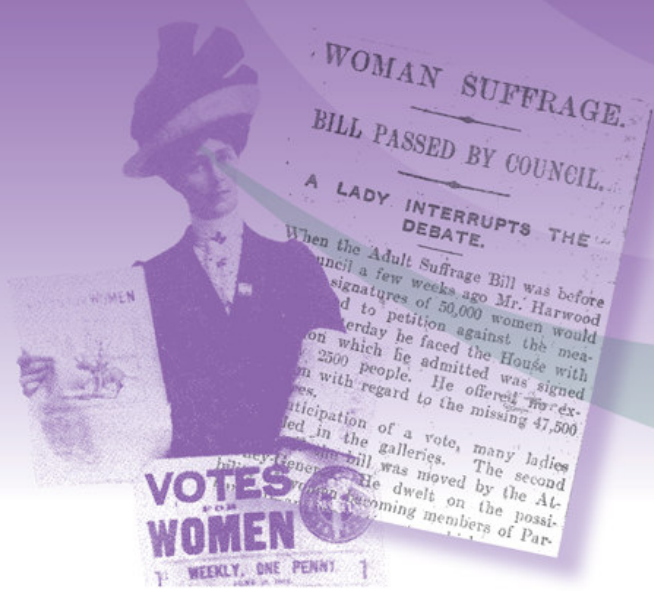


# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008



## Significant Women in the Fight for the Vote

The title of suffragette was given to members of the women's suffrage movement, originally in the United Kingdom. The term comes from the word suffrage, which means the right to vote.

The word was originally coined to describe a more radical faction of the suffrage movement in the UK, mainly members of the Women's Social and Political Union, headed by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.

Suffragist is a more general term for members of the movement, whether radical or conservative, male or female.

Women from all walks of life, with very different political views led the fight for women to vote in Victoria. They campaigned not only for voting rights but also to reduce domestic violence and poverty and to improve women's working conditions and rights as citizens.

Among them were:

### Henrietta Dugdale

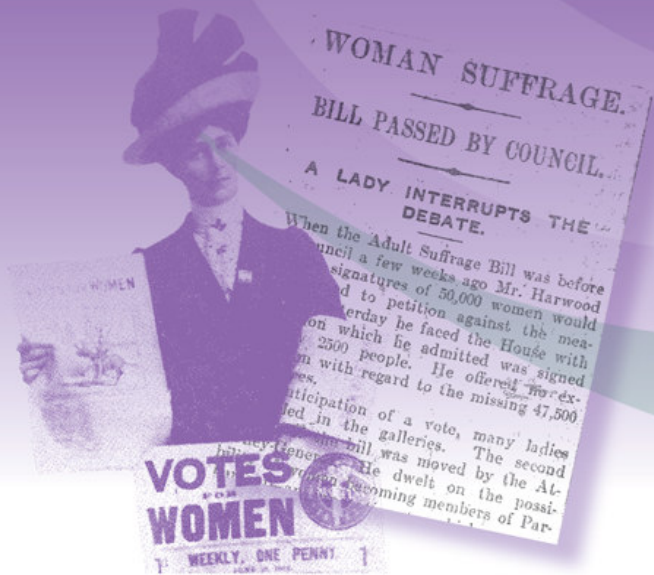
Henrietta Dugdale was born in London around 1826 and married at 14 years of age. In 1852, she arrived in Melbourne with her husband and by 1859 he had died. She then married William Dugdale, son of an English clergyman, with whom she had a son and two daughters.

Around this time she began to be outspoken about the rights of women. In 1869, *The Argus* published a letter she had written about extending the franchise to women, an idea considered revolutionary at the time. This letter was among the earliest recorded examples of women publicly calling for the vote.

In 1883, she published *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*, a booklet that contained her ideas on the equality of the sexes. She wrote, 'My suffering has been borne; no alteration of the laws could now benefit me; but there are thousands enduring the pain I have experienced through man's injustice, and thousands to follow before there be just legislation'.

