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## NATIONAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA – NEW SOUTH WALES

For several reasons, the beginnings of the NSW Country Party are different from those of its counterparts in other states. Its supporters included large graziers as well as small selectors; it initially made use of an existing party with metropolitan supporters; and it established an extensive party organisation in parallel to that of its supporting primary producer groups.

As in Victoria, the NSW party's origins can be traced to a rural pressure group, the Farmers and Settlers' Association of New South Wales (FSA) which was founded at Cootamundra in June 1883. By 1912 it boasted 373 branches. But at its 1912 Annual Conference a motion was lost for the foundation of a straightforward parliamentary Country Party. Instead the FSA continued to support various country factions in the state's Legislative Assembly.

In October 1919 a Central Electoral Council was formed by the FSA, the Graziers' Association of New South Wales and the People's Party of Soldiers and Citizens, with the aim of campaigning on behalf of the already existing Progressive Party in the 1920 state election – the first to be held under the proportional representation system introduced in 1918. The People's Party delegates withdrew from the Council over policy differences, and the Graziers' representatives were by no means convinced of the need for a permanent third party, since the interests of its wealthier members were closer to those of the National Party.

The heterogeneous character of Progressive Party support manifested itself publicly towards the end of 1921 when its parliamentary members with metropolitan seats grew restless over the party's links to primary producer organisations and proposed that they enter into coalition with the Nationalists. The rump of the Progressives – seven members led by Colonel M.F. Bruxner, and known as the 'True Blues' – declared their separate identity and secured the backing of the FSA, and more reluctant support from the Graziers' Association. In 1925 the 'True Blues' were renamed the 'Country Party'.

In 1931 the party took the name 'United Country Party', after embracing the United Country Movement, which represented the four separatist, new state organisations then operating in NSW. Following a decision at the Australian Country Party Association's annual conference in December 1943, it became known as the Australian Country Party – New South Wales. In 1977, two years after a Federal Convention agreed to a name change, the NSW party became the National Country Party of Australia – New South Wales. In 1982 the NSW party voted to change its name to the National Party of Australia – New South Wales.

This first consignment of archives, totalling 1.08 linear metres, from the NSW Head Office, sheds little light on the party's establishment phase. In the Miscellaneous Party Promotional Material and Ephemera series the earliest item is a 1925 publication *Who's Who in the Progressive Party*. Otherwise the rest of the items in this series date from 1966-1991. Similarly, Annual Conference agendas (some annotated to show whether motions were withdrawn, reworded, amended, carried, lapsed or lost) are held for the period 1963-2000; and Electoral Campaign files are held for the period 1962-2003. There are also annotated Victorian Annual Conference business papers, 1949-63 and Victorian Women's Section Annual Conference business papers, 1956-64.

The largest accession of NSW party archives currently available publicly in an archive or manuscript library is at the National Library of Australia (MS7507, totalling 20.72 linear metres). The date range is 1915-83, but apart from two Progressive Party minute books dated 1915 and 1922-23, and what is identified as a 'slim minute book' dated 1922, the bulk of the records are subject and correspondence files produced during the period 1950-83. Some of these records relate to the Federal party because it maintained no office or staff of its own until 1968 and the NSW General Secretary acted as its Honorary Secretary.

Other collections of Country Party records, including original documents, copies and notes on them, can be found in the papers of two of the NSW party's historians, Don Aitkin (National Library of Australia, MS7990, 0.72 metres) and Ulrich Ellis (National Library of Australia, MS748, 2.24 metres and MS1006, 5.04 metres).

However, the Page Research Centre Library holds party room minutes from the Parliamentary National Party of New South Wales (PG2616, 1.44 metres). Confirmed and signed original minutes are extant for the periods 1932-55 and 1962-91. The accession also includes rough minute books for the periods 1969-90 and 1997-99; the party whip's correspondence and subject files for the period 1988-94; financial records; and photographs c. 1930-1984.

#### **Further Reading:**

Don Aitkin, *The Country Party in New South Wales: A Study of Organisation and Survival*, Canberra, 1972.

Paul Davey, *The Nationals: The Progressive, Country and National Party in New South Wales 1919 to 2006*, Sydney, 2006.

Ulrich Ellis, *The Country Party: A Political and Social History of the Party in New South Wales*, Melbourne, 1958.

B.D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australia Country Parties*, Canberra, 1966.