

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN VICTORIA

by **Maureen Walker** (SKHS Member)

As a consequence of legislation to lower the property qualification for the Legislative Council inadvertently containing the term 'all persons', some women in Victoria voted in the 1864 elections.

The legislation was promptly amended however and it was then not until 1908 that Victoria enfranchised its female citizens. It was the last state to do so even though, in 1884, it was the first colony in which a women's suffrage organisation formed.

Therefore, as the centenary of women gaining the vote is celebrated it is important to not only recall the endeavours of a diverse group whose achievements largely became forgotten or undervalued, but to also reflect on the reasons why the vote was denied for so long.

In 1869 *The Argus* published a letter from Henrietta Dugdale calling for the vote for women. In 1852 Dugdale had emigrated from the United Kingdom where she may have observed the early Chartist movement. Dugdale's letter caused a stir but she was also a secularist, a position which also placed her at odds with many at the time.

By the 1880s 'women's rights' began to loom large. The press was divided with *The Age* more aligned to liberal causes and supportive than the more conservative *Argus*.

Particular crimes against women in 1884 may have precipitated the formation of the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society (with both men and women members) by Dugdale and Annie Lowe, described as a warm, likeable woman who had been brought up in New South Wales in a family with broad, liberal views.

Dugdale and Lowe were joined by Brettina Smyth who contended that the most pressing inequality occurred not in the public domain, but in the private where overwork and economic deprivation was caused by frequent and involuntary child-bearing. Smyth was a storekeeper, but she also enrolled as one of the first female students at medical school.

Smyth launched the Australian Women's Suffrage Society in 1888. Although articulate, Smyth was not popular with the politicians of the day because her advocacy of the right of all women to advice and access in regard to contraception conflicted with the views of the policy makers who considered an increase in population to be in the national interest.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union, established in 1885, became interested in women gaining the vote as a means of safeguarding the home. It initiated the 'monster petition', with its 30,000 signatures presented to parliament in 1891. The consequent bill, as with a number of future bills, linked female suffrage as an issue with that of the abolition of plural voting, and was readily rejected in the upper house.

Dr William Maloney

Portrait of William Robert Maloney, M.H.R. [picture].
[190-?] 1 photograph:
gelatin silver; 9.9 x 6.7cm.
nla.pic-an 23365766
Courtesy National Library of Australia

20,000 Melbourne women signed an address of gratitude to Dr Maloney when suffrage was obtained in 1908 (ADB). In later life he retired to the Prince of Wales Hotel, St Kilda.



Henrietta Dugdale

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The first women's suffrage bill was introduced into parliament in 1899 by Dr William Maloney but gained little support.

Annette Bear Crawford, a moderate and respected woman, formed the United Council for Women's Suffrage in 1894 to coordinate strategy from the group of organisations promoting women's suffrage. Bear Crawford, although born in Melbourne, spent much of her life in London. She had a wide range of involvements and when she died in 1899, enjoyed an international standing in the women's movement. Bear Crawford's position in the Council was filled by Vida Goldstein.

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN VICTORIA (continued)

Although the term suffragette was not used until 1906 in England, **Vida Goldstein** has arguably become the best known Australian suffragette. (See also opp. page)

In 1904 Thomas Bent, an avowed anti-suffragist became premier of Victoria.

The Australian Women's National League, which was to have a strong influence in Victorian Liberal affairs was also formed although it remained silent on suffrage until 1906 when it added its voice to those pushing for the female vote.

Premier Bent was prevailed upon to introduce a government bill, rather than a private member's bill and it gained the necessary support in the Legislative Council.



Thomas Bent
1839–1909

Image reproduced with permission, courtesy of La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Why had it taken so long for women in Victoria to be enfranchised?

The ongoing opposition of an entrenched, conservative upper house is often cited although as noted it yielded when Premier Bent moved. Bent had been fearful that women's votes would strengthen opposition Labor, already prominent in Commonwealth elections.

