WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN AUSTRALIA
Studies in Australian History

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WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN AUSTRALIA

A GIFT OR A STRUGGLE?

Audrey Oldfield
For Katherine, Elizabeth, Joel, Mitchell and Amy.
A generation which will learn that their mothers, as well as their fathers, made Australian history.
‘Power is the ballot, the symbol of freedom and equality, without which no citizen is sure of keeping even that which he hath, much less of getting that which he hath not.’

SUSAN B. ANTHONY, 1871

‘What is a vote? It is a certain factor in the system of our government. Does Miss Badham suppose that we are merely fighting for this piece of machinery, which may be here today and gone tomorrow? No, we are battling for the liberty, the freedom of women.’

ROSE SCOTT, 1896

‘The history of men’s opposition to women’s emancipation is more interesting than the story of that emancipation itself.’

VIRGINIA WOOLF, 1929
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Illustrations

In mid-1900 the Queensland Premier promised to introduce a woman suffrage bill
In 1893 a woman suffrage bill was rejected by the the South Australian Parliament
The Bulletin’s view of early moves for woman suffrage in the New South Wales Parliament
The Bulletin’s view of a Woman’s Christian Temperance Union deputation, 1894
The Queensland Premier, Robert Philp, prepares to kill moves for woman suffrage
Premier Arthur Morgan forces the Queensland Legislative Council to reconvene
How Melbourne Punch saw the Victorian women’s threat to take militant action, 1908
A Woman’s Christian Temperance Union leaflet
How Melbourne Punch saw women on the hustings
How Melbourne Punch saw the threat of women in Parliament
Melbourne Punch’s view of Vida Goldstein
Women were pictured as unable to understand political issues
**Plates following page 82**

Mary Lee  
Elizabeth Nicholls  
Jessie Ackermann  
Catherine Helen Spence  
Dr James Stirling  
Sir John Forrest  
Christine Clark  

The *Western Mail* summed up the debate

Walter James  
Frederick Holder  
Charles Kingston  
Dora Montefiore  
Elizabeth Ward  
Annie Golding  
Rose Scott  
Louisa Lawson  
Emma Miller

**Plates following page 162**

The Celebration Meeting of the  
Womanhood Suffrage League of  
New South Wales, 1902

Jessie Rooke  
Elizabeth Brentnall  
Mary Love  
Annie Lowe  
Brettena Smyth  
Henrietta Dugdale  
Marie Kirk  
Annette Bear-Crawford  
Vida Goldstein  
Dr William Maloney  
Lilian Locke  
Sir Thomas Bent  
A Victorian voter’s right

Alice Henry and Miles Franklin  
Margaret Fisher, Emily McGowan and  
Vida Goldstein
Abbreviations

Libraries
BL:WA Battye Library, Western Australia.
JOL:Q John Oxley Library, Queensland.
LTL:V La Trobe Library, Victoria.
ML:NSW Mitchell Library, New South Wales.
ML:SA Mortlock Library, South Australia.
SL:NSW State Library, New South Wales.
SL:Q State Library, Queensland.
SL:SA State Library, South Australia.
SL:T State Library, Tasmania.
SL:V State Library, Victoria.
SL:WA State Library, Western Australia.

Parliamentary Debates
CAPD Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Debates.
NSWPD New South Wales, Parliamentary Debates.
QPD Queensland, Parliamentary Debates.
SAPD South Australia, Parliamentary Debates.
VPD Victoria, Parliamentary Debates.
WAPD Western Australia, Parliamentary Debates.

Organisations
WCTU Woman’s Christian Temperance Union.
In mid-1900 the Queensland Premier, Robert Philp, promised a delegation of the three suffrage groups that he would introduce a woman suffrage bill, but did not fulfil his promise.

Preface

In the early 1980s, during an election campaign which generated much discussion as to whether women’s issues might determine the outcome, I went to the New South Wales State Library to research an article on the granting of the vote to Australian women. I found only a few pieces in academic magazines, but they said little about the women themselves. Driven to contemporary newspapers and to the Mitchell Library’s stock of documents, I soon realised that this could be no article. The stories of the campaigns have had to be pieced together like a giant jigsaw, using parliamentary debates, press reports, surviving records of societies, Louisa Lawson’s Dawn, Vida Goldstein’s Woman’s Sphere, and the records of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Rose Scott’s meticulous preservation of letters gave me references to what was happening at the time in other states, and when I visited their Australiana collections I sometimes augmented my knowledge of the New South Wales movement. I am left with some sadness at the end of my years of research, however; there are some gaps in the jigsaw because so many quite prominent women did not think their experiences important enough to commit to paper, and much of what the others left has been destroyed.

The New South Wales suffragists held what they termed a 'joy meeting’ in late 1902 to celebrate the granting of the Commonwealth and New South Wales votes. The platform of the Sydney School of Arts was crowded with politicians, all of whom were eager to accept the credit, and in the process woo the new electorate. Rose Scott told the men that their names would live ‘not only in the history of Australia, but in that of the world’, while the names of the women would be forgotten. Her words have been true for the best part of a century. I hope that this book will reverse the situation.

Being so heavily dependent on original sources, I have relied very much on the aid of librarians. I cannot speak too highly of the help given to me in the Mitchell Library,
but I must also thank those in the Tasmanian Archives, the La Trobe Library in Victoria, the Mortlock in South Australia, the John Oxley in Brisbane, and the Battye in Perth. In all capital cities I was received warmly and courteously at the offices of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and was given access to their material. They have my thanks. I also express my appreciation to those of the above institutions which gave me permission to publish material from their collections.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use copyright material; the publishers trust that their apologies will be accepted for any errors or omissions.

Audrey Oldfield
Women's suffrage in Australia was one of the earliest objectives of the movement for gender equality in Australia. It began to be socially and politically accepted and legislated during the late 19th century, beginning with South Australia in 1894 and Western Australia in 1899. In 1902, the newly established Australian Parliament passed the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902, which set a uniform law enabling women (except those who were "aboriginal natives" of Australia, Africa, Asia and the Pacific