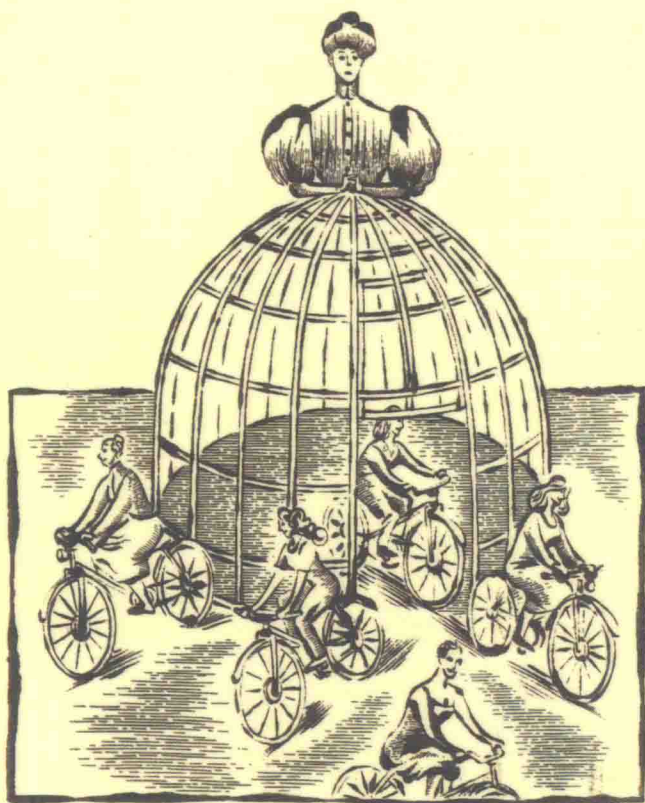


SUFFRAGE & BEYOND

INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES



Edited by
Caroline Daley
&
Melanie Nolan

Suffrage and Beyond
International Feminist Perspectives

Edited by Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan



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*This book is dedicated to our mothers,
Alison Watts and Patricia Flett,
with love*

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The papers could not have been delivered at the conference or published without the generosity of a large number of people, funds and trusts. Dr Jock Phillips, Chief Historian at the Department of Internal Affairs, thought such a conference would be a good idea and allowed the department's Historical Branch to be its first administrative home. 'Suffrage and Beyond' was New Zealand's largest and best funded history conference to date. We are indebted to the 1993 Suffrage Centennial Trust, Whakatu Wahine, and the Bank of New Zealand. They made the conference financially viable and granted publication subsidies for this book. They supported the travel of Patricia Grimshaw, Nancy Cott, Ellen DuBois, Asunción Lavrin, Karen Offen, Jane Rendall and Carole Pateman. Dame Miriam Dell, Chairperson of the 1993 Suffrage Centennial Trust, and Jill Pierce, the Trust's administrator, were particularly encouraging, as was Theresa Gattung, Chief Manager, Marketing, Bank of New Zealand. With the 1993 Suffrage Centennial Trust and the Bank of New Zealand supporting us, we were able to approach cross-cultural trusts and ask for further assistance to bring historians to New Zealand. We thank the British Council and Francis King for supporting Johanna Alberti, Sandra Holton and Martin Pugh; the New Zealand–United States Educational Foundation and Laurie Cox for a Distinguished Visitor Award to Anne Firor Scott to participate in the conference; the Australia–New Zealand Foundation, Robert Hole and John Arathimos for supporting Ann Curthoys, Jackie Huggins, Marilyn Lake and Susan Magarey; the Japan–New Zealand Foundation and Deidre Kerr who supported Yukiko Matsukawa; and the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetica and the Chargé d'Affaires of Switzerland in New Zealand, Peter Graaf, for supporting Margrit Siegenthaler-Reusser.

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Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley
May 1994

Contributors

Johanna Alberti was born in Egypt and has lived mostly in England. She teaches mainly for the Open University, Northern Region, England, but also for two other universities in Newcastle and for the Workers' Educational Association. Her publications include *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-28* (1989). She is currently working on a biography of Eleanor Rathbone.