She blamed the current social problems on male ignorance, liquor and the illiteracy of the working class. She condemned the monarchy for restricting human advancement and attacked Christianity as a form of despotism designed by men to humiliate women. She was a member of the Eclectics, a group devoted to the discussion of controversial subjects, and the Australian Secular Association, which attracted freethinkers on religious and moral questions.

Henrietta won a following among radicals and secularists but she clashed with conservatives. Nonetheless, she was the first president of the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society, which she founded in 1884, and she fought side by side with Christian women to achieve emancipation. This group was the first women's suffrage association in Australia.



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Henrietta also believed in 'rational dress' and wore a long tunic over loose trousers, known as 'bloomers' after Amelia Bloomer who first promoted the outfit. Henrietta cut her hair short, played chess, did her own carpentry and was a vegetarian who grew most of her own food.

Henrietta married for the third time in 1903 at 77 years of age, having by then seen women win the vote federally. She was able to exercise this right several times in Commonwealth and State elections before she died at Point Lonsdale on 17 June 1918, aged 91.

## Bella Guerin

Bella Guerin was born on 23 April 1858, at Williamstown, Victoria. She studied at home to matriculate in 1878, and then gained her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne in 1883, becoming the first woman to graduate from an Australian university; she followed this with a Master of Arts in 1885.

She taught at Loreto Convent, Ballarat, urging the establishment of higher education scholarships to produce 'a band of noble thoughtful women as a powerful influence for good'. She married an elderly poet, Henry Halloran, who died shortly afterwards leaving her with a young son, Henry. She returned to teaching and from the mid-1890s frequented suffragist circles. A second marriage in 1909 to George D'Arcie Lavender was also short lived.

Bella Guerin was vice-president of the Women's Political Association from 1912–14 and co-authored Vida Goldstein's 1913 Senate election pamphlet.

However, dual membership of the non-party feminist camp and the Labor Party was prohibited by the latter in 1914, so from that date she campaigned for the Victorian Socialist Party and the Women's Socialist League, speaking out on a range of controversial issues.

She led the Labor Women's Anti-Conscription Fellowship during the 1916 referendum campaign. In 1918, as vice-president of the Labor Party's Women's Central Organising Committee, she caused controversy by describing Labor women as 'performing poodles and packhorses' who were used for fundraising but under-represented in policy decisions—and she was right.

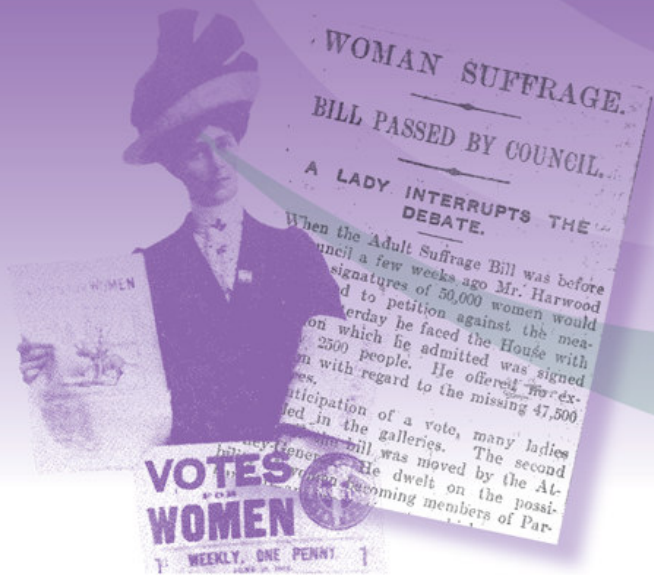
Bella died in Adelaide on 26 July 1923 of cirrhosis of the liver and is remembered for her idealism, her oratory skills and her commitment to equity for women.

## Maria (Marie) Kirk

Marie Kirk was born on 9 December 1855 in London to a salesman's assistant and his wife.

