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**The Intellectual Traditions of Australian Feminism:  
Women's Clubs and Societies, 1890 – 1920.**

by Jennifer Donovan MA (Hons)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of History

University of Sydney

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Table of Women's Clubs and Societies in Australia 1890 – 1920

Type of Club				
State	Intellectual, Higher Education and Cultural	Benevolent, Charitable, Philanthropic and Religious	Trade Union and Work	Political and Suffrage
<b>New South Wales</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dawn Club</li> <li>• Women's Literary Society</li> <li>• Sydney University Women's Association</li> <li>• Women's College</li> <li>• Ladies Club</li> <li>• National Council of Women</li> <li>• Women's Club (Tuesday Club)</li> <li>• Women's Literary and Debating Club</li> <li>• Women's Service Club</li> <li>• Feminist Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sydney University Women's Society</li> <li>• Working and Factory Girls' Club</li> <li>• Girls' Friendly Society</li> <li>• Optimists Club</li> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Industrial Guild</li> <li>• Women's Cooperative</li> <li>• Silk Growing and Industrial Association</li> <li>• Women's Cooperative Society</li> <li>• Queen's Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> <li>• Womanhood Suffrage League</li> <li>• Women's Federal Leagues</li> <li>• Women's Progressive Association</li> <li>• Women's Political and Educational League</li> <li>• Women's Liberal League</li> </ul>
<b>Victoria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Princess Ida Club</li> <li>• Austral Salon</li> <li>• Order of the Daughters of the Court</li> <li>• Warrabee Club</li> <li>• National Council of Women</li> <li>• Woomballano</li> <li>• Writer's Club</li> <li>• Sandringham Ladies Social</li> <li>• Reading Club</li> <li>• The Alexandra</li> <li>• Catalysts</li> <li>• Lyceum Club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presbyterian Neglected Children's Aid Society</li> <li>• Women's Labour Bureau</li> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victorian Lady Teachers' Association</li> <li>• Women's Political and Social Crusade</li> <li>• Royal Victorian Trained Nurses Association</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victorian Women's Suffrage Society</li> <li>• Australian Women's Suffrage Society</li> <li>• Victorian Women's Franchise League</li> <li>• United Council for Women's Suffrage</li> <li>• Women's Federal Political Association</li> <li>• Australian Women's National League</li> </ul>

Continued over...

State	Intellectual, Higher Education and Cultural	Benevolent, Charitable, Philanthropic and Religious	Trade Union and Work	Political and Suffrage
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Karrakatta Club</li> <li>• National Council of Women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> <li>• Women's Service Guilds</li> </ul>
Queensland		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Union</li> <li>• Women Worker's Political Organisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Suffrage League</li> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> <li>• Women's Equal Franchise Association</li> <li>• Women's Franchise League</li> <li>• Queensland Women's Electoral Union</li> </ul>
Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Itinerants (Hamilton Society)</li> <li>• National Council of Women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Improvement and Sanitary Association</li> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> <li>• Women's Suffrage Association</li> </ul>
South Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May Club</li> <li>• Young Ladies Literary Society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society for the Promotion of Social Purity</li> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Women's Trades Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> <li>• Women's Suffrage League</li> <li>• South Australian Woman's League</li> <li>• Women's Political Association</li> </ul>
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australasian Home Reading Union</li> <li>• National Council of Women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's Christian Temperance Union</li> </ul>

# Table of Abbreviations

AHRU	Australasian Home Reading Union
AWNL	Australian Women's National League
ICW	International Council of Women
IWSC	International Women's Suffrage Committee
IWSS	International Women's Suffrage Society
ML	Mitchell Library
NCW	National Council of Women
NUWSS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
PIC	Princess Ida Club
PLC	Presbyterian Ladies College
QWEL	Queensland Women's Electoral League
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
SUWA	Sydney University Women's Association
SUWS	Sydney University Women's Society
UCWS	United Council for Women's Suffrage
VLTA	Victorian Lady Teachers' Association
VTNA	Victorian Trained Nurses Association
WCTU	Women's Christian Temperance Union
WEFA	Women's Equal Franchise Association
WEU	Women's Emancipation Union
WFPA	Women's Federal Political Association
WISA	Women's Improvement and Sanitary Association
WPEL	Women's Political and Educational League
WSPU	Women's Social and Political Union

## INTRODUCTION

*Some day, when the women of a future generation shall stand, thanks to the dimming of their foremothers, upon the same level as their brothers, there will be no need for a paper devoted to the woman's cause, for the welfare of the woman will be one with the welfare of the race, one with the welfare of humanity; and the journals of that bright day will meet the united demands of a brighter and purer life. But that time is not yet. Before the dawn of the harvest home there must be the ploughing of the fallow field of mind, the sowing of many a seed of love and truth. Women must wake up to wider knowledge of themselves, their work and their responsibilities; and the women who can see the need of such knowledge must learn to do the work of pioneers, and must endeavour to lead their sisters to a larger life. Some of this work – our little share – we hope in all humility to do.<sup>1</sup>*

In the last years of the nineteenth century, a small number of doughty Australian women created a new public space. Located in between the public sphere of politics and commerce, and the private sphere of family and domestic life, there grew a new world of voluntary organisations of women: clubs, societies and associations. In these gatherings, the political was debated by the inhabitants of the domestic sphere, and domestic concerns became political. In their meetings, a kind of feminism was moulded and disseminated by women who may never have used the term or applied it to themselves.

In Australia, as elsewhere in the Western world at the end of the nineteenth century, there was an accelerated trend to organise, agitate and change. Australian women – particularly the urban, middle-class – showed an extraordinarily energetic taste for organising themselves. Across Australia, but particularly in the most populated urban centres of Sydney and Melbourne, women established and joined clubs, groups and societies of varied kinds and purposes. There were several groups specifically devoted to the intellectual advancement of women, such as the Dawn Club, the Women's Literary Society, the Women's Literary and Debating Club, the Princess Ida Club, the Warrawee, and the Karrakatta Club. Others focused on political issues: the Womanhood Suffrage League, the Women's Progressive League, the Australian Women's National League, for example. Some organised to meet

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<sup>1</sup> Maybanke Wolstoneholme, First Edition of *Woman's Voice*, Sydney, 1894, Mitchell Library.

specific social agendas, such as the Working and Factory Girls' Club, and the Girls' Friendly Society. Still others were organised mostly for entertainment and social purposes, though they tended to maintain a philanthropic or educational objective, such as the Order of the Daughters of the Court, the Catalysts and the Optimists. Regardless of purpose, all committed themselves to attracting women members (most often they insisted on women-only membership), and to promoting women's interests.

The significance of these groups relates as much to their cultural context as to their overt purposes. These were groups of women organising and operating in the public sphere around woman-centred agendas. Australia at the turn of the century was experiencing a period of progress, political activity and change. These women both were and were not products of their time. They were politicised and energised by the spirit of progress and change, but they were women in a society and time that still did not encourage women to seek roles in the public sphere. They seldom explicitly described their motivations. Their records are not very self-reflective or conscious of their historical context or political role. They did not describe their predecessors or influences, nor did they evaluate their activities or achievements. Their existence tended to arouse little public notice in their own time (nor has it since).

The groups devoted to winning the vote for women have enjoyed considerable attention from historians of the period, but the intellectual and literary groups have remained almost invisible. My contention is that the focus on the work of the suffrage groups has been a misrepresentation of the wider purpose of the women at the time. In efforts to track a history of the suffrage struggle, the correlative phenomenon of women's association has been accepted without much scrutiny. However, many of the women who belonged to the suffrage groups also belonged to one or more of the literary or other groups. It is a skewed and incomplete version of their activities and achievements that only reports the suffrage work. It is a masculinist version of women's history: the inevitable search for what is regarded as 'important' in history; that is, the political. The overlooked phenomenon of association and the ignored existence of groups that were not overtly political have helped to perpetuate an incomplete understanding of the aspirations and audacity of the women involved.

In the literary groups can be found the intellectual roots of feminism for Australian women. The groups were clearly training grounds for the women in the skills of the public sphere: in these associations women learned to think and to speak and to organise, to withstand criticism, to go out at night and to congregate as women. But the groups were also feminist enclaves in that they were staking a claim for women to associate together away from the private sphere. They were intellectual incubators. They created a feminist consciousness in the women by making them part of a feminist culture. The history of these other groups is the essential backdrop to the (more familiar) history of feminist activism. In the suffrage groups they enacted an overtly feminist agenda; in the literary groups they developed feminist tools and consciousness.

The clubs and societies marked a social movement and a shift in the dominant culture. Women were getting together to think. In these gestures of association they were forcing a change in the understanding of what represented a woman's role and a woman's place. A new space was being claimed and other rights were being negotiated too. And these women were discovering that other women were doing likewise, in other colonies and countries. They developed a sense of being part of a worldwide community or culture.

Irrespective of the stated purpose of a group, or its sympathy to feminist ideas, it is my thesis that all of the groups, in some way, contributed to the intellectual birth of Australian feminism. Feminism is both an idea and an act. One can have a feminist consciousness and one can behave in ways that are feminist. By their very existence, by the act of associating, these groups manifested what can be regarded as acts of feminism. It was in the work performed by the groups that feminist consciousness was simultaneously developed. Some of the groups were explicitly anti-feminist and some of the women would have maintained that they were opposed to women's rights movements. Nevertheless, like the paradox of the woman who campaigns publicly for women to stay in the home and out of public life, the efforts of the anti-feminists contributed to the development of feminism. What they said may not have been feminist, but the very political act of saying anything publicly certainly was, because of its axiomatic belief in the capacity of women to wield persuasive power in the public sphere on contemporary agendas.

'Feminism' was not a term in common use in the 1890s,<sup>2</sup> so few of the women described would have explicitly identified as 'feminist'. The definition of feminism used here necessarily encompasses ideology and action that may not be consciously feminist because to look only for explicit and named feminism would exclude from consideration most of the women and groups simply because they did not have the vocabulary of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For evidence of feminism I have looked for ideas and behaviours that have betrayed a woman-centred consciousness, even where the motivation for those thoughts and acts may have been to oppose or limit the emancipation of women. Indeed I may be in some cases accused of examining the intellectual traditions of 'feminist antifeminism'<sup>3</sup> because I maintain that the act of a woman giving public voice to women's issues in a public forum is feminist, even when the voice may be decrying the emancipation of women.

In terms of the historical journey made by white women in Australia, the time was ripe towards the end of the nineteenth century for them to start to look for each other. There had been so few women in the country in the first half of the century, and their struggles to live and work and merely exist in the new country were all-consuming. By the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class women were ready to seek each other out. They had recently gained the right to access higher education, they were entering the paid workforce in increasing numbers, and they were having fewer children. In addition, technology was overcoming the difficulties of geographic isolation, and information and ideas were making their way from England and the United States. The lived circumstances of women made their inequality before the law and in society untenable.

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<sup>2</sup> A discussion of the origins of the term 'feminist' can be found in Karen Offen's 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach', *Signs* (Autumn 1988), p.126. Offen says the term was used synonymously for women's emancipation, and only began to be widely used in France in the 1890s. Women's suffrage advocate Hubertine Auclert used the term to describe herself in her periodical *La Citoyenne* from 1882. The term had crossed the Channel by the mid-1890s, and jumped the Atlantic by the end of the century.

In her book *English Feminism 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), Barbara Caine describes an article published in 1898 by 'Ellis Ethelmer', the pseudonym shared by Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy and her husband Ben, which attempted to define the term 'feminism' for the readers, indicating the novelty of the term.

<sup>3</sup> 'Feminist Antifeminism' and 'Antifeminist Feminism' are neologisms described by Karen Offen in 'Defining Feminism'.

The urge to organise and campaign for suffrage was an obvious and easily understood inclination. Without the vote, women could have little real effect on politics and the social agenda. Men defined what was important and not, and mostly they did not define women's issues as important.<sup>4</sup> Women could not achieve reform for themselves or by themselves. And the news from overseas told of the suffrage campaigns being carried out by British and American women.

The creation of the intellectual groups which had no particular or overt political agenda is less easily understood, but can be seen as a stage in the development of feminist consciousness, as explained by Gerda Lerner. The Australian women at the turn of the nineteenth century were attempting to create for themselves the kind of 'cultural prodding' described by Lerner, that has been denied women throughout history:

... the essential dialogue and encounter with persons of equal education and standing. Shut out of institutions of higher learning for centuries and treated with condescension or derision, educated women have had to develop their own social networks in order for their thoughts, ideas and work to find an audience and resonance.<sup>5</sup>

In her book *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, Gerda Lerner describes the way in which men's control of the mental constructs that explain the world – that is, the power to name and define – has excluded women:

Women have been defined out and marginalised in every philosophical system and have therefore had to struggle not only against exclusion but

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<sup>4</sup> There are, of course, notable exceptions. In England, John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women* in 1861. Victorian feminist Henrietta Dugdale dedicated her utopian tale *A Few Hours in a Far-Off Age*, published in 1883 to Mr Justice Higinbotham: 'I very gratefully dedicate this little book; in earnest admiration for the brave attacks made by that gentleman upon what has been, during all known ages, the greatest obstacle to human advancement; the most irrational, fiercest and most powerful of our world's masters – the only devil – male ignorance.' (Melbourne: McCarron, Bird and Co, Pamphlet File, Mitchell Library). In NSW, William Manning, Chancellor of the University of Sydney put the issue of women's access to higher education on the agenda: 'the right course was to settle and declare the principle of women's right to equality within the University ... rather than the Senate should wait till they come to our gates knocking for admission.'

<sup>5</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.12.

against a content which defines them as subhuman and deviant ... It has forced thinking women to waste much time and energy on defensive arguments; it has channelled their thinking into narrow fields; it has retarded their coming into consciousness as a collective entity and has literally aborted and distorted the intellectual talents of women for thousands of years.<sup>6</sup>

Even worse, Lerner maintains, women's intellectual development has been skewed by the need to dedicate their intellectual endeavours to combating the patriarchy rather than freely developing abstract thought. In applying this analysis to the situation for turn-of-the-century Australian women, it is possible to see the suffrage groups as doing the frontline intellectual work 'combating the patriarchy', while the literary and other groups created a space for the freer development of abstract thought.

On 11 August 1900, the *Sydney Morning Herald* described Maybanke Wolstoneholme as 'about the most intellectual woman in Australia.'<sup>7</sup> This was in spite of her lack of formal education. Maybanke had been educated in a manner typical for middle-class girls in the mid-nineteenth century. She attended a local Dame School near her home in Surrey, England, and when she was older went to a Girls' Academy that was run in the usual fashion by a young woman with no training, where she was drilled on a single textbook. After her family's emigration to New South Wales there is no record of her further participation in schooling at all (though there would have been several options available to her).

Maybanke Wolstoneholme's claim to being called an intellectual stemmed from her 'genius for initiating movements for education and social betterment.'<sup>8</sup> This flexible definition of an intellectual challenges the lingering perception of an intellectual being a (male) member of an elite of high culture and academia. Gramsci suggested that such a stereotypical understanding of 'intellectual' is derived from just one view of the nature of the intellectual and their work. He described another kind of intellectual: the 'organic' intellectuals who

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<sup>6</sup> Lerner, *Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, pp.5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1993), p.132.

<sup>8</sup> H. Thomas Lovell, cited in Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, p.9.

provide conceptual, strategic and organisational skills for social and political groups in everyday life.<sup>9</sup> A broader interpretation of what it is to be an intellectual will admit the company of a woman such as Mary Wollstonecraft. 'Intellect,' writes Richard Hofstadter, 'is the critical, creative, and contemplative side of mind. Whereas intelligence seeks to grasp, manipulate, re-order, adjust, intellect examines, ponders, wonders, theorises, criticises, imagines.'<sup>10</sup> If intellectuals are defined broadly as 'those who engage in the production, transmission and adaptation of ideas about society and culture,'<sup>11</sup> and if they are the members of society who ponder, criticise and imagine, then the women in the literary and other societies at the end of the nineteenth century were doing the work of intellectuals.

Another stereotype of the intellectual is that he (and the stereotype is always a 'he') works in an ivory tower of isolation. Coser contests this, observing rather that intellectuals require two conditions for their productivity to flourish. One is an audience, 'a circle of people to whom they can address themselves and who can bestow recognition,' and the second is other intellectuals, for they need 'the give and take of debate and discussion with their peers in order to develop their ideas.'<sup>12</sup> To this end, through recent western history, institutions have emerged that lend themselves to hosting the work of the intellectual. Coser's book, unapologetically titled *Men of Ideas*, examines several of the 'settings for intellectual life' including the salon, the coffeehouse, the scientific society, the monthly and quarterly reviews, the literary and publishing world, the political party, Bohemia and the journal. These 'incubators' for intellectual thought were rarely available to women (for even while women determined access to the salon, it was typically a forum for men's ideas and debates, not women's). Linda Kerber notes that the theatre for women's intellectual life has rarely been institutional:

Its locus was necessarily wherever women gathered to argue: in antislavery societies, where they wrestled with ideas about the limits of individualism, or in social meetings, where they struggled with concepts of the authentic

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<sup>9</sup> Brian Head, 'Introduction: Intellectuals in Australian Society,' in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, ed. Brian Head and James Walter (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.4.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Coser, *Men of Ideas: a sociologist's view* (New York: Free Press, 1965), p.viii.

<sup>11</sup> Head, *Intellectual Movements*, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> Coser, *Men of Ideas*, pp.3-4.

relationship between labor and capital, or around kitchen tables, where, after a day of labor, they gathered informally to discern the essential elements of the social and economic system in which they felt trapped.<sup>13</sup>

It was necessary for the women in the late nineteenth century to create their own intellectual spaces. Naturally some of these were reminiscent of the masculine institutions, but there were critical differences too.

Second wave feminist theory tells us that feminism emerges from collective rather than individual striving, and that feminism requires an intellectual space for the construction of a feminist world view to occur.<sup>14</sup> According to this theory, if we are to build a world in which women are emancipated and equal then we must first create a separate intellectual space in which this can be imagined and a world view developed. The women organising into clubs and societies at the end of the nineteenth century did not see themselves as intellectuals, just as they did not see themselves as feminists. Nevertheless they were doing the work of intellectuals, and their clubs gave them the necessary conditions for incubation: a space, an audience and collaborators with whom to debate and discuss.

The women involved defy classification: they were moderates and conservatives, wealthy and poor, religious and secular, prim and radical. They were as likely to embrace one feminist issue as reject the next; they might associate with men or operate exclusively as women. Their expressions of solidarity and noble gestures were as often undermined by internecine squabbles and petty point-scoring. Nevertheless their disparate efforts to organise for a purpose, as women, in a separate space, add up to a social movement that diminished the distance between the separate spheres of traditional male and female concerns.

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<sup>13</sup> Linda K. Kerber, 'The Unfinished Work of Alice Mary Baldwin' in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Hewitt and Leacock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.351.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Jane Aaron and Sylvia Walby (eds), *Out of the Margins: women's studies in the nineties*, (New York: Falmer Press, 1991), p.1; and Dale Spender, 'Modern Feminist Theorists: Reinventing Rebellion', in *Feminist Theorists: Three Centuries of Women's Intellectual Traditions*, ed. Dale Spender (London: Women's Press, 1983), p.368.

## I. Methodology

Women in Australia during the period 1890 to 1920 were at least as susceptible as those in the United Kingdom and the United States to the association phenomenon. Of particular interest, for their conscious intent to construct an intellectual space for Australian women, are the literary societies that were active in the period, and played an important role in the development of Australian feminism.

In these clubs and societies women met and discussed literary works, contemporary politics, women's issues, philosophy and more. Some of the women involved were public figures. Some became public figures at some point subsequent to their involvement in these groups. For others their membership and participation in one of these groups may have been their only excursion into the public domain in their entire lives. The groups were patronised by benevolent gentry, and hosted visiting overseas personages. Their activities and lectures were publicised and sometimes reported in the press. Their organisation was often conscientious and scrupulous, but their surviving records are distressingly incomplete. Nonetheless, the fragmentary remains of their activities, and the papers, letters, journals and biographical data on the individual women involved, piece together a significant part of our forgotten history.

Suffrage groups from the period have been the exception in terms of attracting the attention of historians. The political motivation and significance of the suffrage groups have ensured that their story has been told and their significance discussed. It has been the intellectual groups that have gone unnoticed.

The original research describing the intellectual women's groups of the period that forms the core of this thesis, meshes with existing research into suffrage groups. The topic is developed by drawing on relevant secondary material such as the excellent biographies of prominent women and the various descriptions of the suffrage movement (see *Historiography*, pp.62-69). My particular focus on the intellectual groups – in all their hitherto undocumented diversity – requires a new light to be cast on women who may already be well-known, and particularly on the activity of the suffragists. It expands the

understanding of their context, broadens the interpretation of their purpose, and encourages a new reflection on their impact.

It would be a mistake to consider the intellectual groups in isolation. The attention given to suffrage groups is an example of such a discrete approach to women's history. The result can be a skewed and incomplete history that may be sufficient when the purpose is to narrowly focus on one issue, but is clearly not appropriate when the aim is broader: to locate the emergence of a feminist consciousness. Indeed my contention is that the suffrage groups and the intellectual groups did not merely exist side by side; rather there was a synergy and co-dependency between them. The suffrage groups could not have emerged without the intellectual groups. As Maybanke Wolstoneholme observed, the intellectual groups had the capacity to act as 'training grounds' for women entering a public life. The women organising into groups at this time only attain their full meaning as pioneers of a social movement when they are considered as parts of a bigger whole. Only when all the groups are considered collectively do the extent of their networks and their often symbiotic relationships become apparent. So part of the task of this research is to insert the groups – known and unknown to existing histories – in all their variety, into the public record to allow a more comprehensive view of the depth and breadth of their activity.

It is noted in several sources that Australia in this period was perceived to be somewhat intellectually bereft.<sup>15</sup> 'For the most part,' wrote Miriam Dixon, 'Sydney lacked a strong and confident intelligentsia,' and she quotes J.A. Froude: 'The deficiency of the Sydney colonists is ... that they have no severe intellectual interests. They aim at little except what money will buy.'<sup>16</sup> Mrs Francis Anderson (previously Maybanke Wolstoneholme) wrote of the literary societies that women began to form in the cities that

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<sup>15</sup> This perception remained true for some years as can be seen in D.H. Lawrence's 1923 novel *Kangaroo* which portrays Australian society as choking talent and sensibility with mediocrity and materialism. Indeed it is probably a criticism that could be made (ungenerously) of Australia at any time in its white history.

<sup>16</sup> Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: women and identity in Australia, 1788 to 1975* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1976), p.204.

they were small associations of the few women who loved literature and wished to know more of it. They could only be small, for the great majority had little taste for learning.<sup>17</sup>

This elitist perception may well have been true, for all that Maybanke dedicated her life to extending educational opportunities to all parts of Australian society. The literary and other groups described in this research can be seen as attempts to counter the apparently national mode of anti-intellectualism and as such their task was axiomatically elitist.

The associations described in this research are grouped according to stated primary goals, though this is potentially misleading. Sometimes the work and discussion of a society ranged beyond the initial focus of, for example, suffrage, to diverse other causes and activities. A woman may belong to a variety of organisations, crossing the rough groupings. The overlapping and intersecting of groups and members illustrates the intellectual evolution of feminism at work.

Any grouping of the societies can divert attention from that primary and most fascinating fact of the simple existence of another women's club, regardless of its purpose. Nevertheless, for the sake of some structure that is not too artificial, the broad categories are: intellectual, higher education, and cultural pursuits; benevolent and philanthropic societies, religious groups and charities; trade unions and working associations; political and suffrage groups. Networks between the groups, intra and inter-state, are traced to highlight the commonality of membership across them.

Australia is in a unique position for any debate about feminism, being (as Sneja Gunew observed) so well-placed to be a clearing-house for feminism, 'allowing us to adapt what works and be critical towards the rest', and to avoid the 'sectarian splits' that have dogged other western feminisms.<sup>18</sup> In the 1890s this was perhaps even more true than it is today. Developments in transport, communication and women's access to higher education meant

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<sup>17</sup> Mrs Francis Anderson, 'Women in Australia' in Meredith Atkinson, (ed.) *Australia: Economic and Political Studies* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1920), p.267.

<sup>18</sup> Sneja Gunew, (ed.), *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.1.

that intellectual ideas were travelling to Australia where they were adapted, critically evaluated, assimilated, and disseminated by women with early feminist consciousnesses and little experience in the public sphere or political movements, and not so divided along entrenched ideological lines. Another factor was the lack of a comparatively rigid class structure. In Britain the demarcation of the classes served to separate women from one another, and to prevent the different strata from imagining the lives of poorer/richer women. Most of the leaders of the women's movement (Frances Cobbe, sisters Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon) came from wealthy backgrounds, and had themselves enjoyed expensive educations, and were typically married to professional men. This left them free from the domestic work of lower-class women, and with the leisure and wealth to engage in philanthropic activities. It also held them somewhat hostage to the existing social structures, and unable or reluctant to engage in a challenging critique. Harriet Taylor had been far more radical in her criticisms of marriage earlier in the century than these women were at the end. In their campaign for women's suffrage there was little thought of extending it to working-class women. By contrast, in Australia there was little representation of the 'upper-class': the governors and their families were the imported 'gentry', and they enjoyed an esteemed and unique place at the top of Australian society, but beneath them the classes were far less demarcated than in Britain.

This singularity of the Australian community assisted the amorphousness and flexibility of the women's groups and their memberships. The looseness of the groupings of the associations does not imply a lack of intellectual rigour or commitment or purpose on their part, rather it reflects the absence of ideological dogma and partisanship. The interconnectedness of the groups and their members is a particular characteristic of Australia.

Differences between the colonies were reflected in differences in the nature of the women's groups they hosted. In NSW, the first established and largest of the colonies (one million people by 1899), developed the most extensive, influential and varied array of women's associations and journals. The prominent women of the NSW intellectual and politically active scene included Louisa Lawson, Rose Scott, Maybanke Wolstenholme (Mrs Francis Anderson), Louisa Macdonald, Matilda Curnow, Lucinda Gullett, Georgina Edwards, the

Windeyers, the Golding sisters, Dora Montefiore and others. These women's individual roles and networks with one another provide important information about the development of the feminist intellectual scene in NSW in the *fin-de-siecle* period.

Victoria, the second most populous colony, also had a significant range and number of women's groups. More advanced in terms of the education of its women, membership of many of the intellectual groups in Victoria was characterised by higher education. Like NSW, the suffrage and political groups in Victoria had several important leaders (including Henrietta Dugdale and Annette Bear Crawford) but Vida Goldstein dominated the activist scene in Melbourne and remains the best-known of the women of the period.

In Western Australia in 1899, out of a total population of 171 000, less than 59 000 were female. The vast majority of adult women were dependent on men. Of the small number of women who were in paid employment, most would have been in domestic work or industry.<sup>19</sup> Working women had little time or energy to devote to women's groups, the suffrage cause or any other agenda. The low standard and limited availability of education for girls would have further limited the inclination of women to take up a political cause. So what were the conditions that led, in 1899, to Western Australia becoming the second Australian colony to give women the vote (preceding the United States and Britain by twenty-one and thirty years respectively) and to electing the first female parliamentarian? The answer lies in the associations formed by a small circle of educated and well-connected, wealthy women, such as Edith Cowan, Bessie Rischbieth and Roberta Jull, and their connections with other Australian women, as well as the influence of international networks.

Like Western Australia, Queensland suffered from a severe gender imbalance, creating what Marilyn Lake has described as a 'masculine frontier culture'. Marilyn Lake believes that this made Queensland women feel vulnerable, and caused them to be particularly susceptible to the message of the Women's Christian Temperance Union concerning the protection of the

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<sup>19</sup> See figures given in Gail Reekie, 'With Ready Hands and New Brooms ...', *Hecate*, Vol. 7, No.1, (1981), p.25: 'In 1901 only 1,964 women in Western Australia claimed professional status, most of them employed in education. In contrast, 6,930 women were employed in domestic work ... 1,523 in commerce, and 2,208 in industry ... No less than 57 571 people were classed as 'dependents,' the great majority of whom would have been women tied to domestic duties within the home.'

home. In 1884 and 1886 thousands of women organised by the Social Purity Society campaigned for the repeal of the *Contagious Diseases Act*. The first campaign of the first women's suffrage organisation was to raise the age of consent. Unlike the other colonies/states, Queensland had no literary or intellectual women's groups; it was the only colony without a university by the end of the 1890s; and it was alone in not hosting any non-party political women's groups. The main women's political groups were strongly aligned to the political parties. The leading lights of feminist activism in Queensland were Emma Miller and Leontine Cooper.

At the end of the nineteenth century Tasmania had a population of about 150 000. The small community of Tasmanian women was no less energetic and diverse in its efforts than the mainland colonies, but the surviving resource material is tragically sparse.<sup>20</sup> Some of the Tasmanian women's associations were modelled on mainland clubs and societies. Networks with women in other states were fostered, and branches of national and international organisations were established. The ubiquitous figures on the Tasmanian women's associations scene were Emily Dobson, Mrs Jessie Rooke and Alicia O'Shea Peterson. Wife of Liberal Premier Henry Dobson, Emily Dobson was also regarded as a local leader, participating in or leading a range of organisations, and representing Tasmanian women on the national and international stage. In her long career she developed a reputation as a good public speaker and made a total of 33 trips to Britain and Europe and 67 trips away from Tasmania. Her political conservatism was balanced by the left-wing reformist activism of Alicia O'Shea Peterson. Cousin of John Earle, the first Labor Premier of Tasmania, Alicia became the first Tasmanian woman to stand for parliament, on a platform of representing the interests of women and children. Jessie Rooke was the president of the WCTU, first in Burnie, then of Tasmania, and ultimately of Australasia. Alongside Emily Dobson she was one of the first Tasmanian women to gain a national and even international profile.

At the beginning of her entertaining historical account of the women of South Australia, Helen Jones laments the absence of so much of the original source material that would have helped lift the 'veil of anonymity which clouds South Australian women's history.' She

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Minutes for the Itinerants have been lost for 1894-6; records for the Tasmanian NCW have been lost for the years 1899-1906.

documents some of the specific tragedies that have seen generations of meticulously documented records lost, stolen or deliberately destroyed.<sup>21</sup> It will never now be possible, for example, to know more about the Young Ladies Literary Society than that it existed, and that in May 1894 it debated some boys from the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society on the topic of Women's Franchise, that the mayor took the chair, and that the girls won easily.<sup>22</sup>

National and international connections however, can be easily found in the development of feminism in the South Australian women's associations. South Australia was home to two redoubtable immigrants: Catherine Helen Spence, who became Australia's first female political candidate,<sup>23</sup> and Mary Lee, a fiery orator and formidable organiser who oversaw the campaign to deliver the vote to women earlier than any other colony. Catherine Spence published and travelled widely, exporting information about the South Australian efforts to America and the United Kingdom, and returning invigorated and energised by the interest and support shown by women overseas. She tried to persuade her contacts in other colonies to follow her lead, succeeding with Vida Goldstein, but failing with her urging of Rose Scott. Mary Lee was a strong and generous supporter of women's movements nationally and is recorded in correspondence with women and women's associations in NSW, Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria.

Both Catherine Spence and Mary Lee refused requests to run for Parliament. Susan Magarey has speculated on the reasons for this, suggesting that their principal reason for declining nominations for election lay in

their commitment to forming organisations that would enable women to work, collectively, in the interests of women, and their recognition that such

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<sup>21</sup> Some examples: the records of the South Australian Housewives' Association were lost when thieves stole the safe in which they were housed in 1980. Records of the Adelaide City Mission's work were thrown away in the 50s. Mary Lee's papers were destroyed by her family after her death, and may have included the records of the Women's Suffrage League.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: A history of women in South Australia from 1836* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1994), p.144.

<sup>23</sup> Spence was a political candidate in 1897 when she campaigned for election to the Federal Convention, but she refused to ever run for Parliament.

a commitment conflicted with the very different priorities of the emerging political parties.<sup>24</sup>

The women's groups in South Australia were fewer than in New South Wales and Victoria but they were more cohesive because the groups tended to cooperate to achieve goals and shared common memberships. There was much less of an emphasis on the overt or aspirational intellectual groups, possibly because the admission of women in South Australia to the University of Adelaide from its inception had created a core of intellectual women in the colony, already equipped with a strong interest in women's issues and formidable ability.

In searching for the intellectual traditions of Australian feminism in the creation of the women's clubs and societies that dotted the country, a methodology is needed that will analyse layers of information. First there is a layer that deals with context. Without an understanding of the nature of the period, the local and international precedents for women's association in pursuit of intellectual stimulation, and the existing secondary research, it is not possible to gain a perspective on the achievement of these women, nor indeed on the original research that forms the core of this thesis. The 'Historical Project' then, is the basis of Chapter One.

A second layer concerns the physical and logistical reality of the efforts of these women. They had to learn to operate in the male domain – the public sphere – and this meant learning to arrange accommodation, advertise programmes, establish rules, apply meeting procedure, set fees and collect subscriptions, minute proceedings. It involved entering into commercial arrangements to lease premises. Most importantly it involved speaking publicly. Speaking in public is always a political act, designed to attract attention of some kind. Along with the obvious significance of the speaker and what is said, there is also potential for a political analysis of what the speech means, what response it gains and how it affects the speaker. The act of speaking publicly by these women aroused sometimes heated response and commentary from the press. It is true that what was actually said was often of less

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Magarey, 'Why didn't they want to be members of parliament? Suffragists in South Australia', in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994), p.82; and in Susan Magarey's *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 2001), p.159.

interest to the society than the outrageous act of a woman saying it. This analysis will be the focus of Chapter Two, and will constitute a recurrent theme throughout the body of the thesis.

The third layer for examination is the enveloping networks in the clubs and societies. Illumination of the relationships between individual women and connections between groups; the personal alliances and public feuds; the shared objectives; and the communication between colonies/states and internationally; will all help to understand the workings of the groups. The structure of these networks is the particular focus of Chapter Three, but their operation will be highlighted throughout Chapters Four to Six.

Next there is the actual work of the groups, in the context of the time. The achievements of each organisation in the short term – that is, the creation of a viable group; the setting and realisation of objectives; the maintenance of an historical record – will be examined along with the achievements in the long term, that is, the contribution of the efforts to the intellectual tradition of feminism. This description constitutes the main focus of the thesis and will be detailed in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

The role of the historian is to analyse change over time. The task for the feminist historian is complicated by the failure of canonical history to recognise that the points of significant change for women may be different from those traditionally recognised for their political significance to men. The task of identifying the causes and consequences of change in the lives of women is hampered by a failure to record issues and events that were of significance for women, but lacking perceivable relevance for men. The activities of the women's clubs and societies in Australia at the turn of the nineteenth century are evidence of substantial change in the role of women in the society. With its focus on discussion, reform and efforts to gain women's issues the attention of the public sphere, their work served to create an intellectual basis for Australian feminism. An evaluation of the contribution will be the focus of the concluding chapter.

Any history of this relatively recent period must confront the frustration and tragedy of missing records. For every instance of joy at uncovering an obscure and hitherto forgotten

document, there are a dozen causes for regret that more was not done sooner to attempt to preserve source material. In some instances then, treatment of the groups and societies described is perforce uneven. In a few cases, no more is known of an organisation than its name, but this has been sufficient to warrant its recording here, in the attempt to give a more comprehensive picture of the scope of associational activity in the period. Where significant research has already been published about a particular group, the description here will be briefer, and acknowledge the work already done. In these cases, the group is still included in the interests of gaining a complete overview of the women's activities and networks by regarding them side-by-side, overlapping and interconnected.

Ultimately, most of the groups and journals described in this research either ceased to operate, or they were incorporated into larger organisations that had less gender-specific objectives, or they became focused on specific political agendas.<sup>25</sup> Some of the women involved became famous or active in the public sphere, subsequently to, or simultaneously with, their membership of one or more of these organisations; for others their involvement in one of these groups was their only foray outside their domestic realm. Their efforts contribute to continuing scholarship by expanding our knowledge of a significant period and constituting a new cause for reflection on existing histories of the period.

Perhaps their greatest significance lay in their mere existence. What they said may indeed be less important than the act of saying anything publicly. It was, after all, aberrant behaviour for Victorian-era women to organise publicly, in this manner, and for so many groups to flourish at one time is curious, at least. Their significance as pioneers of feminism is indicated by several important common features. Despite their disparate memberships, objectives and concerns, all of the clubs and groups examined shared three fundamental perceptions regarding the women they catered for and women in the wider community: the need for a women's space that was separate from men; the need for intellectual rigour and debate as a basis for activism and participation in the public sphere (on any issue); and the need to network and disseminate their concerns, opinions or services. There is also evidence

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<sup>25</sup> Katie Spearritt and Joy Damousi would both argue that the distinctions between middle- and working-class women and their political commitments gradually challenged and undermined any unity demonstrated in the 1880s and 1890s, as can be seen in their chapters in *Gender Relations in Australia*, ed. Saunders and Evans (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

among many of the organisations of a self-consciousness regarding tradition: they wanted to survive and persist and saw themselves as influencing future generations.

The Australian women organising and joining clubs and societies were creating a new space between the public political sphere that was still denied them, and the invisible domestic sphere that hid them from each other. This was always a feminist act. The clubs and societies themselves, ostensibly devoted to one purpose or another were all, consciously or otherwise, in the intellectual and political business of creating feminism.

## THE HISTORICAL PROJECT

*Do you remember Olive Schreiner's parable, of the innumerable army of women who marched down to the river and fell and fell, until at last their bodies made a path across to the other and much desired fields beyond the flood. It seems to me enough to be one of that great army which still marches on through difficulties and dangers, and I am content even to be mentioned as one of the pioneers.<sup>1</sup>*

An intellectual tradition is a vital component of the scholarship of feminism, but it has been overlooked or underrated in the Australian historical setting. The history of the organisations, writings, and networks of women associating has much to tell us about the nature of feminism and of Australian culture, politics and ideas in the *fin-de-siècle* period. The women were laying intellectual foundations for social change and their existence deserves to be entered on the historical record. The effort to retrieve and scrutinise them enlarges our understanding of a dynamic historical period and allows for reflection on its contribution to our own time, helping us a little further along Schreiner's 'path'.

Examination of 1890s Australia for an intellectual tradition of feminism is loaded with potential. By the 1890s, legislation enabled women to gain higher education, and their access to information was increasing with advances in communication and technology. Any intellectual endeavours before this time had to have been hampered by lack of access to higher education facilities. By examining this particular time and place it is possible to find evidence of a flowering of feminist thought which is consciously (aspirationally) intellectual, consciously tradition-building, but not necessarily consciously feminist. It is feminism by another name: an assortment of women and groups stubbornly dedicated to feminist intellectual pursuits and assertively woman-identified, but often rejecting – or not even contemplating – the label 'feminist' or any of its other contemporary designations, such as 'New Woman', 'Shrieking Sisterhood' or 'Woman Movement'.

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<sup>1</sup> Maybanke Anderson, letter to Rose Scott dated 3 January 1924, cited in Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).

One task of feminism is to break down masculine universals. It is a difficult, political task that requires stepping outside conventions to gaze on them critically. This is the task that was undertaken by the women who associated in the late nineteenth century – they stepped outside their conventional sphere and turned their gaze on society from a new place – and it is a task that must even now be undertaken to render those women visible. How and why the literary groups have remained hidden while the suffrage groups have received a good measure of attention is an historiographical question to be answered. It is bound up with another historical question that has been asked before: why did Australian women fail to capitalise on the political advantage they held over most other women in the world in achieving the right to vote so early?<sup>2</sup>

This question, and the invisibility of women's groups that were not primarily concerned with suffrage, both derive from a conventional belief that the primary work of activist women at that historical moment was achieving the vote. But if we shift the focus and examine the means rather than the end, we find that suffrage was not their only goal. The work of these groups was partly an existentialist search for meaning: an effort to make sense of a changing world; an effort to develop women's response. In 1888 Frances Holden issued a circular seeking membership for the newly established Dawn Club, tellingly asking for 'thoughtful women who want themselves to learn how best to face the battle of life.'<sup>3</sup> At one level, federalism – politics – held no meaning as long as women were disenfranchised. The investigation of the literary canon, the pursuit of optimism, the discussion of philosophy, the philanthropic work were all searches for meaning. As the women observed for themselves, 'by talking we find out what we think.'<sup>4</sup> They needed to find out what it meant to be a woman, what were the implications of difference, and what did they need to do. This is the fundamental work of feminism. In these groups lies the mechanism of feminism: the networking, the discovery of like-minded women in other times and places, the reflection on individual circumstances and collective striving, the confrontation with patriarchy and the rattling of the gates of the public domain. Achieving the vote was the tip of the iceberg of their greater task: the development of feminist consciousness.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Susan Magarey's chapter 'Why didn't they want to be members of parliament? Suffragists in South Australia', in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Frances Holden's circular is among the papers of the Dawn Club on microfiche at the Mitchell Library.

<sup>4</sup> The Women's Club Annual Report (the Tuesday Club report), 1906.

Any attempt to measure the success of the women or assess their impact must reflect on the historical context from which they emerged and in which they operated. Australia in the 1890s was hugely influenced by events and activities in Britain and America. Through direct personal contacts and other indirect technological media, information about ideology, politics, and social movements permeated Australia's collective consciousness. A brief examination of Australia in this historical period with reference to the international scene, and an overview of the historical tradition of clubs and intellectual organisations, will provide an essential context for the intellectual work undertaken by women in small local clubs and societies around Australia.

## I. The Period

*A romantic aura always hangs over the last days of a dying century for those who look back on it ... people are impelled to discover a special kind of life about the end of an era.<sup>5</sup>*

Much has been written about the decade of the 1890s. There is a pervasive and persuasive belief among historians that *fin-de-siecle* years are always significant.<sup>6</sup> They are a time of culmination and regathering for the next century; the decade that confronts past and future; the dynamic focus of social and political change and consolidation. Conforming to this expectation of the 'nineties throughout the western world, the decade at the end of the nineteenth century, and the years immediately surrounding it, were astounding for the breadth of change wrought. At one end, in the 1880s, the term 'industrial revolution' was only just coming into general use.<sup>7</sup> At the other end of the period the world was sliding toward the First World War. 'It was obvious then,' wrote the great chronicler of art and ideas of the 1890s, Holbrook Jackson, 'that people felt they were living amid changes and struggles, intellectual, social and spiritual.'<sup>8</sup> The causes, course and results of this ferment varied across nations, but the prevailing climate of transition and transformation was shared.

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<sup>5</sup> Vance Palmer, *Legend of the Nineties* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1954), p.9.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Asa Briggs and Daniel Snowman (eds), *Firs de Siecle: How Centuries End, 1400-2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Briggs and Snowman (eds), *Firs de siecle*, p.175.

<sup>8</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p.21.

In Britain, the term *fin-de-siecle* was considered suspect: an exotic, foreign term denoting the culture of decadence and hedonism of late Victorian aesthetes<sup>9</sup>. According to Ausubel the late Victorians considered themselves to be living in a time of troubles: 'They had complicated problems to solve and they disagreed sharply as to how to go about solving them.'<sup>10</sup> For Englishman Holbrook Jackson the decade fell into two halves: the first 'remarkable for a literary and artistic renaissance, degenerating into decadence; the second for a new sense of patriotism degenerating into jingoism'.<sup>11</sup>

The 1890s was a decade peppered with epithets. It was the 'Notorious Nineties', the 'Epoch of Experiment', and the 'Age of Transition'; the period of the 'late Victorians' and the 'crisis of liberalism'; and it was characterised by the 'aesthetic cult', the 'symbolist movement', the 'culture of modernism' and the 'New Journalism'. In the United States, the *fin-de-siecle* years and those up to World War One were the 'Gilded Age', the 'Gay Nineties', and the era of 'Progressive Democracy'. Here too, these years represented a turning point: a period of cultural transformation and modernism.

The nineteenth century *fin-de-siecle* was a crucible, transforming a Victorian world into a modern world:

The Eighteen Nineties was the decade of a thousand 'movements'. People said it was a 'period of transition', and they were convinced that they were passing not only from one social system to another, but from one morality

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<sup>9</sup> A correspondent, 'Unknown Quantity', wrote in a letter to the editor at the time: 'The moral decline of the nation had begun... in the eighties, with the spread of agnosticism and the birth of the Aesthetic Movement, a combination which had rapidly led to a 'new gospel' in which 'we were told to ransack life for pleasurable sensations, to live and enjoy to the uttermost'. A period of material and intellectual 'extravagance' had followed, its style set by a London 'Society' which enjoyed 'the unintelligible verses of obscene French lunatics and criminals', while the lower classes applauded music-hall songs that 'had for their refrain not words but a string of absolutely meaningless syllables hyphenated together'. Changes in aesthetic taste had diminished decorum to the extent that 'the young lady who talked about her soul had given place to the young lady who talked about her sex in its relationship to your own'. Even the middle classes had become infected, their newspapers taken over by discussions of the failure of marriage and the rights of women ... 'Extravagance and levity - a restless and morbid spirit - all that was implied by that tawdry, borrowed, used-out, detestable word *fin-de-siecle* - these things,' warned 'Unknown Quantity', 'have brought us to the point of departure for revolution,' cited in John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p.7.

<sup>10</sup> Herman Ausubel, *The Late Victorians* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1955), p.9.

<sup>11</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, p.1.

to another, from one culture to another, and from one religion to a dozen or none!<sup>12</sup>

The movements and changes of the 1890s were borne out of the developments in the years prior to 1890, and expanded their impact in the years subsequent to 1899. Change, according to John Stokes, was produced by ‘the clash of opposing tendencies, “decadence” against “imperialism” most obviously.’<sup>13</sup> In politics, industry, bureaucracy, and technology, change came, not fluidly but in shuddering bursts.

Socially, the class system and gender roles were likewise subject to change: political issues surrounding sexuality, the domestic sphere and the position of women were vigorously discussed, and change was often achieved, or imposed. The ‘Woman Question’, ‘Woman Movement’ and ‘New Women’ were all identified as contemporary themes attracting debate and commentary in literature and the press. The term ‘feminist’ was coined and applied for the first time. A new self-consciousness about gender was collectively experienced by and about women, and organisation in the public sphere around issues of sex and gender could be observed among groups of women throughout the western world.

The argument I present in this thesis centres on the decade of the 1890s, but also considers relevant material from the 1880s to 1920.<sup>14</sup> Just as the period spans several decades, so do the women involved encompass a couple of generations. Louisa Lawson, Maybanke Anderson and Rose Scott were all born within a few years of one another. Catherine Helen Spence, Emma Miller and Henrietta Dugdale were older. Bessie Rischbieth, the Golding sisters and the Goldsteins were younger.

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<sup>12</sup> Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties*, p.31.

<sup>13</sup> John Stokes, *In the Nineties*, p.xix.

<sup>14</sup> Rather than restrict this research within the constraint of one strict decade I am using John Docker’s flexible understanding of the ‘nineties to be the final two decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth century (to the end of World War One), and employ Holbrook Jackson’s defence: ‘I have not confined myself strictly to a single decade, for it will be seen that my Nineties trespass upon the adjoining territory of the Eighties and the Nineteen Hundreds ... the compromise is defensible as I have not wilfully singled out a decade for review; that decade had singled itself out’ (p.14).

It is often a feminist historian's complaint that periodisation is an artificial and masculinist way to divide history.<sup>15</sup> It denies the continuity of movements and continuous threads of development across time, asserting instead that the beginnings and endings of all things can be defined with false precision by arbitrary time markers. Traditional periodisation defines history in vast slabs, labelled according to the progress of patriarchy, hence the 'Dark Ages' (which were a time of comparative emancipation for women),<sup>16</sup> the 'Renaissance' (a period of redoubled oppression of women), and the 'Age of Enlightenment' (during which Rousseau said 'women's entire education should be planned in relation to men').<sup>17</sup> Clearly the turning points of historical change for women differ from those that have mattered to men. 'Can women's history claim new periodisations?' asks Yvonne Knibiehler.<sup>18</sup> Periodisation is an essential process by which the historian targets points of change, and hence marks transitions from one stage to another. 'When history is seen from the perspective of women's experience,' argue Sklar and Dublin, 'then new categories of analysis are clearly needed ...'.<sup>19</sup> Periodisation is necessary to the argument presented in these pages because, to paraphrase Holbrook Jackson, the period singled itself out; and because it will help to locate and confine the material within manageable proportions; but the *fin-de-siecle* period will be loosely defined.

### *Fin-de-siecle* in Australia

*Australian development has tended to be a thing of fits and starts. At one moment there is a vigorous programme of expansion, undertaken with over-optimistic enthusiasm and carefree abandon; then comes a crisis of greater or lesser severity, in turn followed by a phase of caution.*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 'Masculine chronological sequences have their own coherence, their orientation, their perspective,' Yvonne Knibiehler, 'Chronology and Women's History' in *Writing Women's History*, ed. Michelle Perrot (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p.34; see also Gerda Lerner, *Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, pp.13-14.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, French women, who were better off, in terms of legislation, in the Dark Ages than they were under Napoleon's Civil Code, implemented in 1804.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, 1762: '... the whole education of women should be related to that of men. To please them, to be useful to them, to become loved and honoured by them; to bring them up when young, to care for them when grown; to advise, to console them, to make life easy and pleasant for them – these are the duties of women at every age, and this is what they should be taught from childhood,' translated [from the French] by Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1974).

<sup>18</sup> Knibiehler in Perrot, *Writing Women's History*, p.37.

<sup>19</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin (eds), Introduction to *Women and Power in American History: A Reader, Vol II from 1870* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1991), p.1.

<sup>20</sup> A.G.L. Shaw, *The Story of Australia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p.137.

For Australia, emerging into post-colonial nationhood, the period focusing on the 1890s was a watershed politically, culturally, socially, technologically, industrially. Despite geographical isolation the spirit of change infected Australia, though the movements and organisations often had a different character to the British or American manifestations. The pace and focus of change was different here: sometimes Australia was in the vanguard for the world; at other times, the vision and imagination of some political or cultural leaders failed and Australia was humiliatingly left behind. The 'nineties brought a burgeoning of political consciousness in Australia. Federation, trade unionism and the right to strike, the birth of the Labor Party, and female suffrage were the major items on the political agenda. Australia was a 'debutante nation,'<sup>21</sup> about to take the step into the world arena as a nation newly independent of its colonial ties.

By the 1890s Australia had reached a turning-point; a 'phase of caution'. Richard Evans in his ambitious early book *The Feminists*, observed that it was only from the second half of the nineteenth century that Australia began to 'escape its origins as a (predominantly male) penal colony' and to develop the institutions of a modern society; it was a society 'in the throes of creation.'<sup>22</sup> The boom of the 'eighties slid into the depression of the 'nineties and corresponded with a growth of political consciousness. A revolution took place in transport and communication. Telegraph lines connected the colonies and established instantaneous communication with the rest of the world. Steamers and clippers halved the time it took to travel to Australia from England. Railway, telephones, bicycles and motor cars had all been introduced by the end of the century. Journalism flourished in many forms: weeklies like the *Argus* and the *Bulletin*, William Lane's the *Boomerang* and the *Worker*, and an array of daily newspapers such as the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

It was a period of innovation, optimism and experimentation. Typically, as Helen Irving notes, experiment and reform often met with conservative opposition: it was a period of both opportunity and obstacle.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> As described by the editors of *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contest the 1890s*, S. Magarey, S. Sheridan, and S. Rowley (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Richard Evans, *The Feminists: women's emancipation movements in Europe, America and Australasia, 1840-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), p.59.

<sup>23</sup> Helen Irving, ed., *A Woman's Constitution: Gender and History in the Australian Commonwealth* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1996), p.viii.

Accompanying significant economic upheaval was industrial unrest, beginning on the wharves and moving to shearers, miners and thousands of other workers across eastern Australia. Henry Lawson's journalism, poetry and fiction described the figure of the trade unionist: in solidarity built on mateship, he was a battler who would never let down his mates by 'scabbing'.

Russel Ward and John Robertson describe the decade of the 1890s as the time when Australia's national identity was shaped, in literature, art and politics, and maintain that it was this upsurge in nationalism that helped to bring about the federation of the colonies in 1901.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Federation was spurred on by a range of intersecting factors. The depression of the 'nineties had highlighted the drawbacks of existing as independent colonies and helped to persuade the colonial leaders that they might face the difficulties of the future more effectively as a united force. Defence was a factor too, with the French in New Caledonia and Germans in New Guinea, and the four million white inhabitants of Australia ill-placed to defend their massive territory. Trade unionism demonstrated that common interests crossed colonial boundaries, as did the organisations of business and industry that also 'federated'. Magazines like the *Bulletin* encouraged a nationalist sentiment and catered to national readership. Chinese immigration was perceived as a threat to all colonies which required a national, united response. In 1903 novelist Ada Cambridge recalled the excited anticipation that accompanied Federation:

I cannot describe the state of tension we were in, the sense of fateful happenings that possessed us that day ... Australia believed herself on the threshold of the Golden Age.<sup>25</sup>

However Federation also revealed negative uncertainties: fear of racial vulnerability led to xenophobic immigration and defence policies. As Goldberg and Smith comment in their introduction to *Australian Cultural History*, the period was an unfortunate one to be in the business of nation-building:

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<sup>24</sup> Russel Ward and John Robertson (eds) *Such Was Life: select documents in Australian social history Vol 2 1851-1913* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Cooperative, 1980), p.235.

<sup>25</sup> Ada Cambridge, *Thirty Years in Australia* (London: Methuen, 1903), p.295.

It was a time of powerful social Darwinism and chauvinist nationalism; faith in hierarchies of race ordained by nature, with British Australians at the top; anxieties about the inevitability of economic and social progress and the survival of the Empire; worries about health ... sexual prowess and 'race suicide' presaged by contraception, at which Australians were early adepts; uncertainties about the ethical and scriptural foundations of the Christianity that justified behavioural boundaries.<sup>26</sup>

Australia was manifestly tied to Britain historically, politically, and culturally, but increasingly other international influences were being felt, especially those of America, which shared the experience of being a new nation populated with immigrants, indigenes and pioneers. Emulating the great cities of the world, Sydney and 'Marvellous Melbourne' held exhibitions which were intended to announce their debut onto the international scene as cities of cultural note and commercial potential. The international exhibitions were immensely popular and inestimably important as demonstrations of merit and identity. The smaller capitals mimicked the examples of Sydney and Melbourne and held their own smaller-scale exhibitions.

Colonists had higher literacy levels since the 1890 Education Acts, and consequently a greater demand for literature. An appreciation of the arts was indicated by the interest in 'culture', the term used by Matthew Arnold in 1869 to mean 'the study of perfection'. In Australia, while modernism had some impact, traditionally commentators and historians have considered this period significant for the development of a definitively Australian culture, attitude and style. A.G.L. Shaw observed that almost for the first time:

there appeared an appreciation of the beauty of the bush, no longer compared unfavourably with the English countryside simply because it was different, but seen to have a peculiar charm of its own when looked at 'through clear Australian eyes, and not through bias-bleared English spectacles'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith (eds), *Australian Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.5.

<sup>27</sup> Shaw, *The Story of Australia*, p.162.

In Australia, writers such as Tom Collins, Barbara Baynton and Banjo Paterson celebrated the bush in poetry and prose, while painters Julian Ashton, Tom Roberts, Charles Condor and Arthur Streeton captured it on canvas. Telling stories with Australian content, landscape and characters was the work of these artists and writers who appeared to have been untouched by the aesthetic movement in England. In his history *Claiming a Continent*, David Day characterises the taming of the bush both physically and metaphorically:

The bush had largely been pacified by the rifles of the native police and the pens of the writers, by the poisons of the pastoralists and the paints of the Heidelberg School artists.<sup>28</sup>

Australia was portrayed as vast, loaded with resources and boundless opportunity. The Australian national character was male:

tall, spare ... clean and wiry rather than muscular ... he takes everything on its merits and nothing on authority ... in the country especially frankness is written largely across his face ...<sup>29</sup>

the men who ... seemed to embody most fully the national impulse ... Much of the country's idiom, whatever was racy and indigenous in its growing literature derived from them ... With their sardonic humour, their initiative, their faculty for improvisation, their underlying idealism they had built up a recognisable Australian character.<sup>30</sup>

Yet even as artists turned their talents to Australian themes their representation was already outdated: most of the population lived on the coastal fringe not in the bush, and the rugged bushman had only ever been a romantic illusion.

While it was true that women had always comprised a minority of the population in the colonies, the Australian national myth rendered women almost completely invisible. The rare evocation of a woman in literature at the time, Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife* (1892), made the heroic female character resigned to the demands of her lonely life.

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<sup>28</sup> David Day, *Claiming a Continent: a new history of Australia* (Australia: HarperCollins, 2001), p.157.

<sup>29</sup> C.E.W. Bean, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1907, cited in Ward and Robertson (eds) *Selected Documents*, pp.248-9.

<sup>30</sup> Vance Palmer, *The Legend of the Nineties* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1954), pp.135-6.

Manning Clark describes the reasons why 'there was no greater tyranny than that of a man over a woman' in Australia at the time:

The great excess of men over women in the convict period, the dispersion of settlement, the prestige and esteem conferred on the masculine qualities of physical strength in the pioneer days supplemented by the teaching of the Christian and Jewish religions, had reproduced in Australia the most monstrous tyrant portrayed in the Old Testament – Abraham. Just as in the Middle East a ghastly country had incubated a ghastly theology, so here a similarly ghastly country spawned the domination of man over woman, husband over wife, father over children.<sup>31</sup>

### Women at the *fin-de-siecle*

Against a backdrop of the Western *fin-de-siecle* world preoccupied with change, the women of Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom began a social movement. They took up the examples that had gone before of women associating and pursuing intellectual work, and they expanded and organised the activity, and disseminated their efforts. By establishing clubs and societies they began the intellectual work of creating a feminist consciousness that supported a challenge to conventional notions of women's sphere.

The expectations surrounding women's role and marriage became the subject of a great deal of attention, both in Australia and overseas. In the early nineteenth century the Saint-Simonians in France and the Owenites in England developed a critique of marriage as an institution, inspiring other social commentators such as Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill to endorse moves towards women's independent and full participation in society. Despite marriage being considered the natural state for women, it entailed, in law, the suspension of a woman's existence. In marriage a woman lost control of her property, her earnings, the right to enter a contract, and to control her own body. By the mid-nineteenth century, marriage was a common topic of debate in literature, the press and parliament. However, amendments to legislation concerning married women did not

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<sup>31</sup> Manning Clark, *A History of Australia Volumes V and VI from 1888 to 1935* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1999), p.134.

relieve the difficulties encountered by the increasing numbers of unmarried women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. When marriage was seen as the only legitimate occupation for a woman, a 'failure' to marry left women regarded as 'redundant' and 'superfluous', and 'no more deserving of sympathy and assistance than was any other business failure.'<sup>32</sup> (This was a far more likely fate for British women where the problem of the gender imbalance was the reverse of Australia's situation.)

