

A TRIBUTE TO THE PIONEERS

'voortrekkers' of the transvaal



Left to right:
Dora Hill
Jean Sinclair
Rose Franks
Trude Hemp



joyce harris

This list is by no means all-inclusive. Some members may unwittingly have been left out. If so we apologise. It has not been possible to contact our country members in time to meet the deadline, and for this too we apologise. Some members are untraceable as they have not kept their membership records up to date. Some were contacted but did not wish to feature for a variety of reasons. Their feelings were respected though their moral and financial support over all the years has been highly valued. Others were away and could not be contacted.

Nevertheless many members over the age of 75 surfaced, quite a number over 80, and even one over 90. Still keen members, they have been the backbone of the Black Sash since its inception.

Jean Sinclair is surely the most prominent of all our pioneers. Jean founded the Black Sash in 1955. She was returning from holiday by car with her husband and five children and in Colesburg

received news of the Senate Bill. While in Cape Town she had attended Parliament and listened to the debate on the Appeal Court Bill. Both Bills were attempts by the government to circumvent the Constitution in order to get the 'coloured' voters of the Cape off the voters' roll.

Jean was incensed, 'furious' as she so often was and still is. As a United Party member of the City Council, she decided that something had to be done about those Bills. She called four other women together and they decided to organise a march of women from the Scottish Memorial to the City Hall in Johannesburg to attend a public meeting the Council had forced the Mayor to call. There were thousands of women marching, and thus the 'Women's Defence of the Constitution League' was formed. Two petitions were launched nation-wide, there was a vigil outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria, and a magnificently organised convoy to Cape Town, with contributory convoys converging right on time to drive together into Cape Town and converge on the Houses of Parliament.

The Women's Defence of the Constitution League became the Black Sash, a constitution was drawn up, and the organisation decided to continue despite the fact that it had lost its first battle. Ruth Foley was its first National President, and eventually Jean became National President, a post she held for 14 years. Not only was she always in the midst of all the action, she actually introduced a great deal of it, and was always ready to do absolutely anything she felt would promote the causes for which the Black Sash stood. She made ordinary people do extraordinary things because she was always ready to do them herself.

Her efforts kept the Black Sash alive and active through all the arid years when not even the Press was interested in it. She never allowed its tempo to slacken. She worked in the Advice office, she attended all demonstrations, vigils and marches, she was always seeking new ways of achieving results, and she led the organisation with determination, imagination and great courage through its most difficult years. It is safe to say that without her there would have been no Black Sash. We salute her.

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Top, left to right:
Isobel Giddy
Eileen Mendelsohn
Lorna Ferry
Jeanette Davidoff
Below:
Olga Rosenberg

Kay Brown is over 80 and was a member from the very beginning. She participated in all demonstrations and did 'everything I could to say NO against the government.' She is now ailing, and is going to live in Cape Town.

Phyllis Craig Cochrane participated in the first march and the first vigil to Pretoria. She took

part in many vigils and demonstrations and ran the Van Der Bijl Park branch. The Black Sash has always been very important to her and she is still a very keen member. She was part of the convoy to Cape Town, and one of those who 'haunted' Minister Eric Louw when he fell up the steps, to the jubilation of the Black Sash members. (Haunting was a major Black Sash activity in the early years. Members, wearing sashes, would congregate in silent protest at venues where senior government officials, usually Cabinet Ministers, were present and 'haunt' them.)

Jeanette Davidoff, whose husband was a Labour Member of Parliament, was coming home from Parliament on the Blue Train in 1955 when she bought a Rand Daily Mail in Krugersdorp and learnt of the vigil at the Union Buildings. She decided to go, with the support of her husband, and went to the Johannesburg City Hall with the women. Then and there she decided to join the organisation, in which she has remained very active to this day. She attended its first meeting, called by Jean Sinclair in her home, at which it was decided to wear sashes and to use the slogan, 'Eerbiedig ons Grondwet.' (Respect our Constitution.)

Netty was the Black Sash's first press officer. She also chaired its first Education Committee, attended all demonstrations, went

on the convoy to Cape Town and one to Bloemfontein, was part of the daily vigil of four women at the Union Buildings, and was Vice-President of the organisation for some time. She has been a member of the Transvaal Regional Committee throughout its existence.

She says that for her the Black Sash has always meant camaraderie, care and genuine affection. At the age of 80 she still makes an immense contribution to all its activities.