She married an ironmonger's assistant, Frank Kirk, on 14 September 1878. Marie was brought up as a Quaker and worked as a missionary in London's slums. In her late twenties, she became active in the British Women's Temperance Association. She represented it in 1886 at a meeting held in Toronto to organise the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WWCTU).

Later that year the Kirks migrated to Victoria and settled first at Warragul before moving to Camberwell late in 1888.



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

In November 1887, Marie played a large part in establishing an offshoot of the Union in Victoria. Its aim was to fight the liquor traffic and promote social and moral reforms. She became colonial (later general) secretary of the WCTU of Victoria and edited its journal, *White Ribbon Signal*, from its inception in 1892.

In May 1891, she became secretary of the newly formed WCTU of Australasia and in 1897 represented the Victorian body at temperance conventions in Britain and the United States.

As a delegate of the WCTU, she helped to establish the National Council of Women of Victoria in 1902 and served on its executive committee until 1913. Owing to ill health, she resigned from her official positions that year but retained her involvement.

Marie Kirk's passionate, earnest and winning manner as well as excellent organisational skills made her 'the heart of the movement'. She combined ardent Christian piety with lively feminist views and a keen interest in social reform.

In 1891, Marie organised and presented to Parliament the 'Great Petition' of 1891 for enfranchisement and in 1894 was a founding committee member of the Victorian Woman's Suffrage League.

In the 1890s, she also fought to increase the age of consent for girls. She advocated the appointment of female gaol attendants and police matrons. Through the WCTU and the National Council of Women (NCW) she fought for the Children's Court Act (1906), and was a keen supporter of free kindergartens for the inner suburbs.

She died on 14 January 1928 at Malvern, Victoria. As a memorial, the kindergarten she helped found in South Richmond in 1909 was given her name.

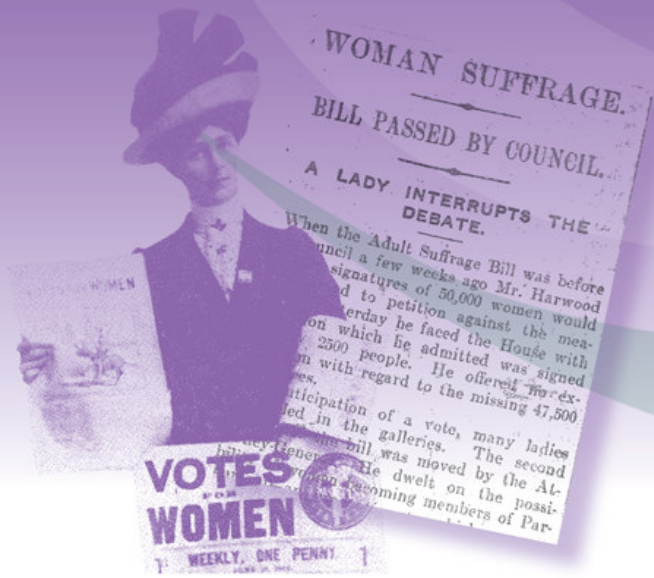
Her epitaph reads: 'Her works do follow her'.

## Vida Goldstein

Vida Goldstein was born on 13 April 1869, at Portland, Victoria.

In 1877, after living in Portland and Warrnambool, her family moved to Melbourne where her father worked as a contract draughtsman. The Goldsteins' involvement in churches, particularly Charles Strong's Australian Church, encouraged Vida's interest in social work. Her father worked for the Charity Organisation Society and was a member of the Women's Hospital Committee. Vida was well educated by a private governess before attending the Presbyterian Ladies College from 1884–86. Her mother was a suffragist and an ardent worker for social reform.

In 1890, Vida helped her mother collect signatures for the 'Great Petition' for women's suffrage.



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

She subsequently became involved in the National Anti-Sweating League, the Queen Victoria Hospital appeal and other social welfare activities. She read widely and attended parliamentary sessions in order to learn about politics. She became friends with Annette Bear-Crawford, who founded the United Council for Woman Suffrage in order to unite the disparate women's groups. Goldstein learnt a lot from her, so much so that when Bear-Crawford suddenly died from pneumonia in 1899, Goldstein took over her leading role. She began spreading the word to other women via her monthly magazine the *Woman's Sphere*, which she owned and edited.

