

Researching Australian military service: Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA)

Researching individual service

Nominal rolls

Land Army gazettes and periodicals from each state record the names of individual members and headquarters staff. The gazettes can be located on the Memorial's Collection search [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search]. Most of the lists are incomplete and members who joined in 1945 are sometimes not listed.

Personal service records

The service records of women who enlisted in New South Wales are held in the Sydney office of the National Archives and include name, address, age, summary dates, and places of service.

To locate personal service records, use RecordSearch [www.naa.gov.au/collection/search/]. Go to NameSearch, enter the family name and select the category "Other defence records". If you get a large number of hits, reduce the results using the refine option to add a first name.

You can apply to the National Archives of Australia [www.naa.gov.au/collection/using/order/index.aspx] for a copy of the service record.

Only the records for New South Wales have survived.

Service record book

Each member of the AWLA, upon enrolling for continuous service, also received a service record book. This was kept by the individual who took it with her from farm to farm. It is a useful source for proof of service as it recorded the different farms where the individual worked, promotion, leave, conduct and discipline. The book was kept by the individual at the end of her service.

The private records collection in the Research Centre includes examples of service record books. These may be viewed in the Research Centre's Reading Room.

Researching the history of the AWLA

Official Records

Official Records relating to the AWLA can be located using the RecordSearch database [www.naa.gov.au/collection/search/]. Search the database using "Australian Women's Land Army" in the Keyword search box to locate relevant material.

The AWLA was administered by the Directorate of Manpower, a division of the Department of Labour and National Service. The records created by the two agencies, particularly the major correspondence series, contain records about the AWLA. Two correspondence series created by the Directorate of Manpower that may be particularly useful are B551 and C605. To locate records in these series, search using the series number in the Reference numbers field.

Official records held at the Memorial include "History of Australian Women's Land Army, 27 July 1942–31 December 1945", **AWM54 1025/4/1**. This official record includes a history of the AWLA, ephemera, examples of recruitment leaflets, badges, forms, news clippings, photographic records of training, and the work women were performing, as well as details of pay and conditions.

Other collections

The Memorial's collections include memoirs, private papers, photographs, original film footage, and filmed and recorded interviews of AWLA members. You can search for these on the Memorial's Collections Search database [www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search] using the keyword phrase "land army".

Printed sources

Land Army gazettes were produced by all states and provide an insight into social aspects of the service. They are available at the Memorial and various state libraries. They were usually published on a bimonthly basis and distributed to AWLA members. The gazettes often record the names of individual members and headquarters staff and were designed to bring together women in isolated regions and make them feel a part of the service. They include information on conditions of employment, uniform, camp news, and letters to the editor.

The Memorial's leaflet collection includes ephemera relating to the AWLA [Box 11 7/2/12].

The Research Centre holds an extensive collection of newspaper clippings relating to all women's services [NC91-95].

Recognition of individual service

Proof of service for the Civilian Service Medal 1939-45

The Civilian Service Medal 1939-45 is available for those who served in the AWLA or other Women's Land Organisations. To be eligible for the award of a medal an applicant must have had at least 180 days service between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945. For further information or to apply for the award, see National Archives of Australia fact sheet 39 [www.naa.gov.au/about-us/publications/fact-sheets/fs39.aspx].

Correspondence related to post-war recognition of members of the AWLA are scattered throughout various files and can be difficult to locate. Files catalogued in the RecordSearch database [www.naa.gov.au/collection/search/] are located by title, which can be misleading. Much correspondence can be "hidden" under an unexpected file title. The following three-part file is an example of a record with a general title that includes correspondence related to post-war recognition:

"Women's Organisations General (Australian Women's Land Army)", A1608: A27/1/5*

Contact the Research Centre [www.awm.gov.au/request] if you have further queries relating to AWLA research.