Lorna Ferry, who is 80, has been a member from the beginning. She went on the first Johannesburg march, took part in the hauntings and demonstrations, and has always been very keen and active. She is a special gardener, and the organisation has benefitted from her plants and cuttings over many years. She also ran the bookstall at the City Hall on a number of occasions.

Rose Franks has been a keen and supportive member for very many years and used to help with clerical work in the office.

Isobel Giddy participated in the first march in Johannesburg and has been a member ever since. She took part in many demonstrations, including the torch demonstration at the City Hall, and was questioned by the Security

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Police at the time of the Dean of Johannesburg's trial — an unpleasant experience. Isobel worked in the employment centre for many years. She is a wonderful needle-woman and still makes lovely garments for the sewing stall at the morning market.

Dorothy Grant is an original member of the Black Sash. She was one of the first secretaries of the Johannesburg Committee and press officer for the Johannesburg Region. She was editor of SASH for four years. She was unable to continue actively after her husband died and she returned to work, but she remains a valued member.

Trude Hemp joined the organisation in 1956. She participated in demonstrations, and bought her first pair of sunglasses in response to the pictures the Special Branch were always taking of Black Sash women. She worked in the Advice Office for very many years and is still a valued member of the sewing stall at the morning market. She feels that her years in the Black Sash reflect both sad and happy times — sad for the sort of work it has to do and happy for the people she has come to know through it.

Dora Hill, also 80, joined the organisation in its early days, and was a member of the convoys to Cape Town and Bloemfontein. She has very amusing stories to tell of those times. The absence of toilets (when most urgently needed) seems to have been a real problem. She stood at the Union Buildings, joined most of the demonstrations, was an early National Treasurer, Chairperson of the Transvaal Region for very many years and a member of its Committee for even longer. She and her husband graciously made their home available for the annual morning market for many years.

Jennie Hoare is over 80 and has been a member right from the beginning. She attended all demonstrations including the vigil at the Union Buildings and the

convoy to Cape Town and haunted ministers at the airport and everywhere else. She helped with clerical work in the office and worked in the Advice Office for many years. She has always given the organisation the most generous financial support, and still does.

Constance Kinghorn, who is 87, has been a member from the beginning. She participated in demonstrations, vigils and activities at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, and always helped in any way she could. She is still a keen member.

Anna Marais is over 80. She is still a member of the Transvaal Regional Committee and has been a member of the organisation since its inception. In those years she worked during the day and was not available to do very much, but she participated in demonstrations whenever she could, including those at the airport. Her father fought on the side of the Boers during the Boer War, but soon afterwards encouraged his children to play with the little English children, and said that we must build a country together.

In latter years, as a member of the committee, Anna has always pulled her weight. She did (and still does) a great deal of clerical work in the office, and for many years she ran the white elephant stall at the morning market.

Eileen Mendelsohn is also 80. She was introduced to the Black Sash in the early days by Netty Davidoff. She attended many demonstrations, and on one occasion was arrested and taken to the Hillbrow Police Station with her posters and her colleague. After some time there the Special Branch was called and allowed her to leave.

Eileen has helped in the Advice Office, worked in the employment centre for many years, and still helps with clerical work in the office, despite poor health. She served on the Transvaal Committee for many years and is still a committee member.

Sylvia Nell has been a member almost from the beginning. A busy person, involved in many organisations, she had limited time to devote to the Black Sash, but has always been a keen and supportive member.

Beatrice Pullinger is a sprightly 93-year-old, who has been a member from the beginning. She worked for most of her life and had little time to devote to the Black Sash, but she did participate in demonstrations, including the one long one at the City Hall, and she remains a keen member.

Olga Rosenberg has been a member for very many years. She joined when she saw fish being thrown at the Black Sash women doing a vigil at the City Hall. She was so impressed with their courage that she walked straight into a little shop, bought a length of black ribbon, and joined them. She attended the meeting which decided on the formation of the Advice Office, and worked in it for 10 years. Olga attended many demonstrations, is still a keen member, and has given very generous financial support over the years.

Barry Silcock has been a member from the beginning of the organisation. She participated in many demonstrations and was part of the march and vigil in Pretoria. She always attended general meetings and is still a keen member.

Mina Stuart joined the inaugural march from the Scottish Memorial to the City Hall and has been a member of the organisation ever since. When she saw a student interfering with that march she hit him in the chest with her shoe bag because she was so angry, even though she knew this was not permitted. She was almost pushed into the flame at the City Hall demonstration, and had to be saved. Mina attended most demonstrations. She is also an excellent marmalade maker, and has been making marmalade for Black Sash morning markets ever since they started. □