In 1902, she travelled to the United States to attend the International Woman Suffrage Conference, and, while there, gave evidence in favour of female suffrage to a committee of the United States Congress. On her return she nominated for election to the Senate, thereby achieving a notable first, though she was unsuccessful at the election of 1903. She made four more unsuccessful attempts: in 1910 and 1917 for the Senate and in 1913 and 1914 for the House of Representatives, always as an independent woman candidate.

Throughout this period Vida continued to be outspoken on many social issues such as equal pay, opposition to capitalism and support for public control of public utilities, as well as for women's rights. She successfully lobbied politicians in order to achieve some of her social reforms.

Vida refused to join a party but sympathised deeply with the cause of working people.

She helped either to found or to support many women's organisations, including the National Council of Women of Victoria, the Victorian Women's Public Servants' Association and the Women Writers' Club. She founded and led the Women's Political Association, the principal voice of feminism and pacifism in Victoria throughout its existence from 1904 to 1919.

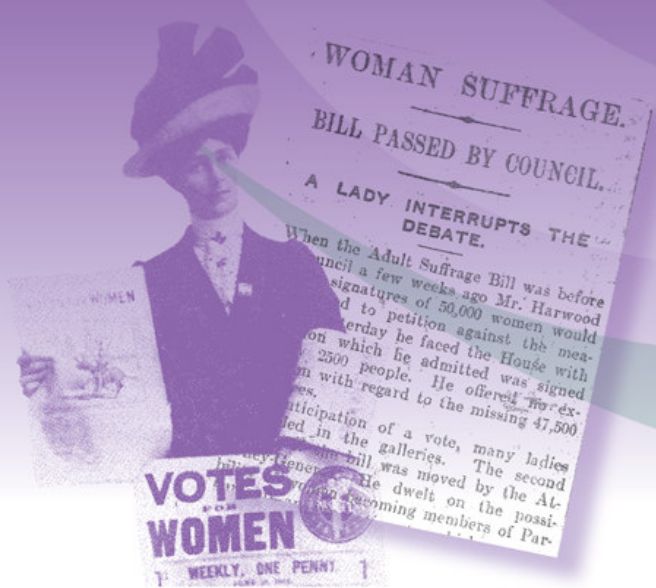
In 1909, she launched a second paper, the *Woman Voter*, which she owned and edited.

During World War I she turned her attention to pacifism, assisting Adela Pankhurst to form the Women's Peace Army in 1915. Her radical pacifism and opposition to the war lost her the support of many erstwhile followers, so she fared poorly in the 1917 elections.

After the war, she spent three years abroad. From this time, she gave most of her energies to her Christian Science faith, venturing only occasionally into public life. She died of cancer at her home in South Yarra on 15 August 1949.

Despite her years of dedication her death passed largely unnoticed, though the League of Women Voters of Victoria endeavoured to establish a scholarship in her name.

Her memory has been revived with the second wave of feminism and in 1984 a federal electorate in Victoria was named Goldstein.



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

## Brettena Smyth

Brettena Smyth, née Riordan, campaigner for women's health reform and women's political rights, was born in Melbourne, probably in 1840.

On 28 October 1861 she married storekeeper William Taylor Smyth at St Paul's United Church of England and Ireland, Kyneton. After his death in 1873 she converted the family greengrocery in North Melbourne into a drapery and druggist's business.

From the age of 43, Brettena was prominent in feminist causes. An active member of the first Australian suffrage organisation, the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society (founded 1884), she formed the breakaway Australian Women's Suffrage Society in 1888.

In the mid-1890s this group was eclipsed by the temperance-backed Victorian Woman's Suffrage League and the United Council for Woman Suffrage organised by Annette Bear-Crawford.

