

Entry type: Concept
Entry ID: AWE0546

Woman Suffrage

Summary

Although the battle for woman suffrage began later in Australia than it did in Britain or the United States, success was achieved earlier. Concerted campaigns for woman suffrage in Australia date from the early 1880s and were supported by organisations and individuals representing a wide array of political and ideological platforms. In some ways, these campaigns signalled the start of women's participation in the Australian political process. Although linked to and inspired by the international campaigns and context of the time, the Australian suffrage movement had its own distinctive, regional characteristics. Matters of race and class, of geographical proximity to Asia and the need to build a healthy white nation at the turn of the century, combined with universal concerns about justice and the rights of the individual to create a uniquely Australian movement.

Details

Australian women, who struggled for the franchise on a colony by colony basis, were amongst the first in the world to win the right to vote. South Australia women were enfranchised in 1894, a year after the women of New Zealand won the honour of being the first in the world to gain the right to vote. Their success was followed by victories in Western Australia in 1899, New South Wales in 1902, Tasmania in 1903, Queensland in 1904 and Victoria, finally, in 1908. The federal franchise was extended to all white women over the age of twenty-one in 1902, due in no small part to the success of the campaigns in South and Western Australia. The framers of the federal constitution agreed that it would be wrong to prevent women who already had the right to vote in state elections from doing so at a federal level. It was hoped that adherence to this principle would lead to consistency across the nation and that the remaining state legislatures would automatically confer woman suffrage for their own parliaments. This was the case for the women of New South Wales and Tasmania, although the women of Queensland and Victoria were required to struggle for longer. By the time they could vote in state elections, in 1908, the white women of Victoria has already voted in two federal elections.

It is important to recognise that the *Commonwealth Franchise Act* did not enfranchise Indigenous women. At the same time federal suffrage was extended to white women it was specifically denied to Aboriginal Australians in those states where they had not previously been eligible to vote. In fact, although some states had granted these men and women the vote prior to 1902, full voting rights were not granted to Indigenous Australians until 1962, when the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* was amended to enfranchise Aboriginal Australians, men and women.

Published resources

Book

That dangerous and persuasive woman: Vida Goldstein, Bomford, Janette M., 1993

Woman suffrage in Australia : a gift or a struggle?, Oldfield, Audrey, 1992

Votes for women : the Australian story, Lees, Kirsten., 1995

The Australian Woman's Sphere, 1900-1905

Book Section

Modernity and mother-heartedness : spirituality and religious meaning in Australian women's suffrage and citizenship movements, 1890s-1920s, Smart, Judith, 2000

A white woman's suffrage, Grimshaw, Patricia, 1996

Resource

1891 Women's Suffrage Petition, Public Record Office Victoria, 2008,
http://wiki.prov.vic.gov.au/index.php/1891_Women%27s_Suffrage_Petition

Worth Fighting For!, Fryer Library with research by Yorick Smaal, 2005,
https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20050708180233/http://www.library.uq.edu.au/fryer/worth_fighting/

Archival resources

State Library of Victoria

The Goldstein chronicle, [between 1950 and 1973]. [manuscript].

Letters, diaries and lectures

State Library of South Australia

Women in Politics: A Forum in the Centenary Year of Women's Suffrage [sound recording]

The University of Melbourne Archives

Oke, Marjorie (1911-2003)

Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

Papers on various Australian women [19--] [manuscript]

Vida Goldstein 1869-1949 January 1966 [manuscript]

National Library of Australia

[Biographical cuttings on Vida Goldstein, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals]

Australian Historic Records Register

Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria Inc. : community organisation records

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Papers on women's suffrage / compiled by Rose Scott.]????????[Papers on women's suffrage / compiled by Rose Scott.]

Scott Family (Rose Scott) papers, 1777-1925 [MLMSS 38/1-79]

William Morrow - recordings of addresses given by Jessie Street, and interviews with Jessie Street, 1953-1960

[Pamphlets relating to Australian women's suffrage]

State Library of New South Wales

SUFFRAGE Group, 1902.

Windeyer family papers, 1829-1943

Author Details

Nikki Henningham

Created 11 September 2003
Last modified 4 May 2009