Nancy F. Cott has taught US women's history at Yale University since 1975. She chaired the Women's Studies Program there from 1980 to 1987, and is currently Stanley Woodward Professor of History and American Studies. Her major books are *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (1977), *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (1987), and *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters* (1991). Her current research focuses on the history of marriage as public policy in the US. She is also editing a ten-volume series on US women's history for young readers.

Ann Curthoys was born in Sydney in 1945 and educated at the University of Sydney. She completed her doctoral thesis on racism in nineteenth-century New South Wales at Macquarie University. She established and taught the women's studies programme at the Australian National University, 1976-77, and since then has taught at the University of Technology, Sydney, where she is now Professor of Social History. Author of *For and Against Feminism: A Personal Journey into Feminist History and Theory* (1988), she has edited a number of collections and published articles and chapters on many aspects of Australian history. She is currently engaged in two projects, one a history of the Australian 'Freedom Rides' of 1965, the other, a co-authored history of journalism in twentieth-century Australia.

Caroline Daley was born in London, in 1964, and immigrated to New Zealand at the age of eight. She was educated at Victoria University of Wellington, where she wrote a doctoral thesis on the gender relations of a New Zealand community. After a post-doctoral fellowship she took up a lectureship in the History Department at the University of Auckland,

where she teaches New Zealand social history and gender relations. She is currently working on a history of gender relations in New Zealand, and in another project is examining the fifty years after New Zealand women were enfranchised. She was on the organising committee of the 'Suffrage and Beyond' conference.

Raewyn Dalziel was born in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, in 1944. After a post-doctoral fellowship spent in London she became a member of History Department at University of Auckland where she is currently an Associate Professor. She has served on University Council, the Council Committee on the Status of Women in the University and the Equal Employment Opportunities Committee. She teaches and publishes on women's history. Her publications include a number of political biographies and she has twice edited special volumes of the *New Zealand Journal of History* on women's history (1989 and 1993).

Ellen Carol DuBois is a Professor of History at University of California, Los Angeles, where she specialises in US women's history. She has been active in the field of women's studies for two decades, publishing extensively on the history of the woman suffrage movement in the US, beginning with her now classic monograph, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Woman's Movement in America, 1848–1869* (1978). She is also the co-editor, with Vicki Ruiz, of *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in US Woman's History* (1989). Currently, she is completing a biography of second-generation American suffragist, Harriot Stanton Blatch, *Generation of Power*.

Patricia Grimshaw is a New Zealander by birth and education. She now teaches American history and women's studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia, where she is the Max Crawford Professor of History. She is co-editor of *The Half-Open Door* (1982) and *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives* (1983), co-author of *Families in Colonial Australia* (1985) and *Creating a Nation* (1994), and author of *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth-Century Hawaii* (1989). Her book *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* was first published in 1972. It remains the definitive account of the New Zealand suffrage movement and was republished in 1987.

Sandra Stanley Holton is currently an Australian Research Fellow in History at the University of Adelaide. She has published a number of articles on the history of the women's movement and the history of medicine, and is the author of *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage*

and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900–1918 (1986). At present she is working on a biography of Alice Clark, the historian of women's work.

Marilyn Lake was born in Tasmania in 1949. She was educated at the University of Tasmania and Monash University, Australia. She has taught women's history at Monash, the University of Melbourne and La Trobe University, where she is now a Reader and Director of Women's Studies. Her publications include *Double Time: Women in Victoria – 150 Years* (1985), co-edited with Farley Kelly, *Limits of Hope: Soldiers' Settlement in Victoria 1915–38* (1987) and *Creating a Nation* co-authored with Patricia Grimshaw, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly (1994). She is currently contracted to write a book on the history of feminism in Australia.

Asunción Lavrin was born in Havana, Cuba, but she has lived most of her life in the US. She was educated at Radcliffe College and Harvard. She has taught in England, Spain, and in several universities in the US. She is currently Professor of History at Howard University, Washington DC. Her doctoral work, on women's religious life in eighteenth-century Mexico, served as a starting point for a career devoted to research in women's history; most of her publications have focused on women, women in the church, ecclesiastical history and twentieth-century feminism in Spanish America. Her recent publications include *Feminism, Women and Social Change in the Southern Cone: 1890–1940* (1984).