Like a number of the early suffragists, Brettena Smyth was also a freethinker, opposed to orthodox religion and disposed to question other institutions and forms of authority. The controversial Australasian Secular Association supported her work.

Recognising the liberating potential of birth control for women, Mrs Smyth lectured to large female-only audiences at the North Melbourne Town Hall and other centres, describing various contraceptive techniques and promoting a rubber 'French pessaire preventatif' (sold at her shop) as 'the only article of the kind that can be used without the knowledge of the husband'.

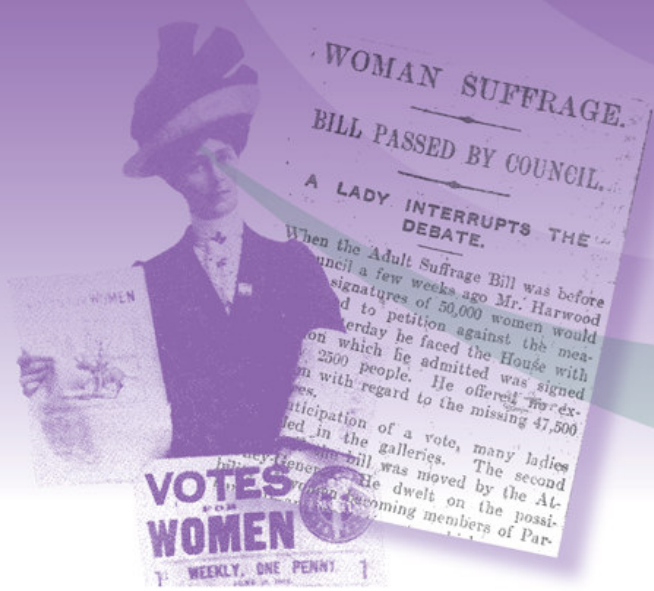
Although she was publicly sympathetic to those forced into prostitution and lobbied for reduced gaol sentences for women desperate enough to kill their illegitimate children, she was no champion of sex outside marriage, or 'free love' as it was known.

As did many contemporary women activists, she saw a new kind of family and an enhanced role for motherhood at the heart of social reform.

In her lectures and pamphlets Brettena argued that well-matched couples could form a more equal partnership. Planned families would mean fewer children, liberating women from the psychological and financial strains of unwilling pregnancy and motherhood. The United States of America provided Mrs Smyth with many of her ideas and much of the material she used in well-advertised publications such as *Love, Courtship and Marriage* (1892), *The Limitation of Offspring* (1893) and *The Social Evil* (1894).

Self-taught but widely read, interested in fringe practices such as electrotherapy and phrenology, Brettena planned to study medicine at the University of Melbourne, but her savings intended for fees vanished in the financial crash of the 1890s. Her book, *What Every Woman Should Know: Diseases Incidental to Women* (1895), though somewhat unpolished and derivative, provided women with information that was otherwise relatively inaccessible.

# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008



Brettina Smyth enjoyed public speaking; almost six feet (183 cm) tall, she had a commanding presence. She became a well-known and respected Melbourne identity, especially in labour movement circles.

Survived by two sons, she died on 15 February 1898 at Morwell and was buried in the Melbourne general cemetery, with Catholic rites—an ironic end, given her history of support for secularism and birth control.

## Flos Greig

Flos Greig was born on 7 November 1880, at Broughty Ferry, Scotland, and migrated with her family to Australia in 1889.

She attended Presbyterian Ladies College between 1894 and 1896 and enrolled at the University of Melbourne to study arts and law in 1897, becoming the first woman to enter the law faculty and the first to graduate LLB in 1903.

Through her efforts and those of her friends, the Victorian Parliament passed the 'Flos Greig Enabling Bill' to allow women to be admitted to legal practice. After completing her articles Flos became the first woman to enter the legal profession in Australia on 1 August 1905.

Knowing it would take too long to be accepted as a barrister, Flos decided to practise as a solicitor.

She drafted amendments to a bill for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which passed into law as the Children's Court Act, 1906.