Although the Australian Women's National League is attributed with convincing Bent that women would not be unduly radical with their vote, Bent may have also been influenced by the militancy already evident in the suffrage movement overseas. The more forceful tactics of the suffragettes in Victoria has, however, been suggested as a reason for the belatedness of the vote. They organized earlier than other states and were generally more critical of women's place in society. Vida Goldstein contended too that a link existed between the anti-suffrage forces and the liquor trade.

Regardless, it is clearly a myth that women were 'given' the vote, a suggestion later promulgated by influential historians such as Norman McKenzie in 1962.

While women did not suffer the cruelties meted out in England for example, they lobbied politicians, they presented petitions and held public meetings in the face of ridicule from anti-suffrage associations, a lack of union support and a somewhat hostile press.

Nevertheless, the 'second wave' feminists of the sixties and seventies were critical of their predecessors. They challenged the suffragettes' acceptance of women's maternal function, that it was a married women's first duty to have children. They also questioned the moral superiority argument contending that it reinforced domestic feminism at the expense of fighting for justice and parity. They claimed that society's attitude to women did not change because of these weaknesses in ideology which perpetuated class and race allegiances and inequalities. The continuing lower pay rates were used as an example. Furthermore, it was argued that the numbers of women who stood for parliament was evidence that women had made little use of their vote.

Vida Goldstein and her fellow suffragettes, in spite of their wide and varied backgrounds, were content to raise women's status within the family and may have placed too much emphasis on the benefits which would accrue to the family and the home by virtue of female suffrage. Such an approach though needs to be understood in the context of the times.

Nationalist and imperialist forces prevailed and a stable family was seen as the best counter to any challenges. Even so, these women achieved social reforms in areas such as the age of consent and prostitution and above all laid the foundations for women to play a more meaningful role in public life.

It is fitting therefore that although Vida Goldstein's death in 1949 received little attention from the public, the renaming of an electorate in 1984 to recognise her contribution was indeed appropriate.



Delegation of United Council for Women's Suffrage arriving for an appointment with members of Victoria's Upper House.

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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN VICTORIA (continued)

Vida Goldstein was born in 1869 in Portland to parents who had a strong social conscience particularly in respect of the plight of the poor. They believed in education and Vida Goldstein completed her schooling at Presbyterian Ladies College in East Melbourne. She also joined her mother in collecting signatures for the 'monster petition'.

In 1892, when apparently the family's fortunes were somewhat depleted, she and her sisters set up a school, 'Ingleton', in Alma Road, East St. Kilda. Her involvements in women's, and social issues grew and she closed the school in 1899.

In 1900 she founded *Woman's Sphere*, a paper which highlighted the prevailing social conditions of the day. The paper's banner carried a quote attributed to the freed slave Terence: 'I am human and nothing human is beyond my sphere'.

In 1902 Vida Goldstein travelled to Washington for the International Women's Suffrage Conference. She also had a variety of other commissions related to issues such as labour, penal systems and neglected children. Goldstein's political endeavours included a meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt.

It was around this time too that the now Presbyterian Goldstein family followed the Reverend Charles Strong when he formed his Australian Church. Vida Goldstein then joined First Church of Christ Scientist which was to play a significant part in her life, particularly when she retired from public life.

Goldstein returned from America in time for the lead up to the first federal elections in 1903. She formed the apolitical Women's Federal Political Association to, initially, educate woman regarding the vote. Although not a suffrage organisation, it had suffragette members.

Vida Goldstein then decided to contest the election, and in so doing became the first woman in the British Commonwealth to nominate for a national parliament.

However, not all women supported her nomination. The WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Union) was critical as it considered it a hindrance to gaining the state vote. The Labor women too could not support her no-party position. They were headed by Lillian Locke, a woman who earned her own living and who, after obtaining a paid position within Labor structures became the first female member of Trades Hall Council.

Vida Goldstein finished fifteenth in the 1903 elections, amassing 51,497 votes. She made four further, unsuccessful attempts to enter federal parliament, the last in 1917 when she lost her deposit*.

* Lack of support in 1917 was possibly a consequence of Goldstein forming the Women's Peace Army and its subsequent campaigns.

Sources:

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1910 election poster signed by Vida Goldstein.

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The Victorian Women's Trust presents its 2nd Public Forum

Dangerous & Persuasive Women: Doing Politics Differently – Australian Women's 'History of Success'

an entertaining oral and visual journey across
Victoria's century of suffrage 1908–2008

Co-presenters:

Angela Pippas, Tracy Bartram

Judith Smart, Mary Crooks

Where:

BMW Edge, Federation Square

When:

Monday June 16, 2006

Time:

6.30pm for 7pm start

Admission:

Free

Reservations:

Bookings essential for a seat

P:9642 0422

E:women@vwt.org.au

WINTER SOUP FOR HISTORY LOVERS

by **Rose Stone** (SKHS Member)

Today, as the cost of food and fuel bite into our budgets we thank feminist Rose Stone for sharing her recipe for easy-to-make nutritional and economical chicken soup with us history lovers.

When Rose moved to St Kilda after her divorce in the late 1960s to become a second-wave feminist (perhaps it was the other way round) she created her own low-calorie version of the traditional Jewish* chicken soup.

Rose told *St Kilda Times* that chicken soup is known for its restorative powers and for whatever else ails us. 'It can be a meal in itself or an appetiser, a winter warmer-upper or a comfort food and is sometimes called Jewish Penicillin'. In her inimitable fashion Rose added, 'It might even be an aphrodisiac'. She also said that the soup has often sustained her, her family and friends as well as her fellow travellers and members of the Vashti Collective.

If that is not enough to convince us of the soup's qualities Rose, who is in her elegant eighties and doesn't need contact lenses, plays bridge, is an active member of SKIFs (St Kilda International Folkdancers) as well as Sisters-in-Crime and co-winner and winner of Port Phillip City's Seniors Writing Festival in 2005 and 2006.

Ingredients	Recipe	Method
Two or more organic chicken Maryland or four or five chicken carcasses		Cut the onion and celery into small pieces. Place oil in saucepan.
One large onion		Heat the oil and sweat the onions and celery.
4 sticks of celery		Add paprika and chilli powder. Stir.
Chop 2 large carrots or equiv. turnips, swedes, pumpkins (big pieces)		Add water. When it boils, add the chicken bones or Maryland and rest of vegetables.
1 teaspoon sweet paprika		Lower heat and cook for 1½ hours.
½ teaspoon chilli powder		Remove bones into a separate dish and put the vegetables in another.
Salt and pepper to taste		Mash vegetables and return to saucepan
½ teaspoon of any oil		Remove meat from bones and return to soup.
2½ litres of water (approx.)		

Suggestions

Soup may be served with separately cooked rice, egg noodles, potatoes or extra vegetables.
Instead of returning all the meat to the soup some can be used in sandwiches when cold.
Mix it with pre-cooked vegetables especially spinach and it will make a delicious rissole.
Mix two spoonfuls with a free-range egg and it will make a lovely omelette.

*Many Jewish households serve traditional chicken soup as part of their Shabbat meal, at festivals and at weddings. Accompaniments may include cooked *lokshen* or *farful* (similar to vermicelli or egg noodles), *kreplach* (similar to ravioli with onion and minced chicken), or *knaidlech* at Passover (matzoh balls).

SUFFRAGE ANNIVERSARY NOTICES

The Age of Suff-Rage

Artists Ursula Dutkiewicz and Fern Smith have created a Travelling Art Installation of **10(m x m) Suffrage Banners** and (30cm high) **Ceramic Sculptures of 100 Suffragists** to commemorate the Centenary of Women's Suffrage and the life and achievements of **Vida Goldstein** who worked tirelessly from the 1890's championing women's rights in Australia and around the world.

Where: St Kilda City Hall Steps
When: 15th August
Time: 11am-1pm
Entry: Free
RSVP: Not Required

Vida Goldstein Display

St Kilda Historical Society
Display Coordinator: Carol Stals

Foyer Showcase

St Kilda Library

1-31 July 2008