Lucy Bland's article, "The Married Woman, the "New Woman" and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s"<sup>33</sup> explores the vexed – often contradictory – attitudes towards marriage and sexuality debated by feminist women in Britain during the 1890s. While the main work of feminism was campaigning for suffrage and pursuing reform to legislation for married women, a number of women involved in the married women's campaigns pursued more radical agendas. Prominent activist women such as Eleanor Marx and Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy lived openly with their male partners (although Wolstoneholme Elmy married when she became pregnant). But Bland's article suggests that they were exceptions and 'free love' was not widely supported by the women's movement. Nevertheless, the issues raised in the simultaneous critique of marriage and hostility to free union, became an agenda for the twentieth century not only in Britain but in Australia as well: rape in marriage, contraception, sexually transmitted disease, male sexuality, sex education, divorce, illegitimacy, free love.

In *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930*, Sheila Jeffreys describes a massive campaign by Victorian-era women to reform male sexual behaviour.<sup>34</sup> She argues that feminist concerns shaped the so-called 'social purity' agenda in the 1880s and 1890s. A large number of organisations in Britain were formed around the issues of child abuse, prostitution, rape in marriage, pornography. The feminist agenda was the transformation of men's sexual behaviour by exposing the double standards of sexual morality. In England in 1884 the *Matrimonial Causes Act* was amended to permit women to gain separations on the grounds of assault, and in 1893 legislation was passed allowing women to be independent owners of their own property. Divorce remained a vexed area,

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Caine, 'Woman's "natural state": marriage and the nineteenth century feminists,' *Hecate*, Vol.3, No.1 (1977), p.95.

<sup>33</sup> In *Equal or Different: women's politics 1800-1914*, ed. Jane Rendall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997).

with the British feminists of the later nineteenth century less inclined to engage in debate on the issue than Harriet Taylor had been half a century earlier, or, indeed, Louisa Lawson and Maybanke Wolstoneholme were in Australia.

Ibsen's *The Doll's House* toured Australia in the 1890s, prompting heated debate about 'the Woman Question', morality and sexual freedom, economic independence and the role of women in modern society. The legislative disadvantages for women in the marriage bond and the actual tragedies of bad and broken marriages led some women (including Louisa Lawson and Maybanke Wolstoneholme) towards agitation and reform.

Despite the historical significance of the period, even feminist history found it easy at first to overlook the 1890s. In Britain, wedged between the groundbreaking campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886 and the rise of militant suffragism in the early twentieth century, the 1890s seem like a period of feminist inactivity. Indeed, a great deal of women's activity of the period could not be described as explicitly or consciously feminist. However the 1890s has gained particular interest as the period of so-called first wave feminism.<sup>35</sup> Conventional periodisation has the decade of the 1890s as more of a trough than a wave: in Britain, Harriet Taylor and Josephine Butler had gained notoriety with their campaigns earlier in the century; the militant suffragettes of the Women's Social and Political Union lay in the future.<sup>36</sup> However, in the United Kingdom and the United States, as in Australia, the 1890s was actually a period of growth of opportunity for women, in education, employment and politics. David Rubinstein describes the period as being a 'women's decade' in which female stereotypes were being replaced with alternative 'new woman' depictions, and the 'woman question' gained a new topicality and audience.<sup>37</sup> The 'New Woman' writers included Sarah Grand, Emma Brooke, George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne), Mona Caird. Male novelists also portrayed 'New Women' heroines and themes; notably George Gissing, and John Galsworthy whose *Forsyte Saga* picks up many of these as themes in its portrayal of a

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<sup>35</sup> The 'wave' theory of feminism argues that feminism recurs, reinvents itself at different times because it has been lost, silenced or submerged in the troughs between resurgences. It is an unsatisfactory theory for while it illuminates the major movements in feminism, it denies any links or connections between the 'waves'. Nevertheless, as a metaphor it is widely understood and is occasionally useful as a shorthand means of distinguishing the feminists at the turn of the century from those of the second half of the twentieth century. A discussion of the feminist historian's dilemma in dealing with the problem of the waves model can be found in Zora Simic's article 'Notes in Search of a Location for Between the Waves of Feminism', *Outskirts Online Journal*, <http://www.chloe.uwa.edu.au/outskirts/>.

<sup>36</sup> The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed in 1903.

<sup>37</sup> David Rubinstein, *Before the suffragettes: women's emancipation in the 1890s* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986).

wealthy Victorian family wrestling with issues related to marriage and feminism as well as class and the new aesthetic.<sup>38</sup>

The commonly held belief that woman was the moral superior to man was conducive to the Victorian notions of chaste femininity (and to its correlative myth of woman as politically incapacitated), but followed a slightly different direction in the United States. Reform movements around issues concerning marriage, contraception, and divorce, for example, were infected by a devout notion of social purity; campaigns had far more religious overtones and conservative characters than corresponding activities in Britain. The struggle for temperance was an extension of the moral guardian role allotted to women. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was composed entirely of women; the Anti-Saloon League relied on a large female membership. Through their rigorous imposition of moral order, crusading women of the late nineteenth century in America 'partially privatis[ed] the public scene.'<sup>39</sup>

In America, a secondary school for women was founded in 1821 in New York, however access to higher education was a long time coming. In 1861 Matthew Vassar had controversially founded a women's college at Poughkeepsie in New York, which served to highlight how limited the opportunities were for women to receive a college education. Many universities opened their doors to women during the civil war when their regular male clients were not available. By the 1880s American women had ready access to higher education, although in some cases it was on the basis of using separate facilities (for example, Cornell and Harvard). By the end of the century a higher education was seen as quite proper for a young woman, but postgraduate and professional training was often still denied and actual employment in professions was virtually non-existent.

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<sup>38</sup> John Galsworthy, *The Forsyte Saga* (London: Heineman, 1922). Interestingly, Galsworthy's novel *The Man of Property*, published in 1906, takes as a theme the fads in Britain at the turn of the century. His character, Mrs MacAnder, characterises the New Woman: 'Dressing tightly and well, she belonged to a Woman's Club, but was by no means the neurotic and dismal type of member who was always thinking of her rights.' It is interesting to see a reflection here of the experience of women in Australia. Belonging to a 'Woman's Club' was clearly typical behaviour for British women of certain education and status. Evidently it was also common practice on the part of male society to mock such participation.

<sup>39</sup> Jeanine Brun-Rouet, 'Private Life and Public Scene in the Gilded Age', in *Impressions of a Gilded Age: The American Fin de Siede*, Marc Chenetier and Rob Kroes (eds) (Amsterdam: Amerika Institut, 1983), p.211.

By the end of the nineteenth century, one third of American women aged between 16 and 20 were in the paid workforce. The age bracket is significant; women experienced the paid workforce between schooling and marriage. Middle-class women found employment in teaching, nursing, and officework. Working-class women were employed in factories and in domestic labour. A rare few women were employed in professional jobs and academia. In 1898 Charlotte Perkins Gilman published *Women and Economics* which argued for the rights of women to choose to find independence in work. The movement of women into the workforce represented a further encroachment into the public sphere.

In Britain, women were taking on new roles in the public sphere. The 'new women' were the generation of women who were entering employment or higher education. The Women's Trade Union League, the Women's Cooperative Guild and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies attracted large memberships and provided forums for women to develop political skills and tactics. In the United States women had been prominent in the public sphere for some time because of their roles in religious, temperance and abolition movements. Women were graduating from universities and entering professions. The settlement houses were flourishing. Simultaneously with its burgeoning imperialism, the United States was playing host to international movements such as meetings of the International Women Suffrage Conference and the International Council of Women.

Perhaps inspired by the Western-world-wide trend to organise, agitate and change, Australian women – particularly the urban, middle class – showed a keen taste for association themselves. Across Australia, but particularly in the most populated urban centres of Sydney and Melbourne, women established and joined clubs, groups and societies of varied kinds and purposes. Like the women in the United Kingdom and the United States, Australian women were making unprecedented inroads on the public sphere in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and like them too, they saw the vote as the means to solve the legislative inequities that obstructed their lives. However, in contrast to the dramatic struggles of the United States women suffragists and abolitionists, and the soon to erupt militancy of United Kingdom suffragists, women in Australia in the 1890s period appear – superficially at least – to have enjoyed a

comparatively placid and equable path towards social and political emancipation.<sup>40</sup> Suffrage was won as early as 1894 by South Australian women; Higher Education Acts admitted women to tertiary study; the Board of Sydney University offered to construct a women's space for the fledgling female students, which became the Women's College. To the external observer it must have appeared that all over Australia, society, academia and the parliament were falling over themselves to hand over the rights being fought for so bitterly elsewhere in the world. However, Ian Turner's observation in 1970 that 'unlike their British sisters, Australian women were, in the 1880s, handed the vote on a plate' is justly dismissed as 'historical amnesia' by Katie Spearritt.<sup>41</sup> Even a superficial investigation into the flowering of women's groups, publications and appearances in the public sphere demonstrate that women were indeed actively organising and campaigning to achieve equality in many areas, including the vote. The real story of the achievement of suffrage at least, was one of a decade of struggle and frustration.

Marilyn Lake's 1986 article, 'The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context' suggests that any progress made by women was matched by a vitriolic backlash from the masculinist culture. She cites the frequent misogyny of the *Bulletin*, especially under the editorship of J.F. Archibald, and the propensity for male writers describing the 'national character' and 'national tradition' to perpetuate a patriarchal conceptual framework. Nevertheless, in response to Marilyn Lake, John Docker observes that it is in these years that women's participation in society flourished: their entry into the paid workforce grew across an increasing range of occupations; birth and marriage rates fell; women took up imported fads: smoking, bicycling, Rational Dress; they entered higher education. Clearly information about overseas movements spread effectively across and through the Australian colonies. However the debates in Australia were overlaid with the other topical obsessions with nationalism and colonialism.

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<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note a relevant example. In *Australia's First: A History of the University of Sydney Volume 1 1850-1939* (Sydney: University of Sydney with Hale and Iremonger, 1991), Clifford Turney, Ursula Bygott and Peter Chippendale note that there were two major factors that led the Chancellor of the University of Sydney, William Manning, to propose opening his institution to women in 1881: the precedent created by other universities in Britain and elsewhere in Australia; and the improved quality of girls' secondary education. 'There was no apparent pressure from any women's movement in the colony,' note Turney et.al. Indeed, in his Chancellor's address in 1881, Manning himself said that he had concluded that: 'the right course was to settle and declare the principle of women's right to equality within the University, and that it would be better to open its portals at once so that the sex might plainly see their way to enter whenever they should be disposed to climb up to it by the necessary paths of preparation - rather than the Senate should wait till they come to our gates knocking for admission.'

<sup>41</sup> Katie Spearritt, 'First Wave Feminism 1880-1914', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, eds Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: HBJ, 1992), p.331.

Richard Evans maintained provocatively that feminism ‘never really succeeded in striking roots in Australasian society’ because the vote was achieved very early after a campaign he asserts was directed mostly by the moderates in the WCTU, and which then ‘faded away... Because it had from the beginning conceded so many legal rights to women, Australasia became a society without feminism.’<sup>42</sup> This observation is belied by the organisation of women into groups and societies across all the colonies/states for a range of purposes. Their continued existence after the vote was won suggests both that feminism continued to develop and that the need for feminist consciousness did not go away just because women had won the vote and some of the worst of the discriminatory legislation had been amended.

Enfranchisement of women had been publicly debated for much of the nineteenth century; first in the English Parliament and later in the United States Congress. Politicisation of women at this time may have revolved around women’s franchise, but the experience of campaigning for, and achieving the vote, gave women the skills and tools to organise around other issues too. Gaining the vote was not an end in itself; the struggle was motivated by a vision of what suffrage could achieve. Women’s particular perceptions of what Australian society could be (and which the vote would help them achieve) were formulated during this period of the 1890s too. Inspired by overseas influences and experiences, and propelled by the circumstances of politicisation, education and affluence, women organised and networked, consciously and unconsciously constructing feminism for Australians.

The intellectual traditions of Australian feminism find the most solid roots here in these notoriously tumultuous, productive, transforming *fin-de-siecle* years. While it is true that women everywhere have always networked and organised and had feminist agendas,<sup>43</sup> it is also evident that the 1890s found Australian women actively, publicly and assertively doing this work, with a new commitment to making Australia different and better for all women.

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<sup>42</sup> Evans, *The Feminists*, p.63.

<sup>43</sup> Most often however, this has been ignored or relegated by history as a feature only of the domestic sphere. Texts such as Dale Spender’s *There’s Always Been a Woman’s Movement This Century* (London: Pandora Press, 1983), remind us that women’s feminist activity has existed even where we cannot easily see it.

## II. Associations of Women

In the 1880s the average number of children born to an Australian woman was eight. By 1900 the average had halved to four. Where politicians and clergy saw a national emergency in the declining birth rate, women saw opportunity and freedom to pursue education and careers. The deliberate quest of Australian women at the end of the nineteenth century for an intellectual grounding for their political activities and positions is reminiscent of other periods and places, before and since.<sup>44</sup> Women organised in a vast array of different areas and activities with varying degrees of feminist purpose. Negotiating the public sphere required skills with which women were not traditionally equipped and they saw association with one another as an appropriate means to identify and acquire them. Precedents existed for women to meet and engage intellectually, in the European salons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in the American (and a few British) clubs of the nineteenth century. Frances Holden's recruitment circular asking for 'thoughtful women who want themselves to learn how best to face the battle of life'<sup>45</sup> summed up the real motivation for women joining clubs and societies in Australia in this period. In their organisations they removed themselves from their domestic lives and sought a new purpose and sphere, and a better understanding of the new potential for women in a changed political landscape. They consciously developed their intellectual capacities and civic skills, and implicitly challenged received conventions about women's place.

### The European tradition of salons

The Australian women's groups drew support from models across their colonial borders and even from overseas. Precedents for women organising in intellectual and cultural pursuits also existed across time, in the historical example of the European salon. The antecedents of the late nineteenth century literary and intellectual societies in Australia may be located in seventeenth century Europe where there is evidence of women associating to fulfil their quest for intellectual stimulation; a pursuit denied them both by

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<sup>44</sup> For example, the women of the Langham Place Circle in the 1850s; the Bloomsbury set of the 1920s; the salon society, an enduring social and intellectual phenomenon, described further in Chapter One.

<sup>45</sup> See Frances Holden's circular 1888. Frances Holden's circular is among the papers of the Dawn Club on microfiche at the Mitchell Library

convention and by legislation that prohibited them from receiving a formal education. Women were relegated to roles in society that confined them mainly to the domestic realm. They rarely had public personae or occupied public office.

It is not surprising then that women who were inclined to resist socially imposed restrictions on their education and role in the world, based their subversive activities in their homes: originally, in fact, in a bedroom. The institution of the salon was created in the Parisian bedroom of a wealthy French noblewoman, Catherine de Vivonne, Marquise de Rambouillet (1588-1665). The famous *chambre bleue* was the domain of the Marquise after she took ill following the birth of her seventh child. From here she directed conversation among the social and artistic elite of France, insisting at all times on tastefulness, courtesy and polite behaviour. The salon was a place in which 'talented and learned women could meet with men as intellectual equals, rather than as exceptional prodigies.'<sup>46</sup> Authors of both sexes were encouraged to share their work and comment on each other's ideas:

Authors could clarify their ideas by filtering them through the minds of peers and admirers; there they found occasions to test their worth in the liveliness of conversation and in continual exchange with significant others.<sup>47</sup>

The salon mediated between the male producers of literature and their new female audience. Marmontel observed that:

Those who desire to write with precision, energy and vigour may be content to associate with men only; but those who wish their style to be flexible and supple, to express affability and charm, will do well, I believe, to live with women.<sup>48</sup>

The salon took on the function of critic, allowing writers to test unformed ideas, both on their target audience and on other brilliant minds, before committing them to publication. Some commentators are inclined to hold the *salonnieres* responsible for the

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<sup>46</sup> Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present Volume II*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), p.104.

<sup>47</sup> Lewis Coser, *Men of Ideas: a sociologist's view* (New York: Free Press, 1965), p.15.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in Coser, *Men of Ideas*, p.14.

trends in French literature of the rococo period: 'its journalistic verve and epigrammatic vigour, but also its occasional shallowness and striving for easy effect,'<sup>49</sup> attributable to the power women had as gatekeepers of the salons and arbiters of taste and fashion.

The idea of the salon was welcomed by Parisian society and quickly became an institution, the concept spreading to other European cities too. Rambouillet and her protégé, novelist Madeleine de Scudery, eschewed sex, and became known as the *precieuses* – the precious women:

By refusing physical love, by rising 'above' their sexual desires, they transformed themselves into 'precious women' – rare, difficult to obtain, delicate – whose chastity gave them power and moral prestige over their suitors. By refusing to have sex, these women freed themselves for a role beyond that of wife or courtesan and gained the power of virtue: they were living up to their culture's ideals about correct female sexual behaviour and they reaped the reward of moral authority.<sup>50</sup>

Other *salonnières* used their sexuality, rather than denied it, and several courtesans established reputations as celebrated *salonnières*. Clearly, not all *salonnières* were noble women: some rose from the bourgeoisie. *Salonnière* was a new role for a woman, and she could use it to bring the public sphere into her private domain, where she could participate in artistic, literary, even political debate. Like the Australian women at the end of the nineteenth century, these women were finding a way to challenge the public/private paradigm. Within the domestic, private realm the *salonnière* orchestrated debates with public figures about public issues. Conversely, within the public sphere of *fin-de-siècle* Australia, women set up private women's spaces to debate issues that were particular to women.

Some *salonnières* became remarkably powerful and influential. Madame Geoffrin was described as the 'prime minister of the society' of her time, as she presided over her

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<sup>49</sup> Coser, *Men of Ideas*, p.15.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of their Own*, p.105.

eighteenth-century salon.<sup>51</sup> Germaine de Stael led the intellectual and political opposition to Napoleon from her salon; twenty years earlier her mother, Suzanne Necker had used the influence of her salon to see her husband made Finance Minister of France. When successful *salonnieres* died, they bequeathed their salons to other women. The rivalry between *salonnieres* was sometimes intense. *Salonnieres* became arbiters of culture. They managed and promoted writers and artists and provided forums for the display of new talent. Diderot wrote of the role of salons in shaping the intellectual discourse of the eighteenth century:

Women accustom us to discuss with charm and clarity the driest and thorniest subjects. We talk to them unceasingly; we wish them to listen; we are afraid of tiring or boring them; hence we develop a particular method of explaining ourselves easily, and this passes from conversation into style.<sup>52</sup>

However, despite some *salonnieres* writing political pamphlets and books, they did not participate directly in political processes, and have been accused of perpetuating the inequities of the class system by their reluctance to admit the new writers and artists from rural and regional areas into their powerful circles.<sup>53</sup>

In England the salon idea took hold among the middle class rather than the aristocracy. Elizabeth Montagu initiated the salon in London by banning card games and positioning chairs in conversational circles. The basic idea arose from the same need of women to have intellectual diversion and challenge. English salons were attended by 'bluestockings', a reference to the relative informality and lack of social pretension of the salon (white or black stockings being prescribed for public affairs). Other influential salons were that of Lady Holland, 'the queen of Whig society,' in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Cambridge House, home of Lord Palmerston from 1850 to 1865:

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<sup>51</sup> Nupur Chaudhuri, 'The salon, the shops, the street: scenes of early feminism in eighteenth-century France' in *Views of Women's Lives in Western Tradition: Frontiers of the Past and the Future*, ed. Frances Richardson Keller, *Women's Studies*, Volume 5 (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1990).

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Chaudhuri, 'The salon, the shops, the street,' p.271.

<sup>53</sup> Coser, *Men of Ideas*, pp.11-18.

Cambridge House ... was called *the mansion, hallowed by a mighty shade, / Where the cards were cut and shuffled when the game of state was played.* The functions were said to owe much to the grace and suavity of Lady Palmerston who knew well the value of asking to their Saturday soirees the wives of MPs likely to give her husband trouble in the House.<sup>54</sup>

As a hostess at her house in Berkeley Square, Lady Jersey was virtually a public institution, according to James McCord in his article about Sarah Sophia Villiers, fifth countess of Jersey. Lady Jersey's house served as one of the Whigs' most important gathering places, where promising new men were integrated into Whig political culture:

She was so popular that Lady Holland accused Lady Jersey of 'taking her company from her,' and it was generally acknowledged that her gatherings had a better mix of the sexes than similar gatherings at Holland House. The central role of Berkeley Square for the Whigs was such that, when Lady Jersey was absent from London, party members saw it as more damaging than almost anything. 'Ill as we can spare speakers' in Parliament, said a rising star in the Whig party, Henry Brougham (1778-1868), on one occasion when the Jerseys had gone to Rome, 'we can still less afford such a loss as this.'<sup>55</sup>

In Scandinavia, Russia, Germany and Austria the salon flourished. Some salons sought to sponsor talented young women who had no other means of attaining publicity or financial backing, and it was in this way that Elizabeth Carter in England attained the backing to publish her translations of Epictetus.

At the same time as the salons were flourishing in France, more explicitly political women's clubs were also gaining popularity in several French cities. Marie Gouze composed a *DedARATION of the Rights of Women* which was based on the *DedARATION of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, and called for equal rights to education, employment and government.

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<sup>54</sup> Joan Perkin, *Victorian Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p.203.

<sup>55</sup> James McCord, 'Taming the female politician in early nineteenth-century England: John Bull versus Lady Jersey' in *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.13, Issue 4, 2002, pp.31-53.

In the salon, women created a new space in which they mingled with men as intellectual and cultural equals, however by the late eighteenth-century, the guests at a salon were typically mostly men. In the so-called period of Enlightenment, this did not dampen a growing perception that the salons fostered an unhealthy and dangerous sense of power and influence in women, and inevitably salons witnessed a decline.

The *salonnieres* had entered the male territory of culture, learning, and politics. Traditionally, European men had feared and condemned any semblance of female influence in politics; the eighteenth century, with its numerous examples of such influence brought forward a deluge of such complaints, often made by men who themselves enjoyed and profited from the *salonnieres* and courtesan's access to the powerful.<sup>56</sup>

Moliere satirised Mme de Rambouillet in his play *Precious Women Ridiculed*; Rousseau condemned the *salonnieres* in *Emile*; philosophers and salon-frequenters Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Montesquieu and Hegel all wrote disparagingly of the women who had hosted them; and of course 'bluestocking' shifted to become a pejorative term used to describe a woman with intellectual pretensions.<sup>57</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, German men had even begun to organise male-only social groups. Domesticity, innocence, and virtue in women were extolled, in opposition to the witty, educated, sexually powerful and politically knowing *salonnieres*. Female political activity was explicitly outlawed in France in 1793. Aristocratic *salonnieres* were among the victims of the revolution, and Napoleon had Germaine de Stael exiled. Marie Gouze was guillotined. In England a queen came to the throne who bore nine children and made her determined domesticity a powerful moral example for the nation.

The new space that had been created by women was repudiated politically and morally, and the traditional place for women, and the traditional nature of women was reasserted: as Anderson and Zinsser portray it, women moved out of the salon and back into the parlour. In Australia, however, the salon had a late blooming. The early governors' wives hosted salons that were an enclave for free settlers with wealth, education or culture.

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<sup>56</sup> Anderson and Zinsser, *A History of their Own*, p.114.

<sup>57</sup> 'The bluestocking was deemed an abnormal creation of a corrupt society – a fungus excrescence nourished by decay.' Description by Miss Sharman Crawford in M.L. Manning's article 'The Industrial Employment of Women: Thoughts suggested by the recent exhibitions of women's work in Melbourne and Sydney' in *Centennial Magazine*, Vol. 1 (Aug. 1888-July 1889), p.409.

They were a refuge, rather than a cultural powerhouse. In Van Dieman's Land, wife of the governor Sir John Franklin, the intrepid Lady Franklin, was keen to promote artistic and intellectual pursuits, and introduced a series of soirées for the well-to-do families, inviting them to join her for instruction in philosophy, science, classical music and literature.<sup>58</sup>

It was during the 1890s in Australia, that the salon returned to something like its original French form, providing a forum for political and intellectual debate for both sexes, as well as a domestic training ground for the women who would go on to create women's clubs and societies in the public sphere.

Rose Scott hosted a salon at her home in Jersey Street Woollahra on a Friday night for many years: the 'only real Salon Sydney has ever known', as her biographer, Judith Allen described it. The principal visitors in the 1880s were men and it is unclear how typically their wives accompanied them:

Some key women were included, but those most directly involved in these so-called 'great questions of the day' were men: politicians, judges, lawyers, public servants, academics, teachers, journalists, editors, publishers, novelists, poets, painters, composers and musicians, architects, town planners, clergymen, literary and cultural critics, philanthropists, businessmen and industrialists, as well as gentlemen of independent means and various interests. Many were university-educated. Many were married, or would be within a few years, and were members of the urban professional middle class ...<sup>59</sup>

At Rose Scott's salon, legislation such as the 1898 Early Closing Bill was drafted. Scott forced the male politicians to confront the sufferings and injustices of women by inviting, for example, shop girls to speak. Other issues debated include: free trade versus protection, industrial legislation, socialism, taxation, Utopianism, nationalism and

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<sup>58</sup> Lady Franklin's efforts were not well received. Author Louisa Anne Meredith who was a contemporary of the Franklins recorded that: 'Lady Franklin's attempts to introduce evening parties in the 'conversazione' style were highly unpopular with the pretty Tasmanians, who declared that they had no idea of being asked to an evening party, and then stuck up in rooms full of pictures and books, and shells and stones, and other rubbish, with nothing to do but hear people talk lectures, or else sit as mute as mice listening to what was called good music.' Cited in Anita Selzer, *Governors' Wives in Colonial Australia* (Canberra: National Library, 2002), pp.131-2.

<sup>59</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.27.

republicanism, capital punishment, public charities and their administration, temperance, Australian literature and literary criticism, Australian art and exhibitions, and urban social problems including slums, contagious diseases, prostitution, illegitimacy and juvenile delinquency.

Guests at Rose Scott's salon included Sir Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales and 'father of Federation'; Judge William Charles Windeyer and his wife Mary, a noted philanthropist; Principal of the Women's College at the University of Sydney, Louisa Macdonald and her companion Evelyn Dickinson; Bernhard Ringrose Wise, Chief Crown Prosecutor in the Attorney General's department in the 1880s and Oxford-educated proponent of liberalism; William Lane, author of *The Workingman's Paradise* and leader of the Utopian community established in Paraguay in the 1890s; and many other prominent public servants of note.

Rose Scott's salon was chiefly recorded in reminiscences after Scott's death, and then often by people who would have been too young to be present themselves in the 1880s, such as Miles Franklin. It is possible therefore that the version we have of Scott's salon owes something to a sense of honouring a great and deceased lady and to a romanticised yearning for a European tradition. Nevertheless, Scott's family and personal connections in Sydney were formidable, and it is possible that in her salon, 'the great questions of the day were debated ... and ... the course of politics, social reform and cultural mores was shaped by the deliberations transpiring in Scott's "salon".'<sup>60</sup> Judith Allen's caution about accepting at face value recounts of the political influence and decision-making power of Scott's salon, are based on the observation that so many of Scott's pet causes for reform nevertheless took so long to achieve. But at the least, the networks forged and sustained by the Friday night salon would have assisted Scott's emergence into public life in the 1890s, and given her effective access to power-holders for lobbying and influence.

Rose Scott's role as *salonniere* can be analysed in comparison with her French forerunners. Like the *precieuses* she was famously celibate – a spinster in a colony that was still suffering a gender imbalance and undersupplied with women. Most of her guests were (married) men, and she dominated her salon with 'charm, beauty, tact and diplomacy, advancing arguments with opponents not with aggression, but with alluring

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<sup>60</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.76.

persuasion and reason,' according to the accounts written after her death in 1925.<sup>61</sup> Like the French and English salons, Rose Scott's forum was a focus for debate about the important political and social questions of her society. Her salon gave her a chance to exploit familial and personal connections to give a woman's perspective on issues to the decision-makers of Sydney. Like several of the French and British women, Rose Scott seems to have used her salon as a training ground for an entrance into participation in the public sphere. Judith Allen regards Scott's first article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*<sup>62</sup> as evidence that the experience of hosting the salon had given her the confidence to voice her opinion in a public forum, and a certainty that it would be publicised and well-received. It was in the Friday night salon too, that Rose Scott first practised the skills as an eloquent and persuasive speaker that she would put to good use throughout the decade of the 'nineties and into the twentieth century.

Despite the precedent set by French intellectual women in their salons, and the feminist philosophy of the influential Saint-Simonians, French women did not gain the right to vote until 1944. In her book, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, Claire Moses identifies the ways in which the development of feminism in France differed so greatly from England, the United States and Australia. In France, the development of any movement as political as feminism was subject to the cycle of revolution and repression that characterised France for over a century. Under liberal regimes, feminism flourished and leaders emerged, agendas were formed, and political tactics developed. When conservatives reclaimed power, feminist leaders were exiled or executed. Moses documents examples of this cycle occurring in 1793, 1834, 1850 and 1871.<sup>63</sup> It was only after 1879, when liberals gained control of the Third Republic, that a continuous feminist movement became possible. Before then, interruption and discontinuity meant that each new generation of feminists had to begin again, with no possibility of building upon the work of predecessors. So while nineteenth-century Australian women were benefiting from the example of the eighteenth-century French *salonnieres*, French women themselves lagged considerably behind other countries in terms of civil equality with men.

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<sup>61</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.79. This effort to retrospectively cast Rose Scott as a beauty of immense femininity probably owes something to her friends' desire to protect her memory from the suspicion with which spinsters were regarded in the post-Freudian 'twenties.

<sup>62</sup> 'Home Lessons,' *Sydney Morning Herald*, April, 1889.

<sup>63</sup> Claire Goldberg Moses, *French Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

## From salons to clubs

Salons arose as a creative response to the effective physical restriction to the domestic sphere of women in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and as an expression of women's desire to engage at an intellectual level with the society of the time despite being denied access to formal education. That salons should fade as the means for private women to gain a voice among public men was inevitable as women gained increasingly direct access to the public sphere. The Industrial Revolution increased the ranks of the middle class and enriched it, at the same time bringing 'the strange gift of idleness to its girls and women.'<sup>64</sup> A shift in attitude towards the education of girls meant that women could legitimately gather in the public sphere to overtly pursue intellectual discourse. And the emergence of the debate about women's suffrage required that women find a public voice to campaign for issues on their political agendas.

Salons metamorphosed into the women's clubs and societies that proliferated towards the end of the nineteenth century. With the metamorphosis came a different emphasis. Clubs and societies had a range of purposes, objectives, procedures and types of membership. Though many continued the intellectual tradition of the salons, others focused on political and social issues. Members of many of the intellectual and cultural clubs came from the middle and upper class, like the salon regulars of previous centuries, but working women and uneducated or socially disadvantaged women were welcomed to other associations.

After a brief flourishing in the early part of the century (mostly among black women<sup>65</sup>), literary clubs and societies reappeared in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and rapidly attained ubiquity:

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<sup>64</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century 1875-1975* (Victoria: Presbyterian Ladies' College, 1975).

<sup>65</sup> Deborah Gray White documents the work of the later black women's clubs in her article 'The Cost of Club Work, the Price of Black feminism' in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Leacock, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993): 'Notwithstanding regional peculiarities, the goals of these clubs were basically the same across the country. Black clubwomen believed they could solve the problems of the race through intensive social service, particularly self-help activity ... other clubs were founded on the belief that one improved oneself by helping others.' (p.248)

This phenomenon ... appeared in every part of the country, transformed the lives of thousands of individual women, provided a support system for virtually every woman of professional or political or even literary ambition, and ... provided a safe setting in which women could begin to question the dominant ideology ...<sup>66</sup>

In 1868 a journalist, Mrs Jennie Cunningham Croly, was inspired by her exclusion from the men-only Press Club's dinner for Charles Dickens, to form a women's equivalent of the men's Press Club called Sirois for professional women. In Boston the New England Women's Club was established in the same year. 'Homes will be ruined, children neglected, woman is straying from her sphere,' wailed the *Boston Transcript*.<sup>67</sup> Similar clubs sprang up at such a rate that, by 1890 when Sirois organised a General Federation of women's clubs, it encompassed 190 clubs and 20 000 members. By 1900 membership had increased to 150 000; by 1910 it had reached over a million. In 1888 a convention of women leaders from eight different countries gathered in Washington DC to found the International Council of Women.

Many of the clubs that emerged at this time were explicitly devoted to overcoming what the women regarded as deficiencies in their education. Like the women in the Australian literary groups they saw themselves as kinds of intellectual self-help organisations; places for women to develop intellectually:

Many clubs eschewed outside speakers, or invited them only occasionally, insisting that members should prepare and read their own papers, no matter how badly, in order to learn how such things were done. Often they recognised that the chief value of these exercises was to the paper-giver, rather than to her audience.<sup>68</sup>

Anne Firor Scott describes women 'flocking' to the literary clubs and societies that 'proliferated as if some very contagious virus was loose in the female population.'<sup>69</sup> Scott's theory about their sudden popularity is that they met a desire for formal

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<sup>66</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.111.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.117.

<sup>68</sup> Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.119.

<sup>69</sup> Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.113.

education on the part of women who were denied access to higher education, though she quotes Susan B. Anthony putting forward her theory that all organisations of women led inevitably to the pursuit of the vote:

It doesn't matter whether an organisation is called ... a Portia Club, a sorosis, or a federation of clubs, a missionary society to reclaim the heathen of the Fiji Islands or an educational association ... somehow or other, everybody and every association that has spoken or reported has closed with a statement that what they are waiting for is the ballot.<sup>70</sup>

It is true that, in the United States, many new institutions created by and for women emerged after their involvement in earlier political activism, such as the abolitionist movement and Civil War. The organisations – often philanthropic in nature – such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the settlement movement created a 'social space' within which women networked and trained their new political leaders and discussed women's issues.<sup>71</sup> In *The Woman Movement* O'Neill asserts that the tendency of American women to associate in groups stemmed from their exclusion from the public sphere associations of men. O'Neill states that there were thousands of women's groups organised and functioning: holding meetings, raising money, debating public issues and seeking intellectual improvement:

In church auxiliaries and missionary societies, and then in philanthropic and charitable bodies, thousands of women found outlets for their altruism and wider fields of enterprise beyond the domestic circle.<sup>72</sup>

Within this climate, 'a revolution of rising expectations was launched.'<sup>73</sup> Women's clubs had begun to develop formally around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The societies took various forms and some extraordinary names, as documented by Anne Firor Scott:

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<sup>70</sup> Susan B. Anthony cited in Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.134.

<sup>71</sup> Sklar and Dublin, *Women and Power in American History: a reader* (N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1991), p.7.

<sup>72</sup> William O'Neill, *The Woman Movement: feminism in the United States and England* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), p.18.

<sup>73</sup> O'Neill, *The Woman Movement*, p.18.

In Philadelphia there was a Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances; in New York, one group, inclined to specificity, called itself the Female Association for the Relief of the Sick Poor and for the Education of Such Female Children as Do Not Belong To or Are Not Provided For by Any Religious Society.<sup>74</sup>

Scott notes that from the beginning benevolent women were 'intent on their own spiritual and intellectual improvement' and that they felt at ease seeking to improve themselves within the context of social responsibility. They created 'reading circles' and literary societies, though these lost impetus as the standards of school education for girls improved.

Kate Larson's 2001 article 'The Saturday Evening Girls: A Progressive Era Library Club And The Intellectual Life Of Working Class And Immigrant Girls In Turn-Of-The-Century Boston' tells about one of the efforts to attract working girls to club membership in order to enhance their intellectual development. Originally established in 1899 to provide intellectual stimulation for young Jewish and Italian working women and girls, the Saturday Evening Club spawned seven additional library clubs. The Saturday Evening Girls and the other library clubs met weekly to 'take an intelligent individual, as well as collective, interest in civic, social and economic affairs.'<sup>75</sup> For some of the young members, the club became a substitute for the high school education they never had. They took an active interest in current affairs and engaged guest speakers to enlighten them. They attended suffrage rallies and published a weekly newsletter called the S.E.G. News. Larson sees the Saturday Evening Clubs as particularly subversive examples of women's association because as the young female members were challenged intellectually they were in turn challenging 'systems that had institutionalised low expectations of them as women and as immigrants ... "these girls were quite ordinary. In their ordinariness, they proved extraordinary."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.13.

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Kate Clifford Larson, 'The Saturday Evening Girls: a progressive era library club and the intellectual life of working class and immigrant girls in turn-of-the-century Boston' in *Library Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No.2, (April, 2001), p.206.

<sup>76</sup> Larson, 'The Saturday Evening Girls', p.217.

Clubs had long been popular as social outlets for men. In 'The World of Women', a 1935 article describing club-life in Australia, Estelle Macken asserted that the popularity of clubs arose from 'an instinctive love of society' which explained why people 'from time immemorial got together to discuss the hobbies or interests they had in common.'<sup>77</sup> The clubs that were traditionally associated with men only, originated in the taverns and coffee-houses of centuries ago, frequented by luminaries such as Shakespeare, Jonson, and Raleigh. Macken observed that, in those days, sociability was the main objective whereas the attraction for modern men seemed to be the escape from home, family, and women. She quoted George Augusta Sala's definition of a club as 'a weapon used by savages to keep the white woman at a distance.'

The later years of the nineteenth century witnessed a phenomenal increase in the popularity of men's clubs and associations. In the United States, for example, over 500 organisations emerged. Symptomatic of a change in the use of leisure as urbanisation made its impact on traditional family life, these groups grew to have a membership of over six million by 1890, representing about 40 per cent of the total male population over the age of 21.

The groups described themselves variously as temples, clans, castles, conclaves, hives and lodges. Their appeal lay partly in membership benefits such as business contacts and sickness benefits, but also in the elaborate ceremony and ritual of the meetings:

[There was a] stampede to become members of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, the United Order of Druids, the Tribes of Ben Hur, the Independent Order of Gophers, the Prudent Patricians of Pompeii, or the Concatenated Order of Hoo-Hoo ... [which] provided such a striking contrast to workshop or factory, to the dull level of so much home life, that their appeal could hardly be withstood ... In colourful regalia, men departed the everyday world of work and worry for a momentary pageant of mystery and make-believe.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Estelle Macken, 'The world of women: club life in Australia,' *The New Nation Magazine*, 15 February, 1935, p.33.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p.203.

Many of the groups admitted women as auxiliary members (Daughters of Rebekah, Pythian Sisters) to provide services such as fund-raising and organisation of suppers and social events.

Paul Hayes also notes a rapid increase in the number of men's social clubs and associations in Europe at the time. Describing it as a sign that the culture of the masses was changing and the old styles of leisure activities declining, Hayes attributes the proliferation of clubs to better and cheaper transport: 'especially in Britain and German ... they brought people from different areas and backgrounds together.'<sup>79</sup> Hayes also identifies associations and societies as one of several new forms of political pressure groups that emerged in this period, indicating a changing relationship between state and society.

In Australia as in England, membership of certain clubs was an indication of social standing and a source of important networks essential for success in working life. The exclusion of women from such clubs, like their exclusion from public and political institutions, further limited their ability to participate in the life of the nation. Lilian Shiman observes that the importance of these clubs – especially the lack of them, for women – was not fully understood until women finally organised their own political and social societies.<sup>80</sup>

A number of clubs existed in Australia in the 1890s to support men's literary endeavours. The Stenhouse Circle, the Dawn and Dusk Club in Sydney and the Yorick Club in Melbourne provided men with more than moral support, according to Debra Adelaide in her text about Australian women writers of the nineteenth century; they also assisted financially:

Women were quite excluded from the Bohemian artistic-literary clubs of the 1890s and thus from any network of financial support, peer

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<sup>79</sup> Paul Hayes, *Themes in Modern European History 1890-1945* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.19.

<sup>80</sup> Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Women and Leadership in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), p.67.

comfort or mutual encouragement in the airing of latest literary or artistic projects.<sup>81</sup>

Times were changing though; by 1935 in Australia Macken believed that maybe men would be the gender with the complaints about clubs, which had become such thriving centres of social and philanthropic activities for women.

The modern club ... keeps our matrons, and our younger generation also, interested in things outside their family life and relieves them of the worries of entertaining at home where economical conditions of the day makes it hard work.<sup>82</sup>

The Australian women's club scene may have had its origins in the drawing room soirees of the prominent ladies of the colony, for example, Lady Forbes, wife of the first Chief Justice of NSW. But women's clubs developed beyond the purely social function of those gatherings to become significant institutions for a wide range of purposes and over a long period of time.

On July 16, 1900 *The Court*, the journal of the Daughters of the Court which was an organisation based in Melbourne<sup>83</sup>, reprinted the text of a speech given by Mrs Haydon to the Austral Salon, on 21 June, 1900. In this speech – 'Women's Clubs: Their Origins and Objects'<sup>84</sup> – Mrs Haydon attempted to provide a history and context for the women's groups that had opened around Australia in the previous ten or twelve years. Her argument was that contemporary women's groups did not realise their own potential. The work of women's groups was sometimes misrepresented by an assumption that they merely reflected the self-interested social purpose of men's clubs, whereas in fact they were invariably utilitarian, and their efforts were always 'in the direction of benefit, even when instituted for social purposes.' Mrs Hayden used the example of club activity in the United States and in London to highlight her belief that women could turn their efforts in these clubs to wider issues:

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<sup>81</sup> Debra Adelaide, ed., *A Bright and Fiery Troop: Australian Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Melbourne: Penguin Australian Women's Library, 1988), pp.8-9.

<sup>82</sup> Macken, 'The World of Women', p.33.

<sup>83</sup> See Chapter Four, pp.221-227.

<sup>84</sup> Mrs Haydon, 'Women's Clubs: Their Origin and Object,' a speech given to the Austral Salon on 21 June 1900, reported in *The Court*, 16 July 1900, pp.180-182.

... I think the time has come when we should extend our horizon and take a broader outlook, being students and organisers as well as helpers.

Mrs Haydon described the creation of the first women's club in America, in Boston. Elizabeth Stanton and Lucy Stone were given the credit for inspiring all women with their philanthropy and political activism, and creating 'a renaissance in woman life':

Learning from man's experience the advantages of union and sympathy of numbers, she founds a club, the first of which took shape in the house of Dr Harriet Stone, of Boston, and amongst its first officers were Mrs P. Willis (wife of the poet), Miss Elizabeth Peabody, Mrs Ralph Emerson. Miss Louisa Alcott, also, was one of its most active members. The aim of the club was to inaugurate a series of reunions, from which members might derive not only social enjoyment, but also intellectual and moral benefit. Social reform was subsequently added, 'so that the club might not only be a pleasure and convenience to themselves, but a source from whence some good may come to others.'

The next club was established in New York and this one grew so rapidly in strength and importance that it soon created satellite branches, each having its own particular work. The object of the club was described as:

the promotion of agreeable and useful relations among women of literary, artistic, and scientific tastes; also, the discussion and dissemination of principles and facts which promise to exert a salutary influence on women and society – in short, the establishment of an order which shall render the female sex helpful to each other and actively benevolent in the world.

The charitable work of the satellite groups provided for the care, housing and recreation of shop girls, improved the conditions of hospitals and asylums, achieved the establishment of two hospitals for 'deserted waifs', and promoted the higher education of women. Conventions were held regularly to talk over the work, compare and plan.

Meanwhile, continued Mrs Haydon, other clubs sprang up all over America. In 1889 the New York club 'Sorosis' called a congress of 117 clubs, resulting in a general federation of women's clubs.

Can greater proof be needed that woman has a natural gift for organisation and administration? And have we not clearly shown the fallacy of the old prevailing idea that women could not work together in harmony, or to good effect?

In *The Women Movement* O'Neill explains that women's clubs in America sprang up to meet the need of women for 'social intercourse, education, and entertainment – self-culture was the phrase they most often used to describe their ambitions.'<sup>85</sup> O'Neill theorises that American women's enthusiasm for club membership stemmed from a culture that gave women a monopoly on virtue, thereby making them 'the only fit associates for one another':

The sororital feelings thus inspired led naturally to that flowering of associationism which became the woman movement.<sup>86</sup>

O'Neill also notes a proclivity of Americans for associationism generally, which may have stemmed from the frontier experience.

This astounding growth [of women's clubs], unmatched by any other middle-class movement during the Progressive era, marked the real emergence of women as an influence in American life ...<sup>87</sup>

In London a rough calculation showed between eight and nine thousand women belonging to various single-sex clubs. In fourteen years, thirteen major clubs had taken firm root by 1900, seven of which were dismissed by Mrs Haydon as being purely social

and of merely passing interest to us working women, being established for the benefit of 'My Lady in Mayfair and Madame in Suburbia,' and

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<sup>85</sup> O'Neill, *The Woman Movement*, p.34.

<sup>86</sup> O'Neill, *The Woman Movement*, p.42.

<sup>87</sup> O'Neill, *The Woman Movement*, p.48.

only open to those of long purses, the entrance fee and annual subscription being four and five guineas each.

The six remaining 'special' clubs were dedicated to specific works, as their names indicated: the University, the Victorian Nurses, the Writers Club, for example. The Writers Club comes in for special mention as Mrs Haydon expresses the hope that the Austral Salon may one day establish a similar branch:

... the condition of membership is that the applicant must have done at least one piece of work that has been published and paid for – a rough-and-ready test, but doubtless serves a useful end in keeping out the literary amateur and vain woman who offers her work for nothing, if only that her name may appear at the foot. It is distinctly a club for workers, and a little writing-room, well supplied with directories and books of reference, and where silence is enjoined, enables members to write reports and paragraphs without unnecessary delay, and to hand in copy at the office in time for the next day's issue.

The other three groups existed to support literary and artistic women. The Grosvenor Crescent Club aimed to furnish a centre for women interested in literature, art, science and social questions. The Club was managed by the Women's Institute which was a large philanthropic organisation. The Somerville Club held weekly meetings when an address or lecture was given, followed by a discussion, and every fourth Thursday was a social evening. The Club boasted a good reading room, well stocked with current papers and magazines, and supplemented by a free lending library. The last club described was the Pioneer, whose motto Mrs Haydon reserved as the finale of her speech: 'In large things, unity; in small things, liberty; and in all things, charity.'<sup>88</sup>

Mrs Haydon's main message was to convey a sense of the scope and vision of women's associations overseas, to thereby encourage Australian women to see their groups as potentially more socially useful than they might otherwise believe. Constructing the intellectual roots of Australian feminism may not have been Mrs Haydon's idea of what the Australian women's clubs should be doing, nevertheless this became their enduring social contribution.

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<sup>88</sup> Haydon, 'Women's Clubs', p.182.

### III. Historiography

'Not many of us are really missed when we go; but the passing of Maybanke Anderson will be deplored,'<sup>89</sup> wrote H. Tasman Lovell, Australia's first professor of psychology, on hearing of the death of Maybanke Anderson (née Wolstoneholme, née Selfe) in 1927. Her death may well have been lamented briefly, but she was quickly forgotten and lost to future generations by her absence from the histories written of Australia. It is a measure of the success of second wave feminism that it now seems a naïve question to ask 'How ever did we lose such an important woman from our history?' Feminist historians have been made well aware of the means by which women's history has been lost and silenced.<sup>90</sup> They have been made indignant by the exposure of efforts to deny women authorship of their words and actions, and then to sometimes attribute them instead to men.<sup>91</sup> They have prodded historians' assertions that sought to deny women agency in their lives, and exposed the fallacies of received wisdom.<sup>92</sup> They have embarked enthusiastically on projects to restore women to history and reclaim their activities.<sup>93</sup> They have illuminated the tactics of masculinist history and sought new methodologies.

Histories of women became a focus of the 'second wave' of feminism and since the 'seventies regular contributions have been made to the catalogue of histories about Australian women. Women's history has been a dynamic field and a range of theoretical approaches has been represented in the texts produced. Each new historical contribution tells another part of the history of women and also adds to the contemporary story about the unfolding methodology in the writing of women's histories. In an overview of the histories written of Australian women in the nineteenth century, each can be seen as helping to create the next. Each instalment in the narrative becomes a stepping-stone for the next contributor. And occasionally in the process of uncovering the past a new contribution requires a reconsideration of what histories have gone before or what

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<sup>89</sup> Cited in Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Marrickville: Hale and Iremonger, 1993), p.9.

<sup>90</sup> Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1983).

<sup>91</sup> Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas (and what men have done to them): from Apha Belm to Adrienne Rich* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

<sup>92</sup> Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence' in Elizabeth Abel and Emily K. Abel (eds), *The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>93</sup> Helene Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Méduse' in Abel and Abel (eds), *The Signs Reader*.

knowledge has become the accepted wisdom of the time. This generous interpretation of the evolution of women's history enables women's historians to become co-operatives in a big project rather than academic competitors sniping about the deficiencies and intellectual impoverishment of predecessors. It would be a foolhardy scholar who claimed to provide a complete or definitive version of past events. The prudent historian makes a modest claim: to add something to the accumulation of existing knowledge and to foreshadow – even invite – further investigation or interpretation.

Conventional, or textbook history has tended to be silent about the participation of women in the worlds it describes. This has been because conventional history was history of the public sphere, and women were excluded from the public sphere. If history ever did turn its gaze to women, it tended only to see the women who were extraordinary figures – who stood out – because they had an impact on the public sphere. A textbook history of the nineteenth century might have included coverage of, for example, Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale. Conventional historians have learned slowly the theoretical changes in approaches to history. The 'add women and stir' effort (as it was characterised by Gerda Lerner) to amend those worst versions of history that ignored or trivialised the existence of women, is as far along the methodological path as many textbook histories have travelled. Women are acknowledged, but only as separate categories (chapters) in books that are otherwise about the traditional stuff of history, that is the male-controlled public sphere, the dominant (male) culture.

Feminist historians have themselves had a theoretical journey to make. When women's history became a project of the second wave feminists in the 1970s, women of the nineteenth century nevertheless remained hidden for some time. What became known as the 'first wave' of feminism was overlooked even by feminist historians, arguably because it wasn't 'sexy' enough for sex-obsessed second wavers.<sup>94</sup> The seminal histories of white Australian women in the nineteenth century are typically cited as Anne Summers' (definitely sexy) *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975), Miriam Dixson's *The Real Matilda* (1976), and Beverley Kingston's *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann*:

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<sup>94</sup> The saleable 'sexiness' of history clearly remains an inducement: note the title of one of the most recent histories of the period: Susan Magarey's *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 2001).

*Women and Work in Australia* (1975).<sup>95</sup> The publication of these texts exposed the conspiracy of silence around women's history, which itself became the subject in other, later texts such as Dale Spender's *Women of Ideas (and what men have done to them)*.<sup>96</sup> Summers, Dixson and Kingston all threw up provocative interpretations of women's experience of Australia. That they have been criticised, cited, revised, enlarged and re-published shows the level of continuing engagement with them as relevant sources of information. Anne Summers' binary opposite roles for women in the colonies have exposed her to considerable criticism for overlooking the inevitable deviants who fit neither stereotype, as well as for the judgemental tone of her categories. While most of the women described in this thesis would probably attract the 'god's police' sobriquet (they certainly weren't 'damned whores'), it would indeed misrepresent and trivialise the scope of their interests, personalities and efforts. Similarly, the search for *The Real Matilda* has led to denunciation of Miriam Dixson's efforts to locate an Australian identity, on grounds of perpetuating myths and assumptions of male historians, and of poor scholarship.<sup>97</sup>

After these histories came a raft of new research attempting to mend some of the gaps in the evidence about women. Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane edited a useful anthology of resources about women, *Uphill all the Way*.<sup>98</sup> The women of the late nineteenth century were reclaimed as members of an important political movement of their time: the struggle for suffrage. The equating of nineteenth-century feminism with suffragism was reductive, but the second wave feminists, absorbed with their own struggles for emancipation and legislative equality, found the urge to locate a sisterhood within the women of the nineteenth century irresistible. The histories of this period have a tendency to the 'celebratory': a dangerous albeit seductive habit that can lead to poor scholarship as anything pejorative tends to be discarded or creatively re-interpreted.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonisation of Women in Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1975); Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1976); Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1975).

<sup>96</sup> Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas*.

<sup>97</sup> '... it is a sad and ironical fact that our past generations of Australian women have received perhaps no more slighting treatment, no bigger put-down than in this latest study ...' wrote Marilyn Lake of *The Real Matilda* in a review published in *Hecate*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (1976).

<sup>98</sup> Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane (eds), *Uphill all the Way: a documentary history of women in Australi*, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980).

<sup>99</sup> Curiously it re-emerges as a shortcoming in one of the most recent texts of this period. Susan Magarey's lasciviously titled *Pastors of the First Wave Feminists* insistently celebrates the women it describes for not conforming to the stereotype of being 'fearsomely respectable, crushingly earnest, socially puritanical, politically limited and sexually repressed' and instead substitutes a new stereotype in which the women are

Once the history of the period became thematised, new works focused on other aspects derived from the activities at the time, such as sexuality, work, education and such. Historians brought other ideologies to bear on the next development in the writing of women's history. Consciousness of class, race, and sexuality led to widening the search for evidence and a re-reading of the existing sources. Verity Burgmann and Joy Damousi<sup>100</sup> contributed to injecting a class analysis into histories of the period. Marian Aveling (Quartly) and Joy Damousi collaborated on a useful collection about women and work.<sup>101</sup> Penny Russell has explored the role of the gentry in the colonies in the period.<sup>102</sup> Pat Grimshaw has written about race and feminism as well as the family and suffrage.<sup>103</sup> Katie Holmes and Penny Russell have described attitudes to marriage.<sup>104</sup> Sexuality was the focus of articles and books by Judith Allen, Jill Matthews and Susan Magarey.<sup>105</sup> Susan Sheridan has written extensively about the journals published in the 1890s.<sup>106</sup> Marilyn Lake's scholarly contributions have ranged across feminist theory and the history of sexuality, nationalism, colonialism and Australian gender relations.<sup>107</sup>

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celebrated as 'passionate, challenging convention on every side, visionary, and centrally preoccupied with sex' (p.2).

<sup>100</sup> Verity Burgmann, *In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labour, 1855-1905* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1985); Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: socialism, communism and gender in Australia 1890-1955* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>101</sup> Marian Aveling and Joy Damousi (eds), *Stepping Out of History: documents of women at work in Australia* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991).

<sup>102</sup> Penny Russell, *A Wish of Distinction: colonial gentility and femininity* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994); Penny Russell ed., *This Errant Lady: Jane Franklin's overland journey to Port Phillip and Sydney, 1839* with introduction and annotations (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> Patricia Grimshaw, 'Colonising Motherhood: Evangelical social reformers and Koorie women in Victoria, Australia, 1880s to the early 1900s' in *Women's History Review*, Vol.8, No.2, (1999); Patricia Grimshaw, Chris McConville, Ellen McEwen (eds), *Families in Colonial Australia* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985); Patricia Grimshaw, 'Women and the family in Australian history,' in *Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australia 1788-1978*, ed. Elizabeth Windschuttle (Melbourne: Fontana, 1980); Patricia Grimshaw, 'Women's Suffrage in New Zealand Revisited: Writing from the Margins' in *Suffrage and Beyond*, ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1994); Patricia Grimshaw, 'A white woman's suffrage' in *A Woman's Constitution: gender and history in the Australian Commonwealth*, ed. Helen Irving (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1996).

<sup>104</sup> Katie Holmes, "'Spinsters Indispensable': Feminists, single women and the critique of marriage, 1890-1920' in *Australian Historical Studies*, 110, (1998), pp.68-90; Penny Russell, "'For better and for worse": Love, power and sexuality in upper-class marriages in Melbourne, 1860-1880' in *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vols 7 and 8, (Summer 1988), pp.11-26.

<sup>105</sup> Judith A. Allen, *Sex and secrets: crimes involving Australian women since 1880* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990); Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The historical construction of femininity in twentieth century Australia* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1984); Susan Magarey, 'Sexual labour: Australia 1880-1910' in Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan, *Debutante Nation*; Susan Magarey, *Passions*, 2001.

<sup>106</sup> Susan Sheridan, 'Louisa Lawson, Miles Franklin and feminist writing 1888-1901', *Australian Feminist Studies*, (Summer, 1988), pp.29-47; Susan Sheridan, *Along the Faultlines: sex, race and nation in Australian women's writing, 1880s-1930s* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1995); Susan Sheridan, 'The Woman's Voice on sexuality' in *Debutante Nation*, ed. Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan.

<sup>107</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'The politics of respectability: identifying the masculinist context' in *Debutante Nation*, ed. Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan; Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney:

New avenues were explored in an effort to reach a more complete picture of women at the time, and individuals were uncovered and their lives and achievements marvelled at. Some anthologies of women were collated, which gave an indication of the scope of the stories that had been lost or were yet to be mined, including Heather Radi's *200 Australian Women*; Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly's *Double Time*; Helen Jones' *In Her Own Name*; Debra Adelaide's *A Bright and Fiery Troop*; and Susanna De Vries' two volumes of celebratory narratives, *Strength of Spirit* and *Strength of Purpose*.<sup>108</sup> Carefully researched and thoroughly helpful biographies were written, including Judith Allen's *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism*, Jan Roberts' *Maybank Anderson*, Brian Matthews' *Louisa Larsson*, Susan Magarey's *Unbridling the Tongues of Women*, and Jeanne Young's *Catherine Helen Spence: A Study and an Appreciation*; Pam Young's *Proud to be a Rebel* about Emma Miller; *Letters from Louisa* by Janice Beaumont and Vere Hole, which anthologises Louisa Macdonald's letters to her friend in England for the first decade of her tenure in Sydney; and Janette Bomford's *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman* about Vida Goldstein.<sup>109</sup> These biographies and anthologies emboldened and encouraged me to tackle the period even when the primary source material was so fragmentary.

Histories of institutions including Presbyterian Ladies College in Victoria and the Women's College in Sydney have provided useful background into the wider society of the time.<sup>110</sup>

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Allen and Unwin, 1999); Marilyn Lake, 'Women, gender and history' in *Australian Feminist Studies*, volumes 7 and 8 (Summer, 1988).