She worked as a solicitor until her retirement in 1942 but was also an intrepid Eastern traveller, sharing with others through lectures her interest in Asian religions and customs.

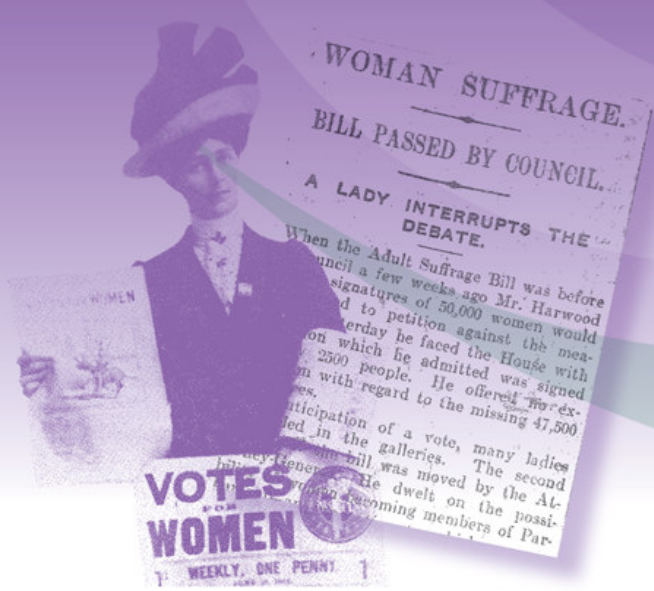
Flos lived in Rosebud until her death at Moorabbin on 31 December 1958.

## Ivy Weber

Born in 1892 in New South Wales, Ivy Weber was Victoria's second woman parliamentarian but the first to win a seat at a General Election. She won and held the seat of Nunawading as an independent in 1937, 1940 and 1943, resigning six weeks later to contest (unsuccessfully) the Federal seat of Henty for the 'Women for Canberra' movement of which she was president.

A widow from World War I with a small child, she married Clarence Weber, principal of the 'Weber and Rice Health and Strength College' and an all-round athlete. He was a widower with seven young children and together they had another three. Clarence died of a heart attack in 1930 leaving Ivy with eleven children.

Ivy became involved in public life through the activities of the College. She was active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the National Council of Women.



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

As was the case with many women entering parliament, most of Ivy's children had left home when she embarked on a political career. The WCTU encouraged women to stand as independent candidates specifically to represent women. In June 1937, the WCTU formed the League of Women Electors of Victoria and endorsed three women candidates, including Ivy Weber.

Ivy's electoral platform was:

- A true democracy to provide economic security, and thus alleviate distress and unemployment;
- Provision of free education from kindergarten to University;
- Establishing a systematic National Health Scheme, thereby raising the General Health Standard;
- Abolishing slum dwellings and erecting suitable homes for families; and
- Securing a comprehensive scheme of National Insurance, and covering hospital treatment.

As a Member of Parliament she successfully lobbied for female representation on government boards and espoused equal pay for teachers. She believed that women should be on local councils and juries. She advocated a homemaker's allowance for women with families.

She was one of the instigators of the Physical Education course at the University of Melbourne, the first of its kind in Australia. In 1938, Ivy was one of two women members of the first National Co-ordinating Council for Physical Fitness.

Although denying that she was a feminist, Ivy's commitment to women and women's issues belies this. She was a woman of vision. Ivy spent her old age in obscurity and died in 1976.