Susan Magarey is Director of the Research Centre for Women's Studies at Adelaide University, Australia and editor of the bi-annual journal *Australian Feminist Studies*. Her publications include *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: A Biography of Catherine Helen Spence* (1985), winner of the Walter McRae Russell Award in 1986, *Writing Lives: Feminist Biography & Autobiography* (1993), *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, co-edited with Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan (1993), and *Women in a Restructuring Australia: Work & Welfare*, co-edited with Anne Edwards, forthcoming 1994. She is currently working on a monograph provisionally entitled *The Politics of Passion: Feminism in Australia 1880–1912*.

Yukiko Matsukawa was born in Japan in 1949. After being educated at the graduate school of Ochanomizu University, she became a member of Yamaguchi Women's University, where she is currently an Associate Professor. She teaches and publishes on education and early childhood care. She is a member of the Women's Studies Association of Japan, and her current research focuses on childhood care, education and feminism.

Melanie Nolan was born in Reefton, New Zealand, in 1960 and was educated at the University of Canterbury and the Australian National University. Her doctoral thesis was on the feminisation of white collar labour. She teaches comparative labour and social history at Victoria University of Wellington. She has published a number of articles on the sexual division of labour in Australia and New Zealand and is currently working on a history of the New Zealand state's role in women's economic well-being. She organised the 'Suffrage and Beyond' conference.

Karen Offen is a historian and independent scholar, affiliated with the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, Stanford University, USA. She is secretary-treasurer of the International Federation of Research in Women's History and also serves as president of the Western Association of Women History (USA). She has co-edited two documentaries and most recently, with Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall, she edited *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* (1991). Her monograph, *Paul de Cassagnac and the Authoritarian Tradition in Nineteenth-Century France*, appeared in 1991. She is presently completing a book on the woman question in modern France.

Carole Pateman is Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she teaches political theory and women's studies and is actively involved in the Centre for the Study of Women and the Centre for Social Theory and Comparative History. In 1991–94 she was President of the International Political Science Association (the first woman to hold the office). She was a Guggenheim Fellow during 1993–94, and presented the Sir Douglas Robb Lectures at the University of Auckland in 1993. Her books include *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970) and *The Sexual Contract* (1988) and she has published many articles on democratic theory and feminist theory. She is currently writing a book on some aspects of democratic citizenship.

Martin Pugh is Professor of Modern British History at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK. He has published widely on electoral reform, politics and the Tories, including *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906–1914* (1978), *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867–1939* (1982), *The Tories and the People 1880–1935* (1985) and *Lloyd George* (1988). Most recently, he has written *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914–1959* (1992), and *State and Society: British Political and Social History 1870–1992* (1994).

Jane Rendall is a Senior Lecturer in the History Department and the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of York, UK. Her research is focused on eighteenth-century women's history, mainly in Britain, and the comparative history of feminisms. Her publications include *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States 1780-1860* (1985); *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (1987); and, co-edited with Susan Mendus, *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies in Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (1989). Most recently, with Ruth Roach Pierson and Karen Offen, she co-edited *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives* (1991).

Penelope Schoeffel Meleisea is the International Projects manager of the New Zealand Institute for Social Research and Development. She has worked at the University of the South Pacific, the University of Papua New Guinea and the University of Canterbury, Christchurch. She was National Program Co-ordinator of the Women and Development Network of Australia. Her publications include work on women in development, particularly on gender, status and power, and women's associations in the Pacific Islands.

Kaoru Tachi was born in Japan in 1948. After graduating she became a research fellow of the Institute for Women's Studies, Ochanomizu University, and is currently an Associate Professor there. She has edited and published several books on motherhood, and discourses on women in the workforce and gender in education. Her current research focuses on gender prescriptions in Japanese history, and gender and self-formation.

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International Feminist Perspectives on Suffrage: An Introduction

MELANIE NOLAN AND CAROLINE DALEY

On 19 September 1893, the adult women of New Zealand won the right to vote. One hundred years later this achievement was celebrated by some, while others used the year to question what suffrage had meant to women's lives.¹ On the whole, historians have been more circumspect than celebratory about the impact of women's suffrage. In August 1993 feminist historians from around the world gathered in New Zealand for the 'Suffrage and Beyond' conference. They came to discuss the achievement of women's suffrage in various countries, and to analyse its impact. The chapters in this book are part of the process of questioning what suffrage has meant for women.

Sixteen of the fifty-four papers presented at the conference are collected here. The internationalism of the conference is reflected in essays about New Zealand, Australia, the Pacific Islands, Japan, South America, the US, Britain, France and Germany. There are obviously many geographical gaps, such as Africa, the Middle East and Eurasia, and they should be borne in mind. However, we hope that the mix of papers from the Old and New Worlds, from east and west, from first- and second-world countries, will be stimulating and will help to break down the ethnocentrism which operates in much suffrage literature. In this regard, we think this relatively international collection makes several very important contributions to the historiography of suffrage and the study of women's citizenship.

First, the comparatively peaceful and quiet suffrage movements in Australasia, which have been underplayed in many suffrage studies, are highlighted here. Several chapters in this book show the 'margins' questioning the history of the 'centre'. Second, consideration of a wider range of suffrage histories leads us to revise the usual or standard account of when and how women's suffrage was achieved. The authors here reassess the gaining of suffrage and what its impact has been. They study the early achievement of women's suffrage in some societies, the relatively

late achievement in others, and the post-suffrage era. Chapters on South American, French, Japanese and Pacific Island suffragists remind us that suffrage history should not cease with American women's enfranchisement in 1920, or the achievement of universal suffrage in Britain in 1928. Chapters examining the mid-nineteenth century remind us that the campaign for women's suffrage in Britain and the US began well before the publicity-seeking suffragettes took to the streets. New interpretations of groups of suffragists, as well as individual suffragists, are offered here. Not all are flattering. While the language and representation of these women are examined, so is their racism. Third, many of the authors discuss the internationalism of the suffragists and its importance to their ideas and actions. These were women who strode the world's stage, encouraging and supporting other women in their fight for citizenship rights. Finally, the authors prompt us to consider how suffragists negotiated boundaries in order to achieve women's enfranchisement. The suffragists, and the authors in this book, require us to go beyond the dichotomies that have often contained suffrage histories in the past. The dichotomies between the margins and the centre, between first-wave and post-suffrage studies, between colonial and post-colonial history, and between masculinities and femininities are rejected by many of the authors. They move beyond such dichotomies and offer new approaches to the study of women's suffrage. Most chapters do not slot simply in one theme. Sometimes the authors contradict one another and generate conversations amongst themselves. Our introduction examines some of the relationships and conversations between the papers.

'Marginal' history?

The antipodean women's suffrage movement is well-represented in this book. While the early achievement of women's suffrage in New Zealand and Australia is usually noted in the international literature, these New World societies are often seen as marginal to the suffrage story. Partly because this region did not experience window breaking, mass rallies and hunger strikes, we have been overlooked by suffrage historians who often do not see further than England and the eastern seaboard of the US when they come to develop explanatory models for women's enfranchisement. So what was the Antipodean example?

New Zealand women's relatively early enfranchisement came after a concerted campaign by women and men suffragists. There had been calls for women's franchise since at least 1869, when Mary Muller, using the pseudonym 'Femina', wrote *An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand*, in

which she asked New Zealand men to grant women the right to vote. She appealed to men's common sense identifying it as the sense of the common interest. Mrs Muller thought that New Zealand should take the initiative, and grant women the vote before other nations.²

Although there were no formal suffrage organisations until Mrs Mary Leavitt of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) visited New Zealand in 1885, there had already been attempts in Parliament to introduce women's suffrage. In 1878 Robert Stout introduced a bill to allow women ratepayers to vote and stand for Parliament. In 1879 a further attempt was made, and in 1880 and 1881, Dr James Wallis also tried to pass women's suffrage measures.³ After the formation of a New Zealand branch of the WCTU in 1885, women began to campaign actively for the vote. The WCTU established a Franchise and Legislation Department, and in 1887 Kate Sheppard was appointed Franchise Superintendent.⁴ She co-ordinated suffragists around the country, while also working closely with politicians sympathetic to women's demand for the vote. Suffrage bills were introduced into the Lower House in 1887, 1890, and 1891, but none succeeded. The struggle for the vote intensified, and in 1892 Franchise Leagues were formed. Their members did not, however, support the temperance aims of the WCTU. As well as lobbying politicians, the suffragists began to collect signatures on petitions in support of women's suffrage. In 1891 they collected the signatures of over 10,000 adult women. In 1892 they doubled this effort with a petition of 20,274. Finally, in 1893, they amassed 31,871 signatures, with approximately a quarter of the adult women of New Zealand signing the suffrage petition. Several Maori women are known to have signed the 1892 and 1893 petitions, although at this time Maori women's political energy was mainly directed at achieving voting rights and the right to stand as members of Te Kotahitanga, an inter-tribal Maori parliament.⁵

By 1893 most members of the Lower House did not have strong objections to women being enfranchised.⁶ But the passing of the 1893 Electoral Act was not a straightforward matter. Premier Richard Seddon had never been a supporter of women's suffrage, and planned to foil the passage of the bill. Two members of the Upper House took offence at Seddon's antics, and voted for a bill they would otherwise have opposed. And so in a less than propitious way, New Zealand women gained parliamentary support for their enfranchisement. This was not the end of the campaign, however. The Governor had to assent to the bill, and it took Governor Glasgow a week to turn the bill into the Electoral Act. But finally, many years after women had first asked for the vote, they were

granted this fundamental right of citizenship in a democracy.

The indigenous Maori women of New Zealand and European – or Pakeha – women received the right to vote at the same time. In most cases they did not, however, vote together. Pakeha women joined Pakeha men at the polling booths and voted for the European Members of Parliament on 28 November 1893. Maori women had to wait until 20 December before they could join Maori men and vote for the four Maori Members of Parliament whose seats had been created in 1867 on the basis of male Maori suffrage. It is estimated that about 4000 Maori women voted in 1893. Maori women and men who fulfilled a £25 freehold property requirement were allowed to vote for the European members, if they so desired. It is not known how many Maori women enrolled on the European roll.⁷

The example of New Zealand's achievement of women's suffrage was lauded by suffragists in other parts of the world. The fact that women in New Zealand took up their voting rights so soon after they were granted – a mere ten weeks after the governor's assent to the franchise bill – and with such vigour – almost 80 per cent of eligible women managed to get onto the electoral roll by voting day, and just over 80 per cent of those turned out to vote – no doubt assisted suffragists elsewhere in their claim that women wanted the right to vote.

While New Zealand touted itself as a world leader in women's rights in 1893, it is often forgotten that women could vote on the Pitcairn Islands in 1838 and Cook Islands women were enfranchised just before New Zealand in 1893. Such facts are usually ignored because of the islands' status.⁸ New Zealand claims the accolades because it was the first *self-governing* country to pass legislation providing for universal female suffrage.⁹ Record-hunting and trans-Tasman rivalries are one of the more entertaining byways of Antipodean suffrage history. The desire to hold the record for women's suffrage runs deep. A recent historian of Australian female suffrage pointed out that Australia almost inherited New Zealand and its record in 1902: 'In 1893 New Zealand had the status of one of the British colonies of Australasia. If it had decided to federate with the other Australasian colonies, as was first envisaged, Australia would have been able to claim the honour of being the first nation in the world to enfranchise its women'.¹⁰

Australians are more inclined to suggest that New Zealand's achievement was not quite as good as theirs, since New Zealand women did not achieve the right to stand for Parliament at the same time as they were enfranchised.¹¹ In 1894 South Australian women won the right to