<sup>108</sup> Heather Radi (ed.), *200 Australian Women* (Sydney: Redress Press, 1988); Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (eds), *Double Time: Women in Victoria - 150 Years* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1985); Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: A history of women in South Australia from 1836* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1994); Debra Adelaide (ed.), *A Bright and Fiery Troop: Australian Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988); Susanna De Vries, *Strength of Spirit: Pioneering Women of Achievement from First Fleet to Federation* (Millenium Books: Australia, 1995); Susanna De Vries, *Strength of Purpose: Australian Women of Achievement from Federation to the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century* (HarperCollins: Australia, 1998).

<sup>109</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, 1994; Jan Roberts, *Maybank Anderson*; Brian Matthews, *Louisa* (Australia: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1987); Susan Magarey, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: the life of Catherine Helen Spence* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1985); Jeanne Young, *Catherine Helen Spence: A Study and an Appreciation* (Melbourne: Lothian, 1937); Pam Young, *Proud to be a Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1991); Janice Beaumont and Vere Hole, *Letters from Louisa: A woman's view of the 1890s, based on the letters of Louisa Macdonald, first principal of the Women's College, University of Sydney* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1996); Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

<sup>110</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century 1875-1975* (Victoria: Presbyterian Ladies' College, 1975); M.O. Reid, *The Ladies Came to Stay: A study of the education of girls at the Presbyterian Ladies College Melbourne, 1875-1960* (Victoria: Council of the College, 1960); Louisa Macdonald, *The Women's College within the University of Sydney* (pamphlet, printed in Australia by Halstead Press, c. 1947, in the Mitchell Library); W. Vere Hole and Anne Treweek, *A History of the Women's College* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1953); also

A stimulating debate has taken place between more recent historians of the 1890s period. In 1986 Marilyn Lake's article in *Australian Historical Studies* entitled 'The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context' contentiously strove to show that the Australian feminism of the 1890s had a distinct character in that it targeted nothing less than the Australian legend: it 'aimed at dethroning the style of masculinity championed by the men's press [especially the *Bulletin*]'. In Australia, where 'masculinist values had been elevated to the status of national traditions', feminism took on a counter-cultural dimension.<sup>111</sup> The subsequent debate engaged Judith Allen and Chris McConville in the pages of *Historical Studies*.<sup>112</sup> John Docker's response 'The Feminist Legend: A new historicism?' published in 1993 reignited the debate and disputed Lake's vision, accusing her of constructing her own feminist legend as a response to the masculinist version she saw being promoted by the male press.<sup>113</sup>

While Lake's article entailed a compelling analysis of the feminist agenda and the masculinist backlash, it also perpetuated the received wisdom of the primacy of the suffrage struggle in the period. Her statement that '[r]ecognising their lack of power to effect radical change, all campaigns converged in the demand for female suffrage,' was strongly put, and appeared to implicitly dismiss any organised women's activity that was not primarily focused on the vote. However her further, critical observation that temperance, for example, offered more challenges to male behaviour than suffrage, and was at least as central to the women's cause, provoked a retort from Docker who reminded her that feminism as a movement 'was so robust that it encompassed many differences and orientations, from the suffrage-centred to the socialist-feminist' and suggested that the *Bulletin's* anti-feminism could be read sympathetically as 'a defensive, confused position.'<sup>114</sup>

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Roma Williams, *The Settlement: A History of the University of Sydney Settlement and the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre, 1891-1986* (Sydney University Monographs, No.4, 1988).

<sup>111</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'The politics of respectability: identifying the masculinist context' in *Debutante Nation*, Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan (eds).

<sup>112</sup> Judith Allen, 'Mundane Men: historians, masculinity and masculinism' in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, (1987), pp.617-628; Chris McConville, 'Rough Women, Respectable Men and Social Reform: a response to Lake's masculinism' in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No.88, (1987), pp.432-440.

<sup>113</sup> John Docker, 'The Feminist Legend: A new historicism?' in *Debutante Nation*, Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan (eds).

<sup>114</sup> Docker, 'The Feminist Legend,' in *Debutante Nation*, Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan (eds).p.25.

A useful overview of first wave feminism was undertaken by Katie Spearritt in an article in Saunders and Evans' *Gender Relations in Australia*;<sup>115</sup> however it also equated feminism and women's organisations with suffrage. Even in this well-researched survey of some very obscure women's groups, a large number have been left out, presumably because they were not regarded as political and therefore significant. Statements such as: 'Suffrage activated widespread feminist consciousness in Australia,' carry the implication that suffrage was the only spur for, and manifestation of, feminist activity; this suspicion is confirmed in other parts of the article. For example, a heading reads promisingly: 'Women's Organisations' but the material under it deals only with suffrage groups. A paragraph begins equally hopefully: 'Feminist activity and thought varied from colony to colony,' but is followed with more information about intra- and inter-state suffrage and political organisations.

An informed historical debate about the nature of Australian feminism could benefit from a more complete picture of the actions and interests of women in the *fin-de-siede* period. This examination of women's clubs and societies, their ideologies, activities and memberships helps to expand the historical understanding of a transformative era. Inserting new research about women's intellectual groups and other previously undocumented associations into an existing historical picture has implications for the received understandings and requires a new reflection on what has been known. Women organising at the turn of the nineteenth century were not only suffragists or politically motivated. They were also driven by more personal desires for self-development and self-improvement, as women and as citizens with an expanding role. The intellectual groups also laid the groundwork for feminism to build: they seized a place in the public sphere for women to associate exclusively with one another; they provided training and knowledge for women contesting the public sphere; and they supported the development of a female solidarity and consciousness. Their participation in the women-only intellectual groups made the women more aware of the strength gained by association with one another and undoubtedly enhanced their capacity to be more effective citizens in their changed social and political environment.

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<sup>115</sup> Katie Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism, 1880-1914', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: HBJ, 1992), pp.325-349.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CREATING A NEW SPACE

*Women's sphere, it is said, is in the home. Truly, but we cannot consent to have the radius from the vital centre arbitrarily limited; and further, we know that harsh necessity drives multitudes daily from their 'sphere' to outside labour ... The sphere is a circle of chalk which the tide of necessity and the steps of these noble ones are obliterating<sup>1</sup>*

Across nations and historical periods women have found ways of pursuing intellectual development and of associating for women-centred pursuits. In Australia at the turn of the nineteenth century the one certain common element with all the historical and international precedents for women's association was the perceived challenge to the separation of the spheres. Associating publicly clearly belongs to the public domain, yet even by the late nineteenth century, a woman's proper place was still primarily regarded as the private sphere. The women joining clubs and societies in Australia at the end of the nineteenth century did not suddenly throw off ancient convention and impulsively gallop out of their homes, away from their domestic duties, to flagrantly take up residence as political activists in the public eye. They took their action decorously, with full knowledge of how it would be regarded by the wider society. The notion of public and private spaces had attracted a re-evaluation in the nineteenth century and was more overtly discussed and widely accepted than at any point previously. For these nineteenth-century Australian women, disregarding the constraints of the separation of the spheres would have been a far more conscious and subversive act than at any other time in history, because the metaphorical and actual boundaries of their lives were more clearly described and understood than they had been before.

The vote can be seen as 'the most conspicuous boundary issue of the period,'<sup>2</sup> and as such has received a good deal of attention from historians. However, other attempts to negotiate the boundary between public and private – to obliterate the chalk circle – such as the

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<sup>1</sup> From *Patchwork*, the student newspaper of PLC in Victoria, June 1886. Cited in Janette Bomford's biography of Vida Goldstein, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Edward Elgar, 1991), p5.

voluntary association of women in literary clubs and societies, show a broader agenda existed for the women. They deliberately flouted the conventions of the separation of the spheres, and by this (feminist) act, created a new space in which to develop intellectually.

An historian of the Victorian era cannot afford to ignore the separate spheres framework, because the subjects of the history used the notion themselves. However, as Reverby and Helly point out, it is no longer possible to employ the concept unself-consciously, 'without a full awareness of its origins, limitations and complications.'<sup>3</sup> Some effort must be made to describe the concept as it would have been understood by the historical actors.

The notion of contrasting the 'worlds' of males and females has been a durable concept, and can be traced back earlier than the classical Greeks, who distinguished between the public and private realms. The dual spheres concept has been a vexed issue for feminists. In 1974 Michelle Rosaldo co-edited *Woman, Culture and Society* and explained in the Overview the usefulness of the framework to any analysis of women:

An opposition between "domestic" and "public" provides the basis of a structural framework necessary to identify and explore the place of male and female in psychological, cultural, social and economic aspects of human life.<sup>4</sup>

For feminist historians, acceptance of the sphere dichotomy translated into justification for regarding women as 'separate' and 'other', and sanctioned the search for a 'culture' of women. The public/private split decentred men's experience:

[it] gave intellectual permission to explore women's lives in the so-called private sphere, validating the difference from the male experience without rendering it lesser.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Helly and Susan Reverby (eds), *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p.24.

<sup>4</sup> Michelle Rosaldo, 'A Theoretical Overview,' *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Rosaldo and Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p.23.

<sup>5</sup> Helly and Reverby, *Gendered Domains*, p.6.

Michelle Rosaldo subsequently published an article in *Signs* that was seen in contraposition to her earlier anthropological work on the public/private domains. In 'The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding,'<sup>6</sup> Rosaldo raised questions about the universality of the public/private framework for analysis of women's lives, and feminist historians reflected particularly on 'those instances when a public/private framework might be imposing a structure on history that obscured rather than revealed the past.'<sup>7</sup>

The difficulty is with the dichotomy: a rigid interpretation of male=public and female=private throws up countless exceptions in any analysis of real lives. These must either be ignored, or dubiously massaged into fitting the framework, or seen as evidence of the inadequacy of the analytical framework.

In her article 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,' Linda Kerber reminds us that the notion of separate spheres is a metaphor – a trope – and one that has been 'vulnerable to sloppy use':

When they used the metaphor of separate spheres, historians referred, often interchangeably, to an ideology *imposed on* women, a culture *created by* women, a set of boundaries *expected to be observed* by women.<sup>8</sup>

Philippa Levine describes the ideology of the separate spheres that was propounded during the Victorian era as an attempt to 'idealise the situation created by the new industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century.'<sup>9</sup> In the newly circumscribed split between home and workplace that had eventuated with the Industrial Revolution, women were given stewardship of the domestic sphere with the consolation that it was on the grounds of the moral superiority of their sex. This was to prove small comfort, as, predictably, any attempt by a woman to move into the public sphere tended to be cast as evidence of immorality, and

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<sup>6</sup> Michelle Rosaldo, 'The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding,' in *Signs*, Vol.5 (1980).

<sup>7</sup> Helly and Reverby, *Gendered Domains*, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Linda K. Kerber, 'Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History,' *The Journal of American History*, Vol.75, No.1 (1988), p.17.

<sup>9</sup> Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.12.

men never really relinquished ultimate authority in the private sphere; certainly not in any legislative sense. A woman's place may have been in the home, but a man's place was everywhere. Women's sphere may have been held to be separate, but it was also subordinate, both to the men within it and to the wider public domain.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century women had become more accustomed to, or familiar with, the notion of the separation of the spheres, and with that familiarity grew contempt. Dissatisfied with the constraints and hypocrisy, women increasingly began to test the boundaries and limits of their space. How was a public sphere that contained women to be described or understood? What new analytic tools are needed to consider a society with blurred or changed boundaries between male/female; public/private?

Jurgen Habermas described a bourgeois public sphere that mediated between the society and the state. This public space was the psychic location for the intellectual work of determining society's agenda. He conceived it as not a place, but a discussion forum: a sphere of private people who have come together as the public.<sup>11</sup> Feminism has wrestled with how to respond to Habermas' ideas. One argument claims Habermas for feminism, maintaining that women as writers, educators and philanthropists participated fully in a public sphere as defined by Habermas. An opposing case claims separate ground for women and their intellectual development, arguing that women have inhabited counter-public, competing or alternative spheres. Joanne Pope Melish suggests an expansion of Habermas' theory to consider who else aside from the bourgeoisie were imagining the nation, and what else they might have been doing: 'Might public political acts have been performing other kinds of cultural work?', she asks in her review essay.<sup>12</sup> It is a relevant question to ask of the nineteenth century women under discussion here: can localised political acts have broad cultural and political

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<sup>10</sup> Consider, for example, the situation of Maybanke Wolstoneholme prior to the passing of the NSW Married Women's Property Acts (1879 and 1893) and the NSW Divorce Amendment and Extension Act (1892): as the deserted wife of an alcoholic she had to support her family and herself; her husband was legally entitled to spend her earnings or use her property, whether he returned to the family or not; she could not make a will leaving any earnings or property of her own accord; she was unable to obtain a divorce without proving that adultery had occurred; she had no rights of custody over her own children.

<sup>11</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992). First published in 1962.

<sup>12</sup> Joanne Pope Melish, 'Of Politics and Publics', review in *Radical History Review*, Issue 79 (Winter 2001), pp.157-167.

meaning? Can women in nineteenth-century literary groups in a few Australian cities be considered to be constructing a culture of feminism for women then and now?

In her recent article about the encroachment of nineteenth century-women on a perceived public place, the British Museum Reading Room, Ruth Hoberman describes a 'quasi-public sphere'. This is on the grounds of her reading of Habermas who explicitly lists museums and reading rooms among the public venues where the work of constructing the discourse of the state is carried out, 'in part because they are places where the absorption and exchange of ideas occurs, but also because they contribute to a specifically literary public sphere ... [which] for men, at least ... fed directly into a political public sphere.'<sup>13</sup> The British Museum Reading Room was the site where journalists and activists did the research that informed their public stands; where the ideas that shaped history emerged, and was thus 'a point of convergence between literary and political public spheres.' In this site Hoberman finds women too, researching their own political stand: that is, the demand for access to the public sphere. The space is 'quasi-public' because the participation of the women was not full or unimpeded. Indeed women often found their public participation qualified, and in the culture of the reading room they were isolated in several ways:

marginalised by journalistic representations, and even by the room's very design, which placed them in separate "ladies seating" ... delighting in entering a space shared with men, these female readers did not constitute a "women-only" association [yet] they remained unmistakably visible and self-aware as women.

By using the slightly pejorative modifying prefix 'quasi' Hoberman wants to imply the sense of instability and volatility caused by the presence of these women in the reading room in the late nineteenth century. Here, says Hoberman, a vital female culture flourished:

a culture all the more exciting and visible for its ambiguous role in the life of the nation. Women readers delighted in their access to the scholarly

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<sup>13</sup> Ruth Hoberman, 'Women in the British museum reading room during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: From quasi- to counter-public,' *Feminist Studies*, Vol.28, Issue 3 (Fall 2002), p.490.

resources and relationships that would allow them to develop both self-knowledge as individuals and authority as public voices; as researchers and journalists, many gloried in their role as producers of public discourse; as conspicuous presences in a room full of men, some delighted also in their sheer visibility at the heart of public life.<sup>14</sup>

Estelle Freedman's 1979 article 'Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930' attempted to tackle the conundrum of women's encroachments on public space by describing a 'public female sphere'. In this blending of the two categories she located the 'female institutions' that 'emerged from the middle-class women's culture of the nineteenth century'<sup>15</sup>, including, for example, Sorosis, Hull House, women's trade union and political organisations, the women's buildings from the Expositions, and women's colleges. Linda Kerber notes that the space Freedman described was in part metaphorical, and emphasises Freedman's observation that:

feminists had been most successful when they had commanded actual physical space of their own, which they could define and control.<sup>16</sup>

In 'The Power of Women's Networks', Mary P. Ryan described the voluntary associations proliferating in a small corner of America in the 1830s-40s. Observing that the various associations were receptive to female membership, she acknowledges that the groups 'occupied a distinctive space in the social order of the community, somewhere along a muted boundary between private and public life.'<sup>17</sup> She wrestles further with the apparent contravention of the public/private split, recognising that the 'association' or 'society' as it was alternately called, was clearly not an enclosed private space:

Yet it was not exactly public, at least not in the way Utica's New England founders used the term: to designate the formal institutions of town and

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<sup>14</sup> Hoberman, 'Women in the British Reading Room', pp.490-1.

<sup>15</sup> Estelle Freedman, 'Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930,' *Feminist Studies* Vol.5, (1979).

<sup>16</sup> Linda Kerber, 'Separate Spheres', p.32.

<sup>17</sup> Mary P. Ryan, 'The Power of Women's Networks,' *Sex and Class in Women's History*, ed. Newton, Ryan and Walkowitz (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p.170.

church where male heads of households met to exercise official authority. Rather, the associations relied on informal but expansive social ties, a voluntary network of like-minded individuals, as its organizational machinery and political leverage.<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately Mary Ryan sees the women in the moral reform societies as opening a new social space 'through which their sex could manoeuvre for power in the community.'<sup>19</sup>

The movement of Australian women into groups and societies at the end of the nineteenth century can be seen as evidence of an attempt to establish a new kind of metaphorical space in between the public and the private. From this space women began to explore the other sphere, to learn the lessons needed to participate effectively in the public sphere, and to articulate a consciousness of their female identity. The new space created by the women's groups was a hybrid: it had elements of being both public and private. The groups were created outside the home and away from the domestic sphere. They were often physically located in commercially leased premises in the city. However the fact that the membership was limited and bound by rules, and was usually restricted to women (and in so many cases consisted of women who were friends with one another or even related to one another) made women's groups a very private kind of public space.<sup>20</sup>

The groups intruded into the public domain by gaining occasional press coverage, and individual members often used the skills learned in the groups to become politically active public figures. However the groups also maintained a sense of belonging to the private sphere. For every woman who used the skills honed in these groups to become visible, there

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<sup>18</sup> Ryan, 'Power of Women's Networks', p.170.

<sup>19</sup> Ryan, 'Power of Women's Networks', p.179.

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Michelle Perrot, in her introduction to *A History of Women in the West Vol.4* ed. Fraisse and Perrot, (Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1993) hints at a radical understanding of the actions of women of this period organising into clubs and societies, suggesting that by breaking out of the domestic sphere, they were attempting 'at last to be at home everywhere'. This is an audacious possibility. From this perspective women were not so much taking up public space as making the whole world private space. This is more radical than Carol Smith-Rosenberg's 1975 interpretation of women's sphere as a separate space that lent women psychological support and strength, articulated in her article 'The Female World of Love and Ritual' (reprinted in *The Signs Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Abel and Emily Abel, 1983). Nancy Cott conjectured that the women's political activity of the nineteenth century actually grew out of the separation of the spheres, because the separate space had enabled effective networks to be constructed between women, and a consciousness of womanhood to be developed (*The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987]).

were dozens who remained invisible. Voluntary membership of a club that sought to improve the lives or minds of its members and others was not so very much at odds with notions of appropriate behaviour for Victorian matrons. Anonymous volunteers do not usually have their names recorded in history, yet the work they do consumes female energy, presumably at the expense of other potential enterprises. It is the inward looking nature of so many of the groups described in this thesis that makes the women less like the selfless, philanthropic Victorian volunteers, and of more interest to the historian of feminism. The recipients and beneficiaries of their volunteer efforts were most often themselves, both as individuals and as groups. They were often doing the work of the intellectual in society: questioning the dominant culture and debating alternatives. They sought to improve, emancipate, or simply entertain themselves. They required their meetings to be conducted in public places away from their families, yet paradoxically they were private meetings in that non-members and (usually) men could not participate.

This expansion into the physical space of the public sphere required the women to learn about operational features of the public domain. They had to engage in commercial transactions in leasing public spaces for their meetings. They had to learn about the administration of organisations: the finances, the communication, publicity, record-keeping and more. Those women who edited and published journals had an additional set of skills to learn. How did they learn about the workings of commerce, industry and public associations? Did they apply the knowledge in conventional or idiosyncratic ways?

The expansion of women into the public sphere also gave them voice. Women learned and applied skills of public speaking, and used their new visibility to publicly support reform. Organised use of 'the platform' as a propaganda tool by male politicians had been happening from the 1840s in England, according to Herbert Asquith. But for women, taking to the podium was new. It meant that a woman could convey her message to an audience *en masse*. The act of speaking was often regarded as being more politically subversive to the established order, than the message in the words themselves.

Just as women used oratorical skills to reach a greater audience in the public domain, they also sought to have a voice in the print medium. Many of the clubs and societies published

journals in recognition of the fact that they could have a wider audience for their ideas and activities by circulating a publication to subscribers too far away or disinclined to become active participants in an organisation. Just as public speaking by women was viewed with hostility as a subversive act, so publication of regular journals produced for women, by women, and about women's issues was seen as inimical. It is of some significance that Vida Goldstein's journal was named the *Australian Woman's Sphere*, and prominently displayed on its masthead the words of the Roman dramatist, Terence: 'I am a human being, and I believe nothing human is outside my sphere.'

## I. Operating in the Public Domain

There are several examples of the clubwomen requiring operational knowledge of the public domain for the conduct of their business. Those involved in the running of clubs and societies needed to lease public space and see to the administration of their organisation, for example they had to keep records of financial transactions, publish an annual report, and supervise subscriptions. Women such as Louisa Lawson and Maybanke Wolstoneholme, who ran small businesses publishing journals, needed knowledge about the printing and publication fields. In addition, Maybanke ran a private girls' school out of her home at Dulwich Hill, suggesting other administrative, entrepreneurial and scholarly talents. Vida Goldstein and her sisters likewise ran a coeducational school in Victoria, Vida published two journals during her career, and her mother and sister ran a successful commercial library.

Commerce or business studies did not form part of the curriculum in girls' education in the nineteenth century. There are several possible sources of the expertise the women had to summons. Several of them were married to wealthy or influential men who were themselves involved in the running of the clubs or journals, or who worked in related fields.<sup>21</sup> Some of the women had been members of other organisations with mixed membership, over which

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Matilda Curnow and Lucinda Gullett, founding members of the Women's Literary Society, were married to the editors of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* respectively. Although the Women's Literary Society was one of the few literary groups that did not publish a journal it did generate a network that may have lent support to Maybanke Wolstoneholme. Matilda Curnow later became a member of the Optimists, a group which did produce a journal/annual.

men presided. And in some cases, women were able to seek the advice and expertise of other women with relevant previous experience elsewhere.

Louisa Lawson had no patience with the idea that women were incapable or incompetent when it came to commercial ventures. She saw it as one of the insupportable anti-suffrage positions to argue that women should not have the vote because they did not have the commercial training that would enable them to understand political and economic questions. She pointed out in one of the lead articles in *The Dawn* that the financial affairs of most working class households were managed by the wife, and that there were 'thousands of women managing business institutions, and hundreds of thousands of women commercially employed, and therefore getting political training ...'<sup>22</sup>

In 1887, despairing of the insufficient income generated by taking in boarders at her Enmore home, Louisa Lawson found a job as a journalist on a radical newspaper, *The Republican*. Less than twelve months later she took the lessons learned there and set up an office on the ground floor of her husband's business premises at 138 Phillip Street in Sydney. This was the first of five homes for the publication of her journal, *The Dawn*. She approached potential advertisers and assumed total responsibility as business manager, editor, printer and publisher. In the first edition on 15 May, 1888, she placed an advertisement of her own, for female staff:

Respectable women, wishing to add to their incomes, may obtain light and remunerative employment on application to the office of this paper.<sup>23</sup>

By October 1889 *The Dawn* was located in new premises at Jamieson Street, which housed both the offices and the printery. There were ten women employed in full-time and part-time positions, in the compositor's room, the printery, the bindery and as unskilled workers. Girls were also employed as clerks and messengers.

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<sup>22</sup> Olive Lawson, *The First Voice of Australian Feminism Excerpts from Louisa Lawson's The Dawn 1888-1895* (Sydney: Simon Schuster, 1990), p.266.

<sup>23</sup> Lawson, *The First Voice of Australian Feminism*, p.3.

Louisa Lawson demonstrated considerable business acumen in her proprietorship of *The Dawn* which was published monthly, profitably, for seventeen years. The journal was sold by subscription at three pence per issue, three shillings per annum, payable in advance. Olive Lawson (Louisa's great-granddaughter) describes the high standards Louisa set for the publication:

The paper ... was good quality White Bond. The pages were guillotined to Crown Quarto, were round-cornered (making dog-ears impossible) and were double sewn with cotton ... The pages themselves were designed to please the eye as well as the mind: hairline rules separated the columns and top margins, initial letters were decorated, a whole range of typefaces was used, and ornamental lettering and blocks separated the various items in the text. The advertisements, as well as some of the general articles, were illustrated - with woodcuts, etchings or lithographs, some even with photographs. Care was taken that the advertisements did not intrude into the serious content of the journal.<sup>24</sup>

The advertisements were all vetted by Louisa Lawson, and were for a range of goods and services that she considered 'conducive to the physical betterment or to the social and intellectual advancement of *The Dawn's* readers.'<sup>25</sup>

The offices of *The Dawn* became the focus of other enterprises including a mail-order service, an agency for collection of donations and signatures (for petitions), and a contact point for women visiting from the country in need of accommodation, physical or medical help. Louisa leased half of her premises to her cousins, the Wynns, who were wholesale suppliers of fabrics and miscellaneous fancy goods. From their surplus stock came the prizes for readers that Louisa offered as incentives to find further subscribers for the journal. Other subscription drives promised gifts of land (at Eurunderee; the acreage Louisa had owned with her now deceased husband) and education (free courses of study, for which *The Dawn* would pay costs, in return for the names of twenty new subscribers). A further scheme saw a

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<sup>24</sup> Lawson, *The First Voice of Australian Feminism*, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> Lawson, *The First Voice of Australian Feminism*, p.6.

subscription to *The Dawn* given as a wedding gift to all new brides married by ministers who were existing subscribers.

A sole surviving subscription list shows how scrupulously the records were kept<sup>26</sup> and also reveals that complimentary copies of the journal were given to libraries. After another move to larger premises at 402 George Street, the printery began to take in other print jobs to supplement the relatively small income from subscriptions. Subscribers came from as far away as England, Scotland, continental Europe, America, New Zealand and Fiji. Surplus copies of the journal were given away in an effort to gain more advertisers.

Louisa Lawson, small businesswoman, was well aware that many of her subscribers, particularly those isolated in country New South Wales, had little education or business sense themselves. Olive Lawson describes how Louisa frequently had to explain elementary business procedure to her subscribers:

To T.B., Singleton. Why did you enclose a blank postcard in your letter for gratis patterns? We only suggest the use of a postcard because its cost would be less than a letter which takes a 2d. stamp to freight. Nor is it necessary to send a letter and a postcard also. When writing upon other matters order your gratis pattern at the same time.<sup>27</sup>

Louisa found herself in constant conflict with the GPO: over unauthorised enclosures in the journal wrap (explicitly outlawed by the *Postage Acts Amendment Act 1893*); over the fines she had to pay on behalf of isolated subscribers; over missing and damaged copies of the journal; and finally over a legal battle she had to claim rights over her invention of a device for effectively sealing mail bags.

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<sup>26</sup> Lawson, *The First Voice of Australian Feminism*, p.10. Among those renewing their subscriptions in May 1899 was Mrs Q. [Margaret] Tart of Gallop House, Ashfield. She was the wife of Quong Tart who generously donated space at his tea-room premises in King St and the Queen Victoria Building to many different meetings of women's groups in the 1890s. Also listed are Miss L. [Louisa] Macdonald of Forest Lodge, Principal of the University of Sydney's Women's College, and Dr D. [Dagmar] Berne, the first woman to study medicine in Australia.

<sup>27</sup> Lawson, *The First Voice of Australian Feminism*, p.296.

Louisa Lawson's skills in the public sphere were further tested when she was boycotted by the Typographical Union for using non-unionised labour. By its own rules her female typesetters were not permitted to join the union; the real purpose of the black-ban was to prevent the employment of women in such work and, if possible, to close down the journal.<sup>28</sup> Most of the women had been taught their skills by their own fathers, and Louisa's daughter Gertrude O'Connor recalled that as long as the women worked for their fathers 'no one troubled to interfere, but as soon as they began to work for a woman on the staff of a woman's paper, the opposition began.'<sup>29</sup> The men resorted to such harassing and intimidatory behaviour that the women were forced to seek police protection. Tactics famously included extremes such as leasing a floor on the building opposite *The Dawn* offices and shining mirrors into the eyes of the women workers to momentarily blind them and prevent them from working.

Like Louisa Lawson, Maybanke Wolstoneholme's first experience of raising income was taking in boarders. Her alcoholic husband, Edmund, abandoned her in 1885, however, since the Married Woman's Property Act passed in 1879, Maybanke had been the proprietor of Maybanke School for girls, acquired by transfer of title from Edmund, and paid for with a loan from her brother Norman Selfe. Situated in Dulwich Hill, the school took in day-students and boarders for sixteen years. Maybanke was a popular and successful headmistress and the school flourished. In 1890 it was rebadged as Maybanke College and boasted some of the best qualified teachers and most advanced teaching methods available. A separate teaching block, tennis courts and a kindergarten were added. Maybanke wrote that "The school, I am thankful to say, prospers, and I am managing to pay my way." In spite of her close eye on the finances, Maybanke was not afraid to publicly maintain her principles even though it jeopardised fee-paying student numbers. Over the years her public stand on suffrage and other feminist issues had prompted several withdrawals of daughters by angry parents. In 1899 the school was sold to the family of Maybanke's daughter-in-law, Edith Doust.

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly a comparable incident occurred in Lyons, France in 1913. When Emma Couriau, a typographer, asked to join the union, not only was she refused but her husband was expelled from the same union for having failed to keep his wife from entering the trade. Cited in Anne-Marie Kappeli, 'Feminist Scenes,' *A History of Women IV*, ed. Fraisse and Perrot, p.509.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.87.

Maybanke Wolstoneholme's independent publishing venture began on 9 August 1894 in premises at 3 Sydney Arcade, Pitt Street. Maybanke was the editor of a new journal, the *Woman's Voice*. She had recently ended a period publishing the journal of the *Australasian Home Reading Union* which had presumably taught her the skills required to run a journal. The *Woman's Voice* was published fortnightly for two pence. Like *The Dawn* it carried advertisements and constantly sought new subscribers. However, just as Maybanke refused to compromise principle for the sake of money in the running of her school, so did she refuse to compromise in the content of her journal. The *Woman's Voice* was a radical voice, addressing topics that were taboo in other publications. Hence it was difficult to find advertisers. Although subscriptions climbed, the journal gradually lost viability. Maybanke sought to hand it over to the care of her friend Margaret Windeyer, and, on her refusal, closed it down.

Maybanke represented herself as a businesswoman in a pamphlet she published entitled *Woman Suffrage: A Refutation and an Appeal, by "A Citizen" who has no vote*, and argued for the vote on the grounds of the increasing participation of women in commerce:

Hundreds of women, who prove every day of their active useful lives that they possess business capacity, are claiming the right to vote, because as taxpayers, heads of families, householders, employers of labour, they are interested, as much as men, in the well-being of the State, and, therefore, naturally desire to express an opinion on matters concerning government.<sup>30</sup>

From Victoria comes the example of Vida Goldstein and her sisters, Aileen and Elsie. Vida acquired pedagogical skills from her on-the-job training as a teacher at the Toorak College. Then Vida and her sisters opened their own private school in St Kilda, initially in premises of its own but later relocated to the family home. The school struggled: they were depression years in Australia and the demand for private schooling had diminished. In addition, the school's co-educational policy (a daring experiment at the time) and enlightened pedagogy further hindered its ability to attract students. At the end of 1898 they closed the school to

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<sup>30</sup> Held in the pamphlet file at the Mitchell Library, no date.

allow Vida to focus more exclusively on her career as a lobbyist. The enterprise is reminiscent of Maybanke Wolstoneholme's Maybanke College, not the least because of the sisters' refusal to compromise principle for the sake of commercial success.

In 1896 Vida's mother Isabella Goldstein began a Book Lovers' Library, which was taken over and built up by Elsie. Despite her generous employment terms (her women assistants earned twice the usual salary, worked 36-hour weeks, shared the profits and enjoyed one month's holiday annually) and the simultaneous decline in other similar ventures, Elsie's library flourished and became a meeting place for Melbourne's literati for over a decade.

A third example of a commercial enterprise also comes from the Goldsteins. In 1900 Vida Goldstein launched a monthly journal called *Australian Woman's Sphere*. It is not known how she funded the enterprise, though it is generally accepted that it was possible because of a bequest from Annette Bear-Crawford.<sup>31</sup> Vida believed that educating women in business was essential and ran a series of articles in her journal on women who had succeeded in commerce and the professions (the first article was about Elsie and her library). Like Louisa Lawson she vetted the advertising and refused ads for alcohol and patent remedies.

There are other examples of women mastering the operational tasks of inhabiting the public sphere, but speculation on where they learned their skills remains largely uncorroborated. Maybanke Wolstoneholme's good friends included Matilda Curnow and Lucinda Gullet whose husbands would have been well-placed to provide guidance on the publication of her journal. But as the main force behind the magazine of the AHRU<sup>32</sup>, it is also likely that Maybanke needed little advice by the time she was running *Woman's Voice*. Her brother, Norman, was a successful businessman and helped Maybanke financially on occasion and would probably also have given advice concerning Maybanke's commercial interests. In addition, Maybanke had extensive personal networks and was in a position to draw on the experience of such seasoned international public women as Jessie Ackerman and Annie Besant.

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<sup>31</sup> Suggested in Bomford, *Vida Goldstein*, p.27.

<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that the AHRU journal ceased production immediately after Maybanke withdrew her services.

Vida Goldstein made no secret of the fact that she gained many of her considerable public sphere skills from American examples. When she attended the International Women Suffrage Conference in Washington in 1902 she learned a great deal about the effective organisation of a political movement. Carrie Chapman Catt, she reported, had ‘a perfectly marvellous executive ability; to see her preside over a meeting is something not to be forgotten.’<sup>33</sup> Her biographer, Janette Bomford observes that ‘Vida admired the organising skills of the American women and said their conventions were an education in the art of running public meetings.’ Vida was particularly taken with the ease with which American women seemed able to raise funds for their efforts, but her attempts to emulate some of their tactics failed in Victoria.<sup>34</sup>

It may be significant that there was a solid core of men who were prepared to support the work and efforts of the women (who were often, after all, their wives or daughters). In NSW, for example, the enlightened male academics from the University of Sydney were unstinting supporters who participated actively in setting up the Women’s College and were members of the Womanhood Suffrage League.<sup>35</sup> Vida Goldstein certainly valued the support and advice of her brother-in-law Henry Hyde Champion. A journalist and publisher himself, he actively promoted the suffrage cause. In South Australia, the men behind the establishment of the Social Purity Society created an association that condoned the entrance of women into the public sphere and unknowingly laid the foundations of women’s suffrage

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<sup>33</sup> Bomford, *Vida Goldstein*, p.36.

<sup>34</sup> American women had developed considerable skill dealing with operational aspects of the public sphere over a long period. Lilian Shiman describes seventeenth-century Quaker women handling the considerable sums of money that came through their organisation: ‘The women took their responsibilities seriously and expended much time and energy in carrying out their duties. They also learned to buy property and to deal with business matters, valuable training that few women (or even men) then received.’ In Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Women and Leadership in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1992), p.16.

<sup>35</sup> Prominent male support came from Professors Francis Anderson (second husband of Maybanke Wolstoneholme; Professor of Philosophy), Mungo MacCallum (husband of Dorette; Vice-Chancellor), Tannatt Edgeworth David (husband of Cara; Professor of Geology); Justice Windeyer (husband of Mary; father of Margaret); Sir Henry Parkes (Premier and office-bearer in the Womanhood Suffrage League, although his support waxed and waned according to political opportunism); Julian Ashton (husband of Eliza; prominent artist); Quong Tart (husband of Margaret; philanthropist and businessman); several MPs (Suttor, Fitzgerald and Cotton were office-bearers); and more. In Victoria the Reverend Bevan threw his distinguished weight behind the efforts of women to organise for intellectual or philanthropic purposes. Reverend Charles Strong and Alfred Deakin spoke on pro-suffrage platforms. Vida Goldstein’s brother-in-law, Henry Hyde Champion, was a ‘tower of strength’.

campaign in that colony.<sup>36</sup> However, it would not be true to generalise that behind every good woman was a good man. The women's groups at this time most often actively rejected the interference of men in the spaces they created, preferring a separate space. It is also certainly true that the women were more often the recipients of male scorn and obstruction than the beneficiaries of male goodwill.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed it is less important to know how ground-breakers such as Louisa Lawson, Maybanke Wolstoneholme and Vida Goldstein acquired their operational skills than to recognise that their enterprises generally helped provide broader access to the knowledge for other women, either through direct employment, enlightened schooling, informative journals or educational clubs and other spaces (such as the Book Lover's Library). Though they took place in the commercial public domain the activities of these women were altruistically driven; their lives and work passed on a template to the women who came after them.

## II. Public Speaking

*Many people who feel shocked beyond measure at the idea of a woman speaking in public, will go nightly or travel long distances to hear a woman sing. As a matter of womanly modesty, where is the difference? Will someone please rise and explain?*<sup>38</sup>

Traditionally in Western civilisation, oratory has been regarded as one of the markers of high culture and education: for centuries, says Karen Kohrs Campbell, 'the ability to persuade others [in public] has been part of Western man's standard of excellence ... even of

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<sup>36</sup> When the vote was won by South Australian women, Mary Lee said that in her estimation there were 'four men whose names should live on South Australian history's "brightest page" for their part in gaining the suffrage: they were Dr Edward Stirling, Mr Robert Caldwell MHA, the Hon. Dr Sylvanus Magarey and the Reverend Joseph Coles Kirby,' cited in Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: A history of women in South Australia from 1836* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1994), p.82.

<sup>37</sup> There are innumerable examples of men using their public voice or position to obstruct the women's efforts. Consider the MPs consistently voting down suffrage bills; publications such as the *Bulletin* that delighted in satirising the activities of the women; and the trade unions that hampered efforts to publish women's journals. A particularly interesting case is Vida Goldstein's father, Jacob. In most respects a liberal academic, he nevertheless chose to oppose suffrage for women which put him at odds with his wife and daughters. Furthermore he actively supported the anti-suffragists by speaking at public meetings on their behalf.

<sup>38</sup> Louisa Lawson, in the *Dawn*, Vol 3, No 5 (September 1890).

citizenship itself.<sup>39</sup> Oratory is the tool of politics, and has been a skill possessed by the most respected public figures and opinion-makers in history. The appreciable power and prestige of oratory was further revealed and enhanced by the prohibition against women practising it.<sup>40</sup> Historically women were prevented from speaking in public by the notion of the separate spheres which kept women out of the public gaze; and by lack of access to education which barred women from the sources of knowledge and the skills with which to articulate knowledge. Speaking in public, for women, would have been to violate the social and cultural code. The charge of impropriety was quickly levelled against a woman who sought to speak publicly, thereby immediately negating the worth of her message: 'In nineteenth-century America femininity and rhetorical action were seen as mutually exclusive. No "true" woman could be a public persuader.' By giving speeches, women entered the public sphere 'and thereby lost their claim to purity and piety.'<sup>41</sup> The nineteenth century saw women emerge as public speakers, but it was hostilely regarded as a political act: a subversion of the established order. Participation in public debate required women to assert themselves as authors of opinion, and 'authority' was not one of the Victorian woman's desired character traits.

Female orators were subjected to a range of manifestations of disapproval, extending from subtle resistance to physical abuse, predictably from men but often from women too. Women who spoke in public were frequently criticised on moral grounds, and the terms of abuse were often sexual.<sup>42</sup> Public speaking was considered immodest, indecorous, unwomanly and unbecoming. When Harriet Beecher Stowe went to England on a speaking tour about abolition, her brother read her speeches to the audience while she sat demurely

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in Louise Knight, 'An Authoritative Voice: Jane Addams and the Oratorical Tradition,' *Gender and History*, Vol.10, No.2 (August 1998), p.218.

<sup>40</sup> Linda Kerber notes that the culture of oratory included a culture of argument, and that women as a group have been 'understood to be differently situated in relation to argument, reason, and particularly abstraction ... The "learned" professions – the ministry, the law and the professoriate – involved not only reason and argument but also forceful public speaking, barred to women by law and custom' in 'The Unfinished Work of Mary Alice Baldwin,' *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, ed. Linda K. Kerber (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p.351.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp.9-10.

<sup>42</sup> Fanny Wright caused controversy in the early nineteenth century for her lectures on social reform. Louise Knight records that 'the unfeminine brashness of her speaking in public' was equally as shocking as the radical ideas she propounded: 'Male newspaper editors called her 'voluptuous' and considered her a seductress.' In Louise Knight, 'An Authoritative Voice', p.218.

mute on the platform.<sup>43</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who built her intellectual reputation lecturing in America and England around the turn of the century recognised that it was also the message that offended as much as the messenger: ‘When one is propagating truths deeply radical and desperately unpalatable one cannot expect an eager and convinced audience.’<sup>44</sup>

In her study of the rhetoric of nineteenth-century temperance women, Carol Mattingly observes that women speaking and writing in the cause of suffrage tended to use stronger language than women speaking about temperance, suggesting that although this is often mistaken for conservatism on the part of the temperance women, it should more accurately be seen as a strategy deliberately designed to make unconventional ideas more palatable to a wider audience.<sup>45</sup> Mattingly also gives evidence of the difficulty women had in ‘coming to public voice after centuries of silence’:

When Eliza J. Thompson recounts her leadership of women in their protest before saloons in 1873 and 1874, she describes her own fear, her inability to move or talk ... When her minister asked that she come forward to take charge of the meeting, ‘her limbs refused to bear her.’ As do other women, she notes her greater ease at speaking in the company of women. Only after all the men had left the room did she find both strength and voice.<sup>46</sup>

She cites an example of the kind of hostility encountered by women who spoke in public: Lucretia Wright’s visit to Cleveland to speak on temperance in 1853 earned the following report in the *Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer*:

The lady is poorly fitted for public speaking. She harangues a good deal in the “spread eagle” style. Her voice is pitched several degrees above *screech-o* and is consequently unpleasant. Her declamation is parson-like and

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<sup>43</sup> Lilian Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, p.127.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Elaine Showalter, *Inventing Herself: Claiming a Feminist Intellectual Heritage* (London: Picador, 2001), p.107.

<sup>45</sup> Carol Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth Century Temperance Rhetoric* (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, 1998), p.7.

<sup>46</sup> Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, p.5.

measured. She evidently speaks by rote, or memory. She requires to exert her physical powers too strongly. This produces a labored impression and is unpleasant to the hearer ... In our opinion, *Mrs Wright is right out of her sphere*<sup>47</sup>

This vehement attack on the lady speaker was defended on the grounds that a woman who went out of her sphere is no longer entitled to the gentle treatment she might receive in her feminine role: 'Miss Wright has made herself the object of criticism, and we have felt at liberty to speak of her plainly, and as if she were a *masculine* [sic].'<sup>48</sup>

In her study of the oratorical tradition of American women, Louise Knight describes three generations of women orators, beginning with the abolitionists Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth and the Grimke sisters from the 1830s to 1850s. Abolitionists and suffragists Lucy Stone,<sup>49</sup> Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton are some of the second generation, and the third generation included social reformers Carrie Chapman Catt and Jane Addams. By the third generation there was an established tradition of American women orators to draw on. Knight describes the circumstances surrounding the creation of this tradition:

To scale the walls defining oratory as male and become successful orators, women needed a belief in their authority to speak, a purpose for speaking, examples of orators, including women orators, to observe and be inspired by, support from experienced women orators who could be mentors, and informal or formal training in public speaking, including the opportunity to practise. In other words, they needed what the men already had, an oratorical tradition.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, p.100, my italics.

<sup>48</sup> Mattingly, *Well-Tempered Women*, p.100.

<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, Lucy Stone's friend, Antoinette Brown, wrote to her in 1847 about a women's group she knew of in Michigan. The members wrote essays and debated one another. 'Brown thought the result had been "rapid improvement in the use of the tongue" and she hoped a few of the members would "go out in the world pioneers of the great reform which is about to revolutionise society" by which presumably she meant woman's rights,' as detailed by Anne Firor Scott in *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p.112.

<sup>50</sup> Louise Knight, 'An Authoritative Voice', p.220-1.

A further obstruction to women speaking publicly were the demanding skills of running a public meeting, and the rules of public debate had to be mastered:

Newcomers had to learn the etiquette and traditions of platform work: setting up business discussions, proposing resolutions, making amendments and so on.<sup>51</sup>

In *Women and Leadership* Shiman describes the particular challenge of the platform for speakers in England where the audience understood and enthusiastically employed a noisy code for heckling and indicating appreciation or disapproval.

Women in the nineteenth century were motivated to speak publicly to articulate their vision of society's wrongs. Their social activism demanded that they take their message to the wider public, to campaign more effectively for abolition, temperance, suffrage and so on. In seeking political and legislative reform, they simultaneously achieved a cultural, societal reform by making female voices heard in the public domain. Some of them even managed to persuade males in their audiences not only that their message was true, but that it was appropriate for them as women to deliver it to the wider public.<sup>52</sup>

In Australia there had been no anti-slavery movement, no evangelical temperance movement (until the late 1880s) and the suffrage issue was not widely addressed until the last two decades of the century. For the Australian women of the 1890s, there was no local oratorical tradition to draw on. They had the remote example of the American and British women and the occasional imported speaker as their only role models.<sup>53</sup> The Australian women joining clubs and societies in the late nineteenth century lacked oratorical skills, and suffered the same weight of disapprobation as had been felt by the public speaking women pioneers in

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<sup>51</sup> Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, p.127.

<sup>52</sup> Josephine Butler's campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts won large mixed audiences: 'she has a voice of great charm and softness and intense but subdued earnestness and perfect simplicity in her style of speaking such as only the most accomplished orator possesses.' In Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, p.147.

<sup>53</sup> Annie Besant's tour is a good example. She had taught herself public speaking skills by sermonising privately in an empty church: 'I shall never forget the feeling of power and delight – but especially of power – that came upon me as I sent my voice ringing down the aisles.' When she toured Australia she was one of the most sought after speakers of her day, and a male listener commented that: 'the flaming fire of her eloquence must consume every man and woman who listened to her.' Cited in Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, p.130.

America. The opportunity to learn and practise the skills of public speaking was a strong motivation for Australian women joining literary clubs. This is reinforced by the fact that so many members of such clubs also held membership of political groups, hence had a reform agenda to promote on a public stage. It explains the desperation expressed in some of the groups about encouraging silent members to speak: it was never just an issue of obeying club rules and sharing the work of the club; there was a wider and more urgent issue of extending lessons in empowerment to all women. The emergence of an oratorical tradition for women can be seen as ‘an important achievement on the road to full citizenship ... a social reform in itself.’<sup>54</sup>

Learning the skills of oratory was the hallmark of a classical education: the kind of education that had been denied women for so long. When public speaking is understood as an act of citizenship that is revolutionary in the hands of women, the significance of women gaining access to higher education becomes even greater. The Greek and Roman classics were a source of inspiration for male orators. In the nineteenth century the study of Latin and Greek largely consisted of examination of oratory and rhetoric. The main text was Cicero’s *De Oratore* which described oratory as a series of learnable skills, essential for participation in the civic duties of a citizen. Public speaking talent did not have to be innate or confined to possessors of deep, booming male voices. It could be learned and developed through practise by anyone motivated by having something compelling to say. For aspiring female orators in Australia, the small and friendly audience in a literary club or society was the ideal training ground.

There are many examples of women speaking publicly as a result of their association with the clubs and societies at the time. Unlike the United States, where women had been developing a tradition of female oratory, it is clear that in Australia, public speaking was a daunting act for women and often disapproved of by society. In a speech to the Victorian Trades Hall in 1899, Catherine Helen Spence told the audience that it had taken her thirty years to gain the courage to speak up politically, adding that she had waited all that time for

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<sup>54</sup> Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.220.

men to take up her political cause.<sup>55</sup> The Victorian-era standard demanded that women be modest, meek, self-effacing. Indeed it is true too that at first the women were inexperienced and bad at public speaking: it was this self-knowledge that saw them joining together in the clubs to give themselves a place to learn and practise their skills. Speaking first to each other gave them the opportunity to hone the oratorical craft before taking to the podium in front of a larger or mixed audience to speak authoritatively on a political issue.

Catherine Helen Spence became a confident and sought-after speaker, even delivering fourteen lectures on a tour of the United States. She tended to be reported more sympathetically than her younger colleagues for her oratory:

Her arguments are thoughtful and sober, and her language entirely free from the screeching hysteria that has so often brought ridicule and contempt on the cause of “women’s rights”,

wrote the correspondent for *The Advertiser*. In contrast, Mary Lee was derided: ‘Poor Mary Lee! How she does froth and foam and stew and scold,’ wrote C.H. Hussey, M.P. to the *Adelaide Observer*.<sup>56</sup> However, this was by no means a universal opinion. Mary Lee’s rhetorical skill was such that she was invited to stand for election to the South Australian parliament in 1896, though she declined. Mary Lee was subject to particular criticism because she was deliberately provocative in the style and content of her oratory. Susan Magarey records her public denunciation of one parliamentarian as ‘an idiot’, and of the United Labor Party as ‘a lot of nincompoops’:

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<sup>55</sup> Helen Irving (ed), *A Woman’s Constitution: gender and history in the Australian Commonwealth* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1996), p.15. In Jeanne Young’s biography of Spence is another instance of Spence’s impatience with men failing to speak adequately for her: ‘Her ability being great and her desire to do something so imperative, she at first wrote papers for literary and debating societies. These were read by some man friend. But on one occasion she had been so much incensed with the very poor reading by her friend... of a paper she had written, that she declared she would have no more of it, and until the platform was open to women speakers, would write no more papers.’ Jeanne Young, *Catherine Helen Spence: A Study and an Appreciation* (Melbourne: Lothian, 1937), p.17.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Elizabeth Mansutti, *Mary Lee 1821-1909: Let her name be honoured* (South Australia: Women’s Suffrage Centenary History Sub-Committee, 1994), p.11.

We must go forward and upward. There is no finality in human progress...  
Surely the time is ripe – aye, rotten-ripe – for change? Then let it come.<sup>57</sup>

Queensland's Emma Miller did not regard herself as an orator and was unable to write a speech, however she was always in great demand as a public speaker. This was because she used an informal style that came across as heartfelt and sincere:

Mrs Miller never 'addressed' a meeting, she would 'talk' to it heart-to-heart – sometimes she talked 'at' it but always her great earnestness, her wonderful sincerity, rather than the words spoken, were the things that told  
... .

recalled Joe Collings.<sup>58</sup> According to her biographer, Pam Young, she also had the gift of mimicry and often illustrated her speeches with humorous descriptions and anecdotes.<sup>59</sup>

The early public speaking efforts of the club-women were, at best, regarded as a curiosity, and at worst, mocked and derided. See, for example, the *Bulletin's* account of a meeting of the Ladies Club in Sydney:

A few women in Sydney can rise and emit a coherent sentence to a roomful of people without gasping and clutching at the nearest chairback but even the fluent person who goes beyond remarking, 'I think the price of tickets should be 2-and-6' at a Town Hall meeting, looks straight down her nose and takes herself mighty seriously. She never elocutes or jests or perorates, and her vocabulary is limited to the best-worn words and "I think". If a woman orator is eloquent it is usually on her own, and only, subject which she drags in everywhere. If some of those one-topic women thunderers were men we should call them simply bores.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cited in Susan Magarey, 'Why didn't they want to be members of parliament?' in *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* ed. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994), p.78.

<sup>58</sup> Pam Young, *Proud to be a Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1991), p.89.

<sup>59</sup> Young, *Proud to be a Rebel*, p.89.

<sup>60</sup> *Bulletin*, no author (26 June 1897), p.12.

In 1891 Maybanke Wolstoneholme made her first public speech, on a platform with other members of the Womanhood Suffrage League. Her biographer notes that she was 'wildly applauded', that the speech appeared in print several times over subsequent months, and that it 'marked her transition from the domestic to the public woman.'<sup>61</sup> Like her companions on the platform at that meeting, Maybanke Wolstoneholme had used the Women's Literary Society as an effective training ground for public speaking. The speech, reprinted in the *Daily Telegraph*, used 'strong, simple language and concepts', and in its delivery, writes Jan Roberts, can be seen

the process of the domestic becoming political. One must imagine, however, the effect of the words when spoken by a voice described as 'bordering on the masculine, but so modulated and sweet that once heard you never forget'.<sup>62</sup>

In a letter to Rose Scott, Maybanke wrote of the experience of public speaking:

When I stand up all the wild horse spirit surges up in me and though I tremble I feel as if I were ready to fight like a lioness.

With this sense of power and strength though came the understanding that to betray such feelings would alienate her audience, and that she must curb or disguise her energy.

But we shall win more by being soft so I am going to try to be as wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove.<sup>63</sup>

In an interview given in 1925, Maybanke reflected on the experience of becoming a public speaker:

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<sup>61</sup> Jan Roberts, 'Maybanke Anderson: The Domestic and the Public,' *A Woman's Constitution?* ed. Helen Irving, p.21.

<sup>62</sup> Roberts, 'Maybanke Anderson,' p.27.

<sup>63</sup> Roberts, 'Maybanke Anderson,' p.29.

It was an ordeal. I had never spoken in public before. But I foresaw many years of struggle and much public speaking, and I determined to do without notes, or break down, and retire. After that, we spoke at drawing rooms and public meetings wherever we were invited. I did so sometimes two or three times a week. Mrs Dickie, Miss Golding and I were a debating team and we never lost a debate.<sup>64</sup>

An obituary written for Maybanke after her death recalls how skilful a speaker she became:

When Mrs Anderson spoke at large meetings ... I have seen people listening spellbound at her earnestness, her eloquence and her wonderful understanding of human nature. Indeed it was impossible not to feel that inspiration came from her heart and soul.<sup>65</sup>

Louisa Lawson's daughter, Gertrude O'Connor noted in her account of her mother's career that her bluntness of speech had led to her making enemies easily. She confronted 'anxiety, timidity and fear of ridicule' in the women she tried to enlist in the Dawn Club. This she attributed to 'many ages of suppression':

Whoever heard of a body of men united in a cause abandoning their work for fear of what a woman might say?<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, O'Connor notes that Lady Windeyer was a good public speaker, practising the softness and restraint described by Maybanke Wolstoneholme:

Logical, refined and sometimes very eloquent ... In her soft cultured voice she would convince where many [such as Louisa Lawson?] would fail.<sup>67</sup>

Louisa Lawson typically tackled the contentiousness of women speaking publicly head-on. In the July 1893 issue of the *Dawn* entitled 'The Silence of Women' she harangues women for

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<sup>64</sup> Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1993), p.69.

<sup>65</sup> Ellen Desailly cited in Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, p.115.

<sup>66</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.126.

<sup>67</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.126.

their silence making them seem complicit with the male dominated culture that seeks to keep them invisible, and helping to prolong and sustain immorality:

Women have been laughed at, scolded, scorned and flattered for their garrulity: it is time they were censured for their silence ... I say that their silence on these matters amounts to criminal condonation of wrongs which positively belong to their sphere, *and their sphere alone*, to uproot and cast out of society.<sup>68</sup>

Rose Scott was a very practised public speaker, having made good use of the audience at her private salon over many years. During the referendum years of 1898 and 1899, she became a frequent speaker against Federation. Her speeches gained extensive press coverage. For many reasons, Rose Scott made a strong impression as a public speaker, observes Helen Irving. At first she was a curiosity, a 'lady orator' at a time when women did not even attend official banquets, let alone speak at political meetings.

'I had never heard a lady speak before,' wrote one journalist, herself a woman, 'and in my mind's eye I saw a large, florid, tall, aggressive, not to say vinegary, person with a loud voice and ultra-offensive, assertive manner and spectacles, carrying fire and sword into the enemy's country'. Instead she found a 'nice lady, not too large, with demure, not to say, quakerish ways' whose meek presentation was occasionally coloured with humour and with 'sly digs at the men'. The men in the audience sat back, the reporter observed, their arms folded, their legs crossed, 'quiet as mice', as if they were 'prepared to hear "mother" talk'.<sup>69</sup>

Public speaking did not come easily to these Victorian-era women. Apart from the legitimate fear of public (and sometimes familial) disapproval, there was a basic and understandable fear and reluctance to engage in an undertaking that was unfamiliar and unpractised. To make matters worse, oratory was a demanding discipline. High standards were set for good oration, and women by and large lacked oratorical training.

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<sup>68</sup> Louisa Lawson, *Dawn*, July 1893, original emphasis.

<sup>69</sup> Helen Irving, 'Fair Federalists and Founding Mothers,' *A Woman's Constitution?* ed. Helen Irving, pp.8-9.

The Women's Literary Society, like other clubs and groups of the period became an effective training ground for women learning the art of public speaking. Indeed, many members of the Women's Literary Society became public figures, esteemed for their oratory. However, even in the sheltered enclave of a women's group, some women found the task of finding their voice in front of an audience overwhelming.

Women's Literary Society members included a core of vocal and articulate women who consistently lamented the reluctance of other members to share the burden of organisation, committee participation, and paper presentation. The Minutes record a lengthy discussion in September 1892 which was initiated by Miss Vallentine, about means of forcing members to actively participate more in the meetings. The Report of the Society of the fourth year, ending August 1894, laments that

it is a matter of regret to your Committee that the number of workers is in such slight proportion to that of the members. It is earnestly hoped that, during the ensuing year, papers may be written for the pleasure and benefit of the Society by many able members who have not yet contributed.<sup>70</sup>

By 1895, the Report was even more dismal: 'it has again fallen to the lot of a few to be the main contributors, and a large number of members have been apathetic in their attitude.'<sup>71</sup>

The Annual Reports of the Tuesday Club, a debating circle that was an offshoot of the Women's Club, consistently record similar laments:

greater interest would be maintained if some of the hitherto silent members would feel it their bounden duty to overcome their timidity and take part in the discussions and so assist the supporters of the debate.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Report of the Women's Literary Society, Sydney, August 1894 (held at Mitchell Library).

<sup>71</sup> Report of the Women's Literary Society, Sydney, August 1895 (held at Mitchell Library).

<sup>72</sup> The Women's Club Annual Report for 1906 (held at Mitchell Library).

Indeed, the Rules of the Tuesday Club specifically insisted that every member must share in the discussion or else stand for three minutes in silence if too shy to speak. In spite of this victimisation of the timid, the Club was very popular: visitors had to be restricted and latecomers couldn't find standing room.

The Annual Report of the Women's Club for 1906 gives an interesting insight into the personal and political motivations for women to speak in public. By speaking publicly they are not just speaking to their immediate audience of like-minded women; the political act of speaking in the public domain means that the act has a resonance that is felt in the wider society.

Doubtless the great value of the Tuesday debates, apart from their centralising power, lies in the fact that they stimulate the flow of ideas and encourage the expression of thought. Even though the arguments seem often to have no definite result, and the variety of opinions at the close of the discussion are even greater than at the beginning, nevertheless the interchange of ideas is helpful and perhaps we gain more than we know when we try to express in words what we possess and value in thought ... After all we are talking to find out what we really think, and the fact of being very serious about it does not perhaps detract from the value of the result.<sup>73</sup>

In the Annual Report of 1907, the Honorary Secretary, Miss Ross, is able to report that:

An ever-increasing number of new speakers has arisen; many who had been silent auditors at the discussions in the past, having at last found the courage to express their views. And it is to be remembered that each additional speaker, by the expression of her thought, not only enlarges the mental outlook of the members generally, but herself gains in clearness of perception and in readiness of speech.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The Women's Club Annual Report for 1906 (held at Mitchell Library).

<sup>74</sup> The Women's Club Annual Report for 1907 (held at Mitchell Library).

At this time, even on the rare occasion when a woman was recognised as an effective public speaker, she was often discouraged from speaking. Lack of skill was not the issue; a perceived lack of womanly virtue was. In a short memoir written to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of Women's College at the University of Sydney, Louisa Macdonald recounts a salient episode where she was asked to represent the University of London at the celebration of the University of Sydney's Jubilee:

My own University had done me the honour of asking me to represent them, chiefly, I think because being a Fellow of University College I stood for the first beginnings of the London University. When he heard this, the then Chancellor of Sydney called to say that if I didn't want to present their address, the Senate would be quite pleased to excuse me from doing so. I believe myself, that the Senate was quite sick at heart to think of a woman representing any University, but I only laughed and said I was not afraid they would eat me, and declined his offer with thanks.<sup>75</sup>

Louisa Macdonald's higher education and recent experience of the wider politics of Britain lent her credibility as a public figure, and she had extensive experience as a public speaker. She often commented on her own and others' public performances. At the inaugural meeting of the National Council of Women which was held at the Town Hall in June 1896, Lady Hampden presided poorly, according to Louisa Macdonald, who described her as 'without much ability as a chairwoman'. Writing to Eleanor Grove of the meeting, Louisa criticised her own speaking performance too:

I moved one motion [to create the Council], but very badly for I had not had time to learn what I wanted to say and was too tired when I got to the meeting to cover my gaps of memory with fresh invention.<sup>76</sup>

Of course, very often it was the content rather than the context that grabbed the public's attention. If the sight of women speaking from a public platform did not alone cause

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<sup>75</sup> Louisa Macdonald, *The Women's College Within the University of Sydney* (a pamphlet printed in Australia by Halstead Press, 1947, held at the Mitchell Library), p.12.

<sup>76</sup> Janice Beaumont and Vere Hole, *Letters from Louisa: A woman's view of the 1890s, based on the letters of Louisa Macdonald, first principal of the Women's College, University of Sydney* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p.87-88.

censure, they still had the capacity to shock with their message. One renowned example of a woman being censured for her publicly stated opinion was the speech given by Eliza Ashton in 1891. 'Lizzie' was married to the artist Julian Ashton, who taught at Maybanke Wolstoneholme's Maybanke College. She was a columnist for the *Daily Telegraph*, writing as 'Faustine'. At this time, the paper was edited by Sir Henry Baynton Somer Gullett, husband of Lucinda Gullett. Lucinda, Maybanke and Lizzie were all members of the Women's Literary Society and later of the Womanhood Suffrage League; indeed, Lizzie Ashton and Maybanke Wolstoneholme were among the eight founding members drawn together by Dora Montefiore.

Eliza Ashton spoke (somewhat facetiously) about the institution of marriage, suggesting that lifelong unions were unnatural and that a better model may be to conduct an annual review when the couple would decide whether to continue or discontinue their union. This way, she reasoned, the whole messy issue of divorce could be avoided. She proposed rational and mutual decision-making as a more civilised way to conduct human relationships than through legislative intervention.

Eliza Ashton's critique of marriage, made from a suffrage platform and reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 12 November 1891 caused a crisis in the Womanhood Suffrage League. It drew an outraged response from the conservative wife of the Governor, Lady Jersey, who wrote to Lady Mary Windeyer (current President of the Womanhood Suffrage League) urging her to publicly dissociate the Womanhood Suffrage League from Ashton's 'atrocious' sentiments which, she said, raised the spectre of 'free love'. Rose Scott was prevailed on to make a public response to Ashton and deftly turned the argument away from one of the sanctity of marriage to one of men's behaviour. Men, she said, given the opportunity to annually review their marriage contract, would exploit it to the disadvantage of wives and mothers, and would behave dishonourably, selfishly and faithlessly. Thus she sidestepped an argument with her friend Lizzie Ashton and yet was seen to take issue with Lizzie's provocative suggestions at the same time. Rose Scott retained a private friendship with Eliza Ashton until Lizzie's death in 1900.

Maybanke Wolstoneholme was less inclined to accommodate what she regarded as nothing less than an attempt to censor Lizzie Ashton. She reacted energetically, within months establishing her journal *Woman's Voice* which she promoted as being a forum for the free expression of views, including some regarding marriage that were far more provocative than Lizzie's thoughtful ideas.

In Victoria, Vida Goldstein, graduate of the Presbyterian Ladies College and a generation younger than the women from NSW described above, was renowned as an effective public speaker. She made her first public speech in 1899 at a woman suffrage meeting in Prahran.

Her delivery was described as having 'ease and fluency of speech ... united with a charm of manner essentially womanly, and this, together with the clearness and precision of her arguments, carried the audience irresistibly with her'. Vida's voice had 'clear bell like tones'; it carried well and her thorough knowledge of her subject led to 'an assurance of manner and precision in argument for which she became noted'.<sup>77</sup>

Vida evidently drew heavily on the models encountered in her travels in the United States. She wrote of Carrie Chapman Catt, 'She is not a speaker, she is a born orator.'<sup>78</sup> Vida Goldstein's own attempts to be elected to Parliament in 1903 met with predictable backlash, and some new tactics on the part of the press. She received considerable attention but it was largely negative. The *Age* dismissed her as 'a pretty speaker who can talk charmingly apropos of nothing', while the *Bulletin* facetiously focused on her appearance instead of her policies, making her appear a topic more suited to fashion pages than serious political analysis.

The spectre of a woman speaking in public aroused curiosity, hostility and sometimes simply confusion. In a poignant example of more attention being paid to the act of speaking than to the content of what was said, Penny Russell points to the absurd press reports of Lady Jersey's public speaking endeavours. A natural communicator and relaxed public speaker

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<sup>77</sup> Bomford, *Vida Goldstein*, p.25.

<sup>78</sup> Cited in Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001), p.161.

(‘clad in the authority of her aristocratic lineage,’ as Russell elegantly phrases it<sup>79</sup>), Lady Jersey received a great deal of press attention for her speaking engagements. Lady Jersey’s topic was always far from feminist, and rarely strayed from patronising benevolence. The inability of the press to understand the phenomenon of a woman who could and would speak in public – even on innocuous topics – led to the Lady being ludicrously depicted as a shrieking feminist who manipulated her husband and effectively governed NSW; and this in spite of her repeatedly and explicitly stated anti-feminism. For example, Sappho wrote in the *Bulletin* in April 1891:

Sometimes she cannot keep silent, but whispers her views into his willing ear, and then you hear his obedient echo: ‘As Lady J. desires me to say’...

Indeed, her reputation had preceded her because even before Lady Jersey’s arrival the *Bulletin* had asserted that Lady Jersey was ‘believed to be the Governor’s governor’.<sup>80</sup>

Membership of the various clubs and societies gave women an opportunity to experience the rare phenomenon of seeing their sex declaiming opinions and knowledge. The literary clubs encouraged (sometimes bullied) all members into taking turns at delivering papers to an audience of club members, and thereby developed the oratorical skills of their members within a supportive and sympathetic intellectual environment. However, not content with the internalised intellectual benefits of participating in the club lectures, debates and discussions, many of the clubs overtly primed their members in public speaking in order to encourage them into public roles and participation in political debate.

### III. Public Writing

Earlier in the nineteenth century a taboo existed against women’s names appearing in newspapers. Women who wrote letters to the editor, for example, tended to sign themselves with *nom de plumes* or submit their opinions via male relatives who would then appear as the

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<sup>79</sup> Penny Russell, ‘A Woman of the Future? Feminism and conservatism in colonial New South Wales’, *Women’s History Review* Vol.13, No.1 (2004), p.10.

<sup>80</sup> Penny Russell, ‘A Woman of the Future?’, p.11.

author. It was held that only a woman of doubtful repute would ever have her name in the newspaper, and by this convention the dominant culture found yet another means to silence women from one another and from history. Contemporary historians are forced to speculate and debate the true authorship of letters and articles that were coyly published under false names. The conscious decision to 'go public' by women in the later nineteenth century was another feminist act, often encouraged by the solidarity and support derived from club membership.<sup>81</sup>

By the last decades of the nineteenth century it was not unfamiliar for women to be in print, but the expectation was that they would publish in certain genres, and through the agency of a male publishing house. Women could be 'lady novelists', writers of romance fiction, writing from – and about – the domestic sphere.<sup>82</sup> Occasionally women were accepted as journalists, but they were retained by male publishers to write as instructed.<sup>83</sup> The mass circulation of journals devoted to women's issues, often published by women, is further demonstration of women testing the boundaries of the public/private split. Words gain resonance in print, and become even more powerful politically than oratory for their ability to be circulated to a mass audience, and to stand as a record through time. Indeed, the journals that were published by some of the women's clubs and societies at the time often printed the text of speeches made by the prominent women in their organisations. The publication of journals written by women and for women, and sometimes even produced by

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<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Rose Scott's first article for the *Sydney Morning Herald* printed over her own name ('Home Lessons') had its genesis in the Friday night salon, where its content was refined and she was able to confirm that it would receive a sympathetic reception. See Chapter One, p.52.

<sup>82</sup> Susan Sheridan shows how women writing within this convention exploited the opportunity for a voice in the public sphere, in her book *Along the Faultlines: Sex, Race and Nation in Australian Women's Writing, 1880s-1930s* (NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1995), using the genre conventions of romance writing to explore the condition of women in colonial Australia: '... the so-called 'lady writers' such as Ada Cambridge, Rosa Praed and Jessie Couvreur ("Tasma") [used] romantic plots and themes to make more overtly critical comment on relations between the sexes.' Sheridan argues that while the separation of the spheres was maintained, women writers could achieve 'a degree of freedom within the feminised discourse of romance and get public recognition for their writing' (p.xii).

<sup>83</sup> Several of the women described in these pages earned a living as journalists: Catherine Helen Spence, Alice Henry, Eliza Ashton, Lucinda Gullett, Miles Franklin, all wrote for the mainstream (male) press. Alice Henry combined entrepreneurial work with journalism. She worked for the Melbourne *Argus* but found the editorial restrictions frustrating: her editor believed that 'both the labour movement and the women's movement should either be ignored or actually opposed', so she was forced to constrain her views to unsigned, unpaid (and usually unpublished) letters and articles.

a female workforce was an act of defiance and a further transgression of the boundary between the spheres.

A precedent existed in England for the publication of serious journals for women. The Langham Place Circle established the *English Woman's Journal* as early as 1858. The editorial collective organised their own printing firm, the Victoria Press, which was run by women. It took on young women as apprentices and then kept them on as 'journeymen'. The Victoria Press lasted in business for many years, printing the *Journal* and material for other women's organisations. Lilian Shiman describes the device of the journal as an important tool for women's organisations in England:

Each woman's organisation gave top priority to establishing and sustaining a journal that was circulated to the membership and not only educated them in organisational matters but gave them a sense of being part of a larger group – no longer isolated and unimportant. The consciousness-raising of these publications was essential.<sup>84</sup>

The most influential feminist journals established in Britain during the decade of the 1890s included *Shafts* (1892-1897), edited by Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp; *Women's Penny Paper*; *The Adult* (the journal of the Legitimation League, established 1893); and *The Women's Signal*.

In Australia, some of the journals were published by the clubs and societies to disseminate information about their activities. Other journals were unaffiliated to a group, but were written for or edited by women who were prominent in one or other of the clubs: Maybanke Wolstenholme's *The Woman's Voice* is an example. Other general readership journals could be relied on to feature articles by and about women and their role and concerns, for example, *Cosmos*, *Sydney Quarterly Magazine* and *Centennial Magazine*.<sup>85</sup> And still others catered specifically

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<sup>84</sup> Lilian Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, p.125.

<sup>85</sup> *Cosmos: an illustrated Australian magazine*, which was edited by Mrs Charles Bright, began publication in 1894. While not exclusively devoted to women's issues, *Cosmos* consistently reported on the prominent women and women's activities of the period. It was in *Cosmos* that Henry Hyde Champion published his influential pro-suffrage article 'The Claim of Woman'. *Sydney Quarterly Magazine* published the series of articles by Florence Walsh discussing women's position in Australia.

for a female audience but offered politics and intellectual rigour instead of recipes and fashion advice.<sup>86</sup>

When public speaking is recognised as a subversive act for women at this time, then the title of Maybanke Wolstoneholme's journal, *Woman's Voice*, gains added significance (although, paradoxically, it liked to describe itself as 'the quiet voice of the home'). 'Speaking out' was considered 'licentious' and an 'effrontery' when performed from a public podium, but even giving voice in print was regarded as inappropriate for women, especially when the subject matter was 'disreputable'. Maybanke Wolstoneholme established the journal in response to continued frustration with the single agenda of the Womanhood Suffrage League, and the timidity of the Women's Literary Society in dealing with controversial women's issues. As was noted earlier, the immediate spur was the censorship of Eliza (Lizzie) Ashton over her provocative comments about marriage; at this Maybanke Wolstoneholme saw a need for an outlet for the free expression of views on a range of issues.

The *Woman's Voice* commenced publication on 9 August 1894, under a masthead that read:

Democratic, but not revolutionary –  
Womanly but not weak –  
Fearless without effrontery –  
Liberal without license.

Maybanke Wolstoneholme wrote the editorials 'From the Casement', which were characterised by their frank treatment of marriage, sex, divorce and property issues, and frequently contained reflections drawn from personal experience. The first edition declared that it would deal with

the subjects that interest thinking women to form a bond of union amongst all women who work for the common good, and to aid mothers trying to educate their daughters to the same level as their sons.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> In 1891 the *Woman's Suffrage Journal* commenced publication in Sydney. Edited by J.H. Theobald, it covered the formation of the Womanhood Suffrage League, and reprinted speeches made by the members giving them voice in print for an audience unable to attend in the flesh.

Contained in the first edition were articles on the recent win for women in New Zealand of female suffrage, and another entitled 'Thoughts on Woman Suffrage' by Rose Scott which analysed emancipation of women and workers. However there were always more articles on sex than on suffrage; the *Woman's Voice* was Maybanke Wolstoneholme's forum for openness, explicitness, and impatience with hypocrisy, and, as Susan Sheridan observes, 'sexual reform [was] central to its vision of social transformation.'<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the *Woman's Voice* was especially provocative for its courageous coverage of such topics as rape in marriage:<sup>89</sup> topics so taboo that neither men nor women could broach them without attracting opprobrium.

Like Louisa Lawson's *The Dawn*, the *Woman's Voice* was produced by an all-woman team of office staff, typesetters, and compositors. It was published fortnightly at a cost of just two pence. By 1895 there were sixteen agents carrying the journal in NSW, as well as all railway bookstalls. Two agents carried the journal in Victoria, one in Queensland, and three in New Zealand. However, the radicalism of the subject matter made it hard for the journal to keep advertisers and subscribers (and some parents removed their daughters from Wolstoneholme's school 'Maybanke College' in disapproval at the material covered and views expressed).

Over the eighteen months of its life, the journal carried articles on diverse topics with a liberal agenda: pro-rational dress, pro-divorce law reform, pro-cremation, anti-capital punishment, anti-compulsory motherhood, and more. Maybanke Wolstoneholme was well aware of the subversiveness of a woman going into print about such issues:

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<sup>87</sup> Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, p.73.

<sup>88</sup> Susan Sheridan, 'The *Woman's Voice* on Sexuality' in *Debutante Nation*, ed. Magarey, Rowley and Sheridan (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p.114.

<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, it was on this topic that Maybanke Wolstoneholme's distant relative, Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy, campaigned most vigorously in England in the later half of the nineteenth century.

There was a time, and that not so long ago, when to think these thoughts would have been sinful, and to say them, except with bated breath, repugnant to the average women.<sup>90</sup>

Towards the end of 1895, ill and depressed over the recent accidental death of one of her sons, Maybanke Wolstoneholme asked Margaret Windeyer to take over editing the journal, but her request was refused.

The *Woman's Voice* ceased publication at the end of 1895, though the same title was used in 1905 by the National Council of Women. The 1905 *Woman's Voice* was subtitled *A Monthly Journal Devoted to the Higher and Broader Education and Advancement of Women*. The first edition was published in May, and its cover featured a photograph of Lady Rawson, the then President of the National Council of Women, NSW. Its introductory 'Address to the Women of Australia' proclaimed it as:

a journal to be devoted to the elevation of the national character, through the influence, and by the higher and broader education of womanhood; to arouse women to the conscious sense of the great need of culture and discipline, and to the fact that it lies with them, especially with the mothers of the people, by slow and strenuous work, to bring about the solution of the problems of humanity; to awaken a greater realisation of the fact that woman's power and influence in the home, and through the home, out into the world, plays an important part in the building of the Empire.

With Mrs Molyneaux Parkes as editor, the new monthly journal took on a conservative tone that was in complete opposition to the earlier radicalism. Nevertheless, this too can be seen as a feminist endeavour: the journal was insistent about its educational agenda for its female readership, even while it used the rhetoric of conservative religious ideology ('woman is the mother/moral guardian of humanity') to explain its mission.

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<sup>90</sup> *Woman's Voice*, 17 November 1894; cited in Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists*, p.60.

The women's journals gave voice to the activities of women when they were ignored or trivialised by the mainstream male press. Louisa Lawson reprinted in *The Dawn* the full text of her own speech on suffrage given at the first meeting of The Dawn Club. *The Dawn* has received a great deal of scrutiny elsewhere, but it should be mentioned here as a particularly subversive breach of the public domain by being the first journal to employ an exclusively female workforce, as well as by its enduring success. In Western Australia in 1920 Bessie Rischbieth revived and paid tribute to the memory of Louisa Lawson's *The Dawn* by naming the new journal for the Women's Services Guilds which she edited throughout its life, *The Dawn*.

Vida Goldstein's journal *Australian Woman's Sphere* was made possible by the generous financial contribution of an unconfirmed source (probably the estate of Mrs Bear-Crawford). It commenced publication in 1900 as the mouthpiece of the United Council for Women's Suffrage. Vida wanted it to contain serious reading (though nothing dull), and regarded it as the responsibility of the journal to report on the activities of women all over Australia.<sup>91</sup> Women from interstate, including Catherine Helen Spence and Rose Scott, contributed articles. Reports discussed the suffrage and other work of women nationally and internationally, including issues relating to sexuality, equal pay and penal reform.

The *Woman's Sphere* was forced to close down due to its lack of financial viability in 1905. In 1909 Vida Goldstein launched a new journal for women entitled the *Woman Voter* which became the mouthpiece of the Women's Political Association. Like the *Australian Woman's Sphere* it covered issues of national and international interest for women.

Many of these examples illustrate how inseparable the journals were from the clubs that spawned them. A journal was often the product or manifestation of a club's purpose which existed in a larger forum with a larger audience. Other examples of journals that existed to disseminate the ideology of their parent clubs include *The Court* which was published from

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<sup>91</sup> Her monthly round-up of suffrage activities inadvertently drew her into the middle of an acrimonious dispute between Rose Scott and the Golding sisters in NSW. She made the mistake of appearing to acknowledge the pre-eminence of Rose Scott in the NSW suffrage struggle, which inflamed Annie Golding; but also managed to offend Rose Scott by nevertheless soliciting and publishing information about the activities of the Golding sisters.

1894 in Melbourne by the Order of the Daughters of the Court;<sup>92</sup> *The Woman* which appeared from September 1907 and was a conservative Melbourne monthly published by the Australian Woman's National League; the *Austral Cultivist and Woman's Realm* which was a cooperative effort out of Melbourne, published under the auspices of the WCTU, the Women's Franchise League, the Women's Land Reform League and the Women's Progressive League; and *The Australian Woman* which came out of New South Wales from March 1894 and was designated 'the Official Organ of the Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW'. Its motto ran:

This Paper is written for and by women  
It is canvassed for and by women  
It is edited by women  
And it will be read by women.<sup>93</sup>

The first edition carried a column from Washington about the activities of United States women and a story about Elizabeth Cady Stanton written by Jessie Ackerman. Included in its contents was a list of other Australian journals 'from which intelligent people holding various views can get all sides of every question'.

Other unaffiliated women's journals that were published in the period give some insight into the extent to which such publications helped to spread and sustain the development of feminism. A forerunner of these was *The Australian Women's Magazine and Domestic Journal* which was published in Victoria from 1882. It was overtly political in its efforts to deal with women's issues, distinguishing them both from men's concerns and from the domestic realm. It aspired to be intellectual and woman-centred:

*The Australian Women's Magazine* is projected by women, for women ...  
Hitherto women in Australia have had few opportunities of expressing their views, or demonstrating the fruit of their intelligence and experience, save in journals written more in the interests - different, though not necessarily

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<sup>92</sup> The Order of the Daughters of the Court was a Victorian women's group that is described in Chapter Four, pp.221-227.

<sup>93</sup> Edition held (on microfilm) in Mitchell Library.

conflicting – of the stronger sex. And woman's work and life and mission lies much outside of these. It is to her interest to have a medium of expression peculiarly her own, to have before her the thoughts that women like herself think daily, to be possessed of the interpretation of matters which affect her life, social and domestic, from her own point of observation.<sup>94</sup>

The first edition contained front page articles about hours of work for women in retail jobs and a strike of the Tailoresses Union. These shared space with short stories, poetry, recipes and fashion notes.

The concern to be of educational merit to women was also evident in the first edition of *The Lady*, published in Sydney in November 1889:

We desire to produce a paper that will interest, amuse and instruct every woman – not a journal of fashion only, nor a mere novelette, but a representative periodical, in the pages of which girl, maid and matron will alike find pleasure and profit. No pains will be spared towards obtaining the fullest accounts of current social events and other topics appertaining to the world in which we live ... we fully recognise the right of women to compete with men in any occupation the nature of which permits such competition ... nor will our poorer sisters be forgotten.<sup>95</sup>

An article in the first edition described approvingly the campaign to raise funds to establish a Women's College at the University of Sydney.

Several existing, conventional women's magazines underwent a transformation at this time in order to meet the perceived demand from readership for more political, educational content. In Sydney in 1905 a fashion magazine in its sixth volume called *The Wardrobe – An Australian Monthly Journal of Latest Fashions, Shopping, etc, for Australian Homes* was taken over and remodelled:

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<sup>94</sup> *The Australian Women's Magazine and Domestic Journal*, No.1 (April 1882), p.1 (held in Latrobe Library).

<sup>95</sup> *The Lady*, Vol.1, No.1 (15 November 1889), p.1 (ML).

Hitherto it has been a fashion journal ... But there is little scope in one avenue. The [reasons for the] introduction or commencing of one of these [serious content journals] may be found in the contribution of Miss Rose Scott ... and the interview with Mrs Dwyer. The new departments for which arrangements are being made will embrace ... "Society", and "Women's Politics". The services of an accomplished journalist as general editor, and a competent staff of experts in their several spheres, have been secured.<sup>96</sup>

Also out of Sydney, the *Australian News of Ladies' Politics* was similarly the re-badging of another title, and a re-casting of itself as a serious political journal for women:

Hitherto this magazine had devoted its columns almost entirely to dress, fashion and other more or less unimportant feminine frippery; but in the last few numbers the process of remodelling has been commenced ... Women have long enough been looked upon as dolls; treated as dolls, and many have developed by this process of evolution into mere human dolls. The emancipation of women has commenced, and this magazine will cater to her higher intellect instead of to her petty vanity.<sup>97</sup>

It emerged in this form in 1906. It is not known how many of its existing 3000 subscribers it retained. Its objective was to reach every woman's industrial or political association throughout NSW, to contain articles and interviews with the leaders of the women's political movements, and to educate women in the responsible use of the vote:

The *Australian News of Ladies' Politics* is the only journal in the Commonwealth which treats solely on the subject of its title, more especially in a serious manner; giving in concrete form the solid sentiments of the most intellectual women in the country, amplifying in detail, and explaining from the mouths of authority, the various issues as viewed by the chief exponents of social, industrial and national politics. For this reason it

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<sup>96</sup> *The Wardrobe*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (October 1905), (held in Mitchell Library).

<sup>97</sup> *The Australian News of Ladies' Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (March 1906), (held in Mitchell Library).

should receive the attention of every intellectual (and, in fact, any other kind of) woman into whose hands a copy might fall.

The evidence of these two (competing) journals suggests that for a time, in NSW at least, it was felt that women generally were more interested in politics than in fashion and household advice, and that this trend had not escaped the notice of commercial proprietors. These were after all commercial publications, not mouthpieces for feminist organisations. It also indicates that there was sufficient activity in the area of women's politics to sustain monthly publications. The overhaul of fashion magazines into feminist forums reflected a major shift and growing acceptance of the presence of women at least as an informed audience in the public sphere.

Nineteenth-century Australian women used voluntary associations in clubs and societies to create a new public space in which they began to invent a culture of feminism.<sup>98</sup> The space was both actual – existing as commercial entities in the public domain – and intellectual. If the chalk circle delineating women's sphere wasn't obliterated by their efforts, it was certainly re-drawn. Society was forced to become accustomed to women claiming a voice, both on public platforms and in print, that spoke of change.

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<sup>98</sup> In 1916 *Woman's Work: A New Australian Woman's Paper* was published in Sydney and Melbourne. This journal was an uncomfortable mix of serious journalism and frippery. Interestingly an article in the first edition by Jennie Scott Griffiths addressed the topic of women's clubs: 'One of the most pressing needs of the working girls and women everywhere are residential clubs, run on broadly democratic lines.' Jennie Scott Griffiths, 'Just between Ourselves,' *Woman's Work: A New Australian Woman's Paper*, Vol.1, No.1 (Sydney and Melbourne, September 1916), p.9. (ML)

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE NETWORKS

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 1891, Maybanke Wolstoneholme read a letter to the second informal meeting of what would become the Womanhood Suffrage League. The letter was from Jessie Ackermann, the American temperance leader and suffragist, who was at that time in Australia advising the Australian branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. It was resolved by the meeting that Maybanke Wolstoneholme was to interview Jessie Ackermann 'to get from her personally all information that might be useful,' as Dora Montefiore recorded.

Maybanke Wolstoneholme duly interviewed Jessie Ackermann to pick her brains regarding the suffrage issue. As a topic for discussion at a Women's Literary Society meeting, Maybanke had already raised suffrage once, but was met with silence. She recalled: 'After a while one member rose and said "I hope that we shall never touch this abominable question."' The Women's Literary Society never coped well with examination of contentious political issues. As will be seen later, the Womanhood Suffrage League had just as much difficulty dealing with any issue not related to suffrage.

Nevertheless, on 6 May 1891, the Womanhood Suffrage League was formally founded at a public meeting attended by many members of the Women's Literary Society (including Maybanke Wolstoneholme). This story illustrates how, by indirect yet tangible means, an American woman with wide experience of a range of women's issues in an international context helped to expand the understandings and ambitions of a small local women's group in the colony of New South Wales. The Women's Literary Society members who created the Womanhood Suffrage League tapped into the international world of the womanhood suffrage movement.

Maybanke Wolstoneholme's continued efforts to engage with international representatives and ideas led to her election as Vice President of the International Women's Union in 1893.

For three years she was Vice President of both the Women's Literary Society and the Womanhood Suffrage League. Other women's memberships of both of these organisations, and others, also overlapped. The internal, local, national and international networks developed by the nineteenth-century women and their contribution to the development of an intellectual tradition of feminism are the focus of this chapter.

Networks remain a powerful theme for contemporary feminism. The metaphor of the web inter-connecting women across time and space was described by Mary Daly in 1978 as a metaphysical construct, psychically linking women who spiral dangerously, unnerving and subverting patriarchy.<sup>1</sup> In her radical interpretation, 'spinsters' gain a new literal meaning, as women who have rejected association with the patriarchy and are free to 'spin' the webs that are the networks of feminism. Indeed the notion of networks is so much a part of the feminist discourse that it, like the concept of spheres, is rarely examined as the metaphor it is. More tangible networks, connections and associations of and between women have been described by historians including Barbara Caine, Philippa Levine, Mary P. Ryan and Anne Firor Scott.<sup>2</sup> Networking, associating, connecting can be seen in the voluntary organisation of the women in Australia at the end of the nineteenth century. Their efforts can be examined for psychic and tangible effect. They are a slice of social history: the history of women's associations; and they also represent an idea: the idea of association as a factor in the collective development of feminism.

This inextricable combination of the cerebral and tangible is exemplified in Philippa Levine's 1990 work on Victorian feminism. In this study she describes the strength of the connections nineteenth-century women made, even in the face of an ideology that obstructed women's association. The creation of strong networks of activity and support, exemplified by the enduring friendship ties, flew in the face of the demands of the public/private separation. According to the separation of the spheres ideology, women's first

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> See for example Philippa Levine's *Feminist Lives in Victorian England: Private Roles and Public Commitment* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Barbara Caine's 'Family History as Women's History' in *Feminist Studies* Vol.12, No.2 (1986), a study of the family ties of Beatrice Webb (née Potter) and her eight sisters; Mary P. Ryan's 'The Power of Women's Networks' in *Sex and Class in Women's History*, ed. Newton, Ryan and Walkowitz (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); and Anne Firor Scott's *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), a history of American women's associations.

loyalties were required to be to family, and her friendship ties were to be broken as soon as she moved from one male-dominated domestic centre (father's house) to another (husband's house). Nevertheless, observes Levine:

characteristic of feminist women was the strength of their female friendship and their refusal to diminish ties with women friends on behalf of men and even after marriage. They were both celebrating the strength of their female connectedness and simultaneously defying the ascription of 'feminine' qualities required by the separate sphere ideology.<sup>3</sup>

Barbara Caine's description of the tragic Potter sisters identifies a different level of connection: the 'connection between the personal situation and experiences of women and the political agitation of the movement' where one sister, freed from the constraints of her marriage by the death of her husband, immediately joins a militant suffrage group and devotes the rest of her life (just four more years) to speaking, demonstrating, petitioning and writing letters to the newspapers.<sup>4</sup> The familial connection between the sisters is continually tested by their different decisions about how to live their lives in the late Victorian framework that was prescribed for women. Widening the sphere often meant cutting loose from existing sanctioned familial connections.

Mary P. Ryan has shown how informal networks of women could be organised to become a powerful social force. The Female Moral Reform Society in the United States grew out of informal personal associations and social contacts, and became a 'direct, collective, organised effort, which aimed to control behaviour and change values in the community at large.'<sup>5</sup> What began as a web of domestic contacts and relationships became a significant public association. Similarly the clubs and societies of *fin-de-siècle* Australian women were mostly born out of small groups of friends coming together. The importance of the networks between the nineteenth-century Australian women under discussion here lies in the consciousness with which they were created or exploited, and the effect of their connections on the work they undertook.

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<sup>3</sup> Levine, *Feminist Lives*, p.10.

<sup>4</sup> Caine, 'Family History as Women's History,' p.316.

<sup>5</sup> Ryan, 'The Power of Women's Networks,' p.172.

Anne Firor Scott's examination of 'organised womanhood' in the United States attempts to move beyond a description of the multitude of associations of women that she uncovered to putting an argument for their contribution to the political and social development of the American state. She describes the social consequences of the complex network of women's organisations, citing Darlene Roth's observation that they amounted to 'a separatist tradition ... which manifests itself in a wholly separate entity within the domain of public affairs – an interconnecting network.'<sup>6</sup> She also describes the physical legacy of the women's activities, citing dozens of public structures (kindergartens, playgrounds, school lunch schemes and such) that were wrought by the efforts of women's organisations.

The women joining clubs and societies in late nineteenth-century Australia often introduced friendship and familial ties to the groups, or developed friendships in the groups that were sometimes tested by political or ideological difference, and either endured or faltered in the face of it. In addition, they exploited connections with women overseas, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. Thanks to technological advances in telegraphs and steamships, Australian women were in close contact with women internationally. The networks that existed across Australia were duplicated in networks that reached around the world.

When Australian women travelled overseas, they returned with a new vision of themselves as individuals, as women, and as Australians. The experience of being abroad helped them to redefine who they were and what they could be. Catherine Helen Spence encouraged Rose Scott to visit the United States and see for herself the work of the women's movement there:

Think it over, don't say it can't be done. You would come back ten years younger as I did.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.2.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.170.

Letters to Rose Scott from Miles Franklin, Vida Goldstein, Marian Harwood and Bessie Rischbieth during their travels overseas reflect the same experience of being energised by the engagement with other women:

After lunch I went to the annual meeting of the British Committee against State Regulation ... A girl spoke there to the Resolution raising the age of consent and equal moral standard. Oh how these women speak so logically, with such zeal and knowledge ... So, I am having a glorious time as you can see.<sup>8</sup>

The power of networking – of sharing experience, support and advice – has been well understood by women across time and cultures. The nineteenth century was a time when networks were able to take on a global dimension. This was a period in history when increased movement around the world, facilitated by technological advances, was creating a sense of global connectedness. As Angela Woollacott observes, for white colonial women, these ‘accelerated shifts opened up possibilities for shaping new lives and subjectivities.’<sup>9</sup> While it is probably true that most women left Australia with the expectation that they had much to learn from the experiences they would have, the ideas they would encounter and the culture they would absorb, it is also true that Australian women took with them salient experience to share with the women they met. Despite the isolation of Australia and the brevity of its (white) history, Australia was frequently at the forefront of feminist, intellectual and political developments. Significantly, Australian women achieved the vote long before women in the United States or Europe. Jessie Ackermann recalls in her 1913 book *Australia From a Woman's Point of View* that twenty years earlier Australian women had been contacted by the Women's Political League in Iceland, inquiring about their methods in trying to gain votes for women. In addition, the International Council of Women (which boasted ten million members, according to Ackermann) ‘repeatedly requested Australian women to send delegates to their gatherings; also to prepare papers bearing on social reforms, detailing to what extent women were helping to carry them into operation.’<sup>10</sup> Vida Goldstein and

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<sup>8</sup> Rischbieth cited in Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.226.

<sup>9</sup> Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian women, colonialism, and modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.7.

<sup>10</sup> Jessie Ackermann, *Australia From a Woman's Point of View* (London: Cassell, 1913), pp.3-4.

Catherine Helen Spence were both invited to embark on their travels to the United States and the United Kingdom by women's groups anxious to hear about the Australian experience of activism, particularly around the suffrage issue.

When Vida Goldstein accepted an invitation to attend the conference of the American Women's Suffrage Association in Washington in 1902, she represented a country where women had the vote in three states (since 1894 in South Australia, 1899 in Western Australia, 1902 in New South Wales), and federally (1902). In contrast, American women did not vote until 1920. Vida Goldstein was appointed secretary of the conference, which founded the International Woman's Suffrage Society. Angela Woollacott notes that Vida Goldstein's later tour of Britain in 1911 had a symbolic interest:

Goldstein's stance in Britain was not that of a white colonial coming 'to learn from the metropolitan power' but rather that of an experienced woman voter from a progressive country who could extend the benefits of her knowledge to her beleaguered English sisters.<sup>11</sup>

On other fronts too, Australian women were in the vanguard. In her biography of Melbourne's Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC), Kathleen Fitzpatrick observes that the school was part of an educational movement that was new to history: that is, the education of girls. Australia's prestigious private boys' schools were established according to ancient British models, but PLC had just two predecessors, both English. The North London Collegiate School and Cheltenham Ladies College predated PLC Melbourne by just twenty-five and twenty-one years respectively. Fitzpatrick comments that

We are apt to think that a great time lag existed between the colonies and the home countries a century ago but it was not really so. Most of the adult colonists in Victoria in the late sixties of the last century [nineteenth] had been born in the Old World, and through correspondence with friends and relations still living there, and through avid reading of the newspapers and journals which arrived regularly by steamship and of their own lively press

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<sup>11</sup> Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*, p.116.

which, by 1872, was providing fresh news from 'home' brought by the submarine cable, they were kept well abreast of all the latest movements, including the advances in the direction of the higher education of women.<sup>12</sup>

And, culturally, Australian women have been described as achieving modernity, twenty years ahead of modernism taking hold elsewhere. In her article entitled 'History, Cultural Studies, and Another Look at First-Wave Feminism in Australia', Susan Magarey suggests that Australian feminism was a force for modernism, two decades earlier than in the northern hemisphere. Arguing that the lack of an 'old' Woman Movement encouraged Australian feminists to devise a 'new social order in a new country', Magarey claims that the Australian Woman Movement was not only 'born modern but also [was] a force for modernism.'<sup>13</sup> She observes the strategic alliances of women created across differences of class, religion, country of origin, language, accent and 'cultural assumption', and recognises in their collective activism the 'historical moment' described by Nancy Cott, when the nineteenth-century woman movement yields to a new and 'distinctly modern movement calling itself "feminist."<sup>14</sup>

So the international trade in ideas did not go all one way: Australia had experiences and examples to offer the women of the world, and Australian women had some justification for feeling as if they belonged to a global community of women. A brief survey of the actual relationships between women in Australia and elsewhere shows many energetic Australian women exporting ideas, skills and support to likeminded groups of women interstate and internationally.<sup>15</sup> A similar survey of local women illuminates the connections between them that supported – and occasionally distracted – their efforts.

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<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century 1875-1975* (Victoria: Presbyterian Ladies' College, 1975), pp.23-24.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Magarey, 'History, Cultural Studies, and Another Look at First-Wave Feminism in Australia', in *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 106, p.110.

<sup>14</sup> Magarey, 'History, Cultural Studies,' p.110.

<sup>15</sup> In Angela Woollacott's article 'The Colonial Flaneuse: Australian Women Negotiating Turn-of-the-Century London', in *Signs*, Spring, 2000, she points out that the actual physical traffic in humans went mostly one way: 'Australians and New Zealanders journeyed "home" to England in numbers that rose from about two thousand per year in the 1870s to about 10 000 from the late 1880s through the turn of the century and then doubled in the interwar period ...'. Woollacott quotes Alice Grant Rosman's observation made in 1913 about the 'one way' nature of the traffic: 'Cryptic as the statement sounds, Australia is much farther from England than England from Australia; ... while we think nothing of the twelve thousand mile trip, our English cousins

In addition to these literal connections, there are also the metaphysical connections between women, of shared experience. These connections created a shared consciousness about their experience as a gender that crossed boundaries of class, education, religion, and such. In her biography of Rose Scott, Judith Allen describes the impact upon women philanthropists of 'moments of uncomfortable recognition of the commonalities and connections between the situations of middle-class wives and working-class servants' that were the 'outcome of the philanthropic gaze':

For that gaze, disclosing as it did sexual asymmetry, exploitation and discontent, permitted the kind of cross-class, cross-ethnic identification of women as a sexed group: in Cott's words, the 'we' requisite for the emergence of feminism.<sup>16</sup>

Anne Firor Scott identified a kind of psychic legacy of the women's groups in the different style of professionalism displayed by women who became the first doctors, lawyers, academics and so on:

In their own groups women learned to be professionals before the traditional professions were open to them, and developed a recognisable female style of professional behaviour that relied heavily on cooperation. Reflecting their voluntary-association training, the first women doctors, lawyers, teachers and ministers often functioned differently from their male counterparts.<sup>17</sup>

It is instructive to examine briefly some of the women whose connections and influences made up the web that sustained the groups in Australia at this time, for it illuminates the commonality of experience across continents and backgrounds, and the organic detail of the networks.

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regard it as a stupendous and even perilous undertaking, not to be thought of on an income of less than 5000 a year.'

<sup>16</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.94.

<sup>17</sup> Scott, *Natural Allies*, p.3.

## I. Intra- and Inter-Colonial/State

Within the colonies women's associations most often grew out of existing familial and friendship ties. Friendships and relationships forged within groups sometimes led to new groups being formed on the basis of mutual interest or ideology. Within each colony there was a handful of women whose ubiquity in local groups led to establishing a profile across the colonial borders. While it is true, as Katie Spearritt observed, that 'very few feminists were known in more than one colony,'<sup>18</sup> it is also true that there are discernible connections and continuities across the country.

In New South Wales Rose Scott, Maybanke Wolstoneholme and Louisa Lawson were arguably the best-known club-women in the period, and from each emanated a wide circle of overlapping connections.

Situated at the core of the suffrage and other women's movements in NSW was the formidable Rose Scott.<sup>19</sup> Her eminent connections made her a natural focus of the movement, because she was able to draw together the influential men and women of the time. Some of her connections, however, were as renowned for the strength of the antipathy as the friendship.

At various times Rose Scott held the following offices: President, Women's Literary Society; President, Women's Political and Educational League; Hon. Treasurer, National Council of Women, NSW; Secretary, Womanhood Suffrage League; Vice President, Women's Club. She hosted a Friday night 'salon' at her Point Piper home that was the scene of debates on the great questions of the day.<sup>20</sup> Guests at the salon included prominent men in Sydney society: Sir Henry Parkes, Judge W.C. Windeyer, Bernhard Ringrose Wise, and William Lane. Women who have written about Rose Scott's salon include Maybanke Wolstoneholme, Miles Franklin, Mary Booth and Edith Fry.

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<sup>18</sup> Katie Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism, 1880-1914', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: HBJ, 1992), p.332.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Allen's *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* is the authoritative biography of Rose Scott (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> As described in detail in Chapter One, pp.50-52.

Rose Scott's prominence in the women's movement in NSW at this time was the result of the strength of her character, her intelligence and energy, and the influential connections she enjoyed that stemmed from her family background. All of these attributes also made her a target of disaffection and she had contentious dealings with a number of the other significant women of her time. She resigned from the Women's Club over an issue with the Honorary Secretary, Elimina Sutherland. Lady Mary Windeyer resigned from the Womanhood Suffrage League after a dispute with Rose Scott, though they eventually restored a level of cordiality. Nevertheless, after the dispute, Mary Windeyer's friend in South Australia, Mary Lee, never again communicated with Rose Scott<sup>21</sup>. Annie and Belle Golding and Kate Dwyer and Nellie Martel left the Womanhood Suffrage League and formed a splinter group, over their perception that control of the League was too centralised and that Rose Scott was too autocratic. Rose Scott was forced to publicly rebut Lizzie Ashton's reported views on marriage, although she managed to retain their friendship. She was criticised by Leila Darley for her public activities. She had a turbulent relationship with Louisa Lawson (due to a perception of competition between the two), though she became friendly with Louisa's famous son Henry. Annie Kelly remonstrated fiercely with her on at least two occasions, once threatening to resign from the Womanhood Suffrage League. She became estranged from Maybanke Wolstoneholme. She endured unprovoked attacks from Adela Pankhurst and Agnes Murphy over her admiration for Millicent Fawcett and repugnance for the Women's Social and Political Union.

Her enduring friends included Louisa Macdonald, Miles Franklin, Nellie Melba, and Eliza Pottie. Miles Franklin was the connection for Rose to Vida Goldstein in Victoria and also to Alice Henry in America.

Rose Scott never travelled overseas, but her influence was felt around Australia. She corresponded with Mary Lee and Catherine Helen Spence in South Australia, Vida Goldstein in Victoria and Bessie Rischbieth in Western Australia. Vida Goldstein stayed with her during her stopover in Sydney on the way to England in 1902, and again in 1905 when she

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<sup>21</sup> See account of this episode in Judith Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.129.

travelled to Sydney for the first congress of the National Council of Women of New South Wales. Catherine Spence strongly urged Rose Scott to travel to the United States to see the work of the women's movement there. Rose Scott also corresponded with Alice Henry and Miles Franklin while they were overseas and received correspondence from Millicent Garrett Fawcett.

A second indomitable woman was the core of other networks that criss-crossed the clubs and societies. Maybanke Wolstoneholme<sup>22</sup> (born Maybanke Selfe, and later remarried and known as Mrs Francis Anderson) was born in England and migrated with her family as a young girl. She was of the middle class and raised with sufficient education to become a teacher, though she married quite young and moved with her husband to Maitland in NSW. Although seven children were born only three lived beyond infancy. The marriage was unhappy; her husband, Edmund, was a drinker and an unreliable provider. Eventually the family returned to Sydney and Edmund abandoned them. With financial assistance from her brother, Maybanke turned the family home into a school for girls and set about becoming the breadwinner. Her anxiety about providing for her family in a legislative climate that would have permitted Edmund to reappear at any time and claim what limited financial success she had, made Maybanke a champion of divorce law reform. In addition her interest in education saw her become an advocate of every educational cause existing in NSW, and instigator of several more. She was on the executive of the Australasian Home Reading Union; she began the Kindergarten Union; she was one of the movers behind the Sydney University Women's College; an office holder in the Sydney University Women's Society; and a founder of the Workers' Educational Association. Her second husband was Francis Anderson, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney.

Maybanke was remarkably enterprising and built up a wide circle of like-minded friends and colleagues. Her sons went to Newington College which led to friendships with Matilda Curnow and Lucinda Gullett whose sons were also students there. Her divorce proceedings brought her the acquaintance of the Windeyer family and Louisa Lawson, who was in a similar state of marital strife and used her journal *The Dawn* to promote reform of legislation.

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<sup>22</sup> The definitive biography of Maybanke Wolstoneholme is Jan Roberts' *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Marrickville: Hale and Iremonger, 1993).

Her friendship with the Windeyers was deepened by a shared interest in theosophy. Friendship with the Windeyers gave her entrée to the company of Rose Scott. She employed the artist, Julian Ashton as a teacher at her school, and made a friend of his wife, Eliza, a journalist. Maybanke Wolstoneholme was an office-bearing member of the Women's Literary Society and Vice-President of the Womanhood Suffrage League when Lady Windeyer was its President, and succeeded her as President after Lady Windeyer's acrimonious resignation. She published her own feminist journal, *Woman's Voice*. She attained international renown and was elected Vice-President of the International Women's Union in 1893.

Maybanke's circle was extraordinarily wide. She counted all of the main feminist figures at the time among her friends, including Mary Lee in South Australia whom she met there when she presented at a conference. She evidently had a talent for maintaining and expanding friendships where Rose Scott had a habit of losing them. Indeed, the only known friendship that suffered periods of estrangement was hers with Rose Scott. Nevertheless she published a tribute to Rose Scott on her death in 1925, which graciously acknowledged the huge collective effort that created and sustained the 'first stage feminist network.'<sup>23</sup>

Of the NSW trio, Louisa Lawson<sup>24</sup> came from the least advantaged background and endured the greatest struggles in a life devoted to promoting women's causes. Her early marriage to a prospector produced five children, including most famously, the writer Henry Lawson. The marriage was unhappy and Louisa was forced to support the family after it inevitably broke down. She became a journalist then began her own journal: the brave and popular *Dawn, A Journal for Australian Women*. Her marital strife left her with strong opinions about the wrongs of marriage and a dedication to improve the lot of women generally. Like others, she saw the vote as the means by which women could achieve reform and she was an indefatigable worker in the suffrage movement.

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<sup>23</sup> Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, p.195.

<sup>24</sup> Louisa Lawson's biography was creatively written by Brian Matthews, *Louisa* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, 1987).

Louisa maintained a connection to the labour movement, a sympathy that arose from her own working-class background and working experiences. This clear political allegiance placed her in opposition to the non-party-political position preferred by Rose Scott. Louisa was never invited to join the Women's Literary Society, but formed her own club devoted to the intellectual advancement of women called the Dawn Club. Louisa, Maybanke and Rose were all members of the Womanhood Suffrage League in its infancy, and all three eventually left for different reasons. Louisa joined a revolt led by the Golding sisters and helped form the Women's Progressive Association, which opened a new network of feminist Labor women.

While Louisa made only one trip out of NSW (to Queensland, to help launch a petition to appoint women warders to police cells), her journal enjoyed national distribution, and she corresponded both personally and via the pages of the *Dawn* with subscribers all over Australia.

Women in the other colonies were similarly industrious at establishing and maintaining the friendships that were the core of the feminist activity. The dominant figure in Victoria was Vida Goldstein.<sup>25</sup> A generation younger than Rose Scott, Maybanke Wolstoneholme and Louisa Lawson, she was drawn into the women's movement by women of their generation, notably Mrs Annette Bear-Crawford. She formed the Women's Political Association in Melbourne to win the vote for women and educate them in the principles of democratic government. She led the Victorian women's movement for twenty years, owned and edited two newspapers, and was the first woman to stand for Australian Parliament.

Vida was educated at the Presbyterian Ladies College in Melbourne. Her activist career began in 1890 when, aged twenty-two, she helped collect 30 000 signatures for a franchise petition to the Victorian Parliament. After the depression of the 1890s caused a decline in her family's economic circumstances, Vida and her sisters opened a co-educational school in St Kilda. Vida became involved with Annette Bear-Crawford who had been working with the suffragists in England. Annette Bear-Crawford had initiated the petition to the Victorian

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<sup>25</sup> The most comprehensive biography of Vida Goldstein is by Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

Parliament and created the United Council for Women's Suffrage. When she died suddenly of pneumonia during a trip to England in 1899, Vida Goldstein took over as leader of the Victorian suffrage movement. She launched *The Australian Women's Sphere*, which she owned and edited, in 1900, to disseminate information on social conditions and proposed reforms. In 1901 she was invited to visit the United States by the American Women's Suffrage Association. She made the trip in 1902 and attended the Washington conference that founded the International Woman's Suffrage Society. As Australia's representative she was elected the secretary to the conference, and had the chance to meet well-known feminists such as Carrie Chapman Catt and Susan B. Anthony.

On her return to Australia she led a splinter group away from the United Council for Women's Suffrage and founded the Women's Federal Political Association (WFPA), becoming its first president. After voting in federal elections was extended to women in 1902 she became the first woman in Australia to stand for election to Parliament. Her platform was concerned with women's issues, particularly the anomaly of some states (including Victoria) still not permitting women to vote in state elections. She polled well and won more attention and support for the cause. In 1904 she created the Men's League for Woman's Suffrage, with the Reverend Charles Strong and Dr Maloney. The combined weight of the Men's League and the Women's Political Association kept the pressure on the Victorian Premier, Sir Thomas Bent, and suffrage for Victorian women was finally won in 1908. Vida had closed *The Australian Women's Sphere* in 1905, but in 1909 she founded another paper, *The Woman Voter*, which took the form of a weekly newsletter of the Women's Political Association. She made a second attempt to secure a federal senate seat in 1910, this time focusing her campaign on divorce law reform. Three further attempts to enter the Senate failed in 1913, 1914 and 1917.

Vida was invited to visit England in 1911 by the Women's Social and Political Union (although not a militant herself, the invitation was based on her reputation as a public speaker). A reception was held for her at the Lyceum Club, a club for women with a commitment to feminism. At the WSPU meeting in the Albert Hall on 23 March she assured the audience of the sympathy and support of Australian women for their cause.

In England she wrote articles for the WSPU journal *Votes for Women*, and spoke publicly about the advances Australian women had made since achieving the vote. While she was in England she helped establish the Australian and New Zealand Women Voters' Association – an effort to organise antipodean women in Britain – and she inspired the founding of The Australian and New Zealand Women Voters' Committee which became a forum for feminist discussion of issues affecting women. She returned to Australia having made the acquaintance of Olive Schreiner, George Bernard Shaw, and of course, the Pankhursts. She had become a supporter of the militant tactics of the suffragettes, which put her at odds with Rose Scott; but was later dismayed by the Pankhursts' decision to co-opt the WSPU to the war effort.

Back in Australia, in 1914 Vida Goldstein declared herself pacifist and persuaded the Women's Political Association to adopt a pacifist policy. In addition she founded the Women's Peace Army with Cecilia John and Adela Pankhurst, which was paradoxically a militant organisation heavily influenced by the tactics of the English suffragettes. While her later career focused on her spiritual beliefs, as a younger woman her political activities were diverse and indefatigable, and made full use of her extensive networks.

South Australian suffrage worker and secretary to the Women's Suffrage League, Mary Lee maintained strong connections with the women working to the same ends in the other colonies. She made Maybanke Wolstoneholme's acquaintance after Maybanke spoke at the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Adelaide in September 1893 on behalf of the Australian Home Reading Union.

Mary Lee was also friendly with Lady Mary Windeyer, who complained to her about the activities of Rose Scott in the Womanhood Suffrage League<sup>26</sup>. Lee encouraged Windeyer to attempt to get on with Rose Scott, and encouraged them both to regard themselves as at the very core of the movement. After Mary Windeyer finally resigned from the Womanhood Suffrage League in NSW however, Mary Lee ceased correspondence with Rose Scott.

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<sup>26</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.129.

In South Australia Mary Lee's strong allies were Mary Colton, President of the Women's Suffrage League and longtime philanthropist working for disadvantaged women and children in the colony, and Augusta Zadow who worked with her in the Working Women's Trades Union. Mary Lee was a generous supporter of women's movements all over Australia. Her communication with women and groups in Tasmania, NSW, Queensland and Victoria shows her commitment to constructing and maintaining feminist networks.

Catherine Helen Spence<sup>27</sup> was the other South Australian woman most strongly identified with women's causes. An early and renowned export to the world stage, she was herself an import to Australia. Catherine Helen Spence was actually born in Scotland, but emigrated to Australia aged fourteen, and always identified as Australian; indeed, on her death she was mourned as 'The Grand Old Woman of Australia'. From South Australia Catherine Spence travelled overseas to establish links with women's movements elsewhere, especially the United States where she became friendly with Charlotte Perkins Gilman and met Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams, and London where she met Millicent Garrett Fawcett. She strongly advised Rose Scott to see the work of the women's movement in the US as she had, but Rose Scott never left Australia.

Among her six occupations,<sup>28</sup> Catherine Spence was a novelist and used this medium to write about the position of women in society, and, in *Handfasted*,<sup>29</sup> to posit a utopian vision of a matriarchal future. She was also a journalist for a South Australian daily, *The Register*. She recorded giving fourteen paid lectures for women's clubs during her tour of the United States.

Maybanke Wolstoneholme held Catherine Spence in high esteem and published an interview with her in *Woman's Voice*. She also wrote about Spence at some length in her chapter on Women in Australia in the *Australia – Economic and Political Studies* volume.

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<sup>27</sup> Spence has attracted two biographers: Susan Magarey, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: the life of Catherine Helen Spence* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1985); and Jeanne Young, *Catherine Helen Spence: A Study and an Appreciation* (Melbourne: Lothian, 1937).

<sup>28</sup> Novelist, journalist, orator, teacher, preacher and philanthropist.

<sup>29</sup> *Handfasted* was unpublished in Spence's lifetime, but was published most recently in Australia by Penguin Books, 1984.

Like many of the women in this research, Catherine Helen Spence's political activity extended beyond the suffrage issue to other social justice concerns, including a campaign to establish a children's court in South Australia, and a long campaign to implement a representational voting system, which she commenced even before she became associated with the struggle for women's suffrage. She published extensively and was widely revered.

Western Australia boasted Edith Cowan and Bessie Rischbieth. Edith Cowan who became Australia's first female MP, was a core member of many of Western Australia's most significant women's groups, including the Karrakatta Club, and founder – with Roberta Jull, her friend from the Karrakatta Club – of Western Australia's branch of the National Council of Women.

Bessie Mabel Rischbieth was perhaps the most important of the new generation of young feminist women. Bessie Rischbieth was a young admirer of Rose Scott. Fuelled with enthusiasm for the cause of women, she corresponded with Scott throughout her travels in London and America. In London in 1913 she went to hear Charlotte Perkins Gilman speak and then joined the WSPU. She attended the funeral for Emily Davidson and participated in the vigil for Emmeline Pankhurst conducted during the hunger-strikes. Returning to Western Australia she founded the Australian Federation of Women Voters. Her objective was to achieve a unified, federated organisation for Australian feminist activity, with 'an all Australian outlook and an international understanding'. From 1920 she edited a Perth newspaper called *The Dawn*. The paper contained international as well as interstate news, and made a point of celebrating women's achievements. In 1922 she travelled to attend the International Council of Women conference in Europe. On her return to Australia she detoured to Sydney to meet with Rose Scott. Judith Allen constructs a version of this meeting in which Rose Scott enacts a kind of passing of the baton to Bessie Rischbieth<sup>30</sup>. Rischbieth's feminist activities continued and expanded. *The Dawn* published an obituary for Rose Scott on her death in 1925. In 1935, Bessie Rischbieth received the OBE for her political and social work.

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<sup>30</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.247.

In Queensland, Emma Miller and Leontine Cooper were at the centre of much of the women's activity and maintained membership of several organisations. Leontine Cooper is recorded speaking at a NSW public meeting about women and suffrage.

Tasmania's Jessie Rooke and Emily Dobson became major figures not just in that colony, but nationally, for both took on the leadership of national women's organisations. Jessie Rooke even gained an international profile as delegate to the International Women's Suffrage Committee.

While these were the core women in each colony, their friendships with one another and others and their collegial relationships with other members of their various clubs formed a web of connected women with common interests and objectives. As important as the friendship ties that drew the women together into the groups were their existing family connections. The networks based on these ties form a further layer of connections within and across the membership of the groups and organisations. The Windeyer family for example, were a prominent Sydney clan by reason of their wealth and the position Sir William held as an MP, the NSW Attorney-General and Supreme Court judge. However, both William and his wife Mary and their daughters, Lucy, Susannah and especially Margaret were activists for reform of women's rights, particularly the pursuit of suffrage.

Sir William Charles Windeyer, as NSW Attorney-General was responsible for steering through the Married Women's Property Act. Mary Windeyer (née Bolton) was one of the first female students to graduate from the University of Sydney. Her sister was Annie Bolton, an academic who was forced to move to New Zealand to take up an academic post, as New South Wales universities would not permit women to be academics. W.C. Windeyer had long been an advocate of women's rights to a higher education, and in 1877, as a fellow of the University of Sydney Senate, moved that women be allowed to matriculate. Husband and wife were both supporters of the movement to establish the Women's College at the University of Sydney. Later in her career, Mary Windeyer became a vice-president of the University Women's Society.

Through her involvement in temperance work in the 1880s Mary Windeyer became friendly with Maybanke Wolstoneholme. Lady Mary became the first president of the Womanhood Suffrage League, (although she was the second choice<sup>31</sup>). In her President's Report of 1893 she claimed 'There is no weedy prejudice so hard to uproot as sex bias,' and thanked 'those men who believe in us and help us to gain our liberty.' She resigned later in 1893, with Louisa Lawson, over an issue concerning the setting up of new branches of the Womanhood Suffrage League, and an amendment of the constitution to allow eighteen-year-olds full membership. This issue masked a falling-out with Rose Scott who was the powerhouse driving the League. Lady Mary's emotional resignation was based on her belief that the new members opposed her and that Rose Scott was supporting the new membership. She took up a leadership position with the Women's Christian Temperance Union as the head of the Franchise Department, and was replaced in the Womanhood Suffrage League by Emma Palmer. Thereafter the new suffrage paper, *The Australian Woman* attacked both Rose Scott and Maybanke Wolstoneholme, while profiling Lady Mary in an 1894 edition.

Lady Mary retained her connections and continued her efforts in women's issues. She corresponded with Mary Lee in South Australia and was guided by her advice about strategy in the pursuit of the vote. In an interview in 1896 she said: 'The fact is you men seem to be afraid of the women. It is very amusing to notice how you tremble at the thought of giving us any power.' She attended her daughter Margaret's meeting to discuss the establishment of an Australian arm of the International Council of Women. Both Margaret and Mary were at various times members of the Women's Literary Society, the Womanhood Suffrage League, the National Council of Women.

Mary Windeyer's daughters Margaret (described below), Annie and Susannah (Gale) evidently inherited social consciences from their parents, and became activists, albeit with different focuses. Susannah Gale and her daughter Anna were active members of the WCTU, and belonged to the Franchise League in NSW. It was for her temperance work that

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<sup>31</sup> The first choice – the Governor's wife, Lady Jersey – declined the position on the grounds that she was 'debarred from active political work.' In a bemusing twist, on her subsequent return to England she became President of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League.

Susannah gained the attention of Louisa Lawson who acknowledged her influence in the Dawn Club papers. Susannah was also a prominent 'Progressive Spiritualist'.

The Windeyer name was ubiquitous in liberal circles. The Windeyers were well placed to extend their influence and promote their multiple humanitarian causes. However, it was not necessary to hold a title, a higher education or even a middle-class background to become prominent in the cause of women's emancipation in NSW. The Golding sisters were the daughters of a miner and were politicised by their association with the labour movement. Annie and Belle Golding and their sister Kate Dwyer suffered some turbulence in their relationship with the women's suffrage movement as a result of their pro-party-political stand. As members of the Womanhood Suffrage League, they sought to promote the suburban branches in working-class areas (Newtown, Redfern, Glebe, Annandale and Camperdown), and resented the pre-eminence of the central Sydney headquarters. Their provocative actions brought them into conflict with Rose Scott who had them censured by the August 1902 meeting of the Womanhood Suffrage League. By this time however, the inner-city branches had seceded and the Goldings with Nellie Martel formed the Women's Progressive Alliance, inviting Louisa Lawson to join them as well.

Louisa Lawson used her journal *The Dawn* as a mouthpiece of the Women's Progressive Alliance, setting up Nellie Martel as the focus of the suffrage movement in the same way that Rose Scott was presented as the focus in other publications. *The Dawn* ceased publication soon after Nellie Martel left Australia for England.

Annie, Belle and Kate fell out with Vida Goldstein over her perception that Rose Scott led the suffrage movement in NSW. In 1905 they used their numbers to have Rose Scott silenced at a Political Labor League Annual Conference to which she had been invited to speak.

The Women's Progressive Alliance was eventually subsumed by the NSW Labor Party's Women's Organising Committee. In 1917 Kate Dwyer became the first woman to be elected to the Senate of the University of Sydney.

A third example of family ties constructing networks is the Goldsteins of Melbourne. Isabella Goldstein, mother of Vida, Elsie and Aileen, was a co-founder of the Queen Victoria Hospital for Women and Children in Melbourne. With Annette Bear-Crawford, Isabella was also responsible for securing women factory inspectors as well as women on the Benevolent Asylum Committee and as members of school boards.

Isabella's three daughters shared views on suffrage, reform and spiritualism, though neither Elsie nor Aileen aspired to Vida's profile for activism. Vida lived in Melbourne with Aileen. Both were correspondents of Miles Franklin's. Vida Goldstein's sister, Elsie, married the English labour leader and journalist, Henry Hyde Champion who wrote extensively about women's emancipation. It was this brother-in-law who sponsored Vida's entrance into the Theosophical Society in 1895. Henry, Elsie and Vida shared office space in Bourke Street. Out of here Henry ran his journal the *Book Lover*; Elsie ran the Book Lovers' Library (which became a meeting place for activists and Melbourne literati); and Vida ran her journal the *Woman's Sphere*.

In Queensland, Emma Miller and her daughter Kate Macfie were prominent political activists with ties to the Labor Party<sup>32</sup>. Bessie Rischbieth in Western Australia never had children of her own, but her niece, Rachel Cleland, became drawn into the women's causes championed by her aunt<sup>33</sup>.

## II. International

The networks that were woven through and beyond the Australian membership of clubs form part of the intellectual tradition of Australian feminism. Internationally too the network model – the idea of collectivity or association – sustained the organisations of women. For Australian women in this period, participation at an international level in formal organisations of women was less successful and educative than the organic networks that evolved through individual personal connections, at a more local level. At the *fin-de-siècle*

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<sup>32</sup> Pam Young, *Proud to be a Rebel*, (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Rachel Cleland, 'Across the Decades' in Joan Eveline and Lorraine Hayden (eds) *Carrying the Banner: women, leadership and activism in Australia*, (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1999), pp 45-55.

Australia was too easily dismissed as colonial, remote and insignificant. It was not until post-World War One, as imperialism receded and Australia emerged into nationhood, that Australian women participated truly effectively in international forums. However, at the end of the nineteenth century transnational personal relationships successfully provided tangible as well as cerebral support to the Australian club women in their task of developing feminist consciousness.

There are several kinds of connection between the women that can be identified. These include:

1. non-Australian women residing overseas who had some tangible connection/influence on Australian affairs;
2. Australian women who left Australia to live overseas or who travelled overseas to seek or offer support and information regarding women's issues;
3. women born overseas who settled (for some time) in Australia, bringing with them their sensibilities and experiences of women's activism and networking in other parts of the world; and
4. the participation of Australian women, and the affiliation of Australian women's groups to international women's organisations.

Of the non-Australian women residing overseas who had some tangible connection/influence on Australian affairs, Jessie Ackermann was perhaps the one with the most enduring association with Australia. In addition to providing an influential letter and interview with Maybanke Wolstoneholme as described earlier, Jessie Ackermann, the American suffragist and temperance leader spent time in Australia advising the Australian Women's Christian Temperance Union. Her work included the establishment of over 400 branches of the WCTU around the country. Jessie Ackerman was well-known as a lecturer and her advice to Maybanke may have included encouragement for her to speak publicly about their shared interests, because it was at the first formal meeting of the Womanhood Suffrage League just one week later that Maybanke Wolstoneholme made her first public speech.

Jessie Ackermann was the author of *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*, published in 1896. In 1913 she published *Australia From a Woman's Point of View* by which time she had paid four visits to Australia. She noted in her preface to the 1913 book that Australia at the time was attracting a great deal of world attention:

because of the social evolution through which it is passing, and the fact that it has called women into the councils of men in the capacity of citizens, to aid in the establishment of 'New World conditions for the people.'<sup>34</sup>

Her book was inclined to overstate the role of the WCTU and its Franchise Leagues in gaining the vote for women in Australia. She was extremely critical of the selfishness of middle-class women who failed to use their vote (either appropriately or at all) to help the situation of working-class women, and she derided male politicians who sought to grant women the rights of citizenship only to exploit them for political gain. Clearly she remained an active presence in the political and philanthropic life of Australia over some time, and a useful link to the international scene.

Another American woman who influenced individual women and the affairs of Australian women generally – though she never visited Australia herself – was Charlotte Perkins Gilman (also Stetson). Charlotte Perkins Gilman's analysis of the enforced economic parasitism of women on men, *Women and Economics*, struck chords with both Louisa Lawson and Maybanke Wolstoneholme. Like them, she had initiated a divorce from her (first) husband. Like them too, she edited and published her own feminist journal, *The Fore-runner*. When Miles Franklin went to live in America, Charlotte Perkins Gilman befriended her (Miles Franklin described her in a letter to Rose Scott as 'bold as a lioness'). She professed herself to be a great admirer of Catherine Helen Spence, who also met her when in America. Bessie Rischbieth went to hear her speak while on a visit to London, and wrote of the experience with great excitement to her sister afterwards<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Jessie Ackermann, *Australia From a Woman's Point of View* (London: Cassell & Co., 1913), p.vii.

<sup>35</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999), pp88-89.

While Rose Scott never met or corresponded with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, she certainly read her work. She delivered a paper on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short stories at a meeting of the Women's Literary Society, out of recognition that her literary writing, just as much as her journalism and academic work, was relevant and useful to Australian women aspiring to gain intellectual depth and breadth<sup>36</sup>.

A third significant American influence was Dr Emily Ryder. Emily Ryder was an American member of the International Council of Women, who used the networks of that organisation to make contact with the suffrage and temperance workers in Australia. She recruited Rose Scott and Eliza Pottie to fundraise for the Little Wives of India, an organisation drawing attention to the plight of Indian child brides. She is credited with inspiring the creation of the Karrakatta Club in Western Australia, and with the specific suggestion that the four arms of the club include a Legal and Educational Department, out of her belief that enfranchisement of women was imminent and that women should be educated in how to use their vote<sup>37</sup>.

Of the English women who had profound effects on the development of Australian women's feminist consciousness, Annie Besant was one of the few who actually visited Australia. Annie Besant gained renown for her outspoken views in favour of contraception and as a Fabian socialist before becoming the leader of the international theosophy movement in 1891. Theosophy challenged the conventional Christian religions with critiques of male domination and the lack of a social justice mission. For its resistance to orthodoxy, theosophy won many converts among suffragist and feminist women of the late nineteenth century, in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia.

Like Dora Montefiore, Louisa Lawson and Maybanke Wolstoneholme, Annie Besant had been radicalised by her experience of a failed marriage. (Like Dora Montefiore her children became the subject of a custody dispute.)

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<sup>36</sup> Report of the Women's Literary Society, sixth year ending August, 1896, p.6.

<sup>37</sup> An account of Ryder's visit and activities is given in Gail Reekie's 'With Ready Hands and New Brooms', in *Hecate*, V.7, No.1, p.29.

In 1894 Annie Besant toured Australia. Her celebrity aroused a frenzy of interest in her lectures. Annie Besant's audience contained both the converted (Maybanke Wolstoneholme) and the curious (Louisa Macdonald and Rose Scott). Bessie Rischbieth became a theosophist. But the spiritual message was just one part of the experience Annie Besant had to offer Australian women. Her ability as a public speaker and her reform agenda made her an influential figure for the women's groups in the 1890s. She gained the particular attention of Maybanke Wolstoneholme. There may have been several grounds for a relationship to develop: the shared (but still relatively rare) experience of divorce; the common interests in suffrage, socialism and spiritualism; and mutual acquaintance – Annie Besant was a friend of Elizabeth Wolstoneholme and Ben Elmy.

Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy never came to Australia but maintained several connections with Australians. Elizabeth and Maybanke were distantly related (by marriage), and certainly knew each other. The two women engaged in remarkably similar activities in terms of political activism around suffrage and reform of women's issues, particularly concerning marriage and 'enforced maternity.'

Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy's activity in the women's movement had been ceaseless since 1861, and ranged across participation in campaigns for access to higher education, Married Women's Property Acts, Contagious Diseases Acts, maternal custody rights and for women's suffrage. In 1880, in a paper for the Dialectical Society, she raised the issue of rape in marriage. This was a particular concern of Maybanke Wolstoneholme too, and became a topic of much discussion in her journal, *Woman's Voice*.

Described by Lucy Bland as a 'veteran feminist'<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy was a subscriber and contributor to *Shafts*, a feminist journal published between 1892 and 1897. She set up the Women's Emancipation Union (WEU) which laid out the following claims:

1. equality of right and duty with men in all matters affecting the service of the community and the state;

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<sup>38</sup> Lucy Bland, 'Sexual Politics of the 1890s' in *Equal or Different: women's politics 1800-1914*, ed. Jane Rendall, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.146.

2. equality of opportunity for self-development by the education of the schools and of life;
3. equality in industry by equal freedom of choice of career;
4. equality in marriage and equality of parental rights.<sup>39</sup>

The WEU was small but vigorous, and pamphleted widely, especially on the issue of a divorce bill.

Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy married Ben Elmy in 1874. They had set up a 'free union' in the early 1870s (inspired by the example of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin), but were induced to marry when Elizabeth became pregnant. The couple were targeted by an extraordinary campaign from the suffragists with whom they were associated. For these women, Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy's broader agenda and reading of the sexual politics of women's emancipation was a distraction from the primary goal of achieving the vote. Even after Elizabeth and Ben's marriage in 1875, Millicent Fawcett wrote to her requesting her resignation from the secretaryship of the Married Women's Property Committee on the grounds that 'the prospects of the women's movement will be very materially affected by what you do at the present time ... What happened before you were married has been and is a great injury to the cause of women.'<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy was to become an enthusiastic supporter of the militant tactics of the later suffrage struggle, and herself took part in demonstrations in her seventies. Indeed, it has been suggested that the divergence of the two approaches to gaining the vote for women may have its origins in the response to the crisis raised by Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy.<sup>41</sup>

Despite being badly served by elements within the suffrage organisations, Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy worked tirelessly for the cause of women's emancipation. Like Maybanke Wolstoneholme in Australia, she belonged to an 'embattled minority' within the

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<sup>39</sup> Bland, 'Sexual Politics of the 1890s', p.150.

<sup>40</sup> Bland, 'Sexual Politics of the 1890s', p.160.

<sup>41</sup> 'Elizabeth Wolstoneholme's insistence on continuing to take an active part in campaigning after [the] forced formalisation of her marriage precipitated a crisis in the two organisations with which she was most closely associated at that time. And that crisis served to establish, for the first time clearly, two conflicting approaches to women's emancipation ...' Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Free Love and Victorian Feminism: The Divers Matrimonials of Elizabeth Wolstoneholme and Ben Elmy,' in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 37, (1994), p.200.

women's movement 'for whom coverture was as much a bar to women's citizenship as disenfranchisement.'<sup>42</sup> The similarities in the careers of the two Wolstoneholme women do not end there. Common concerns about the right to control one's own body and the right to education, drove both to publish books for children about sex education. Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy published *The Human Flower* in 1892, which began with a description of plant reproduction, continuing on to describe human reproduction. Maybanke Wolstoneholme published the 'Voicelet' series in the *Woman's Voice* in 1895. 'Shall We Confide in the Girls?' takes the form of a short story, with a mother using the analogy of plant reproduction to explain human reproduction to her twelve-year-old daughter.

Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy watched the successes of her Australian sisters in the battle for the suffrage avidly and celebrated their triumphs. She corresponded with Maybanke Wolstonehome and also with Rose Scott and had the acquaintance of both Dora Montefiore and Nellie Martel, the two most prominent Australian suffragists to join the WSPU.

Like Elizabeth Wolstoneholme Elmy, Josephine Butler never came to Australia herself but her work for women in Britain was certainly well known and influential on Australian women. Rose Scott had the greatest admiration for this woman activist who worked between 1870 and 1884 for the abolition of the English Contagious Diseases Acts. These Acts allowed police the power to detain any woman suspected of being a prostitute for detection and treatment of venereal disease. Josephine Butler was a philanthropist who had responded to her observations of the effect of the Contagious Diseases Acts upon the prostitutes she worked with in London. Leader of the Ladies' National Association, she was a powerful example of a woman radicalised by her commitment to a cause. She saw the necessity of the vote for women as a means to an end: of getting the legislation that she was concerned with passed.

The esteem in which Josephine Butler was held by Rose Scott meant that she became an indirect influence on Australian women. Rose Scott may have identified with Butler's experience of seeing beyond the comforts of her own middle-class background to the

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<sup>42</sup> Holton, 'Free Love,' p.212.

travails of less privileged women in the wider society. Scott may also have identified with the experience of being undermined by her own colleagues within the organisations for which she worked: despite a shared commitment to women's suffrage, Josephine Butler's campaign did not win public endorsement from suffragist groups. Furthermore, Josephine Butler was a powerful role model as an effective public speaker, a skill for which Rose Scott was also renowned.

Of the Australian women who left Australia to live overseas or who travelled overseas to seek or offer support and information regarding women's issues, Alice Henry enjoyed perhaps the most transforming experience. Alice Henry was a Melbourne journalist, feminist and reformer. She relocated to the United States in 1906 after six months in Europe in 1905 under sponsorship from the Melbourne Charity Organisation Society to attend conferences in Germany and England. While in England she attended a suffrage demonstration. Her decision to move to America was probably influenced by the advice of her friends and supporters, including Catherine Helen Spence<sup>43</sup> and Vida Goldstein. Armed with letters of introduction to significant women such as Jane Addams, and financial backing and moral support from Australians such as Catherine Helen Spence, she worked vigorously in the United States in a variety of activities which included working with Jane Addams at Hull House, trade unionism, and other social justice issues. She corresponded with Rose Scott about the setting up of Children's Courts in New South Wales.

Novelist Miles Franklin met fellow ex-patriot, Alice Henry, in 1907, at Hull House, and became her assistant in the Chicago office of the Women's Trade Union League. Later Franklin became secretary to the president of the national WTUL, and co-editor of its journal *Life and Labor* from 1911 to 1915, at which point the war precipitated her decision to move to London. There she worked for a while in the Minerva café, run by the Women's Freedom League.

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<sup>43</sup> In her memoir, Alice Henry described the 'great occasion' that was her meeting with Catherine Helen Spence: 'to become intimately acquainted with someone from another colony was a novelty and the larger group to whom she introduced me made many ties later on,' Nettie Palmer, (ed.), *Memoirs of Alice Henry* (Melbourne, 1944), p.36.

Miles Franklin had become a close friend of Rose Scott's after Scott wrote her a fan letter in 1902 when *My Brilliant Career* was published. Scott drew Franklin into her circle, introducing her to Henry Lawson, and making her a regular at her Friday night salons. Scott was dismayed when Miles Franklin decided to leave Australia to live and work in the United States. Franklin remained a regular correspondent however, and through Scott's networks and her friendships with Vida and Aileen Goldstein in Victoria ensured that the main metropolises in Australia received a great deal of correspondence about the efforts of women's movements in America and later in England.

Annette Bear-Crawford was the daughter of a Victorian MLC. She spent some time in England after being schooled at the Cheltenham Ladies' College and training in social work. She met leaders of the English women's movement and became involved in suffrage activities. On her return to Victoria in 1890 she used her experience, skills and personal charisma to take responsibility for organising and uniting the numerous suffrage groups into the United Council for Women's Suffrage (UCWS). With her at the helm, this union of the four main suffrage groups in Victoria took on a powerful lobbying function. On her sudden death, her friend and colleague, Vida Goldstein, took over her role.

Like Vida Goldstein, a number of young women made the trip to England and became seduced by the Women's Social and Political Union. Nellie Alma Martel was a member of the Womanhood Suffrage League in NSW and broke away with Annie and Belle Golding to form the Women's Progressive Association. In 1903 she stood for election to the NSW senate. Louisa Lawson gave her a great deal of support especially by chronicling her efforts in *The Dawn*. In her attempts to promote closer ties with the labour movement she received close attention from *The Dawn* until 1904 when she left Australia for England and immediately took up with the Pankhursts and Dora Montefiore in the WSPU. She is recorded as speaking at public rallies for the WSPU on 15 July 1906 and 21 June 1908. In 1913 she published a book entitled *The Women's Vote in Australia*.

Agnes Murphy was another young activist who went to London to join the suffragettes (and worked as Nellie Melba's secretary). She returned to Australia in 1910 to try and secure some support for them, sharing a platform with Vida Goldstein. She described militancy as 'the

greatest spiritual movement in the world today<sup>44</sup> and attacked Rose Scott for her admiration of Millicent Fawcett, the non-militant suffragist.

An Adelaide girl, Muriel Matters, gained notoriety for her spectacular acts of militant suffragism as a member of the Women's Freedom League. On one occasion, she chained herself to the grille at the front of the House of Commons so effectively that both she and the grille had to be removed. Another time she flew a hot air balloon over London scattering suffrage leaflets during a suffrage demonstration, in a 'flamboyant appropriation' of public space.<sup>45</sup> In 1910 she returned to visit Australia and in Melbourne was sponsored by Vida Goldstein's Women's Political Association. In 1912, when Vida Goldstein toured England speaking about the vote for the WSPU, Muriel was able to return the hospitality.

Several of these women found a vocation in their trips to the United States and the United Kingdom. Margaret Windeyer deliberately set off for America to become a librarian, and in the course of her travels became a pro-suffragist feminist as well<sup>46</sup>. Daughter of Sir William Charles and Lady Mary Windeyer, Margaret shared her parents' social conscience and was a committed participant in the organisations for women in Sydney. A lifelong friend of both Maybanke Wolstoneholme and Rose Scott, she joined the Women's Literary Society with them. She also became a member of the Womanhood Suffrage League Council after being one of the original group of eight invited to Dora Montefiore's house for the first meeting. It was Margaret Windeyer who Maybanke Wolstoneholme begged to take over the running of the *Woman's Voice* when she was herself unable to continue it.

Margaret trained as a librarian and went to the United States to continue her education at the famous Library School in New York. She became a friend of John Dewey. As a suffragist she also connected with suffrage groups in the US and Canada, and became a minor public figure. In April 1893 she made a speech entitled 'Municipal Suffrage for Women in Australia' to the New York City Women's Suffrage League. Through John Dewey's family she also

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<sup>44</sup> cited in Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.225.

<sup>45</sup> Angela Woollacott, 'The Colonial Flaneuse: Australian Women Negotiating Turn-of-the-Century London,' in *Signs*, Vol.25, Issue 3 (Spring 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Heather Radi, ed., *200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology* (Sydney: Redress Press, 1988), pp32-34.

became interested in the kindergarten movement, and on her return to Australia in 1895 she gave an account of the San Francisco movement to Maybanke Wolstoneholme. Wolstoneholme proved to be a receptive listener, and within a few months she had initiated the Kindergarten Union of Australia. Margaret Windeyer continued to advise and consult with Wolstoneholme on policy matters, but was content without a more public profile. Later she joined Maybanke Wolstoneholme's committee for Parks and Playgrounds. As one of Australia's first trained librarians she worked at the Mitchell Library and set up a children's library. Her private collection contained women's suffrage journals and early and rare editions of women's history source books.

In November 1895, inspired by other parts of her US political experiences, Margaret Windeyer invited women representing every woman's group in Sydney to a meeting to discuss the establishment of a National Council of Women along the same lines as the organisation already in existence in the US. Rose Scott was one who responded enthusiastically. Windeyer described to the assembled group the meeting of the International Council of Women in Chicago in 1893, where representatives of other countries were asked to go and form branches in their homelands. The objects and constitution of the American Council were discussed in detail, and a resolution was passed to attempt to create an Australian version. The National Council of Women of Australia was subsequently established in 1896, and still exists today. Again, content with a low profile, Margaret Windeyer became its Correspondence Secretary. Margaret Windeyer's international experience and networks of friends and associates were invaluable stimuli to the Australian organisations to which she lent her energy.

There is one other group of women who were Australian but spent time overseas that radicalised or at least expanded their political awareness. For some years, women who wanted to practise medicine in Australia were forced overseas to qualify. In NSW this was because, while women could enrol in medicine courses, the Dean of Sydney University's medical school flatly refused to allow them to pass. In Victoria access to tertiary education –

and specifically the medical courses – had come more slowly<sup>47</sup>. Dagmar Berne from NSW travelled to Britain to finally gain her degree in 1893 after fulfilling all requirements at the University of Sydney and nevertheless being failed by Professor Anderson Stuart. Constance Stone was forced to enrol at the Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia to undertake her medical studies after the University of Melbourne refused to give women access to the medical degree courses. On completion of her degree she then had to gain British qualifications as well before she could practise in Australia, where, in 1890 she became the first woman registered as a medical practitioner. Both of these women benefited from the experience of being forced overseas. Dagmar Berne worked with Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson in her women’s hospital. Constance Stone likewise spent time with Dr Garrett Anderson, and on her return to Australia established the Queen Victoria Hospital for Women and Children in 1899. Her colleagues in this venture included the seven women who had finally succeeded in forcing the hand of the University of Melbourne Senate and been permitted to enrol to study medicine. (Annette Bear-Crawford was the head of the fund-raising committee for the hospital, and Isabella Goldstein was a member.)

Angela Woollacott speculates that a boom in the number of women’s clubs in London coincided with a marked increase in the numbers of Australian women visiting and basing themselves in London as a centre of educational, creative and professional opportunity: ‘Both phenomena were related to women’s transnational encroachment on the public and political world.’<sup>48</sup> By this Woollacott suggests that the club movement in London was partly attributable to the presence of Australian women both as the instigators and creative drivers behind clubs, and also as the chief clients of certain clubs:

Clubs provided a place to meet others, to dine or take tea, to use as a postal address, or to rest while in the heart of the city. Many clubs included rooms for short-term stays, which could be convenient for a colonial woman just arrived in the city. Many of the clubs to which Australian women belonged

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<sup>47</sup> A description of these circumstances is given in Susanna De Vries, *Strength of Spirit: Pioneering Women of Achievement from First Fleet to Federation* (Sydney: Millenium Books, 1995). De Vries devotes a chapter to women in medicine, including brief biographies of Dagmar Berne and Constance Stone.

<sup>48</sup> Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune*, p.100.

sponsored lectures, debates, concerts and other events and thus made available to women a ready and comfortable social life.<sup>49</sup>

Australian women's membership of the Lyceum Club, for example, is evidence of the structured network within which Australian women could connect with British feminist networks. Such clubs constituted 'an imperial feminist infrastructure, a complex and far-reaching network that facilitated the careers and opportunities of individual women and pushed ... feminists' agendas across the empire.'<sup>50</sup>

There were numerous women born overseas who settled in Australia, bringing with them their sensibilities and experiences of women's activism and networking in other parts of the world. Lady Cara Edgeworth David (née Caroline Mallett) was born in England but emigrated to Australia as a young graduate, bringing with her personal experience of access to higher education and a political sensibility about women's rights to access education<sup>51</sup>. She became the first principal of the Hurlstone Training College for Women and joined the Womanhood Suffrage League that had been initiated by Dora Montefiore. She married a young Welsh migrant, Tannett William Edgeworth David, and after he became the Professor of Geology at Sydney University she played a significant role in designing the curriculum and syllabus for teacher training in New South Wales.

With such an obvious interest in education, it is not surprising that Cara became a friend of Maybanke Wolstoneholme's, nor that, together with Lady Jersey and Lady MacCallum, they created the Sydney University Women's Association (the Settlement). She joined an illustrious list of women who were vice-presidents of the University Women's Society, including Lady Mary Windeyer, Louisa Macdonald and Maybanke Wolstoneholme.

Dora Montefiore came to Australia as a wealthy young English widow and soon immersed herself in women's organisations, joining the Women's Literary Society. She had become a

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<sup>49</sup> Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune*, pp.100-1.

<sup>50</sup> Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune*, p.138.

<sup>51</sup> Information about Cara Mallett has been derived from references in Louisa Macdonald's correspondence, in Beaumont and Hole's *Letters from Louisa: A woman's view of the 1890s, based on the letters of Louisa Macdonald, first principal of the Women's College, University of Sydney* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1996).

convert to the cause of women on the death of her husband, when she learned that she did not have automatic guardianship of her own children<sup>52</sup>.

Following a discussion with the radical former governor of New Zealand, Sir George Grey, and on learning of Sir Henry Parkes' intention to draft and enact an Electoral Reform Bill in NSW, Dora Montefiore arranged a meeting with seven friends to discuss the formation of a society to promote women's suffrage. The eight assembled on 24 March 1891 at Dora Montefiore's Darlinghurst Road home, and included Maybanke Wolstoneholme, Rose Scott, Lizzie Ashton, Dr and Mrs Ellis, Miss May Manning and Miss Margaret Windeyer. The group met again on 28 April at Quong Tart's Tea Room; this gathering was quickly followed by the inaugural public meeting of the Womanhood Suffrage League on 6 May 1891.

Dora Montefiore was the Honorary Secretary in the early years of the Womanhood Suffrage League. She also joined Maybanke Wolstoneholme as a founding member of the Australian Home Reading Union. In 1892, Dora Montefiore decided to return to England, complaining that she found Sydney too suffocating, however she continued to travel back and forth between the two. She became a socialist, and in London she sought out the Pankhursts and their militant suffragists, joining the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. In England, despite having been born there, she was regarded as giving an Australian perspective on women's issues.

Rose Scott's speech at the celebration held when the vote was finally won in NSW named Dora Montefiore as the pioneer in the struggle for suffrage in the formation of the Womanhood Suffrage League. However, when Dora Montefiore attended a lunch held in her honour at Women's College she lamented that Australian women had wasted the vote.

Adela Pankhurst – daughter of Emmeline, and sister of Christabel and Sylvia – married and moved to Australia. In Australia she had a long-standing association with the Women's Migration and Overseas Appointment Society, and she maintained her family's commitment to the suffrage cause. She had intended to pay her respects to Rose Scott as the pre-eminent

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<sup>52</sup> Dora Montefiore recounts her life in *From a Victorian to a Modern* (London: Archer, 1927).

activist for women's causes when she arrived in Australia, but refrained on learning of Scott's anti-militancy views. Instead she wrote her an indignant but sincere letter<sup>53</sup>.

Probably the most influential of the 'temporary imports' at this time was Louisa Macdonald<sup>54</sup>. This redoubtable young woman was academic, industrious and personable: a winning combination for the innovative post she was to take up in NSW. Louisa was encouraged by no less than Millicent Garrett Fawcett to apply for the position of Principal of the new Women's College planned for the University of Sydney. She arrived in Sydney in 1892 and oversaw the physical establishment of the college as well as the iconic establishment of it in the consciousness of Sydney society.

Her energy saw her quickly gain membership of the women's clubs and societies at the time and she became a member of the executive of several of them. Her feminism and higher education were great influences on the work and direction of the clubs and she must have been a strong role model for other women in the groups, not to speak of the girls in her care at Women's College.

Louisa Macdonald achieved the success that could be boasted by few, of lifelong friendship with Rose Scott, even in spite of some heated differences of opinion at different times. She maintained the widespread support of Sydney society, despite importing her same sex companion, Evelyn Dickinson to live with her, and despite her public feminism. She commanded the highest salary drawn by a woman in NSW, and counted the elite of Sydney society among her friends.

Clearly actual personal connections and contact served to establish and maintain the networks and strategic alliances that created a structure for Australian feminism. Women's clubs and societies were a significant part of the international feminist framework, in two ways. First, local clubs provided the spaces for women to meet, and this opportunity was

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<sup>53</sup> cited in Allen, *Rose Scott*, pp228-229.

<sup>54</sup> There are several accounts of Louisa Macdonald's time in Sydney: her own memoir, *The Women's College Within the University of Sydney* (NSW: Halstead Press, 1947); a history of the Women's College by Hole and Treweek, *The History of the Women's College Within the University of Sydney* (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1953); and Beaumont, and Holes' collection of letters, *Letters from Louisa*.

extended to international guests as well. Angela Woollacott describes women's clubs as an expression of women's desire for 'communality' which was developing as a result of improved opportunities for international travel and higher education, and maintains that by the beginning of the twentieth century clubs were 'closely linked to internationalism.'<sup>55</sup> Secondly, local and national clubs were inevitably reproduced on a global scale, enabling formal public connections across national boundaries.

In searching for formal international connections between the Australian women and their sisters in the United States and Britain, however, the first finding is perhaps surprising. Their activities were in many ways very different. Evidence of trans-Atlantic networks have been documented by historians, and it is clear that American and European women knew a great deal about one another's activities and that they kept abreast of developments via the 'golden cables of sympathy'<sup>56</sup> as well as other means. Australian women's efforts at association and organisation were often different in nature, function and purpose, and achieved different results than those of the Americans and Europeans.

America in particular was working to an historical cycle different from that of Australia. By the end of the nineteenth century it could be argued that they had already reached the 'trough' between the 'waves' of feminism. First wave feminism came much earlier there: it is usually acknowledged to have sprung from the abolitionist activism in which women took part, and which was later diverted to a struggle for the vote. By the end of the nineteenth century, despite not yet having won the vote, the first generation of American feminists were getting old. They had begun their public careers fifty years earlier and had been highly politicised for two generations.

American society and politics predisposed American women to travel a different path to that trodden by Australian women. Race as an issue, precipitated by the abomination of slavery, had a far greater and much earlier impact on American social and political movements. *African-American Women in the Struggle for the Vote* (1998) by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and *Sex and*

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<sup>55</sup> Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune*, p.116.

<sup>56</sup> Such is the title of Margaret MacFadden's book, *The Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth Century Feminism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999).

*Citizenship in Antebellum America* (1998) by Nancy Isenberg both document the contribution of black American women to the suffrage campaigns there. By the end of the nineteenth century in Australia, the women in the organisations and clubs were still blithely ignoring the existence and plight of Indigenous Australians. Not only did Aboriginal women not participate in the clubs and groups, it appears from all surviving evidence that they were never discussed there. It was assumed that the demand for 'universal' suffrage did not include black women – or men.

Secondly, evangelical Christianity was far more prominent in America than it ever became in Australia, where the Christianity was (mostly) Protestant and properly restrained, according to the British model. Of American evangelical groups, only the WCTU made much inroad into Australian society, and then it was for the temperance and suffrage messages rather than the Christianity.

Finally, Americans had fought a war to achieve the system of governing they had settled on by the turn of the century. War is a radicalising experience, inclined to spawn parochialism and often the product of – or impetus for – imperialism. Australia had received the model for its Westminster system of government from England. Yet colonies themselves, expansion or imperialism was not on the immediate agenda for NSW, Victoria or the other proto-States. Rather, a phlegmatic campaign was moving Australia towards the economically rational model of federalism.

Likewise in England, different social, political and historical conditions led to a different focus in the women's groups and associations. In *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (1997) Sheila Jeffreys documents the massive campaign by Victorian-era women to reform male sexual behaviour. Social purity was an important agenda of the women's groups in the 1880s and 1890s, and dozens of organisations were formed to address issues such as child abuse, prostitution, rape in marriage, and pornography. Organisations included: the National Vigilance Association; the Moral Reform Union; the Ladies National Association; the Social Purity Alliance; the Ladies Association for Friendless Girls; The White Cross Army; the Gospel Purity Association; the Church of England Purity Society; the Society for the Abolition of State Regulation of Vice; the Society for the

Suppression of the Traffic in Girls; the Vigilance Association for the Defence of Personal Rights; the Central Vigilance Committee for the Repression of Immorality; and many more. The motivation of some of the groups was religious; for others it was an overtly feminist ambition to expose the double standards of sexual morality at the time. The common objective was the transformation of men's sexual behaviour. Like abolition in the United States, social purity can be seen as the spur for women in the United Kingdom to organise and politicise.

A strong social purity agenda also existed in the US, though links to religion and the temperance movement were stronger than in England. It is a peculiarity of the Australian groups that they were far less focused on so-called social purity issues in their endeavours. The same problems existed here; women like Maybanke Wolstoneholme, Eliza Ashton and Louisa Lawson made efforts to discuss and address them. Mary Lee had belonged to a social purity group in South Australia before she was diverted into suffrage work. But such issues never attracted the same level of attention and support in Australia. Indeed there was a general squeamishness about tackling any issues that concerned sex. Even though their notions about what was right and proper discussion fodder for ladies had been inherited from Britain, Australian women seemed far more reluctant to follow their English sisters down the path of striving to bring sex issues into the public sphere and reforming male sexual behaviour.

Even when the agendas were the same, the groups in Australia and England tended to pursue different paths to similar ends. The suffrage groups in Australia never undertook the militant tactics resorted to by the WSPU, some of which were taken up by American suffragists. In Australia the strategies were petitioning (sometimes extravagantly for publicity purposes, such as the mile-long petition presented in Western Australia), letter writing, deputations to ministers, public meetings. The WSPU adopted the tactics demonstrated by elements in the Irish Republican movement: hunger-striking, mass demonstration, arson, destruction of property, assault, even suicide. One obvious reason for the ability of Australian groups to resist the example of the militants was that by the time the WSPU became operational (it was formed in 1903 and began its militancy in London in 1906), most of the Australian colonies had already secured suffrage for women.

The differences only serve to highlight the need for Australian women to develop their own feminism: to locate the intellectual roots of their own tradition. Australia was awash with contradictions: still on a journey to nationhood yet its colonial governments had outstripped the American Congress and the British Parliament by permitting women to vote; granting women uncommon access to quality secondary education and universities yet refusing to allow them to graduate (in the case of medicine) or practise their chosen professions (in the case of law).

Nevertheless, for all the differences, there were examples of Australian women and women's groups affiliating with international women's organisations in an effort to construct feminist networks. Lori Ginsberg observed of feminist relationships between the United States and the United Kingdom that

some feminists, especially when they joined their feminism to other movements for universal justice, thought about and agitated for social change on a grander scale than their narrow cultural worlds seem to have demanded.<sup>57</sup>

This was true for Australian feminists too. Differences did not preclude the desirability of participation in international associations of women. Feminism has always assumed a collective striving. However internationalism usually translated into a trans-Atlantic consciousness with a tendency to overlook trans-Pacific connections. The colonial counterparts with whom Australians might have shared more common experience, Canada and New Zealand, were similarly subsumed into the dubious benefits of transnationalism. Despite participating as white, English-speaking women with precocious achievements in having access to the vote, divorce and higher education, Australian women in international organisations carried with them 'all of the paraphernalia of colonial senses of inferiority.'<sup>58</sup> For Australian women, participation in the international sisterhood was an expensive undertaking. The Euro-American leadership of the societies saw meetings always take place

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<sup>57</sup> Lori Ginsberg, 'Re-viewing the First Wave,' in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2002).

<sup>58</sup> Ian Tyrell, 'Conference Commentary - *New Comparisons, International Worlds: Transnational and Comparative Perspectives*' in *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 36, (2001).

on one of those continents. Furthermore the cost of participation to the nationalism of Australian women was great. For the Euro-Americans the 'transcending of nationalism' that was necessary to create a sense of homogeneous womanhood in the groups was a much shorter trip. The homogeneity aspired to looked suspiciously Euro-American.

Leila J. Rupp examines the concept of collective identity, noting that women began to organise across national borders by the end of the nineteenth century, first in conferences, then in formalised institutions such as the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and comments that 'inevitably, the process of constructing an international collective identity reproduced global power relations.'<sup>59</sup> While Australian women affiliated with these international organisations, their participation was limited by 'unacknowledged assumptions about the superiority and natural leadership of Euro-American societies.'<sup>60</sup> While Australian women did not suffer the added disadvantages endured by members from countries that did not speak English or practise Christianity, they were nevertheless handicapped by distance, as Rupp demonstrates through the example of an Australian woman in 1909 wryly remarking to the Business Session of the ICW as it debated the venue for a future assembly that 'the distance is exactly the same going out to Australia as it is coming [to Europe].'<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, Rupp observes that participants in the transnational organisations regularly used the pronoun 'we' indicating their emerging collective identity as internationalists. Internationalism suffered during the years of the First World War when national identity conflicted with internationalism in some cases. However the striving for national and international consciousness to peacefully coexist can be seen in the popularity of the term 'sisterhood' which connoted a dialogue and relationship based on gender, and superceded the similarities and differences based on nationality.

International feminist alliances today continue to reflect on the history of feminism and transnationalism, as can be seen in the 1998 special edition of *Gender and History* entitled

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<sup>59</sup> Leila J. Rupp, 'Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organisations, 1888-1945' in *American Historical Review*, Issue 5 (December, 1994), p.1577.

<sup>60</sup> Rupp, 'Constructing Internationalism,' p.1577.

<sup>61</sup> Rupp, 'Constructing Internationalism,' p.1579.

'Feminisms and Internationalism.'<sup>62</sup> In their introductory chapter, Sinha, Guy and Woollacott observe that the received history of feminism and internationalism places the dominant women's organisations at the forefront, but that a closer analysis raises questions about the complex dynamic between local, national and international feminist organising:

It has often been assumed that even though national and international consciousness coexisted within the international networks of the women's movement, the important precondition for internationalism lay in the existence of a strong and secure national consciousness.<sup>63</sup>

A 2000 conference held in Canberra entitled 'New Comparisons/International Worlds' used as its starting point the long tradition of interest in women's international history and the first wave awareness of transnational dimensions of women's experience, together with the comparability of cross-national gender-based discrimination. However presenters at that conference began to interrogate the relevance of transnationalism for Australian women. Ian Tyrell's summary of the conference proceedings reports that a shared theme was 'limited opportunities for women of education and manifest intelligence to seek fulfilling careers within Australia' and suggested that the oft-noted contemporary 'brain-drain' had its roots in the nineteenth-century movement of the best of Australian women into transnational organisations.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, some papers suggested that international associations may be seen as hastening the process of dismantling imperialism.

In her memoir, Alice Henry recorded the experience of being an Australian feminist in America in the early years of the twentieth century. She enjoyed the opportunity to share her first-hand knowledge of local and national Australian women's groups with an international audience:

Australia was a word to rouse interest in all that circle and I arrived at a moment when Australia was beginning some of her most notable

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<sup>62</sup> I. Sinha, D.J. Guy and A. Woollacott, 'Feminisms and Internationalism,' *Gender and History*, Vol.10, No.3, (November 1998).

<sup>63</sup> Sinha, Guy and Woollacott, 'Feminisms and Internationalism' p.359.

<sup>64</sup> Tyrell, 'Conference Commentary,' 2001.

experiments in social legislation ... My ready passport at that moment was my familiarity with 'Votes for Women'. I was qualified by myself being a Federal voter; I had voted myself and I had voted for a woman even although she did not get in [sic].<sup>65</sup>

On a personal level there were many examples of Australian women benefiting from an exchange with their international sisters: relationships that were beneficial on both sides. Attendance at meetings of the International Council of Women and other groups raised the profile of the Australian women delegates and helped to develop a profile for Australia as an emergent nation on the world stage. However, formalised international collaborations in global organisations of women at the time were less beneficial for Australian women, who were disadvantaged by the US/Eurocentrism of such undertakings. The interest in developing transnational connections was always there, but it was perhaps not until the first Pan-Pacific Women's Conference in the 1920s (held in Honolulu, which Bessie Rischbieth described as 'an alternative Geneva in the Pacific') that Australian women found an international forum that admitted them as more than marginal participants.<sup>66</sup>

The networks between the women and their organisations that existed personally, locally, nationally and internationally became a framework for the development of feminism. The networks facilitated communication and the dissemination of ideas, and enabled the coordination and development of thought and strategy.

With an understanding of the extent of the networks connecting the women and the groups established, Chapters Four, Five and Six examine the groups themselves in detail, conscious of their existence as both individual entities and as part of a bigger social movement of women.

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<sup>65</sup> Nettie Palmer, (ed.), *Memoirs of Alice Henry* (Melbourne, 1944), pp.38-39.

<sup>66</sup> Indeed Bessie Rischbieth argued that support for Australian women's attendance at Pan-Pacific Women's Conferences was essential 'if the greater voice of Dominion women was to be heard within European feminism.' Cited in Fiona Paisley, 'Cultivating modernity: culture and nationalism in Australian feminism's Pacific age' in *Journal of Women's History*, Vol.14, No.3 (Autumn 2002), pp.105-129.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# INTELLECTUAL, HIGHER EDUCATION AND CULTURAL PURSUITS

### I

*'thoughtful Women who want themselves to learn how best to face the battle of life'*

Because suffrage has been the main theme hitherto explored by historians of the so-called first wave, groups such as the Womanhood Suffrage League and the Women's Political and Educational League have already received considerable attention. However most of the women participating in groups in this period have remained invisible for being beyond the scope of such circumscribed research. Few of the previous historical examinations have acknowledged the existence of other agnate clubs. If they do rate a mention, it tends to be in relation to a few noteworthy members: if a notable woman made famous by the struggle to achieve suffrage gave some of her time to membership of some group or other, then the historical gaze may have turned to it briefly, and then abruptly away.

The work of the many disparate women's groups in the *fin-de-siècle* period can be seen as elements of a collective striving towards the construction of feminism. In the existence of these symbiotic groups, in their networks and activities, is the genesis of an intellectual tradition of feminism for Australian women. The reason this period is often described as the 'first wave' of feminism is that major social and political change took place at the time. But the impetus for emancipation did not spring from a void. The proponents of reform did not emerge from their education at the hands of Victorian-era governesses prepared to combat the patriarchy. Clubs and societies were a vital 'training ground', where the intellectual grounding for feminist activity was formed. Groups and societies were one of the means of disseminating information; in these formal, cordial gatherings of women, politics, literature, intellectual movements and morality could be discussed.

The women's groups were concerned with an array of issues and purposes. Belonging to a group energised and equipped women with the skills for moving beyond the group and into the public sphere. Hence a synergetic relationship can be discerned between, for example, intellectual groups and suffrage groups. It was not coincidence that found a woman like Maybanke Wolstoneholme, for example, belonging to both the aspiringly intellectual Women's Literary Society and the overtly political Womanhood Suffrage League. Belonging to the Women's Literary Society gave her the opportunity to develop the public skills she needed for her effective participation in the Womanhood Suffrage League.

The groups met regularly, debated vigorously, minuted their proceedings diligently, and organised tirelessly. Some of the groups gained notoriety and the attention of the mainstream press. Some of the members were prominent in the public sphere in other capacities. While each of these groups described and promoted their own particular objectives, across a vast spectrum of concerns and aspirations (including, bizarrely, a group dedicated to the promotion of optimism), there are features common to them all. Most importantly, they were all committed to providing a forum specifically for women, so that they might find a voice and share ideas. Their political radicalism, intellectual vigour, and feminist commitment could each be subjected to scrutiny and in many cases found wanting. Nevertheless, these groups were significant as a means of disseminating ideas and promoting the concept of women's right to speak and be heard in the public domain.

Women's intellectual groups are almost unremarked by histories of the period, yet their role was crucial. Not only did the intellectual groups give women a physical space to learn the skills to engage in the public sphere on issues such as suffrage; they also created the psychological space for feminist thought to develop and feminist action to emerge. In this sense then, the importance of the intellectual groups retains a significance greater and more enduring than the comparatively brief and limited role of the better documented suffrage groups. The work of the intellectual groups continues to resonate today for those women who claim prominence or authority in the public sphere or otherwise challenge the dominant masculine culture, and for all women who identify or claim consciousness as a collective entity.

While there are obvious reasons to have a women's group dedicated to the attainment of womanhood suffrage or other overt political agendas, the motivation behind a literary society or intellectual group created exclusively for women may not be so apparent. Dominating the women's clubs in NSW for several years however, was a group uncommitted politically: the renowned and mercurial Women's Literary Society,<sup>1</sup> which included as its members and executive some of the leading and most influential women of the Sydney intellectual and political scene.

The Women's Literary Society (WLS) was formed in August 1890 by thirteen women<sup>2</sup> who met at Mrs Lucinda Gullet's house at the suggestion of Mrs Matilda Curnow. Lucinda Gullett was a journalist and columnist, married to Sir Henry Baynton Somer Gullett, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*; Matilda Curnow was married to Reverend William Curnow, the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Matilda Curnow's son, William Leslie Curnow attended Newington College, graduating in 1886 with the son of Maybanke Wolstoneholme. The friendship between Matilda Curnow and Maybanke Wolstoneholme was born of both the personal connection of their sons' friendship and of their common political beliefs. Maybanke Wolstoneholme became another foundation member of the society, at Matilda Curnow's invitation.

The Women's Literary Society was the first women's group to hold meetings in the evening; this was to enable and encourage working women to attend, and although the membership was in fact entirely middle-class, some, like Maybanke Wolstoneholme, had jobs. Meetings were held fortnightly on Mondays at 8 pm. By 1893 the WLS boasted 120 members and at least thirty of them regularly attended meetings. Under Reverend Curnow's editorship, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported regularly – if briefly – about their Programme, occasionally

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<sup>1</sup> The Women's Literary Society is one of the few intellectual groups that have been written about by contemporary historians. This is mostly because of its illustrious membership: Rose Scott and Maybanke Wolstoneholme were simultaneously members of the Womanhood Suffrage League, so the Women's Literary Society has received tangential attention. Judith Allen, Jan Roberts and Susan Magarey have all published research on the Women's Literary Society; see, for example, Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994); Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1993); and Susan Magarey's *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> These included: Mrs Matilda Curnow, Mrs Lucinda Gullett, Mrs Zara Aronson, Maybanke Wolstoneholme, Miss Rose Scott, Miss Edith Badham, Miss Margaret Windeyer.

allocating detailed coverage of a special or controversial lecture. The programmes for the meetings reveal a vast array of topics which ranged widely over literature (particularly representations of women in the canon), politics, matters of social debate, philosophy, cultural identity and issues of particular concern for women.

The objective of the Society was described as 'mutual help in the study of general literature', but this far from adequately describes its activities, nor does it presage the extent of its impact. The Annual Report for its third year describes the Society as

a source of much pleasure and advantage in drawing together thinking women whose interchange of knowledge and ideas has been beneficial to each other. In addition to the study of literature some time has been given to the discussion of important social questions, in which it is desirable to increase the knowledge, and consequently, the interest and usefulness of women.

The Women's Literary Society was efficiently – even fussily – organised and administered. Meetings were held at first in hired rooms, then in a rented room in Pitt Street which was sub-let to other groups, then in a variety of locations around the city, until settling into new premises in 1896.

The 'Rules and Regulations' of the Society were published in each Annual Report, and explained the structure of the organisation, the roles of office-bearers, the procedures regarding elections, and the requirements of membership. Members paid an annual subscription and suffered penalties for non-payment.

The work of the Society as described in Section 12 of the 'Rules and Regulations' was to consist of

searching out and bringing before the meetings such matters as shall be of interest and improvement to the members. Discussions upon important topics of the day, papers upon various matters of interest, criticism upon

literary or artistic works, or theories upon practical matters, will all be in order at the meetings.

The Society may not have differed greatly in intent from the Dawn Club ('the reading and discussion of thoughtful papers'), but it certainly differed in its sense of its own importance. The Women's Literary Society was presided over by an array of dignitaries: Lady Carrington in the first year; Lady Jersey in the second; the trumpeted but disappointing Lady Duff in the third ('[the office of President] has now been accepted by Lady Duff, who has evinced her interest in the Society by selecting two subjects for discussion which will be reported on in the next Programme' enthused the Report for 1893. 'Your Committee reports that our President, Lady Duff, has been unable to attend any of our meetings' reads the terse entry for 1894). Governors' wives having proved disappointing, Lady Duff was replaced as President by Louisa Macdonald, Principal of the Women's College at the University of Sydney. Several residents of the Women's College became members of the Society, including Etta Montefiore and Madge Whitfield.

Some of the women whose names are familiar for their concurrent or subsequent public activities became founding or guiding members of other women's clubs of the period, for example, Rose Scott, Maybanke Wolstoneholme and Margaret Windeyer. Maybanke Wolstoneholme felt it necessary to resign as Vice-President of the Women's Literary Society in November 1893, having been elected President of the Womanhood Suffrage League.<sup>3</sup> Louisa Macdonald was President of the Society between 1894 and 1896, and was one of few members of the Society to hold a university degree. A young Ethel Turner (soon to be celebrated for her fiction depicting Australian locations and characters), was a member, though she famously took exception to the radicalism (!) of some of the views expressed:

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<sup>3</sup> Edith Badham – a public anti-suffragist – wrote to Maybanke Wolstoneholme, congratulating her on her new post, and begging her to consider holding two roles for a short time: 'A practical woman of judgement and experience is so necessary at the head of a society like ours that I do not know how we should get on without you.' Cited in Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, p.64.

It is horrid to see the way some of them go on about their rights and wrongs, it's old-fashioned of me I suppose but I do think it would take from the womanliness of a woman to be in Parliament.<sup>4</sup>

The meetings were minuted and the surviving Minutes provide an entertaining (but tragically fragmentary) record of the often volatile proceedings. 'Frippery,' is the derisive record of a discussion about Thackeray, minuted by Maybanke Wolstoneholme in 1893. A debate was held about Socialism that continued for several meetings, degenerating frequently into provocation and contradiction:

Miss Scott read a list of the things desired by the Sydney Socialistic League not agreeing with all. The perfect system had not yet evolved. We were not responsible for the things of today, but we were for those of tomorrow.

Miss [Etta] Montefiore said she did not agree with the socialistic views expressed. She would yield to those in sorrow for poverty and suffering, but did not allow sympathy to get the better of reason ...

Mrs Curnow said Miss Montefiore had voiced her thought. Miss Coleman agreed entirely with Miss Scott, and said those who were not in sympathy with socialism were not lovers of justice.

Miss Montefiore thought such a generalisation unjust.<sup>5</sup>

Minutes even record arguments about the Minutes themselves:

The Secretary asked that the length of the Minutes might be discussed. Miss Whitfield and Miss Montefiore thought them too long. Miss Badham [and three others] approved of them as present. No vote was taken.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, pp.60-1.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes, 10 April 1893 (held by Mitchell Library).

<sup>6</sup> Minutes, 7 August 7 1893 (ML).

The Programme for the meetings was published and the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. A trawl through the Programmes for the years 1890 through 1896 reveals a vast and eclectic array of topics for lecture and debate; for example, 1891:

- June 6 – Debate: is the Higher Education conducive to the cultivation of the moral qualities?
- June 20 – Buddhism, as set forth in Arnold's 'Light of Asia.'<sup>7</sup>
- July 4 – The Hero of Modern Fiction. Members to write short papers.
- July 18 – A comparison between Milton's Satan and Goethe's Mephistopheles. Members to write papers.

Papers were usually presented by members, but periodically delivered by guest lecturers. While membership was restricted to women only, visiting guest speakers were occasionally male (for example, Mr Fraser-Hill's lecture on 'Modern Fiction' in 1893).

The membership included a core of vocal and articulate women who consistently lamented the reluctance of other members to share the burden of organisation, committee participation, and paper presentation. The Minutes record a lengthy discussion in September 1892 which was initiated by Miss Vallentine, about means of forcing members to participate more actively in the meetings. The Report of the Society of the fourth year, ending August 1894, laments that

it is a matter of regret to your Committee that the number of workers is in such slight proportion to that of the members. It is earnestly hoped that, during the ensuing year, papers may be written for the pleasure and benefit of the Society by many able members who have not yet contributed.

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<sup>7</sup> This esoteric selection may have been an effort to engage the interest of the then President, Lady Jersey, who nevertheless could not be enticed to attend any meetings. See Penny Russell's discussion of Lady Jersey's interest in Buddhism in 'A Woman of the Future? Feminism and conservatism in colonial New South Wales,' *Women's History Review*, Vol.13, No.1 (2004), p.10.

By 1895, the Report was even more dismal: 'it has again fallen to the lot of a few to be the main contributors, and a large number of members have been apathetic in their attitude.'

Miss Vallentine was also the instigator of a motion that the question of the privileges of the junior members might be discussed at the meeting in August 1893. At that same meeting Miss McKenny proposed, and Miss Scott seconded, that

the names of members who did not pay their subscriptions within three months of Annual meeting or of electing should be posted for three months in the Society's rooms at the end of which time, should their subscriptions be still unpaid it would be assumed that they desired their membership to lapse.<sup>8</sup>

The tendency of the Women's Literary Society to a pedantic insistence on adherence to their own rules is also seen in other women's groups at the time. It points to the seriousness with which the women regarded their efforts: membership of these clubs was seldom merely self-indulgent time-wasting; to the earnest members, their endeavours were worthy and important. Indeed the members typically referred to their reading and discussion as 'work' and anticipated intellectual benefits from their efforts.

The Society maintained a small library formed by the gifts of members. Social events were arranged periodically to mark special occasions, for example, a Tennyson Memorial Evening on 5 December 1892, as well as several receptions and *conversazioni* held in honour of special guest international visitors or departing members. Benefits were held too: one raised money for the Women's College, which was also the venue for some of the Society's social events. A large audience assembled to hear a lecture from Louisa Macdonald in August 1894, which gained extensive coverage in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and raised more than five guineas for the Women's College:

On Thursday night I had to give a lecture to the Women's Literary Society  
– a sketch of the literature of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. founded on a paper on

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<sup>8</sup> Minutes, 7 August, 1893.

Ausonius which I read long ago at University College ... I have been studying Ruskin lately and now I have begun to read Dante ... .<sup>9</sup>

The Women's Literary Society gained some measure of notoriety before (and during) a period of decline. The Report for 1895 records the regret of the Committee at the resignation of several members during the year, 'particularly that of Mrs Wolstoneholme,' as well as expressing their 'great regret at the withdrawal from the Committee of Miss Badham and Miss Scott ...' all of which suggests significant turmoil and an exodus of leading figures. In 1895 too the Report regrets the decrease in the attendance of members at the meetings held. And, sure enough, by 1896, the attendance at meetings had 'not been as large as could have been wished.'

According to Beaumont and Hole, by the end of 1896 the Women's Literary Society had been subsumed with the fledgling Ladies Club into a hybrid called the Victoria Club and Salon.<sup>10</sup> Membership of the Salon required an active involvement in intellectual endeavours, but gradually evolved into a club dominated by prominent society ladies. Judith Allen's version of the demise of the Women's Literary Society has it simply being subsumed into the Women's Club (formed in 1901). Certainly many Women's Literary Society members resurfaced as members of the Women's Club.

The Women's Literary Society was a striking example of a women's group devoted exclusively to intellectual pursuits. Consistently their minutes and reports describe their 'work': not fund-raising or evangelical activity or public agitation, for these were of no relevance to the Society; 'work' referred to their discussions and lectures and reading. In their meetings they attempted to develop an analysis of women's position in relation to the great movements of the day. Their intellectual curiosity steered them very often away from literature and towards philosophy or political ideology that had something to say about women. Between the papers read on George Eliot, Shakespeare's Women, and the works of Mrs Gaskell, are lectures on 'Socialism', 'Buddhism as Set Forth in Arnold's "Light of Asia,"'

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<sup>9</sup> Janice Beaumont and Vere Hole, *Letters from Louisa: A woman's view of the 1890s, based on the letters of Louisa Macdonald, first principal of the Women's College, University of Sydney* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p.85.

<sup>10</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.86.

and 'Suggestions for the Improvement of Affairs as Regards Wage-Earning Women.' However the resources for intellectual stimulation were limited, and they frequently had to rely on lecturing each other about their own erratic readings of whatever information was available to them. For example, at the meeting on the sixth of February in 1893, Margaret Windeyer's contribution was to read aloud from the English journal *Shafis* an article on George Meredith, which summed up his ideas about women. These were described as being

progressive for although he did not like 'unwomanly women' he had not a man's horror of those with brains. He delighted in the presentment of women's friendships for each other, too seldom the subject of novelists. He was unpopular by reason of being so far in advance of his time.

A lower point was reached at the 59<sup>th</sup> meeting a fortnight later when the Programme was 'Thoughts on Pictures in the Art Gallery,' and the contributions of Mrs Edwards and Mrs Ashton were to agree that 'the poor were more picturesque.'

Judith Allen's biography of Rose Scott offers the observation that the members of the Women's Literary Society engaged in 'a form of cultural politics.' Some were daughters, some spinsters, others wives and widows. Many of them had little or no formal education, but wished to develop their intellectual and critical skills and influence the course of philanthropy and public opinion in ways that improved the position of women:

This kind of reading, reviewing and public speaking group might readily be characterised as elitist, mild and irrelevant to the everyday struggles of the majority of Australian women of the time. It could be contrasted unfavourably with two other forms of women's organisation to emerge in the same period – women's temperance work and women's work for improved industrial conditions. Such an assessment, however, would underestimate the significance of women's cultural politics.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.83.

The women argued fiercely, with little experience of (or talent for) public speaking. Unlike the later Women's Club, the Women's Literary Society seems to have eventually collapsed under the weight of its internal dissension. The members wanted to be intellectual and to be so in an environment of female solidarity, but they were conspicuous and self-conscious about it, and the Minutes are often wry at best, and petulant at worst, about the ways in which various disputes were to be resolved.

The Women's Literary Society provided a space away from the domestic sphere for women to practise the skills of the public domain. It was this group more than any other that was to be the effective 'training ground' described by Mrs Francis Anderson (Maybanke Wolstoneholme), and several of the members subsequently became renowned public figures. It was a feminist tradition they were building in their 'beneficial interchange of ideas,' and their success may be seen in the extensive network that devolved from their core.<sup>12</sup>

Another women's group chronologically preceded the Women's Literary Society, but did not really provide a precedent in terms of its organisation and activities. Louisa Lawson established the 'Dawn Club: a Social Reform Club for Women' in 1888. Its formal establishment took place at Foster's Hall in Sydney on 23 May 1889, when by invitation of Louisa Lawson, a number of 'earnest Women' assembled for the purpose of establishing an Association of Women whose object would be 'to consider various questions of importance to the sex.'<sup>13</sup> Louisa addressed the meeting:

The popular idea of an advocate of women's rights is this: she is an angular, hard-featured withered creature with a shrill, harsh voice, no pretence to comeliness, spectacles on her nose, and the repulsive title, 'blue-stocking' visible all over her. Metaphorically she is supposed to hang halfway over the

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<sup>12</sup> A tangible legacy may be seen in the future career of Dr Lucy Gullett, daughter of Lucinda Gullett. Lucy Gullett, was born in 1876 and educated at Sydney High School for Girls. She gained her medical qualifications in 1901 and became the first resident medical officer at the Women's Hospital on Crown Street. During the war she did service in France. In 1921 she established the NSW Association of Registered Medical Women. She was a founder of the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and a vice-president of the United Associations of Women. While Lucy Gullett doesn't appear to have been associated with the WLS or other women's groups at the time, it is reasonable to assume that she gained encouragement to pursue her medical degree and a life devoted to the welfare of women from her mother's early feminism.

<sup>13</sup> collected papers of The Dawn Club on microfiche, Mitchell Library.

bar which separates the sexes, shaking her skinny fist at men and all their works. I don't think it will be difficult to unseat this idea as soon as we can get people to think about the subject at all ...<sup>14</sup>

The Dawn Club also predated the first suffrage group formed in New South Wales. It was intended for working women and its general objective was the extension of women's rights, including divorce law reform and suffrage:

A woman's opinions are useless to her, she may suffer unjustly, she may be wronged, but she has no power to weightily petition against man's laws, no representatives to urge her views, her only method to produce release, redress, or change, is to ceaselessly agitate.<sup>15</sup>

Louisa Lawson's personal motivation for pursuing reform of divorce laws arose from her experience of an abusive marriage. Judith Allen describes Louisa's three main preoccupations:

First, Lawson was preoccupied by the prevalence of loveless marriages in which women were instruments of men's pleasures and whims. Second, she also dwelt upon the overwork and exploitation of wives and mothers, and the condition of marriage that led to their acquiescence before their own ill-use. Third, she placed great emphasis upon publicly articulated misogyny – the defaming of women through derogatory claims, popular truisms and other cultural representations.<sup>16</sup>

Louisa Lawson was committed to the intellectual development of women, believing that women must first elevate themselves then contribute to the general elevation of society through club activities such as:

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<sup>14</sup> Louisa Lawson, speech to the inaugural meeting of the Dawn Club. Published in *Dawn* (July 1889).

<sup>15</sup> Lawson, speech, 1889

<sup>16</sup> Allen, *Rose Satt*, p.88.

the reading and discussion of thoughtful papers which condense the onward marching thoughts and life of larger and older communities ... absorb progressive teaching upon temperance, education, health, charity, etc. We will find plentiful occasion to apply it to surrounding life.<sup>17</sup>

As ever, Louisa Lawson's drive stemmed from her passionate commitment to social justice, and this explicit political position distinguishes her women's club from the mainly social and middle-class underpinning of the Women's Literary Society. Tellingly, despite the apparent similarity of their purpose, Louisa Lawson was never invited to join the Women's Literary Society.

The Mitchell Library keeps fragments of Louisa Lawson's writings from this period on microfiche, including verse, prose writings, holograph letters, biographical notes, newspaper cuttings, reviews and more. Among them is a witty and egotistical article about the genesis of women's intellectual inferiority to man, and a copy of the 'first circular issued in the interests of female suffrage,' written by Miss Frances Gilham Holden and published by Louisa Lawson in 1888. This circular describes the purposes for establishing the Dawn Club under a few lines of inspirational verse:

*Let us each reform, one and all will be reformed,  
For the cause that needs assistance, for the wrongs that need resistance,  
For the future in the distance, for the good that we can do*

In seeking to establish a Woman's Club, we desire to gain the definite sympathy and strength which comes from combination, to afford an understood channel for the expression of opinion and translation into practical effort, in connection with Woman's life and work.<sup>18</sup>

According to Frances Holden, the Club intended to circulate 'bright, clever papers' written by women, in the interests of women's causes, which discuss 'clearly, intelligently and

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<sup>17</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.88.

<sup>18</sup> Miss Frances Gilham Holden, 'Dawn Club - A Social Reform Club for Women', p.5. Collected papers (Mitchell Library).

practically every question of life work and reform which is engaging the attention of thoughtful minds all over the world.<sup>19</sup> The subjects to be dealt with included health, temperance, woman suffrage, social purity, education, dress reform and more, and the hope was to have papers from 'individual experience' read and discussed that may 'help in ameliorating the conditions of surrounding life.'

Frances Holden's circular seeks membership for the fledgling Club, of 'thoughtful Women who want themselves to learn how best to face the battle of life,' and lists the executive of the Club as Mrs Lawson (President), Mrs Edwards (Treasurer), and Miss Edwards<sup>20</sup> (Secretary), with their office situated at 26 Jamieson Street, Sydney.

The Club met fortnightly in King Street, in the Loong Shan tea rooms of the sympathetic Sydney philanthropist, Quong Tart. The first meeting was addressed by Miss Margaret Windeyer. Discussions revolved around the social, political and literary issues affecting the members. The comparative informality of the Club probably accounts for the dearth of material surviving. The minutes that exist are careless, ill-spelt documents. Unlike the meticulous administration of the Women's Literary Society, Louisa Lawson's management of the Dawn Club was extremely casual.

There are few other references to the existence or work of Louisa Lawson's Dawn Club. The Club, established in the same year as its namesake journal *The Dawn*, appears to have ceased to operate quite soon, though the journal continued to be published until 1905. In his brief biography of Quong Tart, Robert Travers describes the meetings of Louisa Lawson's 'pioneer feminists' as mostly devoted to working on the content of the journal:

There, in the cigar-free air of Quong's reading area, these early advocates of votes for women browsed over copies of *The Lady* supplied by the tea merchant while drawing up more fiery demands and articles for Mrs Lawson's *The Dawn*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Holden, 'Dawn Club,' pp.5-6.

<sup>20</sup> Georgina Edwards reappears as a member of the Women's Literary Society, and as secretary to the Working and Factory Girls Club.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Travers, *Australian Mandarin: The Legend of Quong Tart* (South Australia: Kangaroo Press, 1981), p.122.

Related papers held at the Mitchell Library may contain a clue about the demise of the Club. A short biographical article (author unknown) asserts that Louisa Lawson was approached by Rose Scott and informed that ‘influential people’ intended to take the matter of women’s suffrage ‘in hand.’ Louisa Lawson was urged to cooperate:

This she did and her following was transferred to the [Womanhood Suffrage] League. She took her seat on the Council, and continued to provide literature, also a meeting place for the Council free of charge, for the next two years.<sup>22</sup>

This suggests that, in a move similar to Maybanke Wolstoneholme’s departure from the Women’s Literary Society, Louisa Lawson abandoned the Dawn Club to lend her membership and support to a unified organisation that was focused on suffrage. History may see this as an unfortunate sacrifice, given that Louisa Lawson’s association with the Womanhood Suffrage League was brief and unhappy. The Dawn Club was an organisation for working women with a broad agenda. The Womanhood Suffrage League consisted of (mostly) genteel or middle class ladies, who did not share a need to concern themselves with the kind of issues addressed by the Dawn Club, especially those that were unrelated or only indirectly related to suffrage. That Louisa Lawson continued to publish her journal *The Dawn*, for which she was journalist, editor and publisher, from May 1888 to 1905,<sup>23</sup> demonstrates her belief that other women’s issues should not be abandoned. Women, she said, endured their wrongs in ‘abominable seclusion. [Women were] weak, unorganised and isolated.’<sup>24</sup> Clearly she saw membership of a Club as a means to strengthen, organise and unite women. In the absence of a Club they could physically attend, at least a journal with wide circulation could help disseminate the ideas and maintain networks.

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<sup>22</sup> No author. Collected papers of The Dawn Club, p.6 (ML).

<sup>23</sup> The journal of the Womanhood Suffrage League, *The Australian Woman* included in its second issue a list of ‘Australian journals from which intelligent people holding various views can get all sides of every question.’ This generous free promotion of worthy competitor’s journals was not extended to Louisa Lawson – *The Dawn* was not on the list.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.89.

Frances Holden's recruitment of 'thoughtful Women who want themselves to learn how best to face the battle of life' is telling. Louisa Lawson's agenda for the Dawn Club, as for the journal, was woman-centred, and through membership of her Club she sought to help women develop their thinking about issues that affected their lives. Her focus on a broad range of issues and her efforts to bring women together ('strength which comes from combination') to read and discuss pertinent literature are an interesting early example of an explicitly intellectual approach to developing a feminist consciousness in Australian women.

After the Dawn Club, no other intellectual women's clubs made such explicit overtures to working class women. Only the Australasian Home Reading Union (AHRU) sought to develop working people intellectually, but this inclusive agenda was eventually lost. Formed in New South Wales in 1892 the AHRU was not a women's group as such, though it did have as its General Secretary that ubiquitous feminist, Maybanke Wolstoneholme. It promoted intellectual activity, being formed under the auspices of the Literature section of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, 'for the purpose of developing a taste for recreative and instructive reading among all classes of the community.'<sup>25</sup> In effect it catered mainly for women as it was designed to reach people 'living isolated lives in the back-blocks' or who were otherwise hampered in their access to education.

Adopting an organisational network suggested by Maybanke Wolstoneholme, the Union suggested that 'Circles' should be formed for joint study, discussion and mutual help, and that several circles should combine to form a 'group', holding periodical meetings for exchange of thought on their common studies:

Course topics were wide: the sciences, history, German literature and politics; there were examinations, a constitution, and instructions on how to set up and conduct a circle. Each circle maintained contact with Mr Robin [first editor of the AHRU Journal, the *Australasian Home Reader*] and Mrs Wolstoneholme.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Australasian Home Reading Union Prospectus, 1892 (ML).

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, p.145.

In her biography of Maybanke Wolstoneholme, Jan Roberts describes the AHRU as hard work for Maybanke who was active between 1892 and 1894, but acknowledges its importance in enhancing Maybanke's standing in educational circles, and in bringing her into contact with like-minded people. Dora Montefiore was another founding member.

The Union did not intend to compete with universities or other existing educational institutions or societies. It aimed to include reading accessible to those without tertiary or even school education, and the reading lists consisted of books 'of moderate price.' The subscription for membership was half a crown per annum.

In the 1892 Prospectus, Provisional Secretaries are named for Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, New Zealand and New South Wales (where it was Mrs Wolstoneholme). By July 1893 there were 106 circles of the AHRU throughout Australia, with over 2000 members.

The AHRU was a means for networking and exchanging ideas between the colonies. In September 1893 Maybanke Wolstoneholme presented a paper on the AHRU to the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science Conference in Adelaide, which gave her the opportunity to liaise with suffragists such as Mary Lee (Secretary of the Womanhood Suffrage League of South Australia).

Maybanke Wolstoneholme's vision for the AHRU was that it should

'throw a plank' across the gulf dividing rich and educated who were often 'superior or indifferent' to the poor and uneducated who were 'too proud to be patronised, or too careless to listen.'<sup>27</sup>

Certainly the 1892 Prospectus shows an intention to cater for the underprivileged and those most disadvantaged in terms of access to education. Its proposed methods were threefold:

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<sup>27</sup> Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*, p.146.

1. To draw up and publish courses of reading adapted to the tastes and requirements of different classes of readers.
2. To publish a cheap monthly journal giving help for each course of reading, such as introductions to the prescribed books, and answers to questions, and also giving information with regard to the proceedings of all branches of the Union.
3. To promote the organisation of Assemblies at the different centres, the delivery of lectures, social gatherings and excursions.<sup>28</sup>

While the AHRU was not formed specifically for the benefit of women, nevertheless women came to comprise the vast majority of the membership. Certainly most women still met the description of being disadvantaged in access to education. And it was women in the main who responded to the opportunities to attend lectures and meetings. Louisa Macdonald was invited to speak to the AHRU in 1892, soon after her arrival in Sydney. Her topic was the promotion of adult education, and she spoke on

the advantages to the general reader of having, from the mass of current literature, a code as to the books most desirable to be read.<sup>29</sup>

Her speech was reported in the *Sydney Mail*, under 'Events of the Week.' A list of prominent people in the audience was provided, along with the observation that 'the vestibule was filled with an audience chiefly of ladies.' This salient report contains two interesting observations: one is that the audience contained so many celebrated personages when the target group for the activities of the AHRU were supposed to be the disadvantaged. The second is the predominance of women in the audience.

The AHRU evidently spoke to a need of women for intellectual stimulation and association, but attracted too many of the 'rich and educated,' and too few of the 'poor and uneducated.' Maybanke Wolstoneholme grew increasingly frustrated at the failure of the AHRU to move more energetically in the direction of catering for the disadvantaged. Ultimately she resigned in 1894. The *Australasian Home Reader* ceased publication when Maybanke resigned as editor

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<sup>28</sup> Australasian Home Reading Union Prospectus, 1892 (ML), p.1.

<sup>29</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.112.

in 1894. In August that same year, Maybanke Wolstoneholme began to publish her own feminist newspaper, the *Woman's Voice*, which was targeted specifically at women as a disadvantaged group in society. The AHRU continued at least until 1912, though its membership and reading circles remained limited to the rich and educated.

## II

*'the idea of themselves as part of a network of the culturally informed'*

The precedent set by the NSW Dawn Club and Women's Literary Society was taken up around Australia (although interestingly not in Queensland) in two somewhat divergent manners. Ladies of leisure who set up restricted reading groups where they came together on a regular basis to share intellectual and essentially self-indulgent discussions about literature and topics of cultural significance were one manifestation. Examples of this type of group include the Sandringham Ladies' Social Reading Club in Victoria and the Hamilton Society in Tasmania. The other was literary and reading groups that offered open membership (to women) and were also dedicated to offering or providing a service of some kind, and which often gained quite large memberships such as the National Council of Women and the Karrakatta Club in Western Australia. Within both of these kinds of groups feminism can be seen developing, as women with varying purposes nevertheless claimed the right to come together to exercise their intellect and reflect on themselves as women in a rapidly changing society.

The first meeting of the Sandringham Ladies' Social Reading Club<sup>30</sup> was held at the home of Miss Callaghan, Hadley Cottage on Bay Road on 1 June 1903. The fifteen women present determined that its object was to 'keep in touch with the literature of the day by reading at home poetry, high class fiction and standard works, and discussing the books read at the

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<sup>30</sup> Primary source material on the Sandringham Ladies' Social Reading Club is held at the University of Melbourne archives. The only secondary account is by Victoria Emery, 'The Ladies Social Reading Club 1903-05,' a paper presented to a 1996 History of the Book in Australia (HOBA) conference, and reproduced on the Internet @ <http://idun.itsc.adfa.edu.au>

monthly meetings'.<sup>31</sup> Mrs H.A. Matters was the first President and Miss A. Cooper the Secretary. The Rules set down at that meeting were subsequently amended and expanded, and the executive roles changed but the foundation core of women remained active for many years.<sup>32</sup>

The Club remained small in terms of membership (the Rules limited membership to just eighteen, later twenty, and later again the rule was stretched to admit an additional member) and meetings were only ever conducted in members' homes, however the women were extremely serious and earnest in their quest to broaden their education. From their small number they formed four sub-committees: a Committee of Management, the Syllabus Committee, the Refreshment Committee and the Decoration Committee. Suggestions for reading were canvassed among members and reading lists from other societies consulted. The reading recorded in the Minutes includes – as predicted in the Object – a mixture of classic literature (mostly poetry and Shakespeare), reflecting their awareness of the canon, and recent bestsellers (mostly novels and travelogues). The Syllabus of the first couple of years demonstrates the catholicism of their tastes: Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*; Israel Zangwill's 1892 *Children of the Ghetto* (a sensation in both England and America; the first Anglo-Jewish bestseller); Darwin's 1897 *Journal of Researches*; Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Marie Corelli's 1902 *Temporal Power*; Francis Marion Crawford's 1884 serialised *A Roman Singer*; John Foster Fraser's 1904 *The Real Siberia*; Henry Seton Merriman's 1903 *Barlasch of the Guard*; Tennyson's *Maud*; Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. This last was easily the best-loved of the texts studied in the early years:

All present expressed the pleasure its reading had afforded them ... the good that comes from the reading of this remarkable book, worthy of the read and re-read, always yielding literary, intellectual and moral profit.<sup>33</sup>

The Rules of the Club were revisited in 1905 and again in 1908. They include one unexplained and curious interdiction: 'That religious discussions should not be allowed.' The

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<sup>31</sup> Minute Book, University of Melbourne Archives.

<sup>32</sup> The Club was active at least until 1945.

<sup>33</sup> Minute Book.

Minutes do not record discussion of this Rule. If the Minutes are an accurate record it would seem that the women were not inclined to stray from the Syllabus in their discussion anyway. The closest they ever come to political discussion was a remark that the socialism in *Aurora Leigh* is depicted as a failure, and a suggestion that a Marie Corelli novel was potentially provocative:

Miss Mountford defended both the Authoress and the book, but thought it was one which it would be unwise to circulate largely and given to the man in the street at the present socialistically political times.<sup>34</sup>

It was in the meeting to discuss Darwin's *Journal of Researches* that the women came closest to describing why they were so committed to their group and what made it valuable to them:

The majority at the commencement of the evening pronounced the book dull, prone to repetition, and mostly to be read or not, according to the pleasure of the member, and in many ways lacking interest, but before half an hour had elapsed the opinion of the meeting had completely changed, and what was deemed profitless became profitable and most interesting. Hence the members saw the benefit of the Club made manifest, discussion of a book bringing out much more from its pages than the mere reading without exchange of the thoughts of other readers.<sup>35</sup>

This notion that through talking they learned underpinned most of the women's literary groups. Unlike other clubs the Sandringham Ladies do not seem to have struggled overly with members being reluctant to speak in front of one another. Indeed, the Minutes for April 1904 record that the President was forced to remind the members about the need for all contributions to be heard:

The President asked members to give the whole Club present the benefit of their discussions, and not to the lady sitting next to them only, as by this

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<sup>34</sup> Minute Book, Tuesday 15 December 1903.

<sup>35</sup> Minute Book.

means the general body of members lost much that might be interesting and profitable from inability to hear what was said.<sup>36</sup>

However, on one occasion the Minutes do note the reticence of a member:

Mrs Peake gave proof of her desire to make the reading club interesting and successful by reading against her natural inclination to keep silent ... .

Lectures from invited experts were given and visitors encouraged. The first lecture, in 1903 from the Professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne, caused a flurry of committee-making, with Reception, Music, Refreshment and Hospitality Committees being formed specially for the occasion. Reverend Fielder's illustrated talk on 'Sponges' (timed to complement their reading of Darwin) was pronounced 'most interesting and instructive.' A later lecture was given by the Reverend Bevan (see p.191), and Dr Charles Strong (Church leader and founder of the Australian pacifist movement) was also invited to speak to the group.

Social events were part of the annual agenda, and included a literary picnic, and a musical 'At-Home' to which friends and family could be invited. Men were prevailed upon to support the Club: a Mr Harris is thanked on several occasions for his service presiding as Chairman when guest lecturers attended, and Mr Leighton is thanked for his kindness in driving the lecturers to and from the place of meeting.

Like other literary clubs, the members of the Sandringham Ladies' Social Reading Club came together out of friendship and familial ties, and they inhabited the same small local community as well. There are several probable mother and daughter pairings and sets of sisters among the membership: the Matters, Barnetts, Coopers and the Bonneys, for example. The women were middle-class and of indeterminate education. They began their group already well-equipped with some skills: for example, they knew the formalities of meeting procedure and their record-keeping and other organisation was scrupulous. As Victoria Emery observes:

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<sup>36</sup> Minute Book.

The selection of office-bearers, drawing up of rules and forming of sub-committees are almost automatic. These ladies were no strangers to the niceties of formal organisation.<sup>37</sup>

The women had a sound basic education but their faculty for independent thought or criticism was less developed. The Minutes are literate and well-spelt (if not always well-punctuated, as is the wont of Minutes). Their literary discussions were heavily derivative – very often the format their meetings followed was to read aloud from famous critics of the work under discussion – and occasionally they admitted defeat and were forced to acknowledge that they had not sufficiently understood or appreciated a particular work.<sup>38</sup> Yet they had the knowledge and wherewithal to locate relevant literary criticism. On one occasion a member drew her opinion from the pages of the *Westminster Review*. Evidently they researched carefully for their meetings. Not all the women managed to read the entire book in time for a meeting. Members who were forced to miss a meeting were required to prepare in advance some notes on their response to the text for use by the meeting.

The Club demanded rigour from the lady members and seems to have devised several structured ways of approaching their reading. At first they read from other critics' works about a text. Next they seem to have set themselves to preparing character sketches. Finally they came up with a set of comprehension-style questions which had to be considered by the reader as she worked through the book, though this was not popularly received at first:

An innovation in the shape of 'a help to more systematic reading and methodical discussion at the meetings' was suggested and approved by the Syllabus Committee and brought into use for the first time and proved to add to the information and interest of the readers (whilst perusing the book) and brought to life much historical fact which would otherwise have been overlooked afterwards. The members seemed in part to hesitate and a

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<sup>37</sup> Emery, 'The Ladies Social Reading Club 1903-05,' p.3.

<sup>38</sup> For example, in response to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the Minutes record that 'Whether it was from the peculiar nature of the play, or from want of knowledge on the part of the members to understand the author's mind and motive, the evening though a very pleasant one was non-instructive.'

few to refrain from expressing their opinions, which caused a slight stiffness at the reception of the new plan ...<sup>39</sup>

Their Minutes conveyed their sense of themselves as 'Ladies'. They were exceedingly courteous and referred to each other always as 'Mrs', 'Miss' and 'Mesdames'. Their thanks for every service was always prettily and graciously phrased, and their literary sensibilities were occasionally tender:

The horror of some of the scenes depicted here touched but not dwelt upon ... everyone felt the power of the authoress [Rosa Praed], although sometimes they deplored her misuse of it. A shew of hands was asked for to test the feeling of the readers and the verdict was largely against the book as a whole.<sup>40</sup>

A suggestion that a future meeting be given over to a debate about the text rather than a discussion was rejected by a vote of the membership. It seems clear that, unlike groups such as the NSW Women's Literary Society this group was not fostering political activists. Public speaking skills were not given particular attention, and the deliberately small membership and domestic venues made the group's incursion into the public sphere minimal. The only audience they ever sought was the company of a single invited friend each at their social events.

So what is the relevance of such a small, apolitical, private group to a survey of the contribution of women's groups of the period to the development of feminism? The Sandringham Ladies assembled as a group of women, holding their relatively formal meetings at night (possibly to accommodate working members), for the purpose of informed discussion leading to self-improvement. While they did not discuss feminism in their group they nevertheless evinced an interest in the literary representations of women in each of the texts they read:

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<sup>39</sup> Minutes of the November 1906 meeting.

<sup>40</sup> Minutes of the August 1905 meeting.

Mrs Barnett surprised all members present with her original idea concerning the personality of the heroine Lotys ...

Mrs Hutchinson brought before the members the respect which Merriman has for women in his writings ...

Mrs Matters read something of the hardness of the Japanese women's life ...

Mrs Hutchinson chose for her sketch the sweet womanly Mrs Brice and her influence on 4 of the characters ... a sweet voiced woman whose nobility of character and efficiency in her life's work were written on her face ... <sup>41</sup>

They undertook their task earnestly and eventually conveyed a sense that they were growing in intellectual confidence. This was observed by Victoria Emery in her consideration of the merits of such a group in terms of developing its literary understandings:

[it] fostered the idea of themselves as part of a network of the culturally informed, allowing them, discreetly, to assert their claims to erudition.<sup>42</sup>

The members of the Sandringham Ladies' Social Reading Club were associating with a clear idea that in a cooperative women-only environment they would learn more effectively. The overt knowledge may have been literary analysis of a range of literature, but the real lessons were in mutual intellectual development, and the construction of networks of confident, well-informed and erudite women:

After a rather prolonged evening, the Club parted, each Member feeling strengthened by many helpful thoughts in the *Pleasures of the Mind*, which they had read and marked and some had even learned.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Minutes from meetings between 1903 and 1904.

<sup>42</sup> Victoria Emery, 'The Ladies Social Reading Club,' p.7.

<sup>43</sup> Minutes from meeting 12 June 1905.

In Hobart, the Itinerants was a ladies' literary society that was begun in 1894 and was still in operation in 1985. According to an article written by Cynthia Alexander in 1985 for the Tasmanian Historical Research Association, the Itinerants' genesis actually lay with the Australasian Home Reading Union, which in turn had drawn its membership largely from the Hamilton Literary Society.<sup>44</sup>

The Hamilton Literary Society was named after its founder, Lady Hamilton. In July 1889 Lady Hamilton invited a group of young women to Government House with a view to starting a literary society. Cynthia Alexander records that Lady Hamilton called it the *Nil Desperandum* Society. They were to meet twice a month and hear a speaker (chosen by Lady Hamilton) give a paper on a topic (also chosen by Lady Hamilton) and then debate it. Topics were sufficiently general to stimulate discussion: 'Manners Make the Man'; 'Old Times and the New.'

In August 1890 Lady Hamilton held a party for one hundred ladies at Government House to celebrate the anniversary of the Society, but in the following year the enterprise unravelled. Lady Hamilton refused to countenance rescheduling a meeting to be held in January. It was the middle of summer and Hobart was packed with visitors. As a result attendance at the meeting was down and the speakers were absent. Ethel Dobson wrote a note of apology but Lady Hamilton considered it impertinent and demanded that the meeting expel Ethel. When this didn't happen Lady Hamilton wrote to Ethel herself demanding her resignation, which Ethel refused. At the February meeting, events came to a head and Lady Hamilton's obduracy led to the resignation of most of the members. The scene was recounted in a letter by member Sarah Walker to her sister:

The whole afternoon was spent in discussing the affair – they voted on it first. I don't know exactly how the question was put but there were only two out of the whole 17 there for Lady H. Then she told them that she wished all those who thought Ethel Dobson had been treated harshly would resign – that there were pen and paper there and they could do it at

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<sup>44</sup> Cynthia Alexander is apparently the only secondary source on The Hamilton Literary Society and the Itinerants Club: 'The Itinerants – a ladies' literary society,' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, Vol.32, No.4, (1985).

once, whereupon ten resigned. Emily Maxwell said she never was present at such a scene, the tension was so extreme – she said the poor young ones went up white and trembling like martyrs to the stake ... .<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately the Hamilton Society survived, but Lady Hamilton withdrew and suspended her weekly 'At Homes.' The ex-members were not so insensitive as to immediately set up a rival group, but in 1892 when the Australasian Home Reading Union began recruiting members and forming reading circles, many of them were drawn in.

Lady Hamilton left Tasmania at the end of 1892. In 1894 the 'Itinerants' emerged from the AHRU. The name 'Itinerants' was a direct reference to the Hamilton Society which had only ever met at Government House. The Itinerants moved around meeting at different members' houses each month.

The Itinerants established rules that, at the time Alexander's 1985 article was written, had never been altered. The club had a maximum of twenty members. Each member had equal opportunity with all others. Each member would be responsible for a meeting at which she would present a paper on a topic prescribed at the Annual General Meeting. No member could hold the post of President for more than two years. No rule could be changed without the agreement of two-thirds of the membership.

Members included Patty Mault who had been vice-president and mainstay of the Hamilton society, Maude Montgomery who was wife of the Bishop of Tasmania and a renowned intellect, Lucy Hudspeth who had 'the ability to write a very clever paper which she hastily jotted down in the intervals of a morning's housework,' and Ida McAuley who represented the group at a combined meeting of literary groups on Women's Suffrage in 1899.<sup>46</sup>

Our facts and our fancies we gather from far  
With our heads on the world and our toe on a star  
For under the dome of the infinite sky

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<sup>45</sup> Sarah Walker, cited in Alexander, 'The Itinerants', 1985.

<sup>46</sup> Alexander, 'The Itinerants', 1985.

But little escapes the 'Itinerants' eye.<sup>47</sup>

One service provided by some clubs with open membership was access to premises. The Women's Literary and Debating Club was one of several clubs that rented premises for use by its membership outside the set meeting times, as a general benefit of membership and return for their subscription. This indicates a widely-held understanding that among the things women lacked and desired the most was a physical space that was conducive to networking whether in intellectual or social pursuits.

One such was the Women's Literary and Debating Club: an arm of the Liberal Association of New South Wales. Candidates for membership were required to accept the platform of the Liberal Association to be considered eligible for membership. The objects of the Club were:

1. To provide a centre for women interested in the Liberal Cause.
2. By Debates, Lectures and such other means as may seem desirable to promote the usefulness of members to the Cause.<sup>48</sup>

The Club was established in 1912 with Mrs J.H. Wise as its Honorary Secretary (and only named office-holder). Members paid a subscription for which they received use of the Clubroom 'for writing, meeting friends, etc, etc ...' Meetings were held fortnightly. Social 'Club' nights alternated with 'Lecture' nights.

Another club that was formed explicitly to provide a physical space for women to be together and away from the demands of family was the Ladies' Club (also the Lady's Club) in Sydney. This was primarily a residential club designed to serve the needs of country and suburban women for a room in the city, conceived along the same lines as gentlemen's clubs which provided meeting places and city accommodation.

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<sup>47</sup> Lucy Hudspeth, 1896, cited in Alexander, 'The Itinerants', 1985.

<sup>48</sup> Women's Literary and Debating Club Syllabus, 1912 (held in Mitchell Library).

The proposal to create a club of this type for women was advertised in a flyer circulated in 1896, notifying interested women of a meeting to be held which would be chaired by Lady Darley:

Ladies who have already given in their names as members (numbering 40) are especially asked to attend, and are invited to bring with them any lady who may wish to hear along what lines this Proprietary Club is to be organised.<sup>49</sup>

The proposal to create a general residential club for women aroused some scandal in Sydney. In response, the first Honourable Secretary of the Club, May Manning, published an insightful article in *Centennial Magazine* pointing out that there was a precedent for such clubs. Similar clubs for men had been long established in Sydney, and such clubs for women already existed in London.

One hundred members were required to secure the thirteen-roomed house on Macquarie Street that the Club intended to use as its premises.

It will be possible through a side entrance close to a back room for members to engage servants and transact other business matters there. For this club is intended to meet the conveniences of country and suburban members. Gentlemen will be admitted – on the invitation of members – to the Dining and Drawing rooms; Children to the Dining and Strangers Room.<sup>50</sup>

Subscription was set at an expensive three guineas. The Club adapted the rules of the men's Union club. It was designed to provide – for those who could pay – a space for work and socialising: writing of letters, meeting of friends, and so on. Small committees were formed to deal with various forms of entertainment.

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<sup>49</sup> Miss May Manning, *Pamphlet*, Ladies Club, April 23, 1896 (held at Mitchell Library).

<sup>50</sup> Manning, *Pamphlet*, 1896.

Louisa Macdonald, first Principal of the Women's College at Sydney University, was a member of the Club and sometimes took her brother Jack to lunch there. In 1897 the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Bulletin* both reported on a dinner she hosted there for Lady Manning (wife of the Mayor of Sydney), with the *Bulletin* being predictably scathing about the phenomenon of women daring to traverse the male domain – albeit separately – of residential club membership. Louisa's own recollection of the event was fairly uncontroversial:

Evelyn and I were part hostesses the other night at a dinner given by the Ladies' Club to Lady Manning to welcome her on her return from England. It was a very pleasant party, all ladies, and almost all on friendly terms with one another. After dinner there were various speeches and toasts proposed, one, rather amusing by Mrs Neville Griffith, who is President of the Women's Suffrage League to 'Other Women,' to which Evelyn replied; and hers was an admirable little speech. Mrs Edmund Barton – wife of the leader of the Federation Movement here, proposed "The Club."<sup>51</sup>

The version given in the *Bulletin* was considerably more provocative, conveying clearly its opinion of women's attempts to encroach on the public sphere:

A 'woman-dinner' the first of these up-to-date soirees recorded in Sydney – was given at the Ladies' Club last week. The hostesses were members of the original coterie out of which the present club has emerged, and the guest was the aunt of the proprietor, lately released from quarantine [Lady Manning].

A hitch arose in the arrangements owing to one of the givers of the feast (a travelled lady with short hair who rides a bike and has written a book) [Evelyn Dickinson] having aired in that work some facts about the life of another member, a sassiety star, but the difficulty was got over by the caricatured lady leaving herself out of the party. Every detail was arranged from manly models, minus spirits and smoke, and the speeches were

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<sup>51</sup> Louisa Macdonald to Eleanor Grove, 20 June 1897. Quoted in Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.83.

nervously correct and proper. The toasts were three: 'The Queen,' 'Our Guests' and 'Other Women' the last a sufficiently comprehensive one. Nothing is more unlike a woman than another woman, and the proposer of the toast, lumping the whole sex together in a grand universal sisterhood, had her work cut out to display an all-embracing goodwill, which isn't by any means feminine. The speeches were short and neat, but not fireworky at all.<sup>52</sup>

While this mocking account of a meeting of the Ladies' Club contains the customary *Bulletin* viciousness of wit and chauvinism, accusing the Club of being a boring copy of the activities of men's clubs, the article points to a common criticism of the women's groups, that is, that they merely replicate – poorly – what is done by men. However, the creation of this Club illustrates the belief held by some influential women that a separate space was a legitimate aspiration and a necessary claim for women. That its creation was scandalous in spite of its innocuous objectives is a telling insight into the constricted lives even of the middle-class women who were clearly the targeted membership.

The first residential club for women in Melbourne was the Alexandra. It was founded by Mrs Potter and the Bors sisters. They used the Empire Club of London as their model, and their club was opened officially in 1903 by Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, with a membership of 150. The first President of the Club was Lady Talbot; its Patron was Lady Northcote; and Lady Madden was Vice-President.

In an interview in 1909 the founders explained their motivation for establishing the club:

The necessity for such a woman's club has long impressed itself on us. We felt that something more than the social, the professional, and the like clubs which already existed was wanted – something which would be a convenience to women as well as serve for a social meeting-ground, if need

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<sup>52</sup> *Bulletin*, no author (26 June 1897), p.12.

were for that. In short, something that should be to a woman what his club is to a man.<sup>53</sup>

Men were sceptical and even scathing about the venture, evidently expecting it to fail: 'Women have such indifferent notions about the management of the club.' But they were by and large converted by the club's hospitality: 'Those who came to jeer and cavill remained to compliment the ladies of the management on this, their latest departure into club-land.'<sup>54</sup> By the end of its first year, the membership had expanded to between four and five hundred. International links were strengthened with a reciprocal membership arrangement made with the Empire Club in London.

An article in *The Red Funnell* in June 1906, created an imagined conversation between an Alexandra Club-member and a 'noted statesman' who is clearly sceptical about the notion of a Club for women:

'Don't you think it a pity,' the statesman asked, 'that so much feminine charm should be wasted in a merely feminine club?'

'Oh,' the member replied, 'you have no knowledge – how should you? – of what women's appreciation of one another is. It is one of the sweetest things in life, and in the club is encouraged and cultivated.'<sup>55</sup>

The visitor is assured that there is no gossip to be heard in the Club: '... you will never hear worse discussed than music, art, literature, and the drama.'

The club provided a haven for society ladies and a piece of their own turf on which they could entertain, and offer hospitality:

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<sup>53</sup> Helen Davis, 'Ladies in Club-Land. The Alexandra: The First Residential Club for Ladies in Melbourne,' *The New Idea*, 6 Feb 1909, p.716.

<sup>54</sup> Davis, 'Ladies in Club-Land,' 1909, p.716.

<sup>55</sup> Helen Davis, 'Women in Club-Land,' *The Red Funnell*, 1 June 1906, p.456.

The great function of club-life is undoubtedly the facilities for social intercourse it offers, which advantage is by no means lost sight of in the Alexandra. Every afternoon its rooms are crowded with well-dressed, fashionable women, enjoying each other's society in the sanctuary of their own club.<sup>56</sup>

A small scandal erupted when the ladies applied for a wine license for the premises, in order to have wine with meals in the dining room. The matter, which looked 'rather grave' for a while, was fairly unsatisfactorily resolved when the ladies learned of the conditions accompanying such a license, and decided to withdraw their application. In 'Women in Club-Land,' the member explains the fuss to her Honourable visitor:

We once thought we should like to keep wine for our lunch or dinner, and went about the lawful steps for doing so. But such a hullabaloo! You would have thought, by the noise raised over the application, that our object was to flood city and suburbs with the contents of the wine cellars to demoralise the residents. Ah! I'm afraid you men too often use a magnifying glass to inspect our actions. We didn't get the license, but we got a terrible Caudle-kind-of-lecturing in public. Our consolation was the thought that our lecturers must, by their exalted tone, have been very good or faultless men. We poor innocents had stumbled unawares, and it became their duty to put us straight again.<sup>57</sup>

In its early days, all the well-known society ladies of Melbourne were members. Membership had to be proposed and seconded by members, and the potential member had to be personally known to them. The Club was unashamedly exclusive; the founders were all from privileged backgrounds (described as 'three enterprising women, who were accustomed to having wants and to trying to satisfy them,<sup>58</sup>') and the membership fee was fixed at a costly four guineas 'as a certain influence against the vulgarity of a crowd.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Helen Davis, 'Ladies in Club-Land,' 1909.

<sup>57</sup> Helen Davis, 'Women in Club-Land,' p.457.

<sup>58</sup> Helen Davis, 'Women in Club-Land,' p.459.

<sup>59</sup> Helen Davis, 'Women in Club-Land,' p.459.

Certainly the Alexandra with its pretensions and exclusivity was a haven only of the very wealthy for their own indulgence. But it is still significant that women chose to indulge themselves in this way, by claiming their own space, on male terms (that is, for leisure and recreation away from home and family) in territory previously marked out by men (the public domain of the clubs). Even the very conservative aristocratic, non-party-political women saw the need for a space that was theirs to define and control; to choose, indeed, whether or not to admit men as guests.

### III

*'they wanted to see what they could do in their own way, with their own organisation'*

In 1902 in Victoria a group of women journalists with a long-held dream to provide a venue for 'sister penwomen' to congregate formed the Writer's Club. The Writer's Club was intended to provide women with access to likeminded women who made a career out of writing. It deliberately copied the example of men's clubs, seeing the networking advantages gained by common membership of an exclusive institution.

The founders of the Writer's Club recognised the social role of the men's clubs providing means of gaining introductions to prominent people in the profession: 'an established organisation always carries more weight as a means of effecting introductions than an individual does.' They intended it to be a meeting place for social as well as business purposes:

The possibility of being able to rest and 'refurbish' in greater comfort and privacy ... is a veritable boon, while as a meeting place for social and business purposes the club has much to recommend it.<sup>60</sup>

The *Australian Women's Sphere* of 22 June 1902 acknowledged that a club of this type was long overdue, and that the benefits it could bring had been too long denied. It also maintained that members who travelled to London, America, or even the other Australian states would

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<sup>60</sup> *Australian Woman's Sphere*, Vol. 2, No. 22 (June 1902), pp.177-8.

soon realise the advantages of the networking facilitated by club membership. This indicates an awareness of the demographic such a club attracted: professional women who were increasingly likely to travel and seek out connections with likeminded women.

In September 1902 the Club moved to new rooms situated in Flinders Street. Meetings were held on the first and third Thursdays of each month, and the rooms were always open for the use of members. Novelist Ada Cambridge and journalist and suffragist Alice Henry were both members of the Club.

Other clubs providing a kind of service were those that catered particularly for women with higher education or professional jobs. These women were sufficiently few in number at the time to feel a yearning for opportunities to associate with like-minded women who shared some of the same challenges, interests and frustrations. Victoria especially saw a number of these groups established. In her book documenting the history of the Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) in Melbourne, Kathleen Fitzpatrick describes the huge importance of the establishment of that school at the time. She makes the point that PLC formed part of an educational movement that was new to history.<sup>61</sup> Unlike the boys' schools established in Australia in the nineteenth century, which had been modelled on the schools for boys in England that had existed for centuries, the formal, institutionalised education of girls was a new idea even in England and Europe. By 1875, when PLC was founded, most of the adult colonists in Victoria had been born in Britain, and emigrated not as convicts, but of their own free will. Through correspondence with friends and family still in Britain as well as the regular arrival of newspapers and journals in steamships, Australians kept abreast of news and social developments, including advances in the direction of education of girls.

The establishment of PLC demonstrated the particular concern in Victoria to provide quality education to girls. Many of the clubs and societies formed in Melbourne at the *fin-de-siecle* were created by young women who had enjoyed or were still enjoying the benefits of a good education (indeed, a remarkable number of them were PLC alumni). This tended to give the Victorian groups a slightly different nature to the intellectual groups in Sydney. In the NSW

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<sup>61</sup> Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century 1875-1975* (Victoria: Presbyterian Ladies' College, 1975).

clubs, the membership was middle class but not well educated (for example, for some years, Louisa Macdonald was the only member of the Women's Literary Society to hold a degree) and an explicit objective for the groups was to develop the intellect of their members. Furthermore the membership of the literary groups in Sydney tended to be older: a generation removed from the confident, ambitious and scholarly young women in the Catalysts, the Princess Ida Club and the Order of the Daughters of the Court.

The Princess Ida Club<sup>62</sup> was the first organised body of the women students of Melbourne University. It was officially formed at its first General Meeting on 21 July 1888, the result of a preliminary informal meeting held some months earlier, at the suggestion of two PLC graduates: Mabel Allen and Edith Gladman. The Club took its name from the heroine of a Tennyson poem, who dreams of establishing a university to promote learning to all women:

Quick answer'd Lilia, 'There are thousands now  
Such women, but convention beats them down:  
It is but bringing up; no more than that:  
You men have done it: how I hate you all!  
Ah, were I something great! I wish I were  
Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then,  
That love to keep us children! O I wish  
That I were some great princess, I would build  
Far off from men a college like a man's,  
And I would teach them all that men are taught;  
We are twice as quick!'<sup>63</sup>

The serious intent of the poem had been parodied by a Gilbert and Sullivan opera of the same name, performed in Melbourne in 1887. Taking the name for the Princess Ida Club neatly indicated its dual purpose: the serious support and advocacy of women students at the university, and the frivolous provision of a social outlet. Like the formidable Ida who had

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<sup>62</sup> Primary source material on the Princess Ida Club is held by the University of Melbourne Archives. The only secondary account is a brief reference contained in Farley Kelly's history of women at the University of Melbourne: Farley Kelly, *Degrees of Liberation: A short history of women in the University of Melbourne* (Parkville: The Women Graduates Centenary Committee of the University of Melbourne, 1985).

<sup>63</sup> Tennyson, Prologue, *The Princess*.

established her women's university which no man could enter, the women of the PIC refused admittance to any man, except the University porter and bell-ringer, Marcham.<sup>64</sup>

The object of the club was described as being to 'promote the common interests of, and to form a bond of union between present and past students.' The 'common interests' proved to be mostly concerned with the continued stimulation of the intellect, though there was certainly a strong social agenda also. The Princess Ida Club Debating Society was established in 1889, as was the Princess Ida Club Literary Society. Later off-shoots included a Christian Alliance and a Junior Debating Club. Farley Kelly comments in her brief history of women students at the University of Melbourne that the Princess Ida Debating Society was 'invaluable':

Most of all women needed practice in public speaking to develop their confidence and their reputation for clear cool-headed argument ...

Propositions that 'Women's education should be wide rather than deep'; that 'Private virtue is necessary to the greatness of public men'; that 'The study of Classics is of more benefit than modern languages' ... and that 'Women with independent means should not enter the professions,' were among the more controversial topics debated during the 1890s.<sup>65</sup>

At the first meeting, Dr Bevan gave a lecture on 'the influence of learned women at different stages of the world's history.' Llewelyn David Bevan had long been interested in women's issues. In England he had been a member of the Society for Procuring Women's Suffrage, and knew John Stuart Mill, Mrs Garrett Anderson and Josephine Butler. In Melbourne his Church hosted a 'Young Ladies Reading Society' which held quarterly meetings at the Doctor's house. Under Bevan's direction the members studied Bacon's Essays, *Paradise Lost*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Shakespeare.

This society had some most gifted members, and was a real intellectual inspiration for many years ... They were a courageous and hard-working set of girls, who, with some adverse criticism and difficulty gained what since

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<sup>64</sup> Kelly, *Degrees of Liberation*, p.32.

<sup>65</sup> Kelly, *Degrees of Liberation*, pp.33-35.

those days, many have entered into with ease and as a matter of course. The Doctor had always held strongly to the right of women to equal educational advantages, to the suffrage, and to an open door to whatever she desired and was able to achieve, and he rejoiced in every step gained; although he fully recognised the need for judgement and moderation, so that women should not become inefficient and poor imitations of the so-called Lords of Creation, nor lose their own special virtues.<sup>66</sup>

The Princess Ida Club maintained a parlour at the university as the meeting place of the club. It quickly became a refuge for the small groups of women enrolling at the university between 1888 and 1915. Founding member, Bella Guerin, the first woman to graduate from an Australian university, overcame only the first of the hurdles to be faced by women seeking access to higher education, and inspired her successors to campaign for their rights: to gain entry to the medical college, the law school, to establish a residential college, and more. Bella Guerin entered the University of Melbourne in 1881; the first year women were permitted to do so. She completed a Bachelor of Arts in 1883 and a Masters in Arts in 1885. Dr Constance Ellis was another illustrious founding member. Constance Ellis was the first woman to gain a Doctor of Medicine degree, and specialised in the health problems of women and children. She pioneered the Baby Health Centres, and was an active supporter of the Queen Victoria Hospital. Enid Derham – a third founding member and secretary of the Princess Ida Club between 1897 and 1908 – was the first woman to be appointed to the lecturing staff of the English Department of the University of Melbourne. The Princess Ida Club served to encourage and support these intellectual pioneers, and to give them a secure social outlet in a sometimes hostile environment.

The papers of the Princess Ida Club<sup>67</sup> include correspondence with the Sydney University Women's Union seeking to set up intervarsity correspondence, illustrating the tendency of the clubs and societies to establish networks with one another for solidarity and mutual

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<sup>66</sup> Louisa Jane Bevan, *Life and Reminiscences of Llewelyn David Bevan* (Melbourne: Wyatt and Wyatt, 1920), p.181. (ML)

<sup>67</sup> Papers of the Princess Ida Club, including Minute Books, Membership lists, Reports and Rules (University of Melbourne Archives).

support. In 1903 a group called the Victorian Women's Federation wrote to encourage the club to federate:

Our object is broad and our methods of work will be broad also. We shall try to bring together in one great Sisterhood, so that they may take effective action in the direction of better and juster laws ... We shall work by forming new societies and by encouraging these societies to hold meetings and discuss questions of all kinds: literary, social, educational, political, historical. We hope by working on these lines to make the Victorian Women's Federation a great engine for good by educating women politically and enabling them to take a broader view than they have hitherto taken. In this task we need the assistance of capable, broadminded women.<sup>68</sup>

It is interesting that the enterprise promoted by the Victorian Women's Federation was actively seeking to insert a political purpose into the literary groups it was targeting. Indeed the manifesto described in this letter to the Princess Ida Club describes exactly the agenda that I argue lay under most of the women's intellectual groups, although it was usually covert and unacknowledged, or even unconscious. The Victorian Women's Federation explicitly sought to create a 'Sisterhood'; they wanted to extend the reach of the women's associations; and they wanted them to engage in literary and other debates with an overt political purpose.

The Princess Ida Club differed in nature from New South Wales' Women's Literary Society, for example, in that it was a club for women of demonstrable intellect: graduate students of higher education. The members of the Women's Literary Society were aspiring intellectuals and mostly lacked any higher education. Members of the Princess Ida Club were younger; they were the embodiment of the 'New Women' being described in popular fiction and the press. They were predisposed to commit acts of feminism: witness their enrolment at the university to undertake higher education in an era where such encroachments by women on the public sphere were still comparatively rare. Nevertheless, the topics for discussion in these disparate groups were not very different. It is instructive to compare the Princess Ida

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<sup>68</sup> Letter contained in papers of the Princess Ida Club.

Club Literary Society Syllabus of 1889 – Matthew Arnold; Mrs Browning; Socialism; the Modern Novel – with the topics covered by the Women’s Literary Society between 1892-3: Matthew Arnold’s Essays; Mrs Browning; Socialism; Australian Poets.

In 1914 the Club fought for women to be represented on the Student Representative Council, but in the same year considered disbanding entirely. Ultimately the Princess Ida Club became merged into the Melbourne University Union. Many of the best known early women students of Melbourne University had been members of the Princess Ida Club,<sup>69</sup> and had benefited from the schooling it provided in debating and public speaking, and from the social contact it facilitated with its ‘At-Homes,’ ‘*Conversazioni*’ and picnics.<sup>70</sup> Many of those women became leading figures in the Melbourne public domain, their careers informed by the feminism and supported by the networks they had developed in their group.

A training-ground for the exercise of certain social, organisational and intellectual skills, the Princess Ida Club provided a protected enclave, a source of enduring friendships and a sense of collective identity for the women students of the University during their first quarter century.<sup>71</sup>

Also in Victoria, the members of the Catalysts (or ‘Cats’ as they called themselves) were among the many women who came together in 1910 with a view to establishing a Lyceum Club in Melbourne similar to the London Lyceum Club. There were difficulties which caused delays to this plan, and the nineteen women who were to become the Catalysts decided to anticipate the foundation of the Lyceum. They agreed to meet each month and to take it in turns to read a paper which was then to be followed by a discussion of the issues raised.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Including Elsie Goldstein, sister of Vida, and Dr Marion Phillips who later became an MP in the British Parliament.

<sup>70</sup> The Princess Ida Club pioneers were recalled in a play performed at the Melbourne Fringe Theatre Festival in 1994. *The Princess Ida Parlour* by Anita Punton was reviewed in the *Age* as ‘fast, feminist and fun,’ by Sonis Harford (10 October 1994).

<sup>71</sup> Kelly, *Degrees of Liberation*, p.37.

<sup>72</sup> Primary source material on the Catalysts is held by Latrobe Library.

Their first meeting was held on 24 September 1910. At first the Cats met in each other's homes, but before long decided to dine at a restaurant for their meetings, and remain there for their paper and discussion. The name 'Catalyst,' meaning 'changing yet unchanging' was selected by Dr Constance Ellis.

The first Catalysts were a distinguished and intelligent group. Their work and activities show them to have been socially concerned, serious-minded women. But they were not solemn, and certainly did not take themselves too seriously, as was the wont of many of their peers in other clubs and societies. Their minutes were kept erratically, were seldom serious, and often recorded in verse.

These vivacious women had as their role models for intellectual and useful lives such women as Mary Wollstonecraft, and Dr Elizabeth Blackwell, who formed the focus of the discussion paper at their second meeting.

The first President of the Catalysts was Mrs Ethel Osborne, a science graduate and painter who later became a doctor. The secretary was Jessie Webb, who had graduated with first class honours in history in 1900 and became a lecturer in Ancient History in Athens and in Melbourne. It was she who was responsible for keeping many of their records in verse, because

she wrote an English of unusual distinction and because she was a scholar whose learning was enlightened by wit ... [she attended] always to the getting and imparting of wisdom.<sup>73</sup>

Co-secretaries were Miss Alice Michaelis and her sister Mrs May Barden, two of eleven children, widely travelled and evidently cultured. May studied at the Conservatorium and lived in Italy for some time. She was present in Egypt at the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb.

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<sup>73</sup> No author, biographical information about the original Catalyst members, no date. (Latrobe)

'Category B' members (their own distinction) included 'any woman who has distinguished herself by ... active interest in art, science or literature.' Among these ranks were some of the most outstanding women of their time, in Australia, for example, the Greig sisters, Jane and Florence. Dr Jane (Jean) Greig graduated with a Bachelor in Medicine in 1895 and a Bachelor of Surgery in 1896, and became Chief Medical Officer in Victoria (and, incidentally, its highest paid public servant). With her sister, Janet Lindsay (Greig), she co-founded the Queen Victoria Hospital: a hospital providing services exclusively for women, and staffed entirely by women. Florence (Flos) Greig studied law at Melbourne University, a history-making act in itself, but when she graduated LLB in 1903, a special act of parliament had to be passed before she could practise: the Women's Disabilities Removal Bill or 'Flos Greig Enabling Act' as it was commonly known.<sup>74</sup>

Whenever Mrs Osborne ('Mother Cat') was travelling overseas, her chair was ably filled by Dr Constance Ellis (previously discussed as a founding member of the Princess Ida Club) who: 'never closed her mind to, or withheld her sympathy from anything that led to progress.'<sup>75</sup>

Another illustrious member was Dr Georgina Sweet who was the first woman to gain the degree of Doctor of Science, and also the first to be elected a member of the Melbourne University Council. She was another founding member of the Princess Ida Club and a staunch champion of women at the university. She represented the Pan Pacific Women's Association at overseas conferences, and became President of the YWCA.

Enid Derham was a minor poet and also the first woman to be appointed to the lecturing staff of the English Department of the University of Melbourne. She had been secretary of the Princess Ida Club between 1897 and 1908. Stella Deakin (daughter of one-time Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, and later Lady Rivett after her marriage to Rhodes scholar David Rivett), studied science at Melbourne University and kept the archives for the Club. Mona

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<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, the Law Student Magazine actually campaigned against this legislation: 'What chance would the less favoured male counsel have, despite his erudition, against an adversary with smiles and tears and blushes at her command?'

<sup>75</sup> No author, biographical information about the original Catalyst members, no date. (Latrobe)

McBurney was the first woman to gain a Bachelor of Music at Melbourne University in 1896. Her home 'The Briars' became a centre for music lovers of Melbourne.

There were many other outstanding women who called themselves 'Cats,' for the pleasure of the solidarity and in recognition that their achievements had a particular quality: they were firsts at their undertakings, and very often had to fight for the privilege. Their monthly meetings must have been a relief and a joy. Each outstanding woman could subsume herself into the group and lose the spotlight which isolated her as an extraordinary woman for a while, amongst women whose experiences had been similar, even where their fields of interest were not.

An earlier group established for a similar clientele, also in Melbourne, was the Austral Salon. The Salon was founded by Miss Hirst Browne (later Mrs Hirst Alexander of London) in January 1890 at a meeting attended by just four other women. An inaugural meeting was held in June of that year, and the Countess of Hopetoun, wife of Australia's soon-to-be first Governor-General was installed as President. Inspiration for the Club had come from the example of the Sorosis Club in New York and the Somerville Club in London.

The object of the Club was described as 'the intellectual advancement of Australia women' and its targets were professional women:

Its object is the intellectual advancement of women by social intercourse, by the formation of a library, by lectures, concerts, dramatic entertainments, a debating circle, a sewing bee, readings, and the delivery of original papers and essays on the special subjects [of art, literature and science].<sup>76</sup>

The membership consisted of 'Members' who were to be the 'women who are actively engaged in literary, artistic, scientific, or dramatic work,' and 'Associates,' who could be men or women, amateurs, or merely 'known to be in sympathy with, and willing by personal

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<sup>76</sup> 'The Austral Salon', *The Cyclopaedia of Victoria*, James Smith ed., Vols.1-3 (1903-1905), p.90.

effort and influence to promote the objects of the Salon.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, provision was made for 'Honorary Members' who might be 'women visiting the colony who are prominently known in literary, artistic, or scientific circles.' Patrons, Members and Associates paid annual subscriptions, incurring penalties for non-payment. A Regulation held that unmarried daughters or sisters of Members living under the same roof may be admitted without the payment of an entrance fee.

By the end of 1900 membership had reached 189 plus five life members and four honorary associates. Mrs Donald Macdonald was the Honorary Secretary of the Salon from its foundation until 1896. Lady Clarke was the President in the year 1900.

The work of the club was described as:

searching out and bringing before the meetings such matters as shall be of interest and improvement to the Members. Discussion upon important topics of the day, papers upon various matters of interest, criticism upon literary, artistic, or scientific works, or theories upon practical matters, will all be in order at the meetings.<sup>78</sup>

The group was much given to social events too; there was provision for four social gatherings a year for the purpose of bringing along friends and visitors, exhibiting members' artwork, reading members' literary productions, or performing members' musical compositions. An Annual Ball in aid of funds for the Salon was held; the Report for 1891 earnestly exhorts succeeding members to maintain this event:

The Committee earnestly commend to their successors in office the absolute necessity of making the Annual Ball one of the great social events of the season; as upon its success the Salon depends largely for its revenue. In this they ask the cordial cooperation of all Members and Associates.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Primary source material including Rules and Regulations, Membership and Qualification lists, and Objects are held at Mitchell Library.

<sup>78</sup> Rules and Regulations, no date. (ML)

<sup>79</sup> Rules and Regulations, no date. (ML)

Meetings were held on alternate Thursdays in a room secured by the Salon. The papers presented at the meetings of the Austral Salon were published in a variety of media, including a weekly report in *Punch*, which accorded them popular attention. Indeed the Austral Salon became something of an institution in Melbourne, and led to the creation of a similarly influential society in London. The Austral Club was formed in London in 1902 by Mrs Hirst Alexander and Madge Donohoe of Sydney. It sought to provide Australian women in London with a meeting place for mutual support. It established weekly 'At Homes,' where papers were read and recitals given, and gained a reputation as the centre of the Australasian musical world in London. In her book about Australian women in London in the period, Angela Woollacott describes the Austral Club as 'an institutionalised form of Australian women's networking in and colonisation of London.'<sup>80</sup>

Many of Melbourne's most illustrious women were members of the Austral Salon, including Nellie Melba. When Vida Goldstein accepted an invitation to attend a conference in America in 1902 she was farewelled with a reception at the Salon. It was Vida Goldstein's first attempt to enter Parliament that inspired the Austral Salon's first political meeting. Vida spoke at their 'Monday tea' on 24 August in 1903. 'Her address was entitled "Why Women Should Vote?" and members were so interested they stayed well past their normal time.'<sup>81</sup>

Mrs Haydon's paper given at the Austral Salon on 21 June 1900 entitled 'Women's Clubs: Their Origin and Object,' referred to in Chapter One, was reproduced in *The Court*, the journal of another Melbourne-based women's organisation, The Order of the Daughters of the Court:

The idea of a woman's club is to us Australians so unique, and I may say novel, that we have scarcely grasped our *raison d'être*, nor have we yet realised the extent of our latent power and influence. To the uninitiated the word club conjures visions of luxuriously appointed apartments, card

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<sup>80</sup> Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian women, colonialism, and modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.103.

<sup>81</sup> Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.57.

rooms, bar and billiard room, and costly living, to say nothing of a fine fat entrance fee, rendered necessary by the engagement of a chef, at the modest figure of, let's say, £1000 a year. But that applies only to a man's club, that haven of refuge from all domestic perplexities and worries ... How is it that a woman's club is the very antithesis of all this? For answer, I reply, that women are so intensely utilitarian that, no matter to what extent women's clubs may grow, their efforts will always be in the direction of benefit, even when instituted for merely social purposes.<sup>82</sup>

The Austral Salon is one of the more overt and successful examples of a women's group seeking intellectual advancement through meeting, organising and sharing. The naming of the club a 'Salon' indicates the founders' awareness of the historical precedents for such groups, and their desire to emulate the examples of the eighteenth-century French salons which were centres for political education and debate of social issues and which served to expose and spread culture and learning in a private-sphere environment.<sup>83</sup>

Launched years after the establishment of the Austral Salon, on 21 March 1912, the Lyceum Club in Melbourne catered for a new generation of female professionals and intellectuals. The Melbourne Lyceum Club had a crucial difference from the London version on which it was modelled: being the wife or daughter of a prominent man was not sufficient grounds for admission. Members had themselves to be women of distinction and university graduates: for example, doctors, university lecturers, artists, writers, teachers, musicians. Exceptions to this rule could still qualify for membership under exemption 2B which permitted women without university degrees as members if they had notable achievement in public life or business.

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<sup>82</sup> Mrs Haydon, 'Women's Clubs: Their Origin and Object,' *The Court*, 16 July 1900.

<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, in 1982 the *Melbourne Age* reported the establishment of a new 'Salon,' named 'Salon A-Muse' which was described as 'an attempt to revive the art of conversation; they hope to provide a place where women artists and audience can meet and share their work and ideas in an atmosphere of trust, rather than criticism,' Karen Kissane (16 April 1982).

Salon A-Muse declared its wish to follow the model of Natalie Barney (1876-1972), heiress, lesbian, writer, who, for sixty years, made her house in Paris a *salon* for the use of women artists to discuss and display their work, and held frequent women-only gatherings. At Salon A-Muse, similarly, men were not welcome: 'The Salon is to be a place where women can perform without having to pander to male expectations; a congenial environment to encourage women who have not made it in the system.' Evidently the drive to find a creative and intellectual space independent of men has persisted across centuries.

Ethel Osborne (see the Catalysts, above) was responsible for bringing to Australia the formula for the Lyceum Club. The London version had been established in Piccadilly in 1904 and caused a great stir among the inhabitants of men's clubs: 'in Pall Mall and St James' Street there was a shaking of bald heads and a gloomy rustling of *The Times*' reported the press at the time.<sup>84</sup> The London Lyceum Club was seriously intellectual and committed to furthering the interests of professional women, 'with a special emphasis on professional women's networking and international connections,' observes Angela Woollacott. Its programming encouraged high standards of accomplishment and serious discussions:

The Lyceum's organisers believed that women's access to education and the professions were key feminist issues and that women should become competitive with men despite the considerable obstacles they faced in every professional arena. The role of the club, as they saw it, was to facilitate professional women's networking through mixing with and advising each other, as well as to provide a salubrious environment for women to entertain professionally or socially and to rest, read, write, dine, and stay overnight.<sup>85</sup>

When Ethel Osborne travelled to London in 1910 she was encouraged to visit the Lyceum Club and bring back a report. She returned with great enthusiasm for the club and a copy of its Constitution, as well as a standing invitation to any Australian club of similar nature to affiliate.

The Melbourne branch was the first in Australia though most other states eventually established Lyceums themselves. The work of the club expanded hugely in the 'twenties in Melbourne and saw the creation of seven dedicated 'circles.' Pattie Deakin was invited to become the first President of the Melbourne Lyceum Club. Other prominent women who were early members included Mary Grant Bruce, Clara Southern (who became an active member of the Lyceum Club Art Circle), Jessie Trail, Violet Teague and E.M. Sweatman,

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<sup>84</sup> Cited in Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune*, p.111.

<sup>85</sup> Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune*, p.112.

Mrs Frederick (Annie) McCubbin and Mrs Arthur (Nora) Streeton. Motorist and garage proprietor Alice Anderson qualified for membership in 1918 under the rule 2B exemption.

The shared agenda of the Lyceum Clubs was overtly feminist in the intention to promote professional women's interests via the establishment of professional networks. It was also overtly and rigorously intellectual, and certainly helped to extend the notion of women's sphere.

The Woomballano (later the Women's Art Club, then The Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors) was an artist's club formed in 1901 for women only.<sup>86</sup> 'Woomballano' was the Aboriginal word for 'beauty.' The club was initiated by Tina Gowdie, with Annie Gates as the first president.

They met monthly, usually in the studio of Miss Merfield in the early years, and took care to preserve the minutes of their carefully planned programme:

Art and business matters, graced with feminine qualities, were duly balanced. Compositions set at each meeting were done by the next, and keenly judged. Members read papers on art. The National Gallery was frequently visited in company. Outdoor sketching parties ... 'delicious' afternoon teas ...<sup>87</sup>

A retrospective article in *The Age* in 1959 by its art critic, Arnold Shore, described the history, activities and scope of the club in an occasionally patronising manner, noting the particular desire to form a club exclusively for women:

No law barred women from painting. They belonged to mixed art societies, and had full rights. But they wanted to see what they could do in their own way, with their own organisation.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Papers of the Woomballano Club are held by Latrobe Library.

<sup>87</sup> Arnold Shore, 'Melbourne Woman Artists,' *The Age*, 17 October 1959.

<sup>88</sup> Shore, 'Melbourne Woman Artists,' 1959.

Shore was condescendingly impressed by the humanity of the club members, manifested by the card always sent to a bereaved club member: 'A sense of human values kept them from rabid feminism.' He also notes – without further comment – that men were invited to lecture, and that 'art history, almost exclusively male, was closely studied.'

The Constitution of the Club held that, as an Art Society, the main objective was

to present an annual exhibition of a high standard, whilst our meetings also provide social contact between members of the various schools of art and kindred interests.<sup>89</sup>

In 1905 the Club held its first exhibition in the small studio used for its meetings. Larger premises were needed for the 1906 show, which attracted over 1200 ticket-buyers. Ultimately entire private galleries were required to be venues for the annual exhibitions.

The Club changed its name to the Women's Art Club in 1916, then became the Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors in 1930. According to Arnold Shore, most of the women artists of note in Melbourne had at some time been associated with the Club, and it had had some illustrious presidents, including Mrs Colquhoun (wife of artist and critic Alexander Colquhoun) and Ola Cohn. Shore also remarks on the intellectual rigour of the group, observing that the discussions showed an awareness of the newest movements in art:

As early as 1916 ... a talk by Miss Asquith Baker included a section on Cubism and other modern movements ... nearly twenty years would elapse before Cubism or other modern ideas would again occasion special mention in this city.<sup>90</sup>

The Club established its own art collection (including some Turners and McCubbins) and a lending library, which was a source of concern to some of the members:

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<sup>89</sup> Constitution, Melbourne Society of Women Painters and Sculptors (Latrobe).

<sup>90</sup> Shore, 'Melbourne Woman Artists,' 1959.

Some of the members felt that we were in danger of becoming too literary a club, and thought we ought to do more art work, so the usual course of study was changed to a more general one, in which all members far and near could take their part.<sup>91</sup>

Minutes of their meetings indicate that the usual practice was to read and discuss a paper, examine a composition, then display their own pieces of art work for criticism by the meeting. However, the Minutes of Friday, 11 February suggested some problems with their programme, bemoaning

too much time was devoted to the reading, and remarks on the paper, and not enough given to criticism of the composition. So a compromise was effected and on alternate days the whole time is to be given either to the artist chosen or the compositions. Out of the eight members present only two brought holiday sketches. The excuses were numerous and varied but all promised better things for next year.<sup>92</sup>

The Club received mainstream media attention, especially at their annual exhibition, although the remarks were often patronising or dismissive ('too many floral trifles' wrote Harold Herbert in the *Argus*).<sup>93</sup> They held picnic socials and sketching day trips, and even organised art trips to Europe.

The Club was an interesting development of the idea that women should come together in a gender-exclusive space for the purpose of intellectual advancement. Their activities were a combination of intellectual endeavour and practical artistic achievement, for which they felt the need to create their own place and organising structures. Like the other intellectual groups, they recognised the benefits of sharing their learning and collaborating with one another in the production of knowledge. They also represent the efforts of women to construct international networks and channels of communication of knowledge and ideas.

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<sup>91</sup> Author unknown, Woomballano Art Club Minute Book (9 February 1906).

<sup>92</sup> Miss Gowdie (President), Woomballano Art Club *Minute Book*, Friday, 11 February 1904.

<sup>93</sup> Harold Herbert, *Argus*, 8 October 1935.

## IV

*'they will have the consciousness that knowledge is power'*

Founded in 1894 at the suggestion of the American suffragist, Dr Emily Ryder, the Karrakatta Club in Western Australia was initially a literary and debating society but became a forum for the discussion of current affairs and political issues. Its membership consisted of the gentlewomen of the colony: the daughters and wives of men with high social status. A sub-committee drew up a Constitution which included the aim that the Club would 'encourage women to think things out and come to a conclusion; to defend their opinions and have the courage to hold them.'<sup>94</sup> Office-bearers were to be 'good, all-round women of ideal type, not a drudge.' Membership was theoretically open to all, but in effect the fee would have precluded working-class women from joining; at one guinea plus 30 shillings annually, it is not surprising that a number of young women were forced to resign over non-payment of fees.

Members seemed to be invariably well-connected, highly educated, and active in humanitarian and social work. They included Lady Madeleine Onslow, a noted pianist and linguist who was married to Sir Alexander Onslow. She has been described as 'a born leader'; 'to know her was a liberal education.'<sup>95</sup> Her friends and colleagues, Lady Forrest and Dr Roberta Jull were also founding members of the Karrakatta Club. Lady Forrest was wife to the Premier, Sir John Forrest, and was regarded as one of the Colony's most successful and influential hostesses. Roberta Jull benefited from an excellent education in Glasgow before arriving in Perth in 1895 to commence practising medicine. She maintained a strong commitment to the higher education of women, and helped establish the first residential college for women at the University of Western Australia. Edith Cowan was the Club's first secretary and another woman with an intense commitment to women's education. She described reading as 'a tool for an understanding of her society, and as a means of achieving social objectives.'<sup>96</sup> Miss Jane Nisbet of Aberdeen was made principal of the Perth Government's Girls' School in 1886. Miss Amy Best from Tasmania was appointed principal

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<sup>94</sup> Gail Reekie, 'With Ready Hands and New Brooms ...', *Hexate*, Vol.7, No.1 (1981), p.28.

<sup>95</sup> Reekie, 'With Ready Hands,' p.32.

<sup>96</sup> Cited in Reekie, 'With Ready Hands,' p.35.

of the Central High School for Girls in 1885. Clearly a common factor uniting these founding members was education. Although few of them had particularly high levels of education themselves, they all recognised education as a source of power, social success and status, and shared a commitment to propounding higher education for women.

These women were also united by their social class. Their commitment to preserving their sense of their class can be detected not only in the restrictive membership practice and the preferred social events (picnics and balls at Government House), but also in the rules of conduct which provided for the expulsion of a member 'in the event of unbecoming or dishonourable conduct derogatory to the conduct of a gentlewoman.'<sup>97</sup>

The Karrakatta Club established four 'departments': Hygiene (including discussions of such topics as *Bicycling from a Hygienic Point of View*); Literary, Artistic (covering skills such as needlework, millinery and stocking darning); and Legal and Educational. It was in this last department that the discussion of female suffrage took place. Lady Onslow believed that women should be 'well up in all that is happening,' and encouraged many women to write and speak publicly on the issue, also recommending that lectures on the topic be given to female shop workers at their work site. However, in keeping with their commitment to gentlewomanly behaviour, the membership was fiercely opposed to militant tactics, and chose instead to distribute leaflets, write to the papers and politicians and instigate public debates. In her 1981 article, Gail Reekie claims that their efforts were 'pragmatic and specific ... [they] campaigned for the vote in order to raise women's awareness of their own intellectual abilities' and borrows Diane Scott's observation that the organisation was 'a hotbed of ladylike activity.'<sup>98</sup>

The original and primary objective of the Club was to enable women to meet and enhance their literary knowledge and debating skills. Madeline Onslow, as first president, was most insistent that members speak at meetings and encouraged them to present papers to gain more confidence at speaking in public. Edith Cowan, wife of the Police Magistrate in Perth

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<sup>97</sup> Reekie, 'With Ready Hands,' p.31.

<sup>98</sup> Reekie, 'With Ready Hands,' p.31.

and later to become the first woman elected to an Australian parliament, was invited to become a founding member and saw the club as a means of overcoming her intense shyness by training her in public speaking. Her first public speech, about the need for legislative reform to protect abused children and battered wives, was made to a Karrakatta Club audience. Edith learned other important public domain skills apart from public speaking, in the organisation of paperwork and the tactful handling of committees required by her role in the Club. Eventually she was elected chairman [sic] of the Club's Education section, then chairman of the Literary section, then the Legal section, before being voted Club Secretary, Vice President and finally President.

Eventually Edith Cowan determined that she would have more authority in the public sphere as a paid employee than as a lady volunteer and took up a position with the North Fremantle Board of Education. The Karrakatta Club continued to nurture Western Australian feminism well into the twentieth century. In 1920 it merged with the Western Australian Lyceum Club, becoming the Karrakatta-Lyceum Club.

Like other examples of literary, intellectual clubs in Sydney and Melbourne, the Karrakatta Club created a physical and intellectual space for Western Australian women to come together and formulate their challenge to the public sphere. Despite its genteel membership, the Karrakatta Club was more overtly political than, for example, the NSW Women's Literary Society or the Melbourne Lyceum Club.

In NSW additional literary and intellectual clubs emerged with similar objectives: women were seeking a separate space to conduct intellectual work. Often a new club would rise out of the ashes of an old one, such as the Women's Club.<sup>99</sup> Many of the founding members of the Women's Club had belonged to the Women's Literary Society. After a preliminary meeting organised by Dr Mary Booth in consultation with Rose Scott on 9 October 1901, a group of more than one hundred women met by invitation at the Women's College to discuss founding a club for women. Several prominent women are recorded as speaking for the benefits of such a club, for which the timing seemed appropriate: 'For women, the

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<sup>99</sup> Papers of The Women's Club are held at Mitchell Library.

beginning of this century was a time of great awakening,' records Florence Earle Hooper in her animated account of the Club's early history;

In short, it was a time of new ideas, new hopes, new comradeship, and new plans; and it is not surprising that out of that milieu should spring the Women's Club.<sup>100</sup>

Interestingly she cites the imminent achievement of female suffrage as one of the inspirations for the Club: that 'battle ... which had brought women into the open.' Other clubs had been created with the aim of achieving the vote; this one was created as a result.

Dr Mary Booth was a public health worker who developed child welfare policy. She held the position of Honorary Secretary of the National Council of Women in NSW. At the first meeting of the Women's Club, Miss Dickson, acting principal of the Women's College (following the departure of Louisa Macdonald), spoke about the success of such clubs in London, and stressed the benefits of the freedom of club life. Taking up the theme of affording women a measure of social freedom, Mary Booth observed the difficulties for women of having no place to invite 'distinguished' visitors, and more significantly, no means to meet intellectual women. Rose Scott continued, observing that women could learn much from men's clubs, which were 'free from the demands of fashion,' and of course, determinedly isolated from women. Lady David's contribution was to assert that 'it would do brainy women good to mix with one another, and others who were not brainy would be none the worse!' 'Men,' she said, 'could take it easy in their clubs, and women needed a place for that.'<sup>101</sup>

Evidently the primary motivation for the establishment of the Women's Club was to create a separate women's space, for the purpose of intellectual pursuits; indeed the first rules drawn up stated:

- (1) That the Club be called the Women's Club.

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<sup>100</sup> Florence Earle Hooper, *The Story of the Women's Club: The First Fifty Years* (Sydney: 1963), p.7

<sup>101</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women's Club*, p.7.

- (2) That the object is to provide a place where women interested in public, professional, scientific, literary or artistic work, may spend their leisure moments and associate on equal terms.<sup>102</sup>

The Club was intended to be a club for working women, 'not fine ladies.' Lilian Wise, a founding member and the wife of Bernhard Ringrose Wise, NSW Attorney-General, agreed, telling Rose Scott that

I do think there is a real need for a women's club in Sydney and quite agree that it should not be representative only of the University or of society people.<sup>103</sup>

The annual subscription was one guinea.

A debating circle was established – the Tuesday Club – with thirty regular members. With bossiness reminiscent of the Women's Literary Society, the rules of the Tuesday Club insisted that every member must share in the discussion or else stand for three minutes in silence if too shy to speak. Despite this, the Club was very popular: visitors had to be restricted and latecomers couldn't find standing room.

A brief scan of the programmes for the Tuesday Club indicates the breadth of their interests and concerns, ranging from literary texts to social and political issues. For example, the agenda for July to September 1911 begins with a lecture on 'The Status of Domestic Science in the United States'; next 'The Influence on each other of English and German Literature'; then a lecture on 'Women in Civic Government'; 'Is England Evolving a School of Music of Her Own?'; 'The Philosophy of Omar Khayyam'; 'What Makes Musical Comedy So Attractive to Our Generation?'; and finally, 'Is the Movement for Universal Peace Within the Range of Practical Things We May Hope to See Accomplished?'

The Annual Report for 1906 dwells on the importance of the Tuesday Club:

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<sup>102</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women's Club*, p.8.

<sup>103</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.144.

Doubtless the great value of the Tuesday debates, apart from their centralising power, lies in the fact that they stimulate the flow of ideas and encourage the expression of thought ... After all we are talking to find out what we really think, and the fact of being very serious about it does not perhaps detract from the value of the result.<sup>104</sup>

Three other circles were quickly created to meet the demand for intellectual sharing: the Fawcett Club, for social and political discussion; the Lecture Circle for which outside speakers were secured; and the Shakespeare Club which met every second Thursday, to read and discuss Shakespeare's plays. By 1913 the three-month programme of meetings listed all these groups and several new ones as well: the French and German Circles, the Musical Circle, the Dramatic Society, and the History of Art Circle.

Florence Earle Hooper records that the first year of the Club, 'in spite of parental prognostications and brotherly jeers, was an unbroken success.'<sup>105</sup> Membership increased from 100 to 167. The Club possessed only one large room with a partitioned-off reading area, but in 1903 was able to move across the road to a more commodious two-room site, with their own lavatory. The next four years saw the Club expand and solidify; according to Florence Earle Hooper not only the constitution was developed during this time but also the character of the Club. Rules were partly copied from men's clubs and partly formed as a response to internal dissent. Rowe Street, where the new clubrooms were located was a notorious haunt of prostitutes; the new members were unfamiliar with club life and flouted the rules; and the Club was deluged with appeals from charities and other worthy causes that assumed that any club formed by women would naturally be for philanthropic purposes and wanted to move in on some fund-raising. 'It was difficult,' records Florence Earle Hooper, 'to make the world realise that a body of women could get together for no purpose but their own rest and recreation.' All of these difficulties were dealt with, after some wrangling between members, and the inclusion of some new rules and resolutions in the constitution. The unsavoury premises problem, for example, was taken care of:

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<sup>104</sup> The Women's Club Annual Report for 1906.

<sup>105</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women's Club*, p.8.

The Committee got the caretaker to close earlier the iron grille gate on the street. This led one night to an amusing contretemps. Two members, resting and reading upstairs, forgot that earlier hour, and found themselves locked in, but very visible. Uselessly they rattled the gate and appealed to passers-by – the painted ladies laughed at them, busy men glanced and went on, boys stayed and jeered at the ‘monkeys in a cage,’ a drunken man asked silly questions! At last someone told a policeman, who found the caretaker and he let them out.<sup>106</sup>

One interesting dispute arose concerning publicity and the Club. Press women wanted to write notices and the *Sydney Morning Herald* wanted to pen an article, but a rule was quickly devised stating that ‘No press notices or “writing up” to be permitted.’ However several years later, with the continued expansion and another relocation, the issue was raised again:

Naturally because women had now invaded the journalist world, and there were many, some of whom were club members, whose job it was ... to sniff out news, especially about women, ‘publicity’ in their case was their livelihood; they could not even begin to understand that it might not be desired.

Amy Mack of the *Sydney Morning Herald* was particularly persistent, and astonished when Rose Scott gently refused, offering instead a meeting with Committee members to hear why. ‘So the Women’s Club, owing nothing to publicity was kept out of the news ...’<sup>107</sup>

In 1908 the Women’s Club, with 390 members, moved to rooms in Martin Place. At this time the only public face of their activities were the debates of the Tuesday Club (a report of a debate on the nature of patriotism led to the establishment of Wattle Day). Wrangling over rules continued behind the scenes, as well as an entertaining battle with their neighbours, the Christian Scientists, who had, with some insistence, lent the Women’s Club some of its literature, and took offence at having it returned. A battle raged over whether or not to

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<sup>106</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women’s Club*, p.10.

<sup>107</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women’s Club*, p.11.

permit honorary membership of one month's duration to women of distinction visiting Sydney; the cause of this was the imminent visit of Annie Besant; undoubtedly a woman of distinction, but also a woman who had left her clergyman husband, was friends with a renowned atheist, and was a theosophist. On a motion by Rose Scott she was admitted, though it is not recorded that she ever made use of the Club.

In 1911 the University Senate refused to extend the lease on the Martin Place premises, citing too much use of the lift and the lights, but meaning – according to Florence Earle Hooper – there was ‘just too much woman.’<sup>108</sup> In 1913 they moved again, to King Street, where domestic strife consumed a great deal of their attention, as is shown in the creation of a terse new rule:

Skirts must not be left in the dressing room; members must not monopolise the phone; nor have dress fittings in the dressing rooms; nor bring children anywhere but the Strangers Room; nor make complaints to the attendants.<sup>109</sup>

But these were minor concerns, asserts Florence Earle Hooper: ‘The Women’s Club was taking a fine place in our life; masculine opposition and criticism had died.’ A further two circles were created: the Circle for the Study of Social and Economic Law, and a Study Class on Social Reform. Adela Pankhurst was made an Honorary Member.

A reciprocal membership arrangement established in 1906 made it possible for members travelling to Melbourne to take advantage of the Austral Salon, and for those going overseas to use the Austral Club in London. In 1908 a similar arrangement was made with the Pioneer Club in Brisbane. The Report for the Tuesday Club in 1908 records the attendance of several visitors in the course of the year, including Miss Catherine Spence from South Australia.

The Women’s Club survived through the war, by and large retaining its original purpose but acceding to the imperative to contribute to the war effort as well. It determinedly shunned

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<sup>108</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women’s Club*, p.14.

<sup>109</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women’s Club*, p.16.

publicity, though it did lend its support to several political campaigns (for example, the bill regarding naturalisation of women which meant that women no longer lost their nationality on marriage) though generally it preferred to voice political views through the National Council of Women. Florence Earle Hooper's account of the first fifty years of the Club ends with the salient observation that the Club represented a wonderful achievement,

for the women who started it were not wealthy, nor had they important support. Some of them felt the injustice of men's predominance; they had a strong faith in their cause, a keen belief that to found a club for companionship by women, and for women, was worth doing. In the face of opposition and ridicule, they persevered, making history as they went, reaching at last a wise and tolerant attitude toward men, and a most honoured position in our society.<sup>110</sup>

The Women's Club is that rare thing: a group determinedly and overtly feminist, coming together for solidarity and intellectual advancement, and lacking the customary incentives or motives of similar organisations to be evangelical or philanthropic. The Women's Club maintained its *raison d'être* steadfastly, spurning publicity, criticism, and even the tendency of such groups to self-destruct from internal dissension.

Similarly the Women's Service Club can be seen as a successor to the Women's Literary Society and other clubs that were chiefly concerned with the intellectual advancement of the women who were its subscribers. Like the earlier clubs too, it sought to provide a physical space for the women to meet and carry out their activities separately from men. And like the Women's Club (and despite its own name) the Women's Service Club resisted the notion that women's groups were legitimate only if they were benevolent or philanthropic in intent.

The Object of the Women's Service Club was to provide a Club for the use of 'women engaged in professional, commercial, philanthropic, patriotic, literary, artistic or social work.'<sup>111</sup> It provided a Clubhouse and conveniences including accommodation for members,

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<sup>110</sup> Hooper, *The Story of the Women's Club*, p.X

<sup>111</sup> The Women's Service Club, *Rules*, 1917. Papers of the Women's Service Club are held at Mitchell Library.

and reserved the right to confer honorary membership 'upon any woman of distinction who may be visiting Sydney,' thereby assisting the functioning of the networks and the communication of ideas between them.

The Club undertook to promote art, science, and literature and to deliver lectures and conduct classes

for the teaching and study of useful and artistic subjects and the preparation and composition of literary and musical works by and among its members.<sup>112</sup>

The Club also purchased and maintained a library of literary, artistic and musical works for the use of its members.

All office-bearers in the Club, including Trustees, President, Executive and Committee Members, were women. Included among them was Mrs Kingsford Smith, wife of the famous aviator, and a Committee Member in 1917.

Despite the expectation aroused by the name of the Club, this was not an organisation of military women, nor was it a group devoted to performing services for the community. The Women's Service Club was created to be of service to women, both intellectually, and corporeally, by providing a physical space for them to be and enjoy the benefits of membership.

While Sydney did not yet have an equivalent of Melbourne's Presbyterian Ladies College, it did have its own women graduates and undergraduates who had enrolled at the University of Sydney and it did have the Women's College. While it does not meet any of the criteria for definition as a women's group or society, the Women's College was another kind of enclave consisting of women striving for intellectual advancement, acutely conscious of their desire for a female space.

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<sup>112</sup> Women's Service Club, *Rules*, p.2.

The Women's College opened to female students in 1892. Chancellor William Manning had flagged the desirability of establishing a residential college for women that would afford them the same advantages enjoyed by male students, as early as 1879. However, in the absence of 'evidence of a sufficiently widespread wish for a Women's College to lead to any movement in the matter'<sup>113</sup> the issue was shelved until 1887.

The idea was revived in 1887 when female students numbered twenty, by a group of 'earnest friends to the higher education of women'<sup>114</sup> – all men. Turney is anxious to stress that 'the idea of the College emerged neither from the agitation of a feminist group nor from pressure from women students who, at the time, were so few in number.'<sup>115</sup> Indeed, this was also the observation of Louisa Macdonald – the future principal of the College – as recorded in her memoirs: 'It was not particularly popular and there was no urgent public demand for it.' In fact, she observed, to many people in Sydney 'the higher learning was quite unsuitable for women.'<sup>116</sup>

A public meeting was held in St James Hall to discuss the proposed petition for Parliament. Four resolutions were carried unanimously and a ladies' committee was formed to raise subscriptions. Lady Carrington presided over this committee which consisted mainly of the wives of the University men who had promoted the College. Rose Scott was also a member. In 1891 Lady Jersey took over the Chair and the required five thousand pounds was eventually accumulated.

The Bill was passed in 1889 and a College Council was formed in 1891, chaired by Sir William Windeyer. A house in Glebe was rented as temporary premises while the Women's College building was under construction. The position of Principal was advertised in England and Australia, the role described as being:

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<sup>113</sup> Chancellor's address 1879, quoted in Clifford Turney, Ursula Bygott, and Peter Chippendale, *Australia's First: a history of the University of Sydney, Volume I, 1850-1939* (Sydney: University of Sydney with Hale and Iremonger, 1991).

<sup>114</sup> Chancellor's address 1888, quoted in Turney et.al., *Australia's First*, 1991.

<sup>115</sup> Turney et.al., *Australia's First*, p.336.

<sup>116</sup> Louisa Macdonald, *The Women's College: Within the University of Sydney* (NSW: Halstead Press, 1947). (ML)

to carry out the purpose of the College, which is to provide residence and domestic supervision for women ... of all religions without any distinction whatever, together with efficient tutorial assistance in their preparation for University lectures and examinations.<sup>117</sup>

Having been encouraged to apply by Millicent Fawcett, Louisa Macdonald arrived in Sydney in 1892 to take up the position of principal of Women's College. Her arrival was greeted with pleasant surprise by a colony that had evidently feared a militant feminist:

Miss Macdonald, despite her great attainments, has nothing of the typical bluestocking in dress or manner. With a fine vigorous frame and handsome face, a ringing unaffected voice, she confesses a liking for nice clothes and wears hats and gowns of the period with an appreciation of what is becoming and a due sense of what custom demands in the attire of a gentlewoman. She by no means shares the belief that blue spectacles and disregard of the conventions of society are necessary to support academic honour.<sup>118</sup>

Chronicler of the institution, Turney reflects approvingly on Louisa Macdonald too:

While on the one hand, she strongly supported women's rights on fundamental principles of equality, justice and individual liberty, she did not support the use of violent tactics to achieve them. Her subsequent leadership of the women at her college was reflected in their attitudes. Although she was intellectually demanding of her students in her teaching, she was sedate and motherly in her relationship with them.<sup>119</sup>

Raising subscriptions for the building was slow work as the College did not have widespread support. One of its champions was Florence Walsh whose articles in the *Sydney Quarterly Magazine* consistently promoted women's issues:

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<sup>117</sup> Turney et.al., *Australia's First*, p.338.

<sup>118</sup> The *Sydney Mail* quoted in Turney, et.al., *Australia's First*, p.338.

<sup>119</sup> Turney et.al., *Australia's First*, pp338-339.

In the scanty intellectual outfit, with which old-fashioned observers were wont to assume, that Nature had endowed the feminine half of humanity, a superior education would have been considered superfluous, but with general advancement this is changed ... An assured position will have been obtained by the students of our Women's College; they will have the consciousness that knowledge is power, and that what is just and equitable will finally be meted out to them by their champions of the other sex... Providing a residential home during collegiate training will be one of the essential practical benefits which will be conferred by the Women's College.<sup>120</sup>

The Women's College buildings were opened in 1894. Enrolments in the College were slow for the decade of the 'nineties, as the desirability of higher education for women was an idea that took some time to take hold in the colony. However, the members of the College enjoyed social and intellectual stimulation that considerably enriched their education. Alumni of Women's College became the first generations of women in New South Wales with demonstrable intellect, tertiary qualifications to prove it, and who were equipped to enter the public sphere as professionals.

A Women's College Old Student's Union was formed in 1909 which provided a means of updating the illustrious progress of the 'Old Girls' and of perpetuating the networks between them.

Like nuns in a convent, the women of Women's College lived a publicly-condoned separatist lifestyle. As individuals, many of the women became valued members of the women's clubs and societies. As a community, their contribution to the intellectual grounding of Australian feminism was their pioneering intellectualism, their sundering of the public sphere of work and professional careers, and their positive choice of a woman-centred existence for the duration of their intellectual endeavours.

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<sup>120</sup> Florence Walsh, 'The Women's College,' *Sydney Quarterly Magazine*, Vol.7 (September 1890), p.208.

Like the university-educated women behind the Princess Ida Club and the Catalysts in Melbourne, the tertiary-educated women in Sydney demonstrated a desire to associate, though they lacked similar cohesion. Jane Foss Russell, tutor to women students at the University of Sydney, and Louisa Macdonald, principal of the Women's College, initiated the idea of a women's society for both graduates and undergraduates. In May 1892 a meeting of seven graduates and seven undergraduates, chaired by Louisa Macdonald, decided to form the Sydney University Women's Association (SUWA). The aims were

to bring all women graduates and undergraduates together from time to time for social and other purposes, and to take cognisance of all matters affecting their well-being.<sup>121</sup>

Louisa Macdonald was elected President, and Jane Russell succeeded her in 1893. The Association held three meetings a year and charged a membership fee of one shilling a term. The Association was formed with thirty members which had increased to ninety by the end of the century. It encouraged networking between similar colonial organisations, notably the Princess Ida Club at Melbourne University. Louisa Macdonald encouraged a rotation of the Presidency in order to boost the ideals of association rather than hierarchy.

The meetings of the Association entailed the reading of papers on literature, philosophy and ideology as well as the sharing of ideas and experiences of travel, the workplace and higher education. The Association did not concern itself with matters of politics or legislation, a stance which is highlighted in its actions when the editorial staff of the University magazine *Hermes* refused the Association's proposal to appoint a woman to the staff on the grounds that 'men did not wish to cooperate with a woman.'<sup>122</sup> The Association withdrew without protest. Furthermore, it allocated time at one single meeting only to a brief discussion of the suffrage issue; this in spite of the public support given to the struggle by the men within the University.

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<sup>121</sup> Minutes of SUWA, quoted in Turney et.al., *Australia's First*, p.317.

<sup>122</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.82.

In their edited anthology of Louisa Lawson's letters, Beaumont and Hole speculate that it was the conservative influence of Jane Russell that was responsible for maintaining the determinedly apolitical line held by the Association. Nevertheless, the Association provided a space and a sense of solidarity to those pioneer women students, and it did, as Beaumont and Hole point out 'perhaps raise university women's consciousness by providing one of the few forums for debate which was entirely under their control.'<sup>123</sup>

By 1898 there were 64 members, of whom 56 were graduates. This imbalance led to the creation of a separate body for undergraduate students which evolved into the Sydney University Women's Union. The lack of a single representative society of women led to the creation of yet another women's organisation in 1914, presided over by Isobel Fidler, who was then the tutor to women students. Considerable debate over the name of the new society ensued, and eventually it was decided that it should be named the Sydney University Women's Union. The existing Union relinquished the title and was renamed the Sydney University Women's Council. The new society took over management of Manning House which was built to revitalise the social and intellectual life of women students through regular debates, lectures and social events.

Regardless of the respectability and worthiness of the women seeking to make a space in the public sphere for their intellectual pursuits, the dominant culture sensed a threat and often reacted negatively. In Adelaide an article in the press<sup>124</sup> on 23 November 1893 gave considerable space to a story about the establishment of The May Club: a ladies' club. The stir was caused because Adelaide considered itself a conservative city, and a ladies' club was seen as an alarming innovation. A club for women raised the spectre of the 'new woman' in the minds of 'the timorous.' The writer of the article was at pains to convey his own magnanimous toleration and to point out that a club 'whose membership is confined exclusively to women of university education and medical women' was established in London in 1878 and was still in existence, and that 'last year a club for ladies of position only

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<sup>123</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.82.

<sup>124</sup> Muriel Farr, 'The May Club and its Founders,' *Lone Hand*, Vol.7, No.2 (1917).

was formed in the same city.' He also felt that an organisation such as the YWCA provided a satisfactory precedent for a club such as The May Club.

An article on the continued existence of the club in *The Lone Hand* 1 January 1917, asserted that The May Club was 'practically a development of the Homeworkers' Society,' and reported that, 'despite the timorous', it had 'flourished.'

The aims of the club were to provide a meeting place 'where light luncheons and afternoon tea might be secured ... as well as a depot for the exhibition and sale of women's work.' Lady Todd was the first patroness, and Miss Hawker the first treasurer, but the energetic Boothby sisters accounted for the continued success of the club. Mabel Boothby as manager and Nina Boothby as secretary also created a great deal of the art and needlework exhibited and sold by the club. Mabel Boothby's special studies of the kookaburra had achieved her some international renown; her pictures were in the possession of the royal family, the governors of South Australia and Dame Nellie Melba. Both sisters were also prodigious writers for local and interstate papers. The Boothby family was 'intimately connected with the history and development of [South Australia].' Cousin to the Boothby sisters was Guy Boothby, the novelist, and their uncle was the Sheriff of South Australia for many years.

The May Club became the headquarters for The Adelaide Women Writers' Club, the Wattle Day League and the Women's Non-Party Association. Indeed, as the *Lone Hand* observed:

from its earliest days the May Club has been more than a social club and a women's work association in the ordinary sense. Afternoons and evenings are constantly devoted to the discussion of papers on topics of current interest written by one or other of its members or by some specially invited guest.<sup>125</sup>

The May Club is a useful case study in that it demonstrates some of the key points of interest common to many of the women and societies that form the primary focus of this thesis. The

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<sup>125</sup> Muriel Farr, 'The May Club and its Founders,' *Lone Hand*, Vol.7, No.2 (1917).

founding of the club originally was observed with some alarm by the local press, representing those who feared their women would become less ladylike, but the prevailing attitude seems to have been one of benevolent curiosity. The general consensus in the [male] press was that if there existed a respectable precedent in England then such a club could be dismissed as unharmed to the women here. The founders of the club were middle-class women, talented and well-educated, from family of some renown in their colony. They chose as their patron a society lady, who bestowed additional respectability and possibly funding to the project. The stated aims of the work of the club were not political or controversial, but the actual activities expanded to incorporate some that were potentially inflammatory, including debate and intellectual discussion about contemporary issues. The founding of this club led to networks being developed with other clubs, and to personal networks that extended interstate and internationally.

## V

*'a greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose'*

One of the more eccentric manifestations of women's associational activity was Victoria's Order of the Daughters of the Court.<sup>126</sup> The Order was created with the intention of spreading its influence internationally, and indeed managed to establish sub-groups in all of the states (having the least impact in NSW). It apparently aspired to be a women's version of the Masonic Club, and mimicked many of the arcane practices of that organisation. It was organised around a medieval theme, and the interests of its various coteries ranged from moral and religious concerns, through social and charitable services, to those with an intellectual and cultural focus. It was a conservative organisation in its views of women's role in society, and avoided, indeed ignored, political issues.

Most of the members of the Order were educated and middle-class and married to men who were active in Melbourne's business, professional and intellectual life. Several of the 'Daughters' achieved prominence in artistic or intellectual fields.

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<sup>126</sup> Primary source material on the Order of the Daughters of the Court is held at the Latrobe Library.

The founding ten members met for the first time on 24 October 1890. The Constitution of the Club defined its object as being

to form an order of women who shall undertake to speak ill of none, and to cultivate the spirit of helpfulness, endeavouring to do at least one helpful deed each day.<sup>127</sup>

Members were organised into three grades: the High Court, consisting of the original members and others appointed by the Courts; the Courts, consisting of ten members, one appointed from each Coterie; and the Coteries, associations of ten members. Officers were appointed in each Coterie and held their positions for one year, bearing the titles of 'Scribe,' (secretary), 'Chancellor,' (treasurer), 'Chatelaine' (steward or messenger), or 'Companion,' (supporters), and the organisation was directed by the 'High Dame.' Members were called 'Daughters.' They wore distinguishing badges identifying their level of membership, which featured a star (to represent cheer and guidance), and a pearl (for purity), and exchanged a special sign on greeting.

The Court was also rendered the services of a 'Counsellor,' the Reverend Dr Bevan, who was attributed as the creative genius behind the whole organisation:

as a matter of fact, its establishment was the result of a suggestion thrown out by Dr Bevan in a conversation with some lady undergraduates at the university ...<sup>128</sup>

The Order of the Daughters of the Court loved pageantry and regalia, and enthusiastically prevailed on the Countess of Hopetoun to become patron and Grand Dame. Both the Grand Dame and the High Dame (Mrs Bevan) 'had a regal appearance well in keeping with the dignity of their titles,' reported one of the later successors, Mrs Craig, who was responsible for compiling a history of the Order in the 1940s:

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<sup>127</sup> The Daughters of the Court, Constitution, unpublished (Latrobe).

<sup>128</sup> 'The new order: a woman's league - The Daughters of the Court First General Meeting a picturesque gathering', *The Herald*, March 28, 1891.

Mrs Bevan was a graceful figure in her demi-trained gown and little cap with mantilla-like swathings of exquisite lace falling to her shoulders.<sup>129</sup>

The object of the order was

to lead women to recognise the importance of the position which they have to fill, and to show that in the quiet home life, as also in the most prominent and exalted positions, attentions to small virtues will sweeten and ennoble every action and thought.

The Constitution enlarged on its philosophy of women's role:

No woman can avoid exercising influence for good or evil. She is, as Ruskin says, 'a Queen' in her home circle and far beyond it ... The Members of the Order all have this rule as their primary object, but the Order is glad if, with that, Coteries also choose some secondary occupation which will afford an occasion of pleasant interest and recreation.

Having this conservative understanding of the position women should hold in society so clearly spelt out in the Constitution makes it clear that the Order was not in the business of initiating major reform or starting a revolution. Nevertheless, the Daughters regarded themselves as polite provocateurs embarked on 'the self-appointed task of raising the tone of society':

Declaring war on such trivialities as endless paying of calls and feminine gossip over the teacups, they chose as their weapon the practising of kindly deeds and the checking of idle and ill-natured gossip.<sup>130</sup>

Clearly the 'secondary occupations' allowed in the Constitution were to be in keeping with Ruskin's Victorian-era notions of appropriate womanly pursuits. With this in mind Coteries were established which pursued music, painting, history, French, Shakespeare, missionary

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<sup>129</sup> O.S., 'Revolt in the Nineties: Women's Reform Movement', *The Age*, (26 July, 1947).

<sup>130</sup> O.S., 'Revolt in the Nineties,' (1947).

work, Sunday School preparation and hospital nursing. They bore names such as the 'Fairy,' the 'Snowdrop,' the 'Excelsior,' the 'Pearl,' the 'Beethoven' and the 'Eunice.' Each new coterie formed held a special reception, where they received collars, arm badges, bags, pens and wands from the hands of the Grand Dame. Single members joining were endowed with pins and bows.

At first the Daughters of the Court received a deal of press attention. The *Daily Telegraph* described the 'picturesque gathering' of the first General Meeting in March 1891, and breathlessly predicted that

the movement will assume such gigantic proportions in the future as to become to women what Masonry is to men ... At any rate, it must be a glorious revenge upon man ... .<sup>131</sup>

The press described the meeting as a demonstration of 'woman asserting herself... despite deprecation and ridicule,' and claimed that '[f]rom time to time have to be chronicled fresh triumphs and new organisations of the sex,' despite having first to contend with the criticism of male detractors: 'run the gauntlet as other organisations among women have done before it.'<sup>132</sup> An extraordinary insight into the Melbourne society at the time may be gained from these comments. That a group with such innocuous and conservative objectives, inspired by an illustrious clergyman, should yet attract 'deprecation,' 'ridicule' and 'criticism' betrays the fear and disapproval of women inhabiting so small a pocket of the public sphere.

A common response to women who sought suffrage or other reform in the nineteenth century from the establishment opposed to emancipation or the expansion of women's role was to acclaim the moral superiority of women over men. The real power and responsibility of the Victorian-era woman, often claimed, was the influence she brought to bear on her man. The conservatism of the Order of the Daughters of the Court was of this type, as is revealed in an article by 'M.E.L.' from the first edition of *The Court*:

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<sup>131</sup> 'The Ladies Column,' *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 Saturday April 1891.

<sup>132</sup> 'The new order,' *The Herald*, 1891.

It is interesting to observe the various attempts made to improve the position of women at the present time. We hear so much of women's rights that we are apt to overestimate our wrongs, and voices are raised demanding that women shall be given privileges and a position in public life that would have surprised the strongest minded women who lived in the 'good old times' that some people seem to regret have passed away. But as a nineteenth century woman, very thankful for many privileges and admiring the new order of things more than the old, I am afraid we sometimes undervalue our 'rights' given to us with our womanhood, the right to do nobler deeds, and by our influence on the side of truth and goodness to do our part in making earth more like heaven, not necessarily by taking man's place and fighting for more power which gives more responsibility, but by gentleness and patience.<sup>133</sup>

In the same issue of the journal, 'B.E.M.' argued a somewhat limited case for women's suffrage:

Alcohol and tobacco are stunting the physique and brains of men and with the help of women in voting the better time would come and their vote would be the highway to home protection and harmonious relation ... As regards politics taking women from home, 'love of home' is an innate feeling with most women, and I don't think if she got the franchise that she would neglect it ... I think she would be more of a companion to her husband, father or brother, being able to converse on the political topics of the day ...

It is feared that if suffrage is granted, that the women will agitate for seats in parliament. Perhaps there would be one in several thousands who would try to rise above her sisters in this. If she did, those of her own sex would be the very ones not to support her, knowing that they would be able to find a man to represent them ... Why could not a law be made allowing women suffrage, but prohibiting her from taking a seat in the parliament.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> M.E.L., 'Our Order,' *The Court*, No.1 (October 1894), p.8.

<sup>134</sup> B.E.M., 'Woman's Suffrage,' *The Court*, No.1 (1894), p.10.

Coteries 'sprang up like mushrooms'<sup>135</sup> in Victoria, and eventually chapters of the organisation were formed in Queensland and Western Australia and Tasmania,<sup>136</sup> fulfilling the hope expressed in *The Herald* article:

its promoters probably can find encouragement in the success achieved by those societies of women which have already been subjected to man's criticism. The Primrose League in the old country, the Austral Salon in this colony, have shown what women can do in the way of successful organisations, whether men applaud or sneer at their efforts.

The Daughters of the Court published their own journal, *The Court*, which began in 1894. This advertised itself as concerned with 'anything bearing on education, training, philanthropic work, political conditions and wage earning,' and included articles such as 'Studies in the History of Illustrious Women'; short stories as well as opinion pieces debating such questions as women's suffrage, dress reform, the 'New Woman,' the Queensland slave trade in Kanakas, and women and the bicycle. The debating coterie was particularly active and scheduled debates against other women's groups. Discussions in the Janet Bevan Coterie in 1900 included topics such as the French Revolution, *Hamlet*, the Pleasures of Life and Botany, and the Poetry of Browning.

*The Court* reveals that in 1893 Dr Emily Ryder of the Little Wives of India Fund attended the Annual Meeting of the Order (although she is referred to as Emma, not Emily) and that her 'rich Indian dress added to the already picturesque gathering.'<sup>137</sup> It was hoped that

our unfortunate sisters in India, who are suffering so much may hear of our Order, and perhaps the little leaven of kindly word, and deed may be found useful in lightening the heavy lot of those daughters of the East.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> O.S., 'Revolt in the Nineties,' (1947).

<sup>136</sup> 'The High Dame reported that as the result of visits to Queensland and Western Australia chapters with several coteries had been formed there.' *Argus* (2 April 1894). By 1900 only one coterie had formed in NSW, however.

<sup>137</sup> *The Court*, No.1 (1894), p.3.

<sup>138</sup> *The Court*, No 1 (1894), p.3.

In 1894 Annie Besant spoke to the Order about her theosophical beliefs. *The Court* reported that, while her visit created excitement, her theology did not:

It was a cold inhuman teaching, and we could only wish, that as she has already changed her creed more than once, so she may again, and find at last something fuller and diviner.<sup>139</sup>

By the turn of the century the Order had faded into obscurity. It was renamed the Friends in Council and continued to exist until after World War Two. According to Mrs A.L.G. Craig, President in the 1940s, who took it upon herself to prepare a short history of the Order, it continued the fight against the afternoon teas which had perturbed the Order from the start:

Year after year resolutions were passed against elaborate teas ... but before long members would revert to refilled cups, sandwiches and cake.<sup>140</sup>

As one of the first Australian women's organisations, the Daughters of the Court is an interesting demonstration of women attempting to assume responsibility in the community. The ostentatious style of the Order somewhat undermined their campaign against the frippery of a woman's life, but their efforts were well-intentioned and energetic in serving the needy in society, and also in pursuing their own intellectual and artistic advancement. Never self-proclaimed or overtly feminist in its intent, the Daughters of the Court's coterie nevertheless provided opportunities for the discussion of women's issues and served to expand the public space filled by women at this time.

Another unique Victorian club was the Warrawee Club which was established in 1893. There is little information surviving concerning its activities, but the Rules make interesting reading in themselves. Rule One states baldly that 'The Warrawee Club shall consist of women only.' It was to be managed by a committee of twenty, appointed on an annual rotation basis, and the rules made provision for this to be a trouble-free process:

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<sup>139</sup> *The Court*, No. 2, (1 January 1895), p.18.

<sup>140</sup> O.S., 'Revolt in the Nineties,' (1947).

It shall be considered a point of honour not to blackball any candidate [for election to the Committee] on account of her opinions.<sup>141</sup>

The Club seemed to be a particularly volatile organisation, and mainly committed to upholding its rigorous, self-imposed rules:

RULE 15 - The name of every member failing to pay her subscription ... shall be posted in the General Room ... .

The purpose of the Club was to provide a centre for debate and intellectual advancement, as well as some social events, but it seems that their greatest pleasure lay in creating Draconian rules for themselves, debating their merits and penalising transgressors.

Men were permitted to attend meetings and functions of the Club only 'in accordance with the Regulations of the Debate Sub-Committee.' The Debate and Entertainment Sub-Committee was given the power to

make all the regulations and arrangements relating to discussions, lectures, and evening entertainments, to be held in the Club or under its auspices.

The Debate and Entertainment Sub-Committee held a lecture or debate on the first Tuesday of every month. Visitors were welcome – unless they were male, in which case they were only to be admitted 'as specified on the Syllabus.' Monday nights were practice nights and any interested member could take part. Every third Tuesday a social evening with entertainment was held.

The Club survived on its membership subscriptions alone. Monetary gifts to the Club were refused, though gifts of art or literature could be accepted as donations. A Library Sub-

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<sup>141</sup> Rules of the Warrawee Club, unpublished, no author, 1893. Papers of the Warrawee Club are held at Latrobe Library.

Committee was established to facilitate the access of the members to the literature at the disposal of the Club. Its functions were to

- (a) select newspapers, books and other publications for use in the Club
- (b) keep a catalogue accessible to members, of books in the library.

Expulsion was the penalty threatening any member who removed, injured or destroyed any newspaper, book or other article, 'upon any pretext whatever.'

Alice Henry was a member of the Warrawee Club while she was working as a journalist for the *Argus*, before she relocated to America. Vida Goldstein attended lectures and participated in debates at the Club. Many members of the Princess Ida Club were simultaneously members of the Warrawee Club.

The content of their debates – even the topics – have been lost, along with membership lists and other precious resources, but it is clear that the Warrawee Club is a very early example of women organising themselves in their own space and on their own terms for the purpose of intellectual sharing and easy access to contemporary media and literature. While they almost seem like a kind of existentialist club, existing mainly to reflect on their own existence and entity as a club, the obsession with rules indicates the seriousness with which they regarded their endeavours at a time when such activity by women was usually treated with derision, and often obstructed.

Some of the literary clubs were also dedicated in some way to the service of the community. Women who formed clubs out of a desire to serve others were regarded as somehow more natural and acceptable to the community than the women's groups that rejected offering any kind of public service and defiantly formed for their own benefit. While their objectives may have appeared less subversive, the intellectual groups devoted to service were nevertheless equally important as public-sphere training grounds and female cultural enclaves.

The National Council of Women (NCW), for example, was – in name – a national organisation, but in practice the state branches operated parochially, with occasional forays

to national conferences, and even to international congresses. Because Vida Goldstein was the Australian delegate for the NCW to the first International Women Suffrage conference, Victoria's branch of the NCW tended to be the one most often referred to as the national branch. The other states typically were identified as the New South Wales National Council of Women, or the South Australian National Council, and so on.

The genesis of the National Council of Women can be traced to the Equal Rights Convention at Seneca Falls half a century earlier. In 1848 some American women met at a conference to discuss their ideals of national welfare. The importance and success of this meeting was celebrated at its fortieth anniversary, with the holding in Washington of an International Council of Women. At this meeting 55 different women's organisations were represented by delegates from England, France, Norway, Denmark, Finland, India, Canada and the United States. Mrs May Wright Sewell formulated a scheme whereby two permanent organisations were established: the National Council of Women of the United States, composed of women's organisations, associations and societies; and the International Council of Women, formed of representatives of the different National Councils of Women. The objectives of the ICW included

the forging of a truly worldwide parliament of women to intervene in the widest range of issues affecting women. The particular domains of its address included legal and citizen rights, peace and international arbitration, social and economic conditions, and vice and international traffic in women and girls.<sup>142</sup>

In Australia the National Council of Women was begun in Sydney and promoted by the familiar figures of the Sydney society. Margaret Windeyer brought back from a trip to the World's Congress of Representative Women her enthusiasm for creating a National Council of Women in Australia, which would bring together a range of existing groups concerned with educational, economic, social and philanthropic objectives. Margaret Windeyer had travelled to Chicago for the 1893 Exhibition, and then on to England. In the course of her travels she met and was inspired by Anne Clough (Principal of Newnham College for

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<sup>142</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.148.

women at Cambridge), Elizabeth Garrett Anderson and Millicent Garrett Fawcett (sisters; Elizabeth was England's first female doctor; Millicent became the leader of the suffrage movement in England). Margaret Windeyer arranged a meeting to discuss her proposal at her home 'Tulworth' in Rose Bay. At this first and informal meeting, she proposed a scheme to coordinate the different groups that existed for the promotion of women's causes into 'a greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose.'<sup>143</sup> The plan was for each member group and individual to continue their work in their own organisation, with opportunity to meet with, consult, and seek the support of the whole representative body of women.

The inaugural meeting of the NCW was held at the Town Hall in June 1896 with Lady Hampden presiding (poorly, according to Louisa Macdonald, who described her as 'without much ability as a chairwoman'). Louisa Macdonald moved the first motion to create the Council, writing later:

It is founded on an American idea, but there it seems a National Council in England and a great many other countries as well, and it seems to me an admirable thing as Miss Scott put it, of a 'United Womanhood.'<sup>144</sup>

Louisa Macdonald's motion – planned the previous day with Margaret Windeyer – stressed the difficulties for women of working in isolation from one another, and the advantages of having a 'permanent body of advice and guidance in all that pertains to women's work.'<sup>145</sup>

The National Council of Women became the most conspicuous and enduring example of women networking locally, nationally and internationally. A vast array (over twenty) of the women's groups of Sydney immediately became affiliated, including the Women's Literary Society, the Sydney University Women's Association, the Womanhood Suffrage League, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Working and Factory Girls' Club. Most of Sydney's prominent women thereby held membership. Mrs Hugh Dixon (Elizabeth, later Vice-President of the Optimists' Club) and Lady Fanshawe (later President of the Women's

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<sup>143</sup> Florence Gordon, 'The National Council of Women. Its outlook on the future,' *The Lone Hand*, 25 October, 1919, p.16.

<sup>144</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.87.

<sup>145</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.88.

Club) were at one time Vice-Presidents; Dr Mary Booth (founder of the Women's Club) was at one time the Honorary Corresponding Secretary.

The National Council of Women also created a series of Committees focused on specific issues of concern to women. For example, Rose Scott was the Convenor of the Committee of Laws concerning Women and Suffrage.

Louisa Macdonald and Rose Scott came close to falling out over a recommendation of the 1897 Standing Committee on Domestic Economy. Highly educated Louisa was appalled by the recommendation that cookery and housekeeping be compulsory subjects for girls in all schools:

It would be striking one of the most serious blows to women's freedom and there is something rather tragic in thinking that one of the champions of the franchise could help to strike it. Don't you see, you who would help forward women's work and education and lessen her disabilities, that the one idea of the ladies at your drawing room meetings is to get good servants cheap. And they are certainly going one way to do it by having every woman trained compulsorily to one trade.<sup>146</sup>

Rose Scott's participation in the National Council of Women allowed her to develop important links with women in other states and internationally. It was under the auspices of the National Council of Women that Rose Scott struck up her friendship with Vida Goldstein, hosting her visits to Sydney on several occasions. Over the many years of her membership, Rose Scott used the NCW as a platform for voicing her opinions on a range of issues, including her opposition to Australia's participation in the Boer War, the legal position of women, and industrial issues affecting women in the workforce.

The Tasmanian branch of the National Council of Women was formed in 1899 by Emily Dobson. It was the second NCW in Australia after NSW. Emily Dobson was also instrumental in founding other NCW branches in other colonies/states. The inaugural

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<sup>146</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.139.

meeting of the NCW attracted ten societies from the north of the state and twenty-three from the south. Among the affiliates were the Hamilton and Itinerant Literary Societies, the WCTU and the Women's Improvement and Sanitation Association. That antagonism had existed between various groups in the past has already been observed in the description of the Hamilton and Itinerant Societies, and is confirmed by the stated aim of the new umbrella organisation: to 'unite the societies, increase the sympathies and lessen the antagonism thought to exist.'<sup>147</sup> From this point on, the activities of the affiliated groups were coordinated through the executive of the NCW. On the executive sat senior members of the WCTU, and WISA.

The NCW pledged a non-party stance. Emily Dobson's politician husband was opposed to suffrage for women, and in her long public career as a speaker representing various organisations of women, she never spoke publicly on the issue of suffrage for women. However in a letter written in 1906 in reply to a request for support for the British militant suffragettes, Emily explained that the Tasmanian branch of the NCW was pro-suffragist, though not for all women; an attitude that reflected the strong class consciousness of the organisation under her leadership.

Emily held the Presidency of the NCW in Tasmania from 1902 until her death in 1934. In 1906 she became the President of the Australian NCW and an international Vice-President and Life Member. She led Australian delegations to the International Council of Women Quinquennials for many years.

On Thursday afternoon on 22 November 1901 a meeting was held at 'Cliveden' (home of Janet, Lady Clarke) to discuss forming a Victorian branch of the National Council of Women. Lady Clarke described a visit to the London quinquennial meeting of the International Council of Women in 1889 (which she had been asked to attend in the place of the recently deceased Mrs Bear Crawford), which was clearly the inspiration for her own desire to be a part of the establishment of an Australian arm.

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<sup>147</sup> Vicki Pearce, 'A few viragos on a stump The Womanhood Suffrage Campaign in Tasmania, 1880-1920,' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (December 1985).

At the second meeting on 28 November, Vida Goldstein spoke, explaining the work of the International Council and its affiliates. Goldstein's vision of the Club was that it should be representative of all the different associations of women, claiming that

it would not be possible to form a Council on constitutional lines unless the matter was clearly placed before the different associations of women, which, being in full possession of the objects and scope of a National Council, could then appoint its own representatives.<sup>148</sup>

She suggested that a meeting of women's societies be held early in the new year with the object of explaining to them the aims and benefits of a National Council affiliated to the International Council of Women. Another key woman in the founding of the Victorian branch was Marie Kirk, the general secretary of the Victorian WCTU.

The National Council of Women was a driving force behind several significant early reforms for women in Victoria. For example, it brought pressure to bear on the government over the appointment of police matrons (female police officers to handle women prisoners) and saw the first three appointed in 1909.

An article in the *Weekly Times* in 1911 amounted to a recruitment advertisement for the National Council of Women:

The National Council of Women announces that it is anxious to awaken interest and give aid in all efforts for social betterment, and invites the assistance of all women who are willing to help in such work. Meetings are held at the Austral Salon on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm ...

Good work has been done by the organisation in the past, and there is still much to be done. Every high-principled, fair-minded woman is a tremendous individual force when there are social problems affecting

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<sup>148</sup> *Australian Woman's Sphere* Vol. 1 (16 December 1901).

woman and child life to consider. Let her lend her aid, and give the best of her interest, intelligence, and sympathy to this association, which is striving for moral and mental advancement ... .<sup>149</sup>

Further reports on the activities of the NCW appeared in subsequent issues.

Despite Vida Goldstein's high profile early efforts for the National Council of Women, she fell out with the organisation in spectacular fashion in 1915. The issue was over the appointment of Adela Pankhurst as the Women's Political Association delegate to the NCW. The local branch of the NCW was pro-war and objected to the pacifist stance taken by Vida, Adela and the WPA generally. A dubious by-law was passed allowing the NCW to veto the delegation of an affiliate and Adela was forced to withdraw. Vida was furious and subsequently used her journal, *Woman Voter* to deride the NCW, reserving particular scorn for an NCW recruitment rally where only men spoke, concluding that 'the only Australian women who understand the war are against it.'<sup>150</sup>

In Western Australia in 1911, Lady Strickland, wife of the Governor, invited the executive members of the Women's Service Guilds to afternoon tea to discuss the possibility of changing the name and constitution of the Women's Service Guilds to the 'National Council of Women.' This was at the request of Lady Aberdeen, President of the International Council of Women. The officers of the Guilds explained that the Constitution of the Women's Service Guilds provided for individual membership, whereas the National Council of Women was a coalition of organisations. However they agreed to assist in forming a West Australian Division of the National Council of Women, and to become an affiliate organisation.<sup>151</sup>

Subsequently, Edith Cowan and Roberta Jull worked together to create the Western Australian National Council of Women in 1912. Edith Cowan was its President from 1913 to 1921.

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<sup>149</sup> 'Woman's World: National Council of Women,' no author, *Weekly Times* (25 March 1911).

<sup>150</sup> Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p.156.

<sup>151</sup> Gordon, 'The National Council of Women,' p.18.

Their first, and ultimately successful campaign in Western Australia was raising the age of consent to eighteen which was passed in 1914. The National Council of Women and Women's Service Guilds opposed one another bitterly over the issue of compulsory notification of venereal disease. As has already been noted, Bessie Rischbieth led a conservative membership which preferred to ignore or downplay issues to do with sex. Their short-sighted ideal seemed to be that abstinence should happen on a large scale, which would solve other problems better not raised: contraception, prostitution, and such. However, the NCW under the leadership of Edith Cowan supported the venereal disease legislation as a community health policy.

Florence Gordon's article on an interstate conference of delegates in 1919, reports that at that time there were twenty-three affiliated societies, with National Councils established in the other states too. Florence Gordon proposes an answer to a question 'sometimes asked: "Of what use are these meetings for talk and the passing of resolutions?"' which is that 'In the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom.' Formed at a time when women's suffrage was still dominating the political agenda for women's groups, the NCW saw gaining the franchise as its first big objective. When that was gained in NSW in 1902, the focus became other matters concerning women and children. Florence Gordon describes the task of the Council as

rather the forming and focussing [of] public opinion ... than definite corporate action. But a worldwide body, whose corporate thought and speech can so influence public opinion as to bring about desirable reforms, can claim to have thoroughly justified its existence.<sup>152</sup>

In the seventeen years of the existence of the NCW Gordon describes, a great number of measures were seen that ameliorated the conditions for women and children. Nearly all of these measures had been persistently promoted by the NCW and its affiliates, for example, The Factory Acts; the law making a married woman's earnings her own; the Women First Offenders Bill; the Infants Protection Act; the Deserted Wives and Children's Family

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<sup>152</sup> Gordon, 'The National Council of Women,' p.18.

Maintenance Act; the raising of the age of consent; the appointment of women police, and of women warders in prisons.

There is little doubt that public recognition of the necessity for such measures was largely due to the educative effect of discussion and ventilation of grievances and their remedies for large numbers of women ... The International Council of Women is offered unequalled opportunities for educating public opinion.<sup>153</sup>

In *The Real Matilda* Miriam Dixson quotes Lady Rawson, President of the NCW in 1905, reminding women of their role:

... they should never forget that women's first duties were her home duties. Her chief sphere of action was there and her first care should be to secure the well-being of her husband and children, her servants and those over whom she had influence.<sup>154</sup>

This quotation reveals the ideology of the NCW in Australia. It held an essentially conservative view of women's role in society, yet it supported the efforts of women to join together in public space for the purpose of education and networking to promote women's civic interests.

The Feminist Club of NSW was formed in 1914 by Mrs Barker-Young, who enlisted twenty members. She envisaged an intellectual salon, where women could meet for regular discussions of politics, economics and sociology, and establish a library. From the outset, the Club sought to engage in 'movements for the amelioration of social conditions,'<sup>155</sup> though its focus tended to shift in accordance with the particular interest of the various Presidents.

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<sup>153</sup> Gordon, 'The National Council of Women,' p.17.

<sup>154</sup> Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda: women and identity in Australia, 1788 to 1975* (Victoria: Penguin, 1976), p.204.

<sup>155</sup> Gail Griffith, 'The Feminist Club of NSW, 1914-1970: A History of Feminist Politics in Decline,' *Hexate*, Vol.14, No.1 (1988), p.56.

Little is known of the early activities of the Club as surviving records only date back to 1929. However, the Club is recorded as having been present at a deputation to the Attorney General, D.R. Hall, in 1915 to lobby for the introduction of the Women's Legal Status Act, removing barriers to women's entry to the legal profession, parliament and other public offices.

The founding of the Feminist Club in NSW marked the beginning of a new wave of clubs and societies that differed in character to the organisations of the previous twenty years. Membership consisted of a new generation of women: university-educated, professional women, civil servants and artists. When Rose Scott made her retirement from thirty years of public service at a luncheon hosted by the Feminist Club in 1921, the *Sydney Morning Herald* observed how fitting it was that the Feminist Club, under the presidency of parliamentary aspirant Millicent Preston Stanley, should host the event, being 'that body of women which owes its existence to the pioneer work done by [Scott] for woman suffrage.'<sup>156</sup>

In most parts of Australia in the *fin-de-siècle* period women could be found using clubs to pursue intellectual interests. Society was largely prepared to be tolerant of this female activity. Women's intellectual clubs did not meet with much opposition or hostility: more often a patronising kind of benevolence was the response. The existence of the large number and diverse array of clubs and societies across Australia indicates that women's concerns were wide-ranging, and energies boundless. The extent of common membership between them within states suggests effective networks and shared motivations. The clubs and societies were outlets for intelligent women to engage with one another on an intellectual level, which led to an increased level of informed engagement with society as a whole. Participation in a club gave women the confidence to participate in the political, social and intellectual life of the emerging nation, whether as prominent individual campaigners, or as subscribing members of a women's organisation.

Alone of all the colonies/states, Queensland is the only one where no evidence can be found of women organising into literary clubs or societies. Apparently the focus for Queensland

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<sup>156</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, p.239.

women was less on intellectual development and more on pragmatic political reform to ensure protection of women and children in a dangerous environment. The most prominent women in Queensland (Leontine Cooper and Emma Miller) were both affiliated to the Labor Party and the unions, so their particular focus was obviously overtly political.

For all the differences that can be identified between the objectives and memberships of women associating, the essential thesis remains: women in significant numbers began to organise into woman-identified clubs and societies around the end of the nineteenth century, and this marked a social movement. The women concerned were reshaping the place of women in the society and redefining women's roles; that is, they were creating a feminist consciousness.

The invitation from the Victorian Women's Federation to the Princess Ida Club to unite in 'one great Sisterhood' indicates an emerging recognition among politically aware women that the literary and intellectual women's groups at the time had potential to impact on social and political agendas. This was a subtle understanding: it was far more straightforward to see the suffrage and other political groups as the places for political activism. But the literary groups played a critical role in preparing the women to assume their activist, reformist roles in the better known, more public suffrage groups. The literary groups prepared women for engagement with the public sphere by allowing them to practise the skills they would need: they learned to speak and debate and to argue; they learned how to manage commercial enterprises and disseminate information; and they schooled themselves in important knowledge about current and canonical thought.

Underneath these visible efforts the groups and clubs also fostered the development of a feminist consciousness: a belief in the right of women to associate together in spaces that were separate from men; a recognition that women had shared concerns that were not best represented by men; and an emerging understanding that women could seek ways of supporting one another and building networks. This intellectual groundwork equipped women with understandings that would carry them beyond the immediate suffrage struggle to the broader social and political concerns of the new century.

The intellectual and literary groups in all their diversity gain cohesion and meaning when they are viewed as parts of a greater striving. In their work can be found the intellectual roots of Australian feminism.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### HIGHER PURPOSES AND HARSH REALITIES

Between the well-known and documented suffrage groups and the hitherto lost and unrecorded literary groups lay an array of other types of women's associations, each formed to serve a specified purpose and achieve defined goals. These can be grouped loosely into two types. The only organisations for women that were universally legitimised at the close of the nineteenth century were those that were consistent with the Victorian notions of woman as 'the angel in the house'<sup>1</sup>: religious groups, charitable bodies and so on. If women's associations were concerned with good works then they were acceptable to the dominant culture, and endorsed to take a limited role in the public sphere. However even the groups formed by religious organisations or for charitable or benevolent purposes can be seen as contributing to the development of feminism. They tended to meet and operate in the public sphere and were (mostly) exclusively female. Moreover, like the groups established for intellectual pursuits, they also gave women a cerebral space to reflect on their shared experiences and to develop their skills as speakers and participants in the public sphere.

The other women's associations were those dedicated to meeting the needs of working women. These groups had less legitimacy in the eyes of the broader society. Associations of women that focused on their working lives breached twin conventions of Victorian notions of womanliness: that women should not engage in paid labour and that women's place should be in the home, their concerns strictly those of family. However these ideals never matched the reality of women's lives. The link between trade unions and politics has always been overt and this was true too of the women's unions. It is not surprising then to find

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<sup>1</sup> Coventry Patmore believed his wife Emily was the perfect Victorian wife and wrote 'The Angel in the House' about her:

*Man must be pleased; but him to please  
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf  
Of his condescended necessities  
She casts her best, she flings herself.*

(Originally published in 1854, revised through 1862). Virginia Woolf's 1931 observation that 'Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer,' demonstrated the enduring potency of the Victorian ideal ('Professions for Women,' *Women and Writing* (Harvest Books, 1980), pp.57-63).

membership of these groups was often duplicated in the suffrage organisations that are described in Chapter Six.

## I. Benevolent and Philanthropic Societies, Religious Groups and Charities

As happened with some of the intellectual groups, several of the benevolent and religious groups began with socially approved, innocuous purposes and gradually expanded their objectives, thereby becoming far more subversive and challenging. An obvious and well-known example of this process is the diverse activity of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The most extensive women's organisation in Australia, as it was in other countries, the WCTU's watchwords were 'Agitate - Educate - Legislate.' The crusade against alcohol was a protest by women, in part, against their lack of civil rights.<sup>2</sup> When it was formed in the United States in 1873, women could not vote. Most local political meetings were held in saloons from which women were excluded. Women could not have control of their property or custody of their children in case of divorce. There were no legal protections for women and children, prosecutions for rape were rare, and the state-regulated age of consent was as low as seven.

In 1879, Frances Willard became president of the WCTU and began using political tactics in addition to moral persuasion to achieve total abstinence. The WCTU actively sought to train women to think on their feet, speak in public, and run an organisation. Willard's personal motto was 'do everything.' The WCTU adopted this as a policy which was understood to mean that all reform was inter-connected and that social problems could not be separated. The use of alcohol and other drugs was a symptom of the larger problems in society. By 1894 in the US, in the 'Home Protection' departments the WCTU was endorsing women's suffrage. By 1896, 25 of the 39 departments of the WCTU were dealing with non-temperance issues. In Australia the WCTU's focus on suffrage began even earlier, suggesting that the traffic in ideas between Australia and the larger developed nations was not all one way.

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<sup>2</sup> WCTU website, <http://www.wctu.org/history.html>.

The first WCTU world missionary, Mary Leavitt, came to Australia to form branches in 1885. A second world missionary, Jessie Ackermann, revitalised the WCTU on her visit in 1892. The WCTU was the first national women's organisation in Australia, with hundreds of widespread branches – many in small towns – and thousands of members. Even Tasmania had 21 branches in the 1890s.

WCTU members were middle- and lower-middle-class women belonging to Christian churches, usually respectable married women with children. They stressed womanly virtues at all times. Although they acknowledged that 'to every true woman the dearest spot on earth is Home Sweet Home,' they believed they had a Christian duty to work in the public domain for social reform. They were told that 'none had the right to be a modest violet.'<sup>3</sup>

The primary aim of the WCTU was temperance, as a means to achieve moral reform of society. The WCTU did not promote women's rights *per se*, rather, women's suffrage was regarded as a means to an end: liquor prohibition. They hoped to sway political influence to acknowledge their demands, leading to a more compassionate and moral society that would adequately protect helpless women and children.

Their area of interest was wide,<sup>4</sup> but the suffrage campaign dominated the 1890s with public meetings, literature distribution and petitions to the colonial Parliaments. The WCTU Franchise Leagues are discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

Despite a platform of concern for working families and the social conditions of women, membership of the WCTU was largely middle-class. The aims of the organisation were conservative: as Gail Reekie observed in her article about Western Australian suffragists,

the members believed women to be the 'civilising' influence in society and the home the centre of the moral universe ... Although its aims had always been the emancipation, protection and the welfare of women, it saw

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<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian 'Significant women' website, <http://www.women.tas.gov.au/significantwomen/search/wctu.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Members gave temperance lectures to large audiences; circulated suffrage petitions and petitions against opium trade; agitated to close bars on Sunday; campaigned for unfermented wine to be used at communion, age of consent to be raised, and school temperance education. The WCTU was also a founding member (1888) of the National Council for Women (Frances Willard was its first president) and the International Council of Women in 1893.

emancipation purely in the enabling of women to carry out their moral duty towards the society.<sup>5</sup>

The WCTU was an example of that most conservative of women's groups: campaigning on a moralistic, religious platform, and extending that platform to embrace suffrage only as a means to enhance women's access to the public sphere so that they might spread womanly virtue more expansively in the wider society. This woman-centredness though – however conservative the interpretation of womanliness and women's role – contained seeds of second wave feminism and its emphasis on and celebration of women's intrinsic difference.

The WCTU has been comprehensively researched and documented, including its Australian connections, and requires little further examination here.<sup>6</sup> Its significance for this argument is its demonstration that women could speak in public, run an organisation efficiently, maintain international links, and put forward views that challenged authority. Like other religious, charitable or benevolent groups formed for a purpose sanctioned by the wider society the WCTU had another layer of significance: as a female enclave where women developed the tools to mount challenges in the public sphere.

In the religious and charitable organisations in the Australian colonies at the time can be found many of the women who were also members of intellectual, suffrage or other groups. This is partly attributable to class: middle-class women had more leisure time to devote to causes and more resources to donate. However it is also likely that the women understood the intrinsic rewards of belonging to a women's group. The beneficiaries of their benevolence were always, on one level, themselves, because the act of organising for their stated purpose had given them further opportunity to associate, and that delivered additional opportunities to consort with other women and develop their skills and expand their space in the public domain.

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<sup>5</sup> Gail Reekie, 'With Ready Hands and New Brooms ...,' *Hecate*, Vol.7, No.1 (1981), p.29.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Patricia Grimshaw, 'Colonising Motherhood: evangelical social reformers and Koorie women in Victoria Australia, 1880s to early 1900s,' in *Women's History Review*, Vol.8, No.2; Anthea Hyslop in *Women, Faith and Fetes: essays in the history of women and the Church in Australia*, ed. Sabine Willis (Melbourne: Dove Communications, 1977); Anthea Hyslop, 'Temperance, Christianity and Feminism: The WCTU of Victoria, 1887-1897,' *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol.17, No.66 (April 1976), pp.27-49.

For example, in Victoria in 1891, Annette Bear established the Vigilant Society to raise the age of consent from fourteen. Her efforts enabled her to attract supporters and establish networks of women who later supported her suffrage work. The obverse of this example is the Women's Labour Bureau, formed in 1915 by Vida Goldstein and Adela Pankhurst in their capacity as members of the Women's Political Association, who took to a benevolent organisation their experience and allegiances earned from their suffrage work. They opened the Women's Labour Bureau to register unemployed women and coordinate assistance for them. Funds were sought from the government for a proposal to train unskilled women and provide work and relief for unemployed women. In addition the Women's Labour Bureau provided hot lunches and organised lectures on parenting and domestic economy.

The organisers of the Women's Labour Bureau maintained the ideology that charity was unhelpful, and this threw them into conflict with the long-established Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society. The Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society had been formed as early as 1847. Funded by contributions from colonial and municipal governments and donations from private individuals, in the absence of state-based welfare the Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society had become the primary source of relief for the poor in Victoria.<sup>7</sup> The committee of the Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society was made up of the wives and daughters of Melbourne's prominent men: the lawyers, the clergy, the doctors and businessmen. These were women whose position in society reassured them that they were morally unassailable. Their charity was delivered only to recipients deemed worthy according to criteria that assessed morality before means, and it was often distributed in a less than benevolent fashion:

One widow and her nine-year-old son were told by [M]LBS members that one loaf of bread ought to last a week ... unemployed women vowed to starve rather than apply to the LBS again. They were 'humiliated and

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<sup>7</sup> The original aim of the Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society had been to provide support to the aged and ill. They provided food vouchers rather than cash handouts, and strictly monitored and restricted the purchases that could be made.

shamed when the 'ladies' opened drawers and cupboards to find some little not needed article, then said they weren't 'deserving poor.'<sup>8</sup>

Eventually the limited government support for the Women's Labour Bureau was withdrawn with a promise that it would create its own similar bureau for women. However, this task was delegated to the Ladies' Benevolent Society who simply offered charity handouts.

The Women's Labour Bureau had been an innovative exercise in benevolence. The work of the Bureau dismissed the traditional notion of dispensing charity to those in need, replacing it with a constructive vision of enabling the poor to help themselves. The women organising the Bureau not only changed the traditional perception of the role of women in benevolent efforts; the Labour Bureau also reinforced a developing acceptance of the rights of women to employment.

Sometimes the nature of the individual woman leading an organisation was sufficiently extraordinary to change the public perception of what capacities women in general may have. The redoubtable Selina Sutherland established many benevolent societies including the renowned Presbyterian Neglected Children's Aid Society, in November 1894. In 1888 Selina Sutherland had been appointed Victoria's first licensed child rescuer and was a major figure in Melbourne charity circles. She ran into conflict with the long established Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society during the depression years of the 1890s. The old Ladies' Benevolent Society had few resources to cope with the scale of extreme despair experienced by so many of Melbourne's poor at that time. Selina was impolitely vocal about their inadequate response.

Many of Selina Sutherland's early efforts were conducted under the auspices of the Scots' Church. The Presbyterian Neglected Children's Aid Society was an effort to carry out the work 'on broader lines than its connection with the Scots' church society permitted,'<sup>9</sup> but antagonism developed between the Society and the Scots' Church. A personal attack on

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<sup>8</sup> Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.15.

<sup>9</sup> Shurlee Swain, 'Selina Sutherland: Child Rescuer,' in *Double Time: Women in Victoria - 150 Years*, ed. Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1985), p.110.

Selina Sutherland by the Church drew a fiery response from her in which she accused men holding office in the Church of earning rent from brothels and resigned forthwith.

With her loyal supporters Selina Sutherland promptly established the Victorian Neglected Children's Aid Society, a non-denominational group that picked up the work of the Presbyterian society unencumbered by the supervision of the (male) church elders. The Society flourished, funded completely by public subscriptions, and was able to purchase property to establish a permanent home for the children who could not be fostered. It also published a journal, *From Dark to Dawn*.

Selina Sutherland was a controversial and pugnacious character with little patience for Victorian-era niceties. Her work under the auspices of her societies managed to provoke and alienate the doyennes of Melbourne philanthropy in the Ladies' Benevolent Society as well as the respected elders of the Presbyterian Church. This was partly due to her confrontational approach but also because of her belief that it was the unrestrained sexual appetites of men that were to blame for the tragedies of unmarried mothers and neglected children.

Similar 'social purity' agendas can be found in women's groups in other colonies, notably South Australia and Tasmania. In South Australia the Social Purity Society, formed in 1883, was initiated and presided over by men: founded by Reverend Joseph Coles Kirby and chaired by the former Premier of South Australia John Colton. An auxiliary women's committee was formed drawn from the membership of the existing Female Refuge Committee which included Mary Colton and Mary Lee. The primary objective of the Social Purity Society was to raise the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen years of age. After their success in 1885, the men dissolved the society but the women's group continued to meet. They enlarged their focus to include other women's rights and welfare issues and in 1888 decided that women needed the vote if they were to effect any of the reforms they sought. The Woman Suffrage League was subsequently constituted on 21 July.

The Ladies' Social Purity Society, as it was also known, became the kind of training ground in feminist consciousness and political strategy identified in the work of the intellectual women's groups in other colonies/states. The Society met regularly and traded

correspondence with like-minded groups in other parts of Australia and New Zealand. They disseminated literature, collected subscriptions and petitions, 'developing skills which were to become essential in the later suffrage campaign.'<sup>10</sup>

The later efforts of the Social Purity Society reveal a rare tangible illustration of the development of the women's feminist consciousness. Having successfully raised the age of consent, the work of the society retained a focus on social purity matters both locally and internationally. In 1888 more than 2000 women were persuaded to sign a petition appealing against the Contagious Diseases Act and its operation in India. Helen Jones recounts how the Adelaide women were 'appalled to learn that some members of the English Parliament had continued to defend the Acts and resisted their abolition.'<sup>11</sup> At the next meeting of the Social Purity Society Mary Lee posed the question:

If women had the suffrage, would men, who promulgate and defend such laws, be elected to make the laws which women and children should obey?  
There can only be one reply, and that is emphatically 'No!'

Mary Lee then put three propositions to the meeting:

1. That the moral, social and industrial interests of women would be advanced by women's political enfranchisement.
2. That, as the ultimate aim of this Society is the moral elevation of women, the Social Purity Society stands pledged to support all efforts likely to assist this aim. Hence it is resolved
3. That this committee, in the name of the Society, pledges itself to advance and support the cause of woman suffrage in this colony.<sup>12</sup>

The resolution was unanimously carried. The Society then sought advice from the founder of their association, Reverend Kirby who arranged an informal meeting for 'friends of this cause.' At a second formal public meeting, the Woman Suffrage League was born.

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<sup>10</sup> Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: a history of women in South Australia from 1836, including the story of women's suffrage* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 1994), p.27.

<sup>11</sup> Jones, *In Her Own Name*, p.133.

<sup>12</sup> Jones, *In Her Own Name*, p.133.

The concern of the Social Purity women for the plight of other women and girls who were being forced into state-condoned prostitution led them to reflect on the sources of power and strategies for reform in their society. The understanding that the vote was a necessary tool dawned with the correlative feminist understanding that men in power could not be relied upon to protect the interests of women and children.

In Tasmania the Women's Sanitary Association, formed in 1891, was one of Emily Dobson's projects. The women addressed the task of teaching the women of Hobart about good hygiene by dividing Hobart into areas, allocating a member to each area, and visiting every home.<sup>13</sup> The association strode into the public domain, lobbying local governments for sanitary reforms. A petition of over 5 700 signatures concerning metropolitan drainage was presented to parliament in 1891.

Though apparently un-gendered, the issue of sanitation nevertheless became the reason for women to associate in a space that was removed from the private domain with all its constraints and distractions. Many of the women who joined the Association developed skills that they employed in other organisations for other campaigns. Like the Social Purity Society in South Australia, the Women's Sanitary Association performed the 'training ground' function that can be seen as the implicit yet significant task of other associations of women at the time.

In New South Wales the benevolent groups had a slightly different character. There was little emphasis on the 'social purity' issues addressed in other colonies. Rather, the NSW groups tended to see the extension of education to disadvantaged women as the major issue to be tackled.

In 1891 the Sydney University Women's Society was established to help the disadvantaged youth of Sydney. Helen Phillips, the first tutor to women students, tutor to Lady Jersey, the Governor's wife, and previously the headmistress of the Clergy Daughters' School, formed

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<sup>13</sup> Vicki Pearce, 'A few viragos on a stump' The Womanhood Suffrage Campaign in Tasmania, 1880-1920' in *Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings*, December 1985, Vol. 32, No. 4.

the society. It was based on her experience of the philanthropy of students at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Her brother was head of the St John's College (Cambridge) University Settlement in South-East London. Her philosophy was that students sufficiently privileged to be receiving a university education owed a commitment to improving the social order. Supported by Lady Jersey, the society's objective was to 'help anyone requiring and deserving help, as far as lies in the power of the Society.'<sup>14</sup>

All women members of the University could be members for a fee of 1shilling and sixpence per term. Honorary members could be admitted by a general meeting. The first President was Lady Manning, and Vice-Presidents were Mrs C.B. Fairfax, Mrs MacCallum, Mrs Renwick, Mrs Wilson, Mrs Gurney and Miss Phillips. A committee of 12 was to be elected annually and consist of six undergraduates and up to six graduates. The general meeting in 1891 set the agenda for the Society: the focus of attention was to be 'Visiting at Prince Alfred Hospital, Children's Hospital of the Holy Child at Lewisham, Newington Asylum for the Infirm and Destitute at Parramatta, Working Lads' Institute at Woolloomooloo, Night School for Girls at Millers Point.'<sup>15</sup> Maybanke Wolstoneholme and Lady Edgeworth David became Vice-Presidents in 1892, along with Lady Windeyer, Louisa Macdonald and Mrs MacCallum.

In 1892 evening classes for underprivileged girls began under the supervision of Jane Foss Russell. These became known as 'Girls' Clubs' and were an important focus of the work of the Women's Society. Both graduate and undergraduate members took part in the care and tutelage of the girls. By 1893 Louisa Macdonald was also involved, bringing her experience as a member of the committee of a club for girls in Soho in London, and as one of a group of women who gave evening lectures in boarding schools in London. She recorded the difficulties of discipline and accommodation for the Girls' Club:

The University women workers arranged to hire a room and to open the club certain nights a week, a pair of workers being responsible each night

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<sup>14</sup> Clifford Turney, Ursula Bygott and Peter Chippendale, *Australia's First: A History of the University of Sydney Volume 1 1850-1939* (Sydney: University of Sydney with Hale and Iremonger, 1991), p318.

<sup>15</sup> Turney, et.al., *Australia's First*, p.318.

for the management. But the lack of continuity naturally did not tend to discipline, and to keep order was a never-ending struggle. A very short experience of our club as tenants generally caused the landlord to cut our tenure short. To this day I recall the bitter disappointment when a policeman in whose house we had rented a room – hopeful that the mere name of the law would fill our girl members with wholesome awe – gave us notice, ‘as it was more than his job was worth to harbour such a rowdy crew’!<sup>16</sup>

The outbreak of plague around the foreshore in the late 1890s made it unsafe for the students to go to the club at Woolloomooloo, so instead the girls were invited to the Women’s College on Saturdays, and transported there and back on bicycle.

The Women’s Society and Girls’ Clubs survived into the twentieth century. In 1910 the name was changed to the Sydney University Women’s Settlement: a recognition of the settlement work in England on which the society was modelled.

Another organisation with a British precedent was the Working and Factory Girls’ Club, which, under the patronage of the Governor and Lady Duff, provided many services for the young working women of Sydney, including establishing a Home for them in 1894.<sup>17</sup> The Club was instituted for ‘furthering the well-being of working and factory girls,’<sup>18</sup> and for several years in the 1890s it fulfilled this function, albeit with a motivation born of privileged, leisured philanthropy and religious obeisance. This kind of philanthropy was modelled on the examples from London.<sup>19</sup>

The organisation consisted of a Council (of men), and a Committee (of women). Membership of Council and Committee in the years of the Club’s existence, and those on subscriptions and donations lists, include names familiar for their familial ties (Miss Duff,

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<sup>16</sup> Turney, et.al., *Australia’s First*, p319

<sup>17</sup> Papers of the Working and Factory Girls’ Club held at Mitchell Library in the Windeyer Collection.

<sup>18</sup> Preamble, Rules of the Working and Factory Girls’ Club. No author, no date (c. 1893?).

<sup>19</sup> Beaumont and Hole record that Louisa Macdonald had worked on a similar venture in Soho; Janice Beaumont and Vere Hole, *Letters from Louisa: A woman’s view of the 1890s, based on the letters of Louisa Macdonald first principal of the Women’s College, University of Sydney* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p.9.

Miss Darley, and Mrs Sulman, wife of the professor of architecture at the University of Sydney who designed the Women's College building) and others familiar for their participation in other groups dedicated to women's causes (Miss Louisa Macdonald, Mrs Gullett, Miss Georgina Edwards, the Misses Windeyer).

The Report for 1894 indicates that the objectives of the Club were to provide services for young women, creating an Institution which

provides a home and temporary shelter for friendless and homeless girls, medical aid and food in times of sickness, instruction in our most holy religion, in plain sewing, dressmaking and cooking, inculcates methods of self-help and thrift, shields the weak in times of danger and temptation, [and which] desires the support of every member of the community.<sup>20</sup>

The need for such an institution must have been discerned and discussed by the women who formed the various committees, and who chose to organise in this way rather than another. They aimed their Club at young, working-class, under-educated, under-privileged women at risk in the city, in an attempt to rescue them from potential physical and moral dangers.

Those who come under the influence of the Club who have never known a true home ... [are] stunted mentally, morally, and physically. They struggle on amid scenes of vice and misery, and against fearful odds. Into such lives as these the workers at the Club try to infuse a little joy and gladness.<sup>21</sup>

The patronising belief that these young women require the 'joy and gladness' that could be wrought by a titled lady of Sydney society, more than political rights and the meeting of financial and physical needs is probably typical of the mentality of the philanthropic middle-class and gentry who undertook the work of the Club. However, members of the Council and Committees overseeing the Club did make some attempt to legislate for improvement of the lives and working conditions of their clients. Louisa Macdonald was asked to join with

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<sup>20</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.3.

two of the men on the Council to draft a submission to the Upper House for a Bill to regulate the working conditions in factories, which was subsequently passed.

The Working and Factory Girls' Club established a Home providing cheap accommodation<sup>22</sup> for working girls, factory hands, new arrivals from England and other colonies and from the bush. In 1894, 229 women 'thankfully availed themselves of the Home ... and all speak with gratitude and pleasure of the cheering influence and help to be found there.'<sup>23</sup> By 1896 the Annual Report found that

The influence of the Working and Factory Girls' Club is now so far-reaching, and applications for admission are constantly received by the Secretary from young women in the neighbouring colonies, distant parts of the bush, and even from England, one and all bearing testimony to the kindly influence and help to be found within its walls. Fathers and mothers constantly bring their daughters to the Club and ask the Secretary to receive them as members, and when their influence fails, apply to her to aid them in their endeavours to shield their children from temptation and sin.<sup>24</sup>

The Home not only provided accommodation but training in domestic service, evening classes in plain sewing, dressmaking, musical drill and dumb-bell exercises, and religious instruction. The Friday night Mission Service (described as 'the most important feature of the work'<sup>25</sup>) was conducted by the Reverend A.R. Bartlett 'at great self-sacrifice.'<sup>26</sup> The report for 1894 piously observes that

Only those who undertake work of this kind know how difficult it is to reach and influence a class with no religious influence, and drawn from all parts, and 'without God in the world.'<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Prices ranged from 5/- to 12/- per week.

<sup>23</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> Report for the year ending July 1896, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.4.

<sup>27</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.4.

Other Club activities included cooking classes in ‘cheap cooking,’ meetings for the mothers of factory girls, Bible classes, and trips to the country sponsored by the Fresh Air League (this last was particularly appreciated by the tobacco factory girls ‘who suffer much from the fumes of the tobacco’). Amusements reported in the Annual Report included a ‘Bread and Butter Ball’ – a Ball in aid of the General Fund – a Harbour excursion and picnic, and prize nights (including prizes of prayer books for ‘the gentlest girl’). Women were encouraged to save through a sickness fund. Two doctors, a dentist and an ophthalmologist volunteered their services to the girls.

The Rules of the Club defined the fundamental methods governing its management:

1. Religious instruction held in connection with the Church of England.
2. Instructions in Needlework, Cookery and other domestic duties.
3. Providing a temporary shelter and home for the homeless and friendless girls.
4. Providing medical aid and food in time of sickness and distress to such persons, or such other persons as the Club may from time to time decide.
5. Affording means of recreation for such girls.
6. The establishment of a Registry Office for servants.
7. Providing a lending library for such girls of wholesome and useful literature.<sup>28</sup>

By 1897 demand for the services of the Home had diminished, ‘in consequence of the enormous competition among cheap lodging houses,’ but the attendance at Club activities and use of the Club premises remained strong:

The Club Room is open five nights a week ... no girl being allowed to be present unless she is clean and tidy in appearance. The conduct of the young women is admirable, and no difficulty is now ever experienced in

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<sup>28</sup> Rules of the Working and Factory Girls’ Club, undated, no author.

managing them. The nightly attendance ranges from 30 to 80, on special occasions as many as 300 being present.<sup>29</sup>

The observation that ‘no difficulty is *now* experienced’ in managing the girls is intriguing, implying that the clients had presented behavioural problems for the management in the past. Similarly, the Report for 1894 observes of the girls that ‘Their conduct is *now* excellent.’<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately no details of the misbehaviours are recorded, though the ladies responsible for leading the evening classes are singled out for especial thanks for taking charge of ‘certain classes.’<sup>31</sup>

A Women’s Branch was added to the work of the Club, catering chiefly to the mothers of the young girls, providing cheap fabric and sewing instruction, as well as the services of a trained maternity nurse.

Clearly the work of the Working and Factory Girls’ Club was inspired by religious devotion and notions of what is moral and right; in an aside in the Annual Report of 1894 it is noted that ‘only those guilty of misconduct are ever turned away from its doors.’ The Reports from 1896 onwards observe that

Girls once leading wild and reckless lives are now steady and respectable members of society; those who have married still keeping their connection with the Club, bringing their children with them.<sup>32</sup>

The Working and Factory Girls’ Club can hardly be set up as an example of either an intellectual group (although they did conduct readings at dinner time, and they did establish a lending library), or a consciously feminist organisation. It is nevertheless one of the earlier examples of a group consciously established for the purpose of providing a place in the public sphere aimed exclusively at meeting the needs of women. Its function went beyond

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<sup>29</sup> Report for the year ending June 1897, Working and Factory Girls’ Club.

<sup>30</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls’ Club (my italics).

<sup>31</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls’ Club.

<sup>32</sup> Report for the year ending June 1896, Working and Factory Girls’ Club, p.3.

simple provision of accommodation to an attempt to engage the women in activities and projects that would expand their horizons and career opportunities.

An economic motivation for the Club, which may have been unintended, nevertheless became evident in the reports after a few years. The number of girls trained and placed in domestic service was regularly reported, and may have been of particular interest to the audience of these reports – the gentry and wealthy Sydneysiders who held office or made contributions to the Club – who would also have been the main market for domestic workers.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, by 1897 the Report observed that

Factory masters and employers of labour frequently acknowledge [the Club's] good influences on their employees, and frequently apply for girls to work in their factories and workshops.<sup>34</sup>

This suggests that the merchant and business class of Sydney also had a vested interest in a Club that trained cheap labour for their factories.

While the smug and self-congratulatory tone of the annual reports is painful to read, the Club is another example of gentry meeting a need in an energetic way.<sup>35</sup> They describe their own mission as

a truly noble one [which] brings its own reward to those who undertake it, however humble their part may be, in endeavouring to guide and direct those, who, by reason of their surroundings, sorely need a helping hand. In

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<sup>33</sup> This recalls the objection Louisa Macdonald put vociferously to Rose Scott, objecting to an NCW committee suggestion that domestic subjects such as cooking and sewing be made compulsory in all schools: 'Don't you see, you who would help forward women's work and education and lessen her disabilities, that the one idea of the ladies at your drawing room meetings is to get good servants cheap. And they are certainly going one way to do it by having every woman trained compulsorily to one trade.' In both cases the suspicion must be that the altruism and philanthropy of the middle-class ladies could easily be re-cast as self-interest.

<sup>34</sup> Report for the year ending June 1897, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.3.

<sup>35</sup> Office holders included His Excellency the Governor and Lady Duff, and later, the Viscountess Hampden as Patrons, and Presidents were His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Frederick and Lady Darley. Among the Council and Committee were listed several Members of the Legislative Council (including the Hon. W.R. Campbell and the Hon. R.H.D. White); the Lady Mayoress held the Vice Presidents office for several terms, and His Hon. Mr Justice Stephen was the Hon. Treasurer.

all our work in such a cause as this, we may rest assured that it meets with Divine approval, and is accepted as personal service done for Him.<sup>36</sup>

No doubt the efforts of the office holders were made in their own terms and with their own notions of what was right for their clients (arrived at without consultation, naturally); nevertheless, preventing these girls from resorting to prostitution or vagrancy was a worthy achievement.<sup>37</sup> Gentry were effective at attracting the financial support of the merchant/business class.<sup>38</sup> So apparently willing was Sydney society to believe that the English gentry were a better class of human being, they accepted enthusiastically their choices of approach, priorities, and sense of what was right, moral and worthy, and responded generously with donations of time, money and support. The Report each year lists the 'Special Thanks' acknowledgements, including, for example, those given to

Mr Arnott for 36 Christmas Cakes; The Directors of the Fresh Food and Ice Company; Paling and Co for lending piano on two occasions; and Mr Albert Nathan, public accountant, for auditing the accounts.<sup>39</sup>

The Working and Factory Girls' Club did address itself to the physical and material needs of its membership, although its main motivation was concern for the spiritual needs. Even with this agenda though, the Club met these needs in an environment peopled almost exclusively by women who recognised girls' need for space in which they could live, enjoy recreation, receive instruction and some vocational training, and share the experience of being young working women far from home in a big city.

A society with an explicitly religious rather than intellectual or political motivation was the Girls' Friendly Society, formed in Sydney in 1897. Few records remain, but the object of the society has been preserved:

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<sup>36</sup> Report for the year ending June 1894, Working and Factory Girls' Club, p.7.

<sup>37</sup> It is an unfortunate irony that the term 'working girl' has come to be applied to prostitutes, when the main, unspoken objective of this Working Girls' Club was to prevent the members from resorting to prostitution.

<sup>38</sup> The Report for 1894 'tenders its grateful thanks for the generous sympathy and liberal donations' from 'the leading merchants and traders of the city,' p.3.

<sup>39</sup> Report, Working and Factory Girls' Club, undated.

to unite for the Glory of God, in one fellowship of prayer and service, the girls and women of the Empire, to uphold purity in thought, word and deed.<sup>40</sup>

The main work was the attempt to rescue from prostitution girls who had failed to find respectable employment.

According to the Report of the Girls' Friendly Society, published in 1925, only women of virtuous character who were members of the Church of England could gain entrance to the Society. Rose Scott was a worker for the cause, and her aunt, Rose Selwyn, founded a Newcastle branch. The Society became an affiliate of the National Council of Women.

Perhaps the most eccentric of the clubs from the period was also formed in Sydney. The inaugural meeting of the Optimists' Club of NSW was held in response to an invitation from Matilda Curnow to meet at the Sydney Town Hall on April 30, 1909:

Seeing the success that has attended the formation of Optimists' Clubs in America and recognising the value of cheerfulness as a factor in human happiness, I have decided to organise a similar movement here.

'The Optimists' Club of New South Wales' will have for its objects the banding together of those who think alike on this important subject, and the spread of literature bearing thereon.

We invite everyone who can smile in the face of trouble to join, and to pass the smiles along, as smiles oil life's wheels.<sup>41</sup>

Some familiar names featured among the executive (Annie Wilson, who was also Honorary Secretary of the Women's Club; Mrs Hugh Dixon, also on the executive of the National Council of Women, was Vice-President) and in the audience (Miss Louisa Macdonald). Mrs

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<sup>40</sup> Report of the Girls' Friendly Society in New South Wales 1925 (Sydney: D.S. Ford, 1925).

<sup>41</sup> M. S. Curnow, frontispiece, *The Optimists' Club of New South Wales*, pamphlet (April 1909). Papers of the Optimists' Club are held at Mitchell Library.

Curnow proclaimed to them 'I have always thought that women's work should resemble the silent compass which guides the ship. But there are occasions when she can do good more conspicuously.'<sup>42</sup>

Three subsequent meetings were held and membership steadily increased. An *Optimists' Annual* was published and branches formed in country regions including Coonamble and Maitland.

The Club was based on an American model, the Optimist Club of America, whose membership was exclusively male, and included such luminaries as President Roosevelt on its Executive Committee. The American version boasted clubs in every state, each headed by the State's Governor. The 'Cult of Cheerfulness,' or the philosophy of the Optimists was enshrined in a series of aphorisms, such as:

A friend is a live asset; an enemy is an ever-present liability.

The man who borrows trouble will never lend smiles.

A kind word to a tired life is like a drop of dew to a wilting flower.<sup>43</sup>

Astonishingly, the President of the NSW Club, Lady Poore, claimed to find inspiration in these dictums, and addressed the inaugural meeting thus:

After reading the principles, resolutions and axioms formulated by the American Optimists' Club, there seems hardly anything left to say on the subject of optimism. But they gave one food for reflection.<sup>44</sup>

She proceeded to lecture the educated and affluent audience on the ease of being an optimist if one 'has ten thousand pounds a year, perfect health, and no skeleton either inside or outside the family cupboard,'

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<sup>42</sup> No author, 'Lady Poore's Address,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), p.6.

<sup>43</sup> No author 'The Cult of Cheerfulness,' The Optimists' Club of New South Wales, pamphlet (April 1909).

<sup>44</sup> No author, 'Lady Poore's Address,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), p.6.

At the next meeting of the Club (on 6 September 1909, from which scores of potential Optimists had to be turned away) the charming Lady Poore self-deprecatingly introduced the illustrious guest speaker, Mr George Reid, Premier of New South Wales:

He is, perhaps, the best-known man in Australia, while I represent an article of British or Home manufacture, imported for temporary use.<sup>45</sup>

Mr Reid took a pragmatic view of the function of the Club:

I would think this Club a very useless sort of thing if it were only designed for the purpose of gathering together a number of people of a gay and sanguine disposition to congratulate themselves that they are gay and sanguine. I have joined the club for this reason, that every optimist ought to be a missionary to the pessimist world ...<sup>46</sup>

His speech proceeded with many American-style aphorisms extolling the worthiness of an optimistic outlook.

At the third meeting of the Club (also its first anniversary) on 26 April 1910, Lady Poore entreated the membership to donate to the worthy cause of sending literature to the bush. Donations of books rather than cash were sought from the audience on the grounds that

whether they thought imagination in this country needed curbing or developing, she was sure they would all agree that books were wanted for the bush.<sup>47</sup>

Miss Leontine Cooper (a prominent suffragist from Brisbane) and Matilda Curnow also spoke at this assembly.

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<sup>45</sup> No author, 'Sir George Reid on Optimism,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), p.11.

<sup>46</sup> No author, 'Sir George Reid on Optimism,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), p.11.

<sup>47</sup> No author, 'Lady Poore and Books for the Bush,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), p.14.

On 16 August 1910 an unusually reflective Lady Poore spoke at the formation of the Manly branch:

I often wonder whether it is harder for a man or a woman to be an optimist. The man has the grave responsibility of the breadwinner, but is the responsibility of the bread-dispenser lighter than his? In every man's life there must be more than one crisis, but many a woman lives haunted by some anxiety for years together.<sup>48</sup>

Press reports of the formation and progress of the Club were focused on the gender of its membership and the influence of gender on a predisposition to optimism. 'Sunshiny Women' was the saccharine headline of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* account of the first meeting; 'Cassandra Should Have Been a Man' ran the *Daily Telegraph's* version (which, interestingly, included the aside 'What! Another new society?' underlining the commonality of like ventures), asserting that 'a deep and subtle psychological cause exists for the hopefulness and faith of women.'<sup>49</sup> Other reports on the Club were published in the *Sydney Mail*, *Australian Star*, and the *Sydney Stock and Station Journal*.

*The Optimists' Annual* appears to have been a once only effort. It included accounts of each meeting, transcripts of the addresses delivered, press clippings, articles from international writers (G.K. Chesterton) and journals (*The Atlantic Monthly*) and endless aphorisms and exhortations to optimism.

The Optimists were apparently unable to surmount the events of 1914 (Sir George Reid had indeed been prescient with his 1909 observation that Lady Poore 'must indeed be an optimist in joining this club when Germany is building so many Dreadnoughts,<sup>50</sup>'), as there is no further evidence of their activities. The optimism theme was later picked up again, this time in the middle of war, in South Australia, during World War One. The 'Cheer-Up Society' bestowed food, entertainment and friendship on servicemen stationed in or near Adelaide.

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<sup>48</sup> No author, 'Optimists in Manly,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), p.17.

<sup>49</sup> No author, 'Some Views on Optimism,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), pp.26-27.

<sup>50</sup> No author, 'Sir George Reid on Optimism,' *Optimists' Annual* (1911), p.11.

The brief flowering of optimism among the women of Sydney was an unusual manifestation of the phenomenon of association. While it adds to the body of evidence of women organising in the public sphere in a formal way to draw attention to their own agendas, gain solidarity in meeting with like-minded women and develop their skills at functioning in the public arena, it chose a particular and somewhat peculiar focus. One of the easy criticisms commonly thrown at the women's groups was that their objectives and efforts were 'trivial,' and in the case of the Optimists it is a charge more difficult to defend. The tone and objectives of the society were not at all feminist; indeed the group celebrated 'womanly attributes' of charity and cheerfulness. Furthermore, their efforts were to do good for the community at large (by spreading good cheer) rather than bring benefit to themselves or particular groups of disadvantaged women.

That the group attracted the support of important figures in the society (like George Reid) and garnered significant media attention is interesting too. It is tempting to regard the interest shown in the Optimists by the mainstream press as tacit approval of this most innocuous and un-subversive association of women. The groups with more assertively feminist agendas would be derided or ignored, but this one was safe to acknowledge and applaud.

Even when an organisation of women was deemed to be worthy or appropriate by the dominant culture, such as was more often the case with the religious, charitable, benevolent and philanthropic groups, the women involved were consciously and unconsciously embarking on a covert and subversive agenda. The existence of such socially approved groups helped to expand the space for women in the public sphere, which was stretched even further to accommodate groups and associations formed to support the growing cohort of working women.

## II. Trade Union and Work Associations

Even in the intellectual groups that were dominated by ladies of leisure existed women who worked for a living. Maybanke Wolstoneholme in NSW, for example, had sufficient energy to maintain a career (as principal of her own private girls' school) as well as participate in numerous literary and suffrage groups. It is not surprising to see her participation recorded in one of the associations of working women discussed below.

The records for many of these groups are slender. Some of them did not survive for very long. Others were overtaken by male-dominated unions or subsumed into other associations with broader agendas. A few have survived in one form or another to the present day. Like women's groups formed for other purposes, the trade union and working groups expanded the understanding of what a woman's place could be. Membership gave women a sense of the power of association and an opportunity to learn more skills of the public sphere in which they already played active roles as workers.

Many of the women's groups that focused on women's working lives were concerned with the hardships of women in the lowest-paid and least-skilled areas of the workforce. In December 1889, for example, a large public meeting was held in the Adelaide Town Hall to discuss the issue of sweated labour. Mary Lee spoke at the meeting to formally propose that female trade unions be formed in all branches of industry where sweating took place. This was a culmination of some years of preparatory work and agitation by women who had been organising to raise the profile of women's disadvantages in the workplace. The proposal was taken up by the United Trades and Labor Council and at a second meeting in January 1890 the Working Women's Trades Union was formed. Mary Lee became the first secretary, a position she held for two years. In 1893 she became Vice-President and delegate to the United Trades and Labor Council. Augusta Zadow was Treasurer and later became the first government-appointed female Inspector of Factories.

Networks across the main women's groups in South Australia in the period are clearly seen in the membership of the Working Women's Trades Union. A core of women who were prominent in this association was also active in the Women's Suffrage League, and many

were WCTU members as well. Mary Lee took the suffrage message to the male hierarchy of the United Trades and Labor Council, speaking as both secretary of Women's Suffrage League and vice-president of Working Women's Trades Union. Augusta Zadow spoke at both League and Temperance meetings, committing the support of the Working Women's Trades Union to the suffrage campaign.

In 1906 Catherine Spence spoke at a memorial service marking ten years since the death of Augusta Zadow, observing that women's trade unions still held a relatively weak position with fairly small memberships, and, asserting that fear and ignorance were to blame, suggested that the important thing for women was education:

The difficulty was to get women to pull together, and they did not see the benefits to be derived from unionism. Women were ignorant and this default was traded on by unscrupulous people. In order to frustrate such persons, women should learn as much as they could, and not be such nervous and timid individuals.<sup>51</sup>

An interesting example of a different kind of peril awaiting working women who did heed the call to organise is the Victorian Women's Political and Social Crusade. Formed in 1898 with the general aims of righting social, political and industrial wrongs, the organisation became the victim of the socialist ideology that spawned it. The particular focus of the Crusade was on sweated labour and low pay. When the founding group of Labor women met and wrote their constitution, the first aim set down was:

To secure to women political equality, economic justice, judicial equity, and the removal of all abuses that retard and prevent women attaining their full rights of citizenship, for taxation without citizenship is tyranny.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: A history of women in South Australia from 1836* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1994), p.270.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Patricia Grimshaw, "The "equals and comrades of men?": *Tosin* and the "woman question," in *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, ed. S. Magarey, S. Sheridan, and S. Rowley (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1993), p.105.

The socialist journal *Tosin* applauded this initiative by the women at first, reporting that the Crusade was to be ‘a body of women working for the general political and social welfare of the community.’<sup>53</sup> However, this approval was withdrawn when it became clear that the women intended a gender-specific focus to their efforts. Before the first general meeting was even held, objections had been raised concerning the impression that ‘the Crusade was merely for the benefit of women’ whereas its intentions should be ‘for general social and political work.’ The first general meeting presided over by Ada Turnbull was devoted to reframing their direction and re-writing the rules of the organisation.

Trades Hall Council then gave the organisation its blessing and allowed the women to rent a room for their meetings. *Tosin* reported approvingly again of the Crusade when it lobbied against a women’s suffrage bill which did not contain provisions supported by the radical labour men, describing the organisation as a ‘plucky, useful and vigilantly democratic society of women.’

The Women’s Political and Social Crusade was a most unusual manifestation of women’s association at the time. Like all the other groups they sought to pursue their agenda from a separate space of their own creation, and like many of the other groups they were motivated by a particular ideology or political position. Unlike any other group though, they appear to have allowed their male ‘supporters’ to dictate the objectives and work of the group. Their woman-centred agenda was hijacked for the service of the wider community and the socialist cause. Most of the other groups surveyed in this thesis were familiar with a degree of antipathy, derision, even obstruction from the male press and other social institutions expressing disquiet at the infringement of women on the public domain. But only the Women’s Political and Social Crusade can be seen overtly submitting to the efforts to control and divert their activity. In effect they were a women’s group who were not allowed to be focused on women and were insistently turned away from the consciousness-building feminist thought that happened in the other groups.

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<sup>53</sup> Grimshaw, ‘The “equals and comrades of men?”’ p.105.

Queensland women had a more successful experience of associating, albeit under the auspices of a larger male-dominated organisation. Formed in 1890 following a long period of preparation and development the Women's Union was a project of the Australian Labour Federation. May Jordan was the official organiser and was energetically supported by Emma Miller. The first formal meeting was held in September 1890. By the end of September, women from nine different occupations had joined the Union.

The Women's Union received funding from the Australian Labour Federation. The Eight Hours Association gave them free use of a room for meetings. Meetings were to be held at night to accommodate women's working days. A general meeting was held once a week to discuss 'matters relative to the union and of interest to women, not "sewing, dusting etc, but such subjects as education, marriage, etc."' <sup>54</sup> May Jordan opened the room from 12-2pm each day so that girls who were able to could 'rest, read and get a cup of tea.' A boarding house in a central city location for girls to run themselves was planned, but never eventuated.

Leontine Cooper was a strong critic of the Union on several grounds. She denounced male trade unions for refusing to admit women as members, making it necessary for such an amorphous entity as the Women's Union to exist. She believed that the strength of the Women's Union was diluted by being host to too many occupations and that each should have its own union representation. Finally she criticised the motivation of many of the young members who were less concerned with the policy side of the Union and more interested in the social activities. However she was prepared to publicly defend the right of the Unionists to strike as they did on at least one occasion. In 1891 she had a pro-suffrage article published in *The Dawn*, addressing working-class women and arguing that possession of the vote would 'raise women in their own eyes.' <sup>55</sup>

Ultimately the Women's Union was forced to disband under unemployment pressure caused by the depression which set in during 1891.

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<sup>54</sup> Jeanne Young, *Catherine Helen Spence: A Study and an Appreciation* (Melbourne: Lothian, 1937), p.48.

<sup>55</sup> Katie Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism, 1880-1914', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: HBJ, 1992), p.343.

Emma Miller was behind another association of working women in Queensland which focused on educating women in the workforce about politics. In 1903 Emma Miller 'rested' the Women's Equal Franchise Association (see Chapter Seven) and formed the Women Worker's Political Organisation. Practically the whole Women's Equal Franchise Association membership accompanied her into the new enterprise, whose platform was diametrically opposed to the anti-socialist Queensland Women's Electoral Union's programme (described in Chapter Seven).

Under Emma Miller's leadership the Women Worker's Political Organisation held a series of mock elections designed to educate women in voting and parliamentary procedure. Volunteers visited workplaces to hand out literature and talk to women. Members also attended meetings held by the Queensland Women's Electoral Union in order to disrupt them by asking provocative questions.

Victoria was home to other examples of women's working associations that were formed because of – or in spite of – male unions' obstruction or indifference. The Victorian Lady Teachers' Association, for example, was formed in 1884. Then, on 24 April 1886, the State Teachers' Union of Victoria was launched as a central state-wide union of teachers who belonged to either country associations or the Melbourne sectional associations that had been formed between 1884 and early 1886, including the Lady Teachers' Association. The idea of a central body to represent all the associations was derived from the success of the National Union of Teachers in England (established in 1870). About 50 percent of Victoria's teachers joined the State Teachers' Union.

The Lady Teachers' Association was bound to the Union by very loose ties, and members gave their loyalty to the Association rather than to the Union. In 1888-9 the Lady Teachers' Association and the Male Assistant Teachers' Association withdrew from the Union over policy differences.

When depression hit the colony in the 'nineties, a flood of harsh legislation seriously affected the position of all teachers. An amending Act in 1892 so reduced the number of classified

positions that a school of 1000 children might have only six assistant teachers, and 18 monitors or pupil teachers. The Re-Grading Act of 1895 increased the number of classes of teachers from five to eight. However the main issue for women teachers was the campaign for equal pay which reached a crescendo in the 1900s.

Clara Weekes was involved in the Victorian Lady Teachers' Association (VLTA) as Secretary and President over a period of more than twenty years and worked to improve the working conditions of women teachers. She commented upon women teachers' lack of promotion opportunities in 1900, as a witness to the Royal Commission hearings into Technical Education in Victoria. Clara explained to the Commission that most female teachers must have the position of Infant Mistresses to receive promotion. 'In certain schools the first female