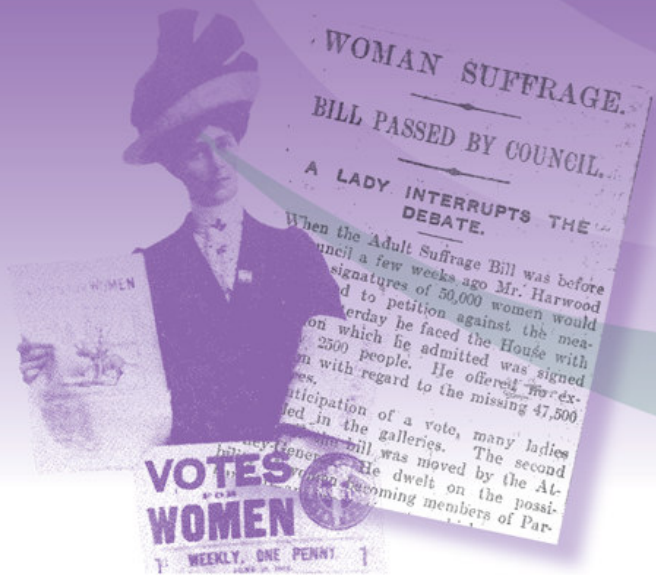
## Bessie Lee

Bessie Lee (1860–1950), temperance evangelist, was born on 10 June 1860 at Daylesford, Victoria. Her mother died of consumption in 1868 and her father was unable to keep his five children together. Bessie was sent to Melbourne relations who mistreated her during their bouts of drunkenness.

As a child, Bessie had little formal schooling, but she read voraciously, began to write verse and also experienced religious conversion before her teens.

A miner, Robert Lee, introduced her at 17 to his younger brother Harrison whom she married. The Lees lived mainly in a depressed area of Richmond. The marriage was not a success. Lee did not approve of his wife's social conscience. She began Sunday school classes, visiting the sick, and touring the slums, refuges and gaols.

In 1884 the American temperance lecturers, Booth and Glover of the Blue Ribbon Gospel Temperance Army, won her into the active prohibition camp.



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

In 1887, she helped to pioneer the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Victoria but fell into disfavour because of her belief in the sinfulness of all sexual intercourse that had no procreative intention.

Leaving the executive of the WCTU she accepted the sponsorship of the powerful Victorian Alliance for the Suppression of the Liquor Traffic from 1890–96, and fought district local option battles over whether numbers of hotels should be reduced, maintained or increased. The suburb of Camberwell in Melbourne still strictly regulates its sale of alcohol—a legacy of the statewide local option poll first taken in 1920 and at intervals thereafter.

1896 saw the first of Bessie's countless trips abroad, principally to Britain, New Zealand and the United States of America. Harrison Lee died on 17 January 1908. She then married Andrew Cowie, a well-to-do farmer of Winton, New Zealand, who had been attracted by Mrs Lee's effective campaigning.

When Andrew Cowie died on 10 December 1928 aged 82, Bessie entered the final phase of her career. In New Zealand, where she was a foundation member of the United Labour Party, she had resumed office in the WCTU and was appointed a world missionary. She spent some years in Hawaii before settling at Pasadena, California. In 1947 her last campaign brought her national headlines in America. She died at Pasadena on 18 April 1950.

## Matilda 'Tilly' Aston

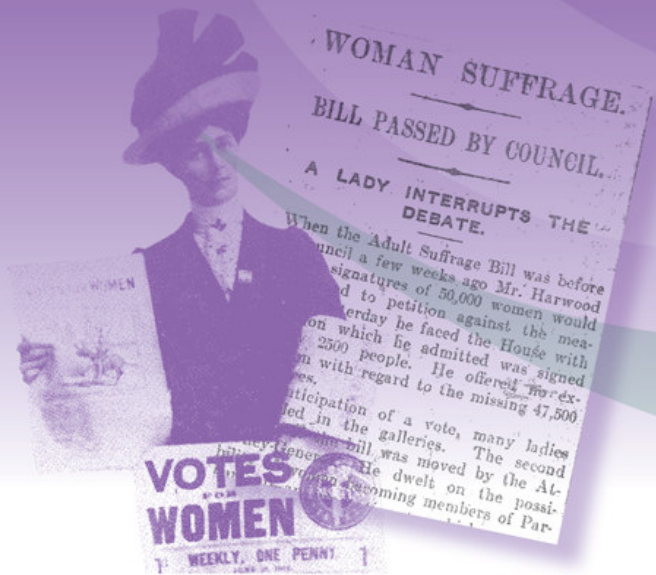
Tilly broke new ground in everything she did.

