



VICTORIAN  
WOMEN'S TRUST

# WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE CITY



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# WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE CITY

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Women sorting cheques National Bank, Head office,  
279 Collins Street, Melbourne, 1953 - Wolfgang Sievers

Members of the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) give "eyes right" as they pass the saluting base during the Service Womens march through Melbourne, 1942.



## Introduction

In late 2017, The City of Melbourne approached the Victorian Women's Trust with a request for assistance in developing a list of notable women to address the gender bias in street naming. As putting women on the public record is an important touchstone of the Trust as an organisation, we were happy to roll up our sleeves and start researching notable women of Melbourne whose mighty contributions shaped the city, we live and work in.

Two stark things quickly became evident in researching these women; one was how buried their incredible stories were. Not only were their names not featured on street signs and in public spaces but they were under-represented, forgotten or lost in textbooks and footnotes.

The other was how vitally important it is to represent women's long contribution to civic life with highly visible, tangible and long lasting tributes.

What we see reflected on the street and in our public records, places and activities both transmits and relays the value we accord to honouring the contributions of women and men in our civic life. Fashioning a city into the future, one embodying the values of gender equality, will require a seismic cultural shift in our public record- honouring the legacy of women and men's contributions in equal measure.

This booklet is by no means an exhaustive list of women who've shaped our city. We know that for every woman named here there are many others. This booklet is an important start however, an accessible entry point for learning more about a broad range of Melbourne women's contributions across disciplines and backgrounds. I urge all departments across City of Melbourne who name projects to utilise this resource and embrace the spirit of this project towards building a gender equal city.

**Maria Chetcuti**  
Project Manager, Victorian Women's Trust



## Women And the Public Record

By Mary Crooks AO  
Executive Director, Victorian Women's Trust

This speech was first delivered in 2001 as a closing speech to the Victorian Women's Trust's exhibition *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*

We don't often stop to think about the public record. It is, however, a critical part of society. The public record is made up, over time, of myriad records, stories and accounts of who we are; what it is we do; how we are governed; the way we live. The public record consists of preserved evidence, all of which testifies to the memory or knowledge of key facts or events.

How is this public record constructed? It evolves from a number of witness sources and chronicles – through historical studies and archival work; newspapers; film; song; and literature. Importantly, it is embedded in curriculum materials used in our schools. When young people access this record in their formal schooling, we can safely assume it is part of an intensely formative experience. The way women and men, for example, are portrayed on this public record, will in some way fashion the way girls and boys think about women and men in their society.

### A Personal Experience

Let me take up this theme on a personal, individual level. As an eighteen year old girl studying Australian History at secondary school level in the late 1960s, the prescribed text was *A Social and Political History* edited by Professor Gordon Greenwood, published in 1955. When I returned to this text some decades later, I read that six university teachers have combined to produce this work. These are all male.

I read in the flyleaf that 'anyone who wishes to gain a knowledge of the historical movements that lie at the back of present-day social and political activity will find this book illuminating. Many new

factors that have been overlooked by earlier scholars have been brought to light and interpreted by modern analysis'. I move past the flyleaf to early pages of the book. The list of illustrations contains references to men only, including John Macarthur Esq., Sir Francis Forbes, William Charles Wentworth, Dr John Dunmore Lang, Sir Samuel Griffith, Henry Bourne Higgins and John Curtin. On checking the eleven-page index, I find it contains few references to women. I decide to look more closely at the particular treatment of Macarthur. Describing the pastoral ascendancy, Macarthur is located as part of the social elite of New South Wales. He, along with other well-to-do landowners, 'had pioneered sheep farming, agriculture and viticulture, but by 1830 their pioneering days were over. They were now wealthy men with the time and interest for politics.'<sup>[1]</sup>

Imagine my surprise and disquiet decades later when, casually perusing through the chart of Australian women's achievements at the back of 'The Women's Power Handbook' compiled by Joan Kirner and Moira Rayner, I find that in 1807, wool merchant Elizabeth Macarthur shipped the first consignment of wool to London. And that in 1822 John Macarthur received the Society of Arts Gold Medal for the quality of his wool. Elizabeth was not mentioned, despite having run the farm and business entirely alone in the years 1801-1805 and 1809-1818.<sup>[2]</sup>

No wonder John had the time and interest for politics! It appears that Elizabeth (the nameless wife according to these distinguished historians) was actually running the show, keeping the farm together, employing 30-40 stock-keepers and gardeners, and overseeing the production of the first stud flock.

Let's look a decade later into my understanding of Australia's social and political history. As a tutor in the Economics Faculty at the University of Melbourne, I had the privilege of meeting Mollie Bayne, formerly the head of the Economic Geography department, and, through Mollie, Kathleen Fitzpatrick (nee Pitt) distinguished and retired historians at the University of Melbourne. About this time, I had bought a copy of Don Watson's book, *Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life*, published in 1979.

I was particularly interested in his treatment of the formation of the Labor Club at Melbourne University. At one point, Watson mentions the Labor Club's women members – Joan Finlayson, Mollie Bayne, Mary Lazarus and Kathleen Pitt. He describes these women as a:

*formidable quartet although, of course, as was the custom of the times, it was the men who generally occupied the stage.*



*Throughout Fitzpatrick's lifetime, women,' says Watson (1979: 18) 'made essential contributions to radical movements but in almost every case it was taken for granted that their organising and instigating roles should be rewarded with no more than the status of Minutes Secretary.'*<sup>[3]</sup>

Watson proceeds to assert that the original Labor Club was composed of a remarkable array of talented young intellectuals, and the direction of their later careers makes intriguing points of comparison with Fitzpatrick's:

*Sir Robert Fraser became Chairman on the Independent Television of the United Kingdom. Ross was a communist union leader in the 1930s and an anti-communist ALP intellectual in the post-war period. Ball, after distinguished diplomatic service, became Professor of Political Science at Melbourne... Perhaps the most extraordinary of all, Ralph Gibson, established the basis of a successful academic career by 1913, then became... a Communist Party functionary.*<sup>[4]</sup>

Significantly, this tracing of the talented young intellectuals fails to mention the achievements of the two women I had come to know and respect for their contribution to academic and intellectual life – Mollie Bayne and Kathleen Fitzpatrick. The very same person who noted wryly that these formidable women of considerable talent were usually rewarded with the status of Minutes Secretary does not see fit to include these same women as part of the remarkable array of talented young intellectuals.

For the record, Kathleen Fitzpatrick completed a brilliant undergraduate degree, gaining first class honours in History and English. She completed a second Arts degree at Oxford and, ultimately, became the first woman to reach the ranks of Associate Professor in an Australian history department. Mollie Bayne, among other achievements, served as Head of the Economic Geography department at the University of Melbourne.

What is happening here? Why are women invisible when it comes to constructing the mainstream public record?

### **The Cloak of Invisibility**

Perhaps you have either read or seen the film, 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.' Harry is given a very special present – an invisibility cloak. When it is wrapped around him, he becomes invisible. The invisibility cloak proves to be a critical defensive

weapon in Harry's ultimately successful quest.

The difference between Harry's and women's invisibility is that for Harry, the cloak actually helps! Moreover, he chooses to wear it. He understands its strategic power.

*Women contribute 65% of the value of unpaid housework in Australia. The value of all unpaid work represents approximately 48% of Australia's gross domestic product.[5] It is estimated that women in agriculture contribute \$13.5 billion, or 48% of real farm income in Australia.[6] Yet this work is not counted in the formal measurement of economic activity.*

Every town hall in the country hosts photo portraits of municipal leaders. These are overwhelmingly male. Yet the work of women in building and sustaining local and regional communities is not a part of this important citizen record.

Daily newspapers, such as the *Herald Sun* and *The Age* publish 20-30 page sections covering a weekend of sports activity. Commonly these sections contain few references to women, despite their significant rates of participation in sport. The achievements of a young American golfer, Tiger Woods, attracted greater coverage than Australia's standout female golfer Karrie Webb.

Media coverage of a recent, high-profile conference on population policy reported the views of prominent Australian men, including Steve Vizard, Jeff Kennett and Richard Pratt. According to these reports, population policy was about equipping and strengthening the Australian economy into the future. Yet the critical role women play in reproduction (let alone everything else) and the need for this role to be adequately supported, did not seem to feature in recent debates about future population targets. Thus a more contemporary part of the public record continues the process of wiping women's experience, interests and priorities from the slate.

### **Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives as a subversive activity**

During the year of the centenary of Australia's Federation (2001), the Victorian Women's Trust wanted to celebrate women's contributions to Victorian community life and to do so in a way that was special.

We knew that women had a long and proud tradition of activity in civil society, linking political work to social endeavour. We also knew that their efforts and achievements were largely unheralded. With this in mind, we mounted the exhibition, *Ordinary Women*,

*Extraordinary Lives*. In September 2000, we advertised the public nomination process and received over 260 nominations. These were, for the most part, incredibly detailed and insightful. So inspiring were all the stories that we couldn't narrow them down to the small selection we had originally envisaged. There was no choice – we not only had to include them all, but also produce a book that preserved the evidence on display.

*Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* – the exhibition and the book – was deeply subversive. This was not uppermost in our minds at the beginning of the exercise. But the decision to include all women gave us a unique snapshot of the lived experiences of 263 women throughout a century of community life. This collective image is powerful and unambiguous evidence of the enormity of what it is that women do – away from the spotlight, usually unremunerated, and not yet properly accounted for on the public record.

The women included in the exhibition span an impressive range of civic endeavour. They have raised families, worked hard for human rights, broken new ground in science, established important new organisations, including advocacy/self help groups, built local services from scratch in rural areas and cities. They have formed trade unions, cared for others, led the way in many arenas, established kindergartens, crèches, and a network of maternal and child health centres. They have been on active war service, run farms and other businesses, written books, opened up new fields of knowledge, been instrumental in the formation and operation of major political parties, forged new understandings of what it means to be multicultural in Australia, and created new forms of cultural and artistic expression. There is no way that this endeavour can be appropriately costed in dollar terms. By any economic and social measure, however, it is invaluable.

This picture of women and their extraordinary effort is subversive because, like it or not, it shows in one great, sharp hit, the falsity of the existing public record. The real power of the exhibition is in showing that the public record is partial, unreliable, invalid and untruthful.

As Kathleen Fitzpatrick contends in a speech to members of the Victorian Women Graduates' Association, in 1958:

*When we read books which deal with such concepts as Australian National Character or the Ethic of the Australian we learn that the Australian referred to is inevitably male, and that ethic is called Mateship, which means comradeship among*

*men. It is rather terrifying to live in a country where half the inhabitants have no character and no ethic and to know that one's place is in that featureless herd.[7]*

How can the existing public record be trusted, be seen as a true reflection of who we are and what it is we do, when more than 50% of the picture is missing?

*Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* has been a much-needed trigger to reshaping and improving the reliability and trustworthiness of the public record. It has already generated valuable ripple effects and most certainly continue to do so. But this is not enough on its own. For all their effort, Australian women are yet to experience the full rights of active citizenship and live in a society free of discrimination and disadvantage. In striving for fairness and equal human rights, women's (and our society's) work is not done yet.

When women are accorded a proper part of this record, when their enormous contribution to families, communities and society are accurately represented, they will have achieved an inclusiveness that is a precondition to equality.

Potentially, everyone can play an active part in shaping the public record – through the myriad accounts, witness sources and chronicles that preserve valuable social, political and cultural evidence. But it is not just about fashioning this record. It is also about challenging it when it is demonstrably false or misleading. *Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives* has been one such challenge.

[1] Greenwood, Gordon (ed.), *Australia: A Social and Political History* Angus and Robertson 1955 p.55.

[2] Kirner, J. and M. Rayner, *The Women's Power Handbook*, Penguin Books 1999. P.282.

[3] Watson, D., *Brian Fitzpatrick: A Radical Life* Hale and Iremonger 1979 p.18.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 18.

[5] Australian Bureau of Statistics *Unpaid Work and the Australian Economy* (1997) (Cat. No 5240.0).

[6] Department of Natural Resources and Environment *Action Plan for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management* Melbourne 2000.

[7] Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Victorian Women Graduates' Association* (1958).

## Dr Zelda D'Aprano (1928-2018)



Zelda D'Aprano was one of the most active feminists of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Zelda first became outspoken about pay equality through her work at the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU). However, after protesting the outcome of the Equal Pay Case with Alva Geikie and Thelma Solomon, she was fired from the AMIEU. Together the women formed the Women's Action Committee which gave way to the Women's Liberation Movement. Through this group she organised the first pro-choice rally in 1975, and the 75c tram ride to protest pay inequality. She also advocated entitlements for pregnant workers, women's participation

in left-wing politics and the removal of gender restrictions in public bars.

She lent her organisational skills to numerous projects as one of the organisers of the Women at Work and Women and the Trade Unions Conference held in 1971, through her involvement in establishing the Women's Liberation Centre in Little Latrobe St, and as a representative of the Women's Liberation Movement on the International Women's Year committee, 1975.

Her advocacy for pay equity was documented in numerous submissions made to the Arbitration Court, as well as her self-published autobiography, *Zelda: the Becoming of a Woman* and her book *Kath Williams - The Unions and the Fight for Equal Pay*.

Her community contributions have since been recognised with an honorary doctorate from Macquarie University, and through her appointment as an Officer of the Order of Australia.

## Mary Owen OAM (1921-2017)

Mary Owen was a passionate social justice campaigner. Mary's political activism began when she joined the Progressive Reform Party, and she began advocating for issues spanning areas of healthcare, workplace equality, and women's issues.

Mary contributed over 40 years of service to the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), often as their representative in numerous government committees. She often contributed to policy formation through her work involving the WEL and the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, making significant strides in advancing the status of women and wage equality. In order to further advance the female workers' rights movement, she founded the Women's Working Centre Melbourne, which was later absorbed into the ACTU.

Her activism in other policy areas such as abortion law reform, and services for both older women and women with disabilities reflected her passion for women's representation in society. However, beyond policy, she sought to maintain women's representation through her early support of the community-

based Australian Women's Archive Project.

As a campaigner for the rights of people with HIV/AIDS, a founding member of EMILY's List, and the Deputy Chancellor of Latrobe University, her community service was extensive and she has been recognised with the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal and the Order of Australia Medal.





## Joan Kirner AC (1938-2015)



Over her life, Joan Kirner was a dedicated advocate for education reform, the environment and the representation of women in politics.

Joan's passion for education reform began through her teaching career, where she became aware of the class-based inequality of the education system. As the Education Minister of Victoria, she introduced progressive reforms to address such inequality, which resulted in the introduction of a standardised curriculum, the Victorian Certificate of Education. These reforms reduced class sizes, increased retention rates, and integrated children with disabilities into the mainstream school system. Her expertise was recognised with appointments to the Victorian Federation of State Schools'

Parents Clubs, the Australian Schools Commission, and the Australian Council of State School Organisations.

As the first female Premier of Victoria, she was a strong advocate for the inclusion of women in politics and public service. After her retiring from politics she published the *Women's Power Handbook*, and was a founding member of EMILY's List, an organisation that supports the careers of women in politics.

She spearheaded environmental protection reform, proposing the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (1988), which was the first Australian legislation giving legal protection to rare species. Joan was also instrumental in the formation of Landcare.

Her contributions to the Melbourne community were recognised through positions on the boards of Museum Victoria, Melbourne Museum, the Royal Exhibition Building, Scienceworks Museum and the Immigration Museum, Melbourne. She has also been honoured with the Centenary Medal, and is a Member of the Order of Australia.

## Dr Concetta Benn OAM (1926-2011)

Throughout her career, Connie Benn fought to improve the circumstances of underprivileged families within Melbourne and create sustainable relief from intergenerational poverty. Through her social work she established Melbourne's only non-church professional marriage guidance agency, the first hostel for girls who were wards of the State, and a Family Centre at the Brotherhood of St Lawrence which provided financial, employment, and housing assistance to disadvantaged Melbourne families.

She sought social change through a productive career in policy, first as the Director of Policy at the Brotherhood, and then through a number of governmental positions, as the first Research Officer in Victorian Parliament, the director of the Social Policy Division, and Deputy Director-General of Community Services.

Working within several government task forces, she contributed to a number of progressive reforms, including the decriminalisation and regulation of sex work, and the creation of a migrant service

program Co.As.It. Connie was also involved in establishing the Victorian Women's Trust.

Her academic career reflected her long-term commitment to social change, especially through her pioneering theory of social work, the 'Development Approach', which aimed to sustain change beyond individual case work.



Before retirement she also headed the academic departments of Social Work at Phillip Institute of Technology, and the University of Melbourne.

## Lisa Bellear (1961-2006)



Lisa Bellear was a well-rounded advocate for Indigenous representation, working in the arts, academia and politics.

Lisa disrupted the male-dominated academic sphere by becoming one of the most qualified academics in her field, with a Bachelor of Social Work, a Masters in Women's Studies and a Masters in Creative Writing. With her skills in high demand, she lectured and worked at more than thirty university campuses in her life, and began a doctorate on contemporary Indigenous issues through radio and photographic texts. Her advocacy on campus extended beyond academia, and continued in her capacity as the Koori Liaison Office at the University of Melbourne.

Arts became another medium through which she advocated for Indigenous recognition. With two other women she started the long running radio program Not Another Koori Show, and was also a founding member of the longest running Aboriginal theatre troupe, Ilbijerri Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-op. In 1996, she wrote a book of poetry exploring the contemporary experiences of Aboriginal people, titled Dreaming In Urban Areas.

Throughout her political career, she continued her advocacy for Aboriginal representation. She was elected as a councillor at Collingwood City Council, before being appointed to the Victorian Stolen Generations' Taskforce, the Victorian Sorry Day Committee, and as a member of Reconciliation Victoria.

## Geraldine Briggs AO (1910-2005)

Geraldine Briggs had a prolific career in activism, where she contributed to policy reforms, and the creation of organisations that improved the lives of many Indigenous Victorians.

As a founding member, and later Victorian Secretary, of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), Geraldine was a passionate grassroots campaigner for Indigenous citizenship rights, distributing how-to-vote cards for the 1967 Australian Referendum.

She was passionate about providing services to her local Indigenous community, which she did through establishing the Victorian Aboriginal and Islander Women's Council, and the United Council of Aboriginal Women. With these organisations, Geraldine ran hostels for homeless, and 'at-risk' youth, visited prisoners, and established and fundraised for services like the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.



She lobbied the government on issues of cultural preservation, land ownership and employment rights for Aboriginal welfare workers. Eventually she worked with the government to address these issues, as a member of the Advisory Committee for the Victorian Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and as a Koori representative for the Victorian State Secretary.

Her services were recognised through honours including the Order of Australia, and induction to the Victorian Honour Roll of Women and the inaugural Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll.

## Jessica 'Bon' Hull (1915-2000)



*In the "equality ride" on a Melbourne tram in 1970, a group of equal pay campaigners, including Zelda D'Aprano (L) and Bon Hull (R), refused to pay more than 75 percent of the adult tram fare to protest that working women received 75 percent of male wages.*

Jessica 'Bon' Hull was a pioneer in the Victorian Women's Liberation Movement, and a prominent advocate for women's healthcare. Her passion for activism saw her become instrumental in establishing a number of social organisations within Melbourne.

After establishing the Women's Action Committee in 1970, she established the Women's Liberation Centre in Little La Trobe Street. As a founding member of organisations that include the Women's Liberation Movement (Victoria), Women at Work, and Women in the Trade Unions, Bon's campaign for equal rights extended into areas of equal pay, education opportunities, and sexism in advertising, trade unions, and bank lending policies. Her campaigns for women's health reforms saw her lobby to prevent the demolition of the Queen Victoria Women's Hospital, and become instrumental in establishing the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. Her campaigns to make women's healthcare more accessible culminated in her role in establishing the Abortion Trust Fund in 1973, and the Women's Health Collective free health clinics in Melbourne.

Her dedication to women's health within the community continued with the publication of her book, *In Our Own Hands: A Women's Health Manual*, making information on women's health issues easily accessible.

## Lady Gladys Nicholls (1924-1999)

Throughout her life, Gladys was a strong advocate for Aboriginal rights which she effected through her creation of the Women's auxiliary of the Aboriginal Advancement League. This auxiliary laid the foundations of the United Aboriginal & Islander Women's Council, and, under Gladys's direction, established and funded the first indigenous girls' hostel and a comparable space for boys. Eventually, similar services for Indigenous adults were established in central Melbourne.

She oversaw the creation of numerous other initiatives which serviced the inner-city Indigenous community, including the Aboriginal Children's Christmas Giving Tree program, an opportunity shop in Northcote, and a program assisting Indigenous youths to complete high school.

Through her grassroots activism, Gladys became a state and national leader in the Aboriginal citizenship movement, working closely with other community leaders in Fitzroy and Collingwood, as well as organisations like the Federal

Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Gladys's approach to community service was holistic, and through both her activism for Indigenous rights, as well as her role in establishing numerous community programs, she has made significant sustaining contributions to Melbourne.





## Ruth Hope Crow AM (1916-1999)



Ruth Hope Crow was a vocal advocate for humanist issues, and a passionate grassroots worker in a number of Melbourne community projects.

Ruth's community work began in her position as the Secretary-organiser of the first federally funded wartime child-care centres in Brunswick.

After training in social work for a year she continued working for several childcare organisations, and initiated the Day Nursery Development Association.

Recognising the value of such wartime programs, Ruth sought the continued support of the government for early childhood child-care and crèches, but was met with resistance. While she continued to work for community child-care organisations, she was also a strong advocate for women's liberation, environmentalism and sustainability.

Her contributions to the community were diverse, and with her husband Maurie, Ruth received a Robin Boyd Information Award for her work on urban planning. Their plans recognised the importance of social and environmental sustainability, and community contributions in town planning projects.

Papers from her career, ranging from her advocacy work with women and children to her progressive urban planning papers, continue to be a valuable community resource, and are held in a collection at Victoria University.

## Mollie Dyer AM (1927-1998)

Molly Dyer was a committed welfare worker within Melbourne's Indigenous community, and was responsible for establishing indigenous child care services in Melbourne.

Her community work began with positions at the Aborigines Advancement League, and the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, where she realised her particular passion for the welfare of children. When her work exposed her to the emotional trauma and loss of cultural identity faced by Indigenous children who were fostered out to non-indigenous families, she campaigned to ensure Aboriginal children were, whenever possible, placed with Aboriginal families.

After delivering a speech at a national adoption conference, she initiated discussions about creating an Aboriginal-run agency servicing Aboriginal children and families. From this initial work the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care were established.



These childcare support programs were highly successful, contributing to a 40% reduction in Aboriginal children in care within three years. Later, she set up the Brambuck Living Cultural Centre, and worked with the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

Her work was highly sought after, and she was recruited as a development officer for the Victorian Aboriginal co-operatives. She also delivered awareness-raising conferences for public servants, and served on numerous boards and committees.

Throughout her career in community service, Mollie also fostered twenty Indigenous children while raising six of her own.

## Margaret Tucker MBE (1904-1996)



Aboriginal woman Margaret Tucker made numerous community contributions as a tireless advocate for Indigenous rights.

As one of the first Aboriginal people from a rural mission to settle in Fitzroy, Margaret helped establish a thriving social and political centre from which a number of influential Aboriginal organisation and community leaders arose.

She became a widely respected community leader, chosen as one of the Koori representative for the Day of Mourning Conference. She also organised a number of

community initiatives, such as social events for Aboriginal girls, musical appeals for the war effort, and fundraisers supporting participants of the Cummeragunja Mission walk-off, and helped to establish the Victorian-based Australian Aborigines League and the United Council of Aboriginal and Islander Women. Through this work, Margaret was recognised as a key contributor to the campaign for equal citizenship rights and opportunity leading up to the successful 1967 referendum.

Her contributions to the Melbourne community were not limited to her activism, but extended through her political career as the first Aboriginal woman appointed to the Aborigines Welfare Board (Victoria) and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, as well as her writing career through her publication of the first autobiography written by an Aboriginal person, *If Everyone Cared*. Her contributions were recognised when Margaret was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire.

## Olive Zakharov (1929-1995)

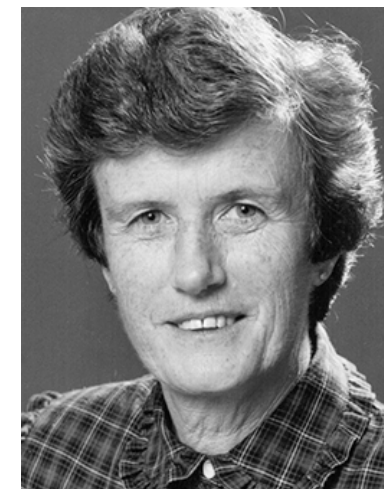
Olive Zakharov's humanist beliefs inspired her advocacy for vulnerable groups within the community, through both her political and community work. As a teacher Olive introduced a human relations course, which included sex education, into the school's curriculum, and for such 'humanist counselling' she was declared the Australian Humanist Society's 'Humanist of the Year'.

As a Senator she advocated for a diverse range of issues affecting the most disadvantaged and discriminated in the community. She often spoke of the necessity of making work accessible to people with disabilities, and was also a strong advocate for the Melbourne LGBTQ+ community. As a member and trustee of the Victorian AIDS Council and a member of a subcommittee of the National AIDS Council she sought to reduce stigma around AIDS, and reform how young people were educated about STDs.

After announcing to the Senate that she was a survivor of domestic violence much of her political work involved women's issues. She initiated the government's Campaign

to Stop Violence Against Women, and during legislative debate was outspoken about sexual harassment and the precariousness of women's employment.

Her humanism was recognised globally, as the representative for the Australian Peace Movement and the Australian delegate to the Vienna Peace Conference. In Melbourne, Olive's legacy was honoured through the establishment of Olive's Place, a high security refuge which provides intensive support for disadvantaged women and children.



## Dame Marie Breen DBE OBE (1902-1993)



Dame Marie Breen was a tireless activist for greater inclusion of women in public life. She advocated for the appointment of married women to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, the removal of the marriage bar from public service employment, and welfare support for civilian widows and deserted wives, which she considered to be obstacles to equality between men and women. She organised her activism through her appointments to leadership and delegate positions in the National Council of Women of Victoria, the National Council of Women of Australia, and the Mothers' Union.

Her passion for welfare extended into her family support work. She served as a founding

and leadership member of numerous organisations, including the Brighton Baby Health Centre, the Marriage Guidance Council of Victoria, the Victorian Family Council, the Victorian Association of Citizens' Advice Bureau, the Victorian Baby Health Centres Association, the Victorian Family Council and the Family Planning Association. She also served on a number of boards in hospitals, and on the Victorian Parole Board.

Marie's political career also reflected her passion for advocacy, serving as the chair of the women's section of the Victorian division of her party, and on the Federal Women's Committee. During her time as a Senator, she sat on committees inquiring into housing, education, immigration, disability, and rehabilitation, and the needs of civilian widows. She was the first woman to chair a Senate committee.

After her political career she was an enthusiastic philanthropist, becoming involved in the Australia-Asian Association, and coordinated cared for Colombo Plan students.

## Dame Margaret Blackwood DBE MBE (1909-1986)

Margaret Blackwood made her most notable contributions to Melbourne through her trailblazing career as a woman in science and academia.

After a five year break from academia, serving on the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, she faced an uncertain return to academic career. However, her sought-after skills in botany and genetics earned her a permanent lectureship as one of the only two genetics lecturers at the University of Melbourne.

As a respected academic, she quickly became a trailblazer for the representation of women in education administration. She was the first female fellow of both Trinity College and the Genetics society of Australia. As a respected female academic she became a member of the Australian Federation of University Women, and the Lyceum Club, a club for women distinguished in their profession.

Her service to the University and academic community continued in her positions as the first chairman of the council and a founder fellow of Janet Clarke Hall, and as chair of the co-ordinating committee of

Soroptimist Clubs of Australia and New Zealand. After retiring as a professor, Margaret's distinguished contributions were honoured with her election as the first female deputy-chancellor of the University of Melbourne, which also presented her with an honorary Doctors of Law. For her contribution to the academic field, she was appointed as a Member, and then as Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.





## Hyllus Maris (1933-1986)



Hyllus Maris's social contributions permeated all aspects of the community, from arts to education. As an active member of the FCAATSI and Aboriginal Advancement League, she was a passionate advocate for Indigenous issues within the Victorian community, which resulted in her establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Service and Victorian Aboriginal Health Service.

Her contributions to education followed the completion of her studies in social policy in London provided through a scholarship from the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs. She worked on Aboriginal education reforms which culminated with her opening the first independent Aboriginal school in Victoria, Worawa Aboriginal College.

This school pioneered a curriculum that balanced Aboriginal cultural studies with western curriculums.

As chair of the Victorian Council for Aboriginal Culture, she helped organise some of the first Aboriginal art exhibitions in Victoria, however Hyllus also fulfilled her own art projects.

She wrote and produced *Women of the Sun*, a series documenting the Cummeragunja walk-off and the colonial experiences of Aboriginal women, which won the United Nations Media Peace Prize, as well as awards from the Banff Television Festival, the Australian Writers' Guild and the Television Society of Australia.

## Muriel Agnes Heagney (1885-1974)

Muriel Heagney was a labour rights advocate and pioneer in the equal pay movement, recognising wage inequality as a fundamental obstacle to the broader social equality of men and women.

Muriel was one of the first in Victoria to advocate for the expansion of the rights of women workers, seeking wage parity, and rights to maternity leave and child endowment. In the absence of government support, she helped secure women's incomes during the depression by establishing the Unemployed Girls' Relief Movement, which raised relief allowances through the proceeds of sewing centres and a jam factory.

She pursued a broader improvement of workers' living standards within her community, not just through her organisational positions, but in submissions made to the Royal Commission into the Basic Wage, and the Arbitration Council seeking a revision of the minimum wage based on the cost of living. Although she was met with much resistance, the government agreed to introduce

quarterly adjustments to the Basic Wage.

She published several written works; *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?* (1937), *Equal Pay for the Sexes* (1948), and *Arbitration at the Cross Roads* (1954). These works have continued to influence the Australian labour movement since her death.



## Jessie Mary Vasey CBE (1897-1966)



Jessie Vasey was dedicated to the welfare of war widows, establishing community support at a time when they were greatly stigmatised within society.

When the death of her husband left her a war widow, Jessie contacted all Victorian war widows to propose the formation of a guild to supplement their meagre pension. After receiving an enthusiastic response, she established the Widows' Craft Guild in 1946, and she served as the organisation's national president until her death in 1966.

Jessie sought reform to secure the war widows pension, and ensure it was adequate after the effects of post-war inflation. Not only did her activism successfully attain concessions for war widows, but it saw the removal of the morality

requirements of the widow's pension in 1949. By 1951, the Guild had already made strides in pension, secured payment of accrued recreational leave pay to soldiers' widows, included medical, dental and optical benefits and provided for the educational costs of children, which have a continued benefit to the community today.

Her efforts have a continued legacy, especially through the housing scheme she established, which has since grown to the War Widows' Guild subsidy, Vasey Housing.

## Madge Irene Connor (1874-1952)

Madge Connor had a trailblazing career within the Victorian police force, opening employment equality up to women and laying the foundations for the first female police officers in Victoria.

After her husband's death, Madge began working undercover for the police. While her skilful work sourcing evidence soon earned her several commendations and wide respect within the force, she was barred from official employment for being a woman.

Following her campaigns, with the help of women's advocacy groups, Madge became one of the first female police agents to be appointed by the Victorian Government. Although her position expanded women's access to police force employment, her position came with limited rights to uniform and pension, and half the pay of her male counterparts, which over her career Madge fought to repeal.

Leading deputations of female police agents and watch-house matrons to the Chief Secretary, Madge campaigned for an increase in their salary, which was successful. This laid

the foundations for the equal wage rights of the first four policewomen officially sworn, which had larger consequences for wage equality as they were the first women in Australia to attain equal pay for equal work.

Madge's career not only opened up employment opportunities for women in public service, but also laid the foundations for broader employment equality.



## Vida Goldstein (1869-1949)



As well as being one of Australia's most prominent suffragists, Vida Goldstein also was also a dedicated charity worker and social reform advocate.

Vida was an active member of her community who worked to improve the experiences of those in Melbourne, by helping to establish the first independent Presbyterian churches, fundraising for the Queen Victoria Women's Hospital, and by campaigning for greater social welfare and prison reform. Through her passion for justice reform she was also fundamental in the establishment of children's courts.

While she made numerous contributions through her activism, her most consequential work was for the Australian women's suffrage movement, as one of its most prominent spokeswomen. She advocated for suffrage through her role in organising the Monster Petition and as the president of the Women's Suffrage League. After women became enfranchised she continued her pursuit for equal opportunity, seeking greater political representation of women as one of the first women in Australia to run for the Senate.

Social welfare was a prominent theme throughout her published works, which include *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, and the newspaper *Women's Sphere*, which were often used to model social reform. Her exposé on the budgets of poverty-stricken families was used to model Australia's first Basic Wage, and her report on youth incarceration shaped State Government welfare reform legislation.

Vida's advocacy and reform work has since had a sustaining effect on the Melbourne community.

## Lady Millie Peacock (1870-1948)

After a life of contribution to the Melbourne community through her charity work, Millie Peacock became a trailblazer in Victorian politics.

Before her term in Parliament, Millie's public service extended over 26 years at the Red Cross, serving the Creswick branch of the Australian Red Cross Society as the first President, and as a member of the Victorian Divisional Committee, and General Committee.

When her husband died in 1933, Millie was urged by Robert Menzies to run in the by-election for her husband's seat in the Victorian Parliament. After a strong win, Millie Peacock became the first woman to be elected into the Victorian Parliament and the third female parliamentarian in Australia.

During her term, she made fundamental contributions to the community as a champion for women's and workers' rights, notably speaking on the Factories and Shops Bill to protect workers' wages and conditions.

Although Victorian women attained the right to vote in 1908 and the right to stand for

elections in 1923, it was not until ten years later that Millie was successfully elected into Victorian Parliament. While her tenure was short, Millie made fundamental contributions to the Melbourne community by bridging the gap between formal and practical access to public office for women in Victoria and Australia.





## Robina Fordyce Cowper (1866-1948)



The Collins Street Independent Church

Through a trailblazing careers as an administrator in her local Melbourne church community, Robina became a strong activist for women's rights and youth justice.

As a respected member of the Collins Street Independent Church, she was one of its delegates to the Congregational Union of Victoria, and one of the first women to serve on

its executive committee. She advocated for a number of social issues including women's rights, greater inclusion of women in the police force, the protection of children and temperance.

She was critical of the lack of female representation within the administration of religious institutions, and pioneered the inclusion of women in administrative and leadership roles in the Melbourne church community through her roles as a founding member and executive of the Congregational Women's Association and as an organiser for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

She also worked as the Women's Home Mission Committee executive, extending her advocacy for women's issues into the broader community. Within the Congregational Union she presented a paper 'The State and the Child Criminal', but her work within youth justice extended beyond her congregational work as a special magistrate of the Children's Court in Melbourne.

## Matilda Ann (Tilly) Aston (1873-1947)

Through her activism, Tilly Aston lobbied to expand the rights and social independence of blind people in Victoria.

Tilly's work, challenging the limited social opportunities available to blind Australians, began when her studies, as the first blind Australian to enrol in university, were cut short due to limited access to Braille material. After leaving, she founded the Victorian Association of Braille Writers, now the Victorian Braille Library, to expand public access to Braille material that was previously scarce and expensive.

In order to expand the social independence of blind Victorians, Tilly founded the Association for the Advancement of the Blind (now Vision Australia) to lobby for specific services and greater inclusion of visually impaired Victorians in the community. Her lobbying was very successful, achieving voting rights for blind people, free postage for Braille material (a world first), transport concessions, a pension for all legally blind people, and the repeal of a travel bounty on blind people travelling interstate.

She also had a successful career in education, as the first blind person to be appointed as head of the Victorian Education Department's School for the Blind, where she worked until her retirement in 1925.

Her achievements have been broadly recognised through numerous public monuments, as well as two King's medals for Distinguished Citizens Service.



## Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown (1889-1946)



Throughout her career, Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown pioneered Melbourne's infant welfare, ante-natal and pre-school child-care programs.

Her dedication to child welfare saw Vera establish several initiatives to decrease child morbidity and mortality, such as regular medical inspection of school pupils, and a compulsory course for sisters at infant welfare centres. Through her appointments to the Queen

Victoria Hospital for Women and Children, the Women's and Children's Hospitals, the Victorian Baby Health Centres Association and the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria, she sought to make information on child-care widely accessible. Her own publications, *A Guide to Infant Feeding*, *A Guide to the Care of the Young Child*, and a report for the National Health and Medical Research Council, not only provided access to fundamental infant and child welfare information, but prompted the Victorian government to fund the Lady Gowrie Child Centres.

Her pursuit of government reform continued, when she was one of two doctors appointed by the government to conduct a survey into the welfare of Victorian and New Zealander women and children. Subsequently, she became the first woman to head a government department in Victoria when the government appointed her as part-time director to the newly established section of infant welfare in the Health Department.

## Margaret McLean (1845-1923)

Margaret McLean became a powerful voice in the women's suffrage movement as an active and outspoken member of her Collins Street church. She mobilised support for women's suffrage as a founding member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1887. Although this organisation was not primarily concerned with suffrage, it encouraged women to become politically active in issues relating to their Christian values, such as equality, welfare, and temperance.

She was instrumental in spreading the women's suffrage campaign throughout Victoria, by circulating her pamphlets 'Womanhood Suffrage' and 'More about Womanhood Suffrage' throughout the Victorian WCTU branch networks. Her suffrage activism culminated when she organised the petition presented to parliament in 1891, known as the "Monster Petition". She was the first signatory to this petition which collected 30,000 signatures through a door-to-door campaign, and was an important tool in mobilising support for the movement.

Her work for equality extended into areas of justice reforms

where she led a delegation to Victoria's Chief Commissioner of Police to encourage the employment of female police officers and the designation of female-specific lockup facilities.

Her work for justice continued when she helped set up the National Council of Women of Victoria, which also campaigned for the establishment of juvenile courts and police matrons.



## Henrietta Dugdale (1827-1918)



Henrietta Dugdale was an active member of the Melbourne and Australian political community, as a founding member of the Australian women's suffrage movement.

With Annie Lowe, Henrietta founded the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society, seeking to obtaining voting rights for women that were equal to those held by men. While the suffrage movement had gained momentum overseas, this organisation was the first

of its kind in Australia. Her activism was informed by strong ideas of the role of equality in society. She believed that the progression of society could only occur when there was equality between men and women, an idea she championed through her book *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*, which played a key role in mobilising support for the suffrage movement. Her grassroots approach to activism saw her contribute to the organisation of the "Monster Petition", and become a revered public speaker at suffrage support rallies.

Her activism was not limited to attaining women's suffrage, and she believed that social equality required elevating the working class. She advocated for progressive reforms including the eight hour day and expansion of workers welfare, which not only had lasting effects within Melbourne, but shaped social reform around Australia.

## Annie Lowe (1834-1910)

As a founder of the women's suffrage movement in Victoria, Annie Lowe was a tirelessly campaigner for women's rights and equality.

Annie's unwavering passion for women's suffrage was complemented by her tremendous organisational and mobilisation skills. She established the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society with Henrietta Dugdale, the first suffrage society in Australia, and later served as the president for the United Council for Women's Suffrage, which involved more than thirty societies.

As a spearhead for the suffrage movement she was a fundamental contributor to many community support rallies within Melbourne, and to the organisation of the Monster Petition which galvanised the support for the suffrage movement with its presentation to State Parliament.

Within the community, Annie was aware of the effects on inequality on the lives of women, and this informed her advocacy. Her pursuit for women's suffrage reflected her broader awareness that the unequal representation in her

community repressed women, whose political privileges were not equal to those of male voters, especially in "equal privileges in marriage and divorce". Annie untiringly worked to counter such inequality by helping women who were experiencing abuse from their husbands to become independent.

Annie laid the foundations for women's representation in society, not only through her political activism, but through the interpersonal support for other women in her community.





## Annette Bear Crawford (1853-1899)



As a forceful advocate for women's suffrage, Annette Bear Crawford believed that voting rights, "would be the most effective instrument for improving conditions of life".

She united existing suffrage societies, creating a number of powerful organisations like the Victorian Women's Suffrage League, and the United Council for Women's Suffrage which she

served as the first president and later honorary secretary. After consolidating their influence, Annette lobbied with these organisations for women's enfranchisement by presenting the Monster Petition to State Parliament.

Her vision for women's representation in politics extended to their participation in public work, training women as orators, and encouraging them be elected to school boards of advice. Within her own public work, she helped amend legislation, which raised the age of consent, and enabled the appointment of women to factory inspector positions and to the committee of the Melbourne Benevolent Asylum. She promoted the use of the Infant Life Protection Act (1890), and her concern for child welfare inspired her work as a founding member of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Victorian Vigilance Society.

Most notably, Annette was a founding member of the Queen Victoria Hospital for Women, which she successfully helped fund through establishing the Queen's Willing Shilling Fund.

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*Nurses beside the troopship KANOWNA, Kew, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, c 1916.*



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