



Background and early history of Seroptimist International of Wellington

On the 75th Anniversary November 2014

Seroptimist International of Wellington was the first club of its kind in New Zealand. On 16th November 2014 we celebrate 75 years in our community.

A women's service club, Seroptimists, began in Oakland, California, U.S.A in October 1921. Seroptimists derives their name from Latin "soror" meaning sister/woman and "optima" meaning best. Seroptimist is interpreted as 'the best for women'.

An extract from the published 'History of Seroptimist International':

"From the beginning the purpose of the organisation was service to the community. The diverse skills, careers and interests of the members were and still are utilised to develop programmes and projects in the community, the nation and the world".

During the early years, a pattern of Seroptimist service emerged,

- Education - Vocational training for women and children
- Economic & Social Development - Housing for the disadvantaged
- Health - Assistance for the sick and disabled
- Environment - Concerns for local areas
- Human Rights - Caring for refugees
- International Goodwill - Expanding Seroptimism

After 75 years we are still committed to serve communities at local, national and international level and to active participation in decision making at all levels of society.

Second only to Sydney in Australasia, the Wellington club was started through the interest and enthusiasm of Kathleen Moore a (London born) business woman, working in New Zealand and Lillian Nelson, an honorary and foundation member of the Vancouver club.

A little about our Founder Miss Kathleen Moore:

Miss Kathleen Moore was born in London and joined the New Zealand Refrigerating Company in London as a confidential clerk in 1914. Miss Moore went on to become the first woman to hold the position of head salesperson at the company. She later managed the London office and in 1928 transferred to their Christchurch headquarters. After a severe illness in 1931, Miss Moore joined the staff of Ford Motors in Christchurch, selling cars to women. She moved to Wellington and organised the Women's Division of Dominion Life Assurance.

In 1939, Miss Moore began her relationship with Seroptimism. While visiting in London she met and received great support from Elizabeth Hawes, the then President of the Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. On her return, Kathleen called a meeting of prominent women in Wellington to discuss the idea of forming a Seroptimist Club. This took place on 23rd February 1939. On 16th March 1939 a motion was carried that a Seroptimist club be formed. Miss Kathleen Moore became the first

President, Mrs WE Suckling (Optician) Vice President, Miss T.R. Smith (Assistant Lecturer), second Vice President, and Mrs Ellen Castle (Apartment House owner) Secretary. Members of the Executive were Mrs E Buele (Secretary in an Architect's office), Miss D. Mowat (Accountant), Miss E. Mainwaring (Handicrafts, Art needlework), Mrs J. Kemp - Saint (Furrier), Mrs J. Yaldwyn (Assistant Teacher, Private School), Miss E.M. Black (Florist), and Miss C. Hooper (Dental Clinic Matron).



Foundation officers of the Wellington Soroptimist Club

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Other charter members included, Mrs V.A. May (Welfare Organiser), Mrs J.M. Williams (Librarian – Municipal Library), Miss Pauline Smith (Hairdresser), Miss D'este (Photographer), and Dr Elizabeth Bryson (Consulting Physician). The club met for some months and in August 1939 had 30 members. It operated for 8 months and during this time members set up a refugee relief committee and planned employment opportunities for people escaping from Europe. One idea proposed was the establishment a coffee shop, to be run by the refugees. But it was debated there were New Zealanders in need of work too so the idea was abandoned in October 1939.

It was decreed at a meeting on 7th September 1939 that the club 'maintain neutrality in all national affairs and to avoid all discussion on political, sectarian, religious and racial questions'. A charter entrance fee of £7 was dispatched to Miss Elizabeth Hawes, the Liaison Officer, of the Soroptimist International Association in London. And on 16th November 1939 the club was formally chartered. At that time the club had 38 members.

To celebrate the occasion of our charter, a grand dinner was held at the Centennial Restaurant at The Exhibition in Rongotai with 73 guests. The Mayor and Mayoress, Mr E.P. Hay and Mrs Hay, and Mrs Peter Fraser were among the guests.

The multiple course dinner included Clear Soup, Fillet of Sole a la Royale, Roast Turkey and Cranberry sauce, Potatoes and Green Peas, Iced Peaches, Pineapple Flummery, Fruit Salad and Ice cream, Salted Almonds and Muscatels and coffee.

During the function the founder and President, Miss Kathleen Moore, was presented with a gavel of New Zealand honeysuckle wood with a silver inscription plate. It is still in use today! It was reported in the Evening Post the 'tables were a delight to behold', with decorations of yellow roses, blue cornflowers, delphiniums, and irises in the club colours of gold and blue. Golden roses were worn by all the women. The floral work was completed by one of the founder members, local florist, Miss E. Black.