Born in Carisbrook, Victoria in 1873, she was the youngest of eight children. By the time she was seven, she had lost her father and become blind.

Tilly started the Victorian Association of Brailled Writers (later known as the Victorian Braille Library) in 1894. Today it is the third largest in the world. In 1895, she co-founded the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, now known as Vision Australia Foundation, which supports thousands of people with vision impairment. Her own writing career included a number of books of verse and a magazine issued in Braille for use in Chinese missionary schools. Her account of her life, *The Memoirs of Tilly Aston: Australia's blind poet, author and philanthropist*, was published in 1946.

Tilly lobbied hard to win rights for visually impaired people, including the right to vote, equal opportunity in education, access to public transport and approval for a blind pension.

The electorate of Aston, which includes the Melbourne suburbs of Wantirna, Knoxfield and Scoresby, is named in honour of this extraordinary blind woman. She died of cancer on 1 November 1947.



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

## Annette Bear-Crawford

Annette Bear-Crawford was a leading force in Victoria's feminist movement and a passionate advocate of equal rights for women. She worked tirelessly to improve the status and conditions of women and children in the late nineteenth century.

With the support of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Annette established the Victorian Woman's Suffrage League in 1894, and then, on her own initiative, she united the existing suffrage societies to form the United Council for Woman Suffrage. Both groups were influential in gaining equal opportunities for women and ultimately the vote for the women of Victoria.

As an important social reformer of her time, Annette's influence extended to encouraging and educating women to undertake public work, attend speaking engagements and to stand for election on all-male boards and committees.

Annette was born in Melbourne, trained in England and worked as a social worker in the London slums before returning to Victoria, where she became one of the first members of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Victorian Vigilance Society.

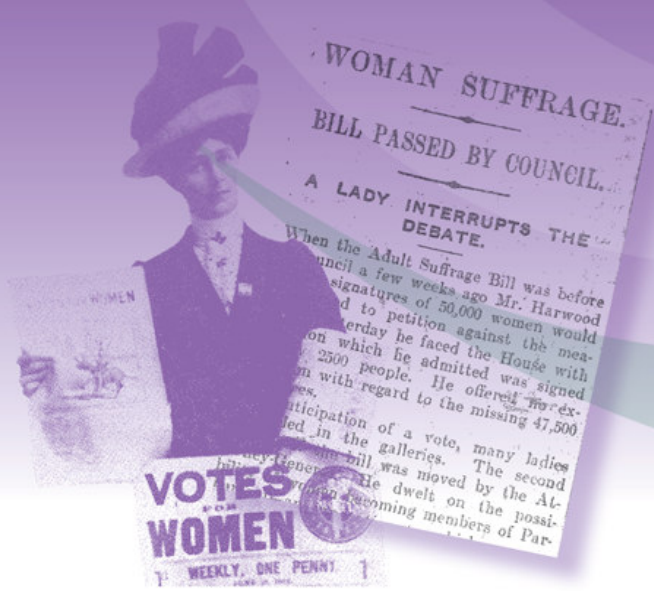
She helped obtain amendments to legislation affecting women, including successfully raising the age of consent for girls to 16 years and the appointment of women as factory inspectors. She also campaigned for police matrons and for women to administer the *Infant Life Protection Act 1890*.

One of her most enduring achievements grew out of her concerns for the welfare of unmarried mothers and their children. Annette led the fundraising campaign to establish the Queen Victoria Hospital and, as a result, the Queen's Shilling Fund raised 63,250 shillings from the women of Victoria, equivalent to around \$2.5 million today.

Sadly, she did not live to see this hospital opened, dying prematurely from pneumonia while in London representing Australia at the quinquennial congress of the International Council of Women in 1899.

Annette is buried in London and a plaque in Christ Church, South Yarra, commemorates her life.

# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008



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Image Vida Goldstein courtesy Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Image The Age courtesy Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria.