2 & 3 will be subject to a detailed comprehensive master plan, which will proceed on the completion of all works contained within Stage 1.

The scope of Stage 1 will be national, with particular emphasis on Queensland, and it will recognise

- The struggle of women to achieve recognition and equality in the workplace
- That women’s work cannot easily be categorised in simple occupational terms – historically, women have typically worked across the boundaries dividing paid, unpaid, “cultural”, commercial, professional, and family work.
- The distinctive experience of Australian working women

The scope of the project is wide, encompassing as it does the whole history of Australia. The breadth of approach that this implies will be achieved by a focus on individual stories which are both distinctive and representative, not only of different periods of Australian history, but also of the different regions, while, in keeping with the exhibition’s location, emphasising the history of Queensland working women.

The project also aims at cultural inclusiveness, so that the stories of Australian and non-Anglo Celtic women are interwoven with other stories through the exhibition.

The exhibition will include unknown and lesser known women and events in order to present a fresh, interesting and intriguing approach.

There will be overall themes and issues to link all sections of the exhibition. These linking features include:

- Technology – which has had an enormous impact on the way people work and the way they have lived their lives since the 1860s
- Relationships between people and place, and between people and landscape, whether rural or urban.

Policy

The project aims to:

- evoke the experience of paid and unpaid Australian women at work over time in the context of the broader currents of the history of women’s work, including the experience of indigenous women and women of non-English speaking backgrounds as well as that of Anglo-Celtic women
- create an understanding of the distinctive nature of women’s work
- demonstrate the range, variety, importance, and value of women’s work

Context (social, historical, political, environmental)

Until the 1970s, the contribution of women to Australia's political, social and economic development was generally ignored in historical writing. Historical and feminist writings in the final quarter of the twentieth century aimed to adjust this imbalance. Women's history in Australia and overseas also acknowledged the importance to society, and to national economies, of women's unpaid work as mothers, maintaining homes, keeping families fed, and working as volunteers for a range of social and community causes.

Exhibitions on women's history in Australian museums have been more concerned with women's achievements and less with their experience. This exhibition aims to deal with the experience of specific individual women within a broad discussion of women in Australian life.

Total budget (very broad breakdown only)

Professional fees and oncosts	\$110,000
Contingencies and miscellaneous costs	\$50,250
Relocation of existing displays	\$35,000
ALOHH display production and installation	\$250,000
TOTAL	\$445,250

(AWHC budget as at 26 November 2001)

Environmental constraints

The exhibition is to be placed in Block A of the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, Barcaldine, which is a 1960s style elevated timber school building in good condition, but presently lacking environmental controls. External climatic conditions range from: summer average 25° to a maximum of 40°. Winter conditions range from 1° to 28°, with ambient RH around 15 % for weeks on end.

Proposed controls will include R4 bats in the ceilings, tinted windows to reflect heat and light from adjacent buildings, and awnings on windows. Fans will circulate air in the rooms 24 hours. Agreement has also been reached with AWHC for the installation of reverse cycle air conditioning in each of the rooms. Humidifiers will also be installed to achieve:

- Temperature: 20-25° 24 hours, all year
- RH: minimum of 45%, max 55%, 24 hours, all year

Criteria for success

- 10% increased visitation to AWHC
- favourable media coverage
- favourable visitor comments

Life of exhibition

"A lot on her hands" is intended as a long term exhibition at the Australian Workers Heritage Centre. For the purposes of this concept statement its duration is taken to be 5-7 years.

In general terms, the display conditions which can be achieved within Block A will impact on the exhibition's life as well as on the objects that can be displayed there.

The exhibition should be designed to minimise the need for conservation support or for complex technical support for its display elements.

Audience profile

AWHC attracts around 20,000 visitors a year.

Visitors to the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, including recognised categories of tourists:

- “grey nomads”
- backpackers (domestic and overseas)
- touring families

(Others to be nominated by AWHC)

SECTION 2

Curatorial vision

The exhibition will be organised around four broad themes:

- striving and achieving
- making and producing
- caring
- communicating

These themes will be interpreted within the broad framework of women's struggles and achievements and the way in which the qualities of adaptation and initiative are displayed.

Individual stories used for these themes will also be broadly representative of different regions of the country, different cultural groups (including indigenous), and different historical periods.

In outline, the four main themes are as follows;

Striving and achieving

As part of the Australian work force and part of the Australian community, women have struggled for and achieved many things – better wages and conditions, equal pay and opportunity, healthier families and better housing, access to education and social welfare.

Whether in government, in business, in sport, in the professions or in community organisations, the achievements and experiences of individual women have also changed how we live and see things.