The Soroptimist International of Wellington club gavel

Membership of the club was on a classification basis, and restricted each club to one member eminent in her own trade or calling. Wearing the Soroptimist badge indicated the wearer as an expert at the peak of her profession and trade. Occupations of some of the Club members who later joined were, a hospital matron, broadcasting administrator, gas industry lecturer, chiropodist, pianoforte teacher, an income tax expert, a subeditor, head teacher, dispensing chemist, guest house owner, harpist, surgeon dentist, ladies outfitter, teacher of voice production, milliner, an interior decorator and a frock designer.

In 1940, one of the first gifts from the Club was the presentation (in London) by Mrs H.D. Williams (President of Federated Soroptimist International Clubs of Great Britain and Ireland) of four ambulances to the War Office. These were presented on behalf of members in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada to be used for field service. In London at the time it was reported, aviator, Miss Jean Batten had been helping with the Soroptimist appeal to raise funds for the ambulances.

Meetings of the Club consist to this day of a business segment and once completed, an evening meal is served with a guest as speaker.

Some of the meetings' early speakers were very interesting with some topics that still resonate with us today. Mrs How – Martyn's addressed the club on 31st October 1940, on the 'Women's movement in England.' She quoted 'there will always be a rebel as the nucleus of progress'. In 1942 on 20th August, Miss M. Lambie gave a talk about the 'Control of Venereal Disease in N.Z.'. Miss Suckling on 1st October that year spoke about 'The emancipation of women'.

Over time, there were a number of male speakers to the club. On the 15th October 1942, Mr Alex Marks, gave a talk on 'The Soviet democracy'. Mr Orchiston (B. Arch.) spoke to the club on 7th March 1946 on 'Slum Clearance' in the Te Aro flat area.

On the 9th September 1943, the club had a general discussion on 'Is there a youth problem?' There was so much interest on the subject, another lengthy discussion was held at the next Club meeting. And on the 6th November 1947, Miss D. Wild gave a talk on 'Women in Banking'.

On 7th October 1943 Soroptimist International Wellington began a local affiliation with the National Council of Women. This association continues to this day.

In 1944 Miss Mabel Howard M.P., was invited to join the club. A number of reminder letters were sent but it could not be established if she ever actually joined the club.

One of the more amusing pieces from the recorded minutes was of the 13th April 1944 meeting. Mrs Williams asked "if something could be done to liven up the programme as it had recently become very dull".

During 1944, to raise funds for the club, a series of music recitals were held. At a meeting everyone was thanked for their work, a special mention was made of Mrs Mackay 'who tried to be helpful'!

The establishment of an annual prize of £5 was made to Wellington Girls College in October 1945. This prize continued for some years.

With 21 members, but unable to find a suitable meeting place, the club went into recess on the 24th June 1948. By March 1949, the club was up and running again.

Our founder, Kathleen Moore continued her association with Soroptimism for many years. During her life time she held a plethora of membership and office positions in many business and community organisations. But it was said, 'her special interest and the one she was most proud of, was her involvement in Soroptimism'. In 1957, Kathleen was to gift a specially made President's 'badge of office' to the club but sadly passed away a short time before the presentation.



The President's badge of office

During the early 1950s membership waned, and the club struggled to attract members. However, by the end of the 1950s the club was flourishing again and very active in the community. Each milestone of the club has continued to be celebrated in style.

From an article in the Evening Post on 21st November, 1964, it was reported a dinner was held at Hallmark House in Kilbirnie to celebrate Soroptimist International of Wellington's 25th birthday. The

President at the time, Miss Dorothy Hamilton, said a “dazzling collection of career girls from all over the country will celebrate our 25th birthday”. Other women to attend the 25th celebration included Miss Clare Burger, first Secretary (in Australasia) of the Wellington Stock Exchange, Mrs Hazel Wright, chief Pharmacist to the Wellington Hospital Board, Miss V.O. Tyler, matron of Alexander Hospital and Miss Sylvia Spear, head teacher at Kimi-Ora School for Physically Disabled Children. Founder members of the club were also among the guests, Mrs Vera May, Miss Sylvia Smith and Miss Challis Hooper. Mayor Frank Kitts and Mayoress Kitts also attended the gathering.

To commemorate this anniversary, on 3rd December 1964, a beautiful President’s badge (made of gold and topaz with the Soroptimist International emblem in its centre) was presented to Dorothy Hamilton. Made by well-known Wellington jeweller, Mrs Ida Hudig, it is proudly worn by club Presidents to this day. It was insured at the time for £55. (Mrs Hudig also designed and made the New Zealand Central Region President’s insignia in silver and paua shell).



25th anniversary Presidents brooch designed by Mrs Ida Hudig

In November 1989, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of Soroptimist International of Wellington. Mrs Wendy Harland was the President at this time. A programme to celebrate this occasion included luncheons and home visits, culminating in a dinner at the R.A. Vance stand of the Basin Reserve.

In November 2009, a lunch was held at The Pines to mark the occasion of our 70th anniversary. A very special part of this event, hosted by our then president Catherine O’Donnell, was the presence of five members of Soroptimist International of Sakai in Japan, one of our Friendship Link clubs, resplendent in their kimonos. (In the same year we became a registered charity with the Charities Commission).

Over the years we have enjoyed and benefited from a special relationship with a number of other individual clubs in the worldwide Soroptimist community who have been our Friendship Links. The aim of the Friendship Link programme is the encouragement of continuing contacts, for international goodwill and understanding, sharing of ideas and projects and discussing issues. Soroptimist International of Wellington have special links with SI Sakai in Japan, SI Joondalup in Western Australia, SI Moss in Norway, SI Hilversum in the Netherlands, SI Cheltenham and SI Kettering in Great Britain. We also enjoyed for a number of years the same contact with SI Paradise in the USA and SI Bridlington in Great Britain.

In 1996, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Soroptimism, Soroptimist International of South West Pacific gifted a number of Soroptimist International Miniature Roses (propagated by the well-known rose grower Sam McGready) to the Wellington Botanical Gardens. A ceremony at The Lady Norwood Rose Garden was attended by club members and friends with special guest, Lady Hardie – Boys, wife of the Governor General.

On 8th of November 2014, the Wellington club plan to celebrate our 75th anniversary with a gathering of Soroptimist International members and friends, at the Waiopahu Gardens near Levin.

To this day Soroptimist International of Wellington’s aims and objects remain the same:

Through goodwill, understanding and friendship, Soroptimists strive for:

- Advancement of the status of women
- High ethical standards
- Human rights for all
- Equality, development and peace

Projects, advocacy and programmes

All New Zealand clubs participate in local, national, South West Pacific Federation (previously the Divisional Union of Clubs) and International projects for the betterment of New Zealand and South Pacific society. They continue to support, fundraise, serve and advocate for the community.

The following are some examples of *local* projects carried out or assisted by Soroptimist International of Wellington over the decades:

- 1941 – raised money to purchase ambulances for forces during the war
- 1945 – 50 – assisted in the rehabilitation of refugees from Greece
- Save the Children sponsorship
- Donated an annual prize for students at Wellington Girls’ College
- Assisted with the formation of The Multiple Sclerosis Society (Wellington branch)
- Helped send a ton of medical supplies to Tonga, plus books and tools for High School students
- Hearing aids for the Community Clinic
- Swivel arm design project, to enable disabled children to feed themselves
- Talking books for sight impaired
- Making Peace dolls to raise funds towards SI humanitarian project “Women, Survivors of War”
- Assisted in the ‘Books in Homes’ programme
- Provided toilet bags for Kosova refugees in Auckland
- Provided social outings for the elderly in the Wellington region
- Donated an annual prize to an outstanding student at He Huaraki Tamariki, a local school for teenage parents
- Raising funds to help purchase a local surf rescue boat
- Donated research equipment to Karori Wildlife Sanctuary (now Zealandia)
- Donation to Kimi Ora School for Physically Disabled Children in memory of Sylvia Spear

- Yearly donation to the Betty Loughhead Soroptimist Scholarship (which gives second chance education grants for women)
- Donation and support in setting up Homeless Women's Trust in Wellington
- Donation to new Ronald MacDonald House to purchase equipment needed
- Donation to Wellington@Heart to assist in holiday family time camps

Soroptimist International of Wellington has also continued the work of our founders in community advocacy. Over the years we have actively lobbied for many causes, some examples:

- Supported refugees from countries in conflict
- Sponsorship of VSA workers in the Pacific
- Involvement and support for the Equal Pay and Opportunity Bill
- Lobbied the Government for the need to legislate to protect individual privacy in relation to computerised data files
- Representation on the Women's Appointment File committee 'to gain fairer representation of women on statutory boards'
- Supported children and adults with disabilities
- Provided grants for secondary and 'second chance' education
- Supported founding committee for a local Homeless Women's Shelter
- Assisted women at Arohata Prison

Some examples of our support to National Projects:

- 1952 – Funding for formation of the Darby and Joan Club & Home (for the elderly)
- 1956 – Assistance to Displaced persons (still suffering the ravages of W.W.2)
- 1964 – Support for the 'Freedom from Hunger' campaign
- 1965 – Tonga Hospital project – providing nursing equipment
- 1971 – Support for the NZ Council for equal pay and opportunity
- 1971 – Sponsorship of VSA workers in the Pacific
- 1970 -71 –Spinal Unit, Burwood Hospital – rehabilitation equipment
- 1973- 75 - Maori Scholarships
- 1975-76 -Scholarships for community education and training centre in Fiji
- 1981 – Support to 'Save a life' project – National Surf Life Saving Manual
- 1989-93 - Support for 'Canteen'
- 1989 – First Betty Loughhead scholarship presented by Lady Reeves at Government House
- 2011 – 2013 – Cliques, crews & catfights: Moving beyond girl violence
- 2013 – 2015 – ECPAT: Child Alert – for the elimination of child pornography and trafficking

Examples of South West Pacific Federation projects

- 2002 -2006 - Halt family violence: Serious problem of domestic violence in Papua New Guinea
- 2006 – 2010 – Hands across the borders: A project to provide water filtration systems, new latrines, hospital supplies and medicines to help eradicate many preventable diseases.
- 2010 – 2015 – Birthing in the Pacific: Supporting the improved training of midwives in Papua New Guinea.

Soroptimist International of Wellington also actively contributes to international causes and projects. The Soroptimist organisation has General Consultative Status with the [United Nations \(UN\)](#)

[Economic and Social Council](#) (ECOSOC). Soroptimist representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva, Paris and Vienna participate in general meetings, sit on committees and provide Soroptimist information and opinions based upon the "[Where We Stand](#)" and the international database of Soroptimist Club Programme Focus Reports.

Projects are always in partnership with an established Non-Government Organisations (N.G.O) or a United Nations Agency. We work closely with these organisations and authorities for positive social and economic changes that improve the lives of women, children and families.

Some examples of International Quadrennial Projects

1995 – 1999- S.I.A.M. Soroptimist International Aids Mediation

1999 – 2003 - Soroptimist International Limbs for Life – in partnership with Red Cross. Assisting victims of landmines

2003 – 2007: Project Independence: Women Survivors of War

2007 – 2011: Project Sierra – helping women and children in war-torn Sierra Leone

2011 – 2015: Birthing in the Pacific: Supporting the improved training of midwives in Papua New Guinea

Divisional Union of Soroptimist Clubs in New Zealand to the South West Pacific Federation:

The second Club to be formed in New Zealand was in Christchurch. Hilda Lovell-Smith (a close family friend of Kate Sheppard) was involved in the establishment of the National Council of Women and instrumental in the Christchurch Club's charter on November 1949. The Auckland club chartered a little later on 21st December 1949. Both of these clubs came about by the enthusiastic support and Extension work of Mrs Florence Rutter, a visitor and former President of the South London Club.

The first meeting of the Divisional Union (with only three clubs at the time) was on the 2nd April 1951. Five SI members gathered in Christchurch, bought together by Miss Hilda Lovell-Smith. The first *council* meeting was held in Wellington on 19th September 1951. It continued to meet and in 1956 held the first combined *conference* of three N.Z. clubs in Lower Hutt. Miss Kathleen Moore was made Vice President.

Over the years Australian clubs were very keen to form an Australasian federation. At the time there was some resistance on the part of the New Zealand Clubs but eventually a Soroptimist Federation was formed with Australia in 1958. This body became the Co-ordinating Committee of Soroptimist Clubs in Australia and New Zealand, C. o. C. for short.

In 1971 the Committee of Soroptimist Clubs of Australia and New Zealand changed to the Council of the South West Pacific. In 1978 it became a Federation: Soroptimist International of the South West Pacific.

In 1973 Soroptimist in New Zealand formed two regions, NZ North and NZ South. From this time to 1983, NZ South went from three to ten clubs and NZ North went from nine clubs to sixteen. Due to the size of the region it was decided to divide NZ North and NZ Central was formed in 1983. Soroptimist International of Wellington is one of eight clubs that form the Central Region. Lyn Stewart (a Wellington club member) is the current Regional President.

Over the years, there have been a number of Wellington Club members who have received Queen's Honours.

- Betty Loughhead
- Sylvia Spear
- Dorothy Hamilton
- Florence Howland
- Patricia Cairney
- Glenys Arthur

More about some of SI Wellington's outstanding Soroptimists:

Betty Loughhead joined Soroptimist International of Christchurch in 1951 and held office at all levels. She served on C.o.C. of which she was Chair in 1967-69 and was President of the Soroptimists Clubs of the South West Pacific 1980 – 82. She served as a member of the International Board from 1979 – 1983. (It was about this time Betty moved to the Wellington club). In 1983 Betty began her two year term as President, Soroptimist International. She was the first New Zealander to achieve this position and many New Zealand Soroptimists attended her inauguration in Istanbul. During 1991 to 1995 Betty was the Editor of the International Soroptimist magazine. Betty was made an honorary member of all clubs in the South West Pacific Federation. A national scholarship (for women over 25), the Betty Loughhead Scholarship, was set up in her name in the 1980's. Over the decades \$147,000 has been given in grants to seventy-five women. The trust is still going strong to this day and has enabled many women to have an opportunity to obtain a 'second chance' education. In 2014 Betty passed away. She left behind a wonderful legacy of an illustrious and busy life with Soroptimism, regionally, nationally and internationally.



Hazel Wright joined Soroptimist International of Wellington in May 1957, and became President in 1960-61. In 1965 Hazel went on to become the Soroptimist N.Z. President. Among her many achievements, she represented Soroptimism on the N.Z. Council for Equal Pay and Opportunity from 1966 until it went into recess in 1978. She was instrumental in Soroptimists gaining *national* affiliation with the National Council of Women and with the United Nations Association. Hazel was the N.Z. delegate to the C.o.C for six years and a N.Z. delegate on the executive committee of the British Federation. Hazel was made an honorary member of all clubs in the South West Pacific Federation.

Dorothy Hamilton was a formidable woman in her own right as principal of the Dental Training School. Her tenure as President in 1964 – 65 meant she led the Wellington club into their 25th Anniversary year celebrations. She was an outstanding Soroptimist with many community achievements and was instrumental in the formation of the Wellington branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society in 1976. (For many years the club continued to support their work in the community).

Sylvia Spear became President in 1962 – 63. In 1973 Sylvia took on the role of President for the newly formed Soroptimist International of NZ North. From 1970 – 1974 Sylvia represented

Soroptimism on the UNESCO board. She acted as N.Z. Extension Officer from 1965 – 1972 and, assisted by Dorothy Hamilton and Hazel Wright, started the Lower Hutt (1965) and Palmerston North (1971) Clubs. Sylvia was on the United Nations Association national body from 1968 – 1975. From 1980 to 82 she was Secretary for the Federation of the South West Pacific, and from 1983 to 1987, Sylvia was the International Programme Coordinator for Education. She was also made an honorary member of all the clubs of the South West Pacific Federation. Her outstanding legacy continues with the Wellington Club through the Sylvia Spear Conference Grant, set up in her name to assist new Soroptimist Wellington members to attend local and international conferences.

In 2014 we are stronger than ever and our work continues in Wellington.



Current members of Soroptimist International of Wellington

List of current members with 25 years of service

- Glenys Arthur
- Bernice Croft
- Wendy Harland
- Pat Maddocks
- Catherine O’Donnell
- Kris Pearson
- Julia Risk
- Barbara Sworder

and Yvonne Wilson is to receive this recognition in November 2015

**SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF WELLINGTON
PRESIDENTS**

1939-41	Kathleen Moore
1941-42	Mrs W. E. Suckling
1943-44	Anne MacKay
1945-46	Miss K. Engledue
1947-48	Miss S. G. Lynch
1949-50	Kathleen Fuller

1951	Miss V Wilson
1952-53	Dorothy Comyns
1954-55	Helen Clark
1956-57	Miss A. E. Raven
1958-59	Mona Hurley
1960-61	Hazel Wright
1962-63	Sylvia Spear
1964-65	Dorothy Hamilton
1966	Kathleen Craig
1967-68	Noeline Anslow
1969-70	Peggy Marsh
1971-72	Florence Howland
1973-74	Moira Dougherty
1975-76	Anne Corcoran
1977	Bridget Fox
1978-80	Barbara Sworder
1980-81	Doreen Gearing
1982	Elaine Whiteman
1983-84	Bernice Croft
1985-86	Maureen Zust
1987-88	Julia Risk
1989-90	Wendy Harland
1990-92	Anne Fyfe
1993-94	Geraldine Stevenson
1995-96	Yvonne Wilson
1997-98	Kristine Pearson
1999-2000	Margaret Becker
2001-02	Susan McEwan
2003-04	Carla Campbell-Redl
2005-06	Sister Raye Boyle
2007-09	Catherine O'Donnell
2010-2011	Lyn Stewart
2012-2013	Jocelyn Butcher
2014-	Kristeen Johnston

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Compiled by President, Kristeen Johnston, Jane Chapman (Publicity Convenor) and Wendy Harland (Membership), 2014