This theme will be illustrated by focal women:

Louisa Lawson, with the summary message: Commitment to improving life for other women, at home and in the paid workforce

Vicki Wilson: Talent, determination and commitment to the future of her sport and to young people

These will be accompanied by sub-focal women:

Emma Miller: Women are capable of winning through political action

Grace Munro: Women must act together to improve services in the bush

Mary Dillon: Not all women in convict era Australia were denied business opportunity

Sharan Burrow: Teaching, training and its communication skills combined with a commitment to improving society can take you a long way

Making and producing

Women make and produce an almost limitless variety of goods and services for a whole range of different purposes. They produce agricultural produce for sale, and flowers and vegetables for the family table. They play music for the pleasure of others and as a means of economic survival. They make objects for consumption or admiration, and write publications for instruction or amusement. Makers and producers can be found in the largest factories, and the smallest houses, in parliaments and standing at easels, in boardrooms and laboratories and at Saturday morning street stalls, in saleyards and kitchens.

The theme will be illustrated by focal women:

Helen Robertson: Lack of justice for women in the workforce can attract the sympathy of a fair-minded public

Mary Sutherland: When they're in a tight spot, women can use their initiative to get out of it

Elsie Wright: Your creative talent has real economic value

And by sub-focal women:

Oodgeroo: Commitment to country inspires indigenous creativity and activism

WWII munitions worker, also land army woman as “productive” side of women at war:
The Second World War provided women with the opportunity to prove that they could capably manage jobs previously reserved for men

Mrs Sophie Kynagopolis (post WWII Greek Immigrant): As was always the case, the work of new settlers was critical to the development of the economy

Caring

Caring work improves life for others. Carers can be mothers, volunteers, or professional experts

Women nurture their families and care for their relatives, friends and wider society. Volunteers help schools and sporting clubs, work for their own communities, and on the broader national and world stage. There are nurses and unionists, publicans and hostesses, nuns and military officers, mothers and conservationists, scientists and suffragettes, volunteers and veterinary surgeons. They focus on other people, and work for a better future.

The theme will be illustrated by focal women:

Ruth Hegarty: Strength of family and hard work can mitigate the effect of inhumane and damaging government policies

Sister Margaret McKenna: Nuns went to remote places to create and maintain communities

And by sub-focal women:

Connie Ellis: Hard constant work to create a good future for the next generation is worthwhile

Mary Barry: A good idea can be developed to create financial security

Jane Bell: An education and training system must be continually improved in order to develop a profession

Dr Elizabeth Nesta (Pat) Marks: Women scientists have made discoveries which have improved community health

Communicating

Communicators pass on knowledge, keep networks alive and help us understand our world

Human beings are social creatures; most are born communicators. Communication adopts many guises in the world of work. Stories are told in many ways, and messages are variously transmitted. The communicators' media include paintings and managerial memos, lessons, lectures and legal arguments, poetry, emails, novels and telephone calls. Communicators keep social networks vibrant, ensure that ideas are heard and allowed to stimulate others, enable arguments to find their mark, and enliven the world with beautiful and ugly sights, scents and sounds.

The theme will be illustrated by focal women:

Louisa Meredith: Documenting Australian society and its plants and wildlife was very important in understanding the continent

Joan Kirner: Community action and networking are important, but need to be translated into political action to achieve great things

And by sub-focal women:

Bid O'Sullivan: Classrooms can be any size and a good teacher can operate in any mode

Call centre worker: women have been essential in maintaining communications

Catherine Helen Spence: Women must believe in themselves

Kate Dwyer: Persistent, consistent advocacy achieves change in many spheres

The nature of the approach

The exhibition will deal not with stereotypes or generic figures but with the experience of real people. It will aim to evoke the quality of that experience in order to inform the arguments raised with their significance in human terms.

Intellectual structure

The exhibition will open with a diorama of three women expressing differing opinions about the significance of work for women, opening into the main display with its four focal areas. The order in which these four areas is not important from the point of the view of the exhibition's content.

Key ideas which will inform each of the main sections of the exhibition are:

- Striving and achieving: recognition of women's achievements has only happened as the result of a great deal of effort
- Making and producing: making and producing have been central to women's work however defined (paid, unpaid, commercial, private, domestic etc)
- Caring: women have tended to dominate in areas which emphasise the traditional female caring role
- Communicating: women have emerged as central to communication throughout our society

Recurrent commentary on the ideas raised in the exhibition will be provided through the figure of a Year 12 student – generic in the opening experience but revealed in the exit statement as Rachelle Horn, a current student at Barcaldine High School.

SECTION 3

Educational vision

The following educational or communication factors are influencing the exhibition design.

- Communication objectives – what we want the visitor to ‘carry away with them’ when they leave – include
 - To clarify the definition of work
 - To present to young visitors role models and exemplars
 - To break down misconceptions about the definition and value of work performed by women:
 - To recognise and clearly identify the view that only paid employment outside the home is ‘real’ work (traditionally performed by men)
 - To recognise and accept that women perform a great variety of work in both formal (‘industrial’) and informal (e.g. at home) settings
 - To recognise and understand that what work a person does says something about that person, identifies them: ‘What I do is, in part, what I am.’
- Specific prior knowledge or understanding of the topic of this exhibit
 - Some visitors will have strong positive feelings about the worth of women’s work – we don’t want to ‘talk down’ to them. Others may have a frivolous view – we must be careful to treat the subject seriously and with respect, and challenge their misconceptions.
- How do we want the visitor to feel with each particular exhibit? (e.g. amazed, sad, entertained, judgemental, involved, inspired, reassured)
- It will be very important not to marginalise certain groups such as women who currently do not perform paid work and don’t accept that ‘home duties’ is legitimate work
- Male visitors should be able to view and comprehend this exhibition as:
 - An interested student
 - A father or brother, a teacher or trainer, a fellow employee or an employer

The ‘generic young woman’ (silhouetted year 12 female student) can provoke thought throughout the exhibition by asking (on behalf of the visitor):

‘What do *I* feel?’

‘What do *I* believe about this?’

‘What could *I* do/want to do with my life?’

‘If I am presently working at XXX, what does that say about me?’

Some key developments to note:

- Up until the 1950s, most paid women's work was in the textile and clothing industries. There have been considerable changes in community attitudes towards women who work in paid employment. Until fairly recently it wasn't fashionable for a woman to be solely dependent on her own earnings. The economic need of a family to have two incomes is a recent phenomenon in Australia.
- Since the 1980s there have been major changes in women's roles and opportunities in the office environment with the advent of computers (for word-processing) and the consequent demise of short-hand-writing and the typing pool.
- The advent of digital technology has allowed women to work at home in fields other than traditional textile piece-work, and to have more flexible work patterns.
- There is an increasing dominance of urban living in Australia, and a clearer distinction between urban and country living. This is exemplified by who works at food production and who carries out domestic chores.
- Women's life expectations or opportunities have expanded significantly (e.g. life style choice, educational opportunities — both at various times in a woman's lifetime; types of housing, variety of clothing).

Potential themes for Trail Sheets useable by students and family visitors:

- Contrast job prospects, career entry points and career paths now and in the past
- Follow a theme such as how working hours have changed
- For post-visit follow-up: Investigate the background to featured women: consider their situations and opportunities, their motives or intentions, and their strategies
- Identify jobs no longer performed and what has replaced them

SECTION 4

Design vision

The intention is to entice, engage and satisfy visitors of different ages, abilities and interests. The exhibition will appeal to emotions, imagination and intellect.

Visitor flow through the exhibition space will be essentially sequential at the macro level, with non-linear options within the theme areas; it may contain the following elements:

- an entry experience
- an introductory statement
- the body of the display
- an exit statement
- opportunities for visitors to share their working women experiences
- opportunities for visitors to view videos about women working in Australia

The entry experience

welcomes visitors. It also poses simple (and possibly profound) questions and/or suggests topics to consider whilst in the exhibition. The aim is to engage and stimulate visitors' imaginations and provoke emotional responses.

The principal elements are:

- a symbolic 'portal' through which visitors enter the space
- a group of three, 3-dimensional, working women figures, posed as though brought together with a purpose. (One of the three looks to the approaching visitors.) The women portrayed represent different places, times and work experiences. The tableau evokes and juxtaposes three periods of Australian history, using characteristic poses, fashions and visual treatments.
- an audio component with a simple message
- a cut-out (2-dimensional) of a year 12 schoolgirl, looking on at the above three women, considering her future – she is a silhouette, anonymous and representative of all girl students facing the prospect of choosing a career.
- a list of women's occupations that includes some that male visitors can relate to as well, e.g. unionist, teacher, architect, carer, parent
- an 'installation', conceptual in nature, designed to stimulate discussion about the different ways in which work can be viewed

The introduction

prepares the visitor for the scope and structure of the exhibition, outlining the content.

Text only, simple in presentation, it appeals to the visitor's intellect.

The body of the exhibition

looks at the working woman's identity under the banner theme of striving and achieving,

and 3 work domains;

making and producing

caring

communicating

It presents experiences of real women as examples, two or three principal women for each theme or domain area. Extra real women's experiences broaden the theme coverage.

The display techniques vary – interpretive panels, audios, photographs, film and/or video clips, illustrations, interactive devices, elements tailored to particular age groups. Variation reinforces the idea of diversity and contributes to the visual appeal for visitors.

Common to the presentation of some of the principal women is a chair, the design of which varies in accord with the life experience of the woman represented. Sitting in the chairs, visitors may activate audios assembled from actual recordings or produced from material written by the women themselves. The chair conveys the individuality and helps the listener to relate to, even relive the working experiences.

The exit statement

The exit statement reuses the year 12 schoolgirl character (already encountered at the entry to the exhibition) to pose questions and stimulate reflection about the future of Australia's working women.

She is now filled out to 3-dimensions, still representative of all girl students facing the prospect of choosing a career but now equipped with an understanding of working women in Australia.

Opportunities for visitors to share their experiences

One of the teacher's rooms in Block 'A' may be set aside for visitors who wish to contribute their own experiences and read about others'.

Opportunities for visitors to view videos about Australia's working women

The other teacher's room in Block 'A' could be used for this purpose.

APPENDICES

Support materials may be developed to accompany the exhibition

e.g. exhibition catalogues, leaflets, posters, publicity, educational material, signage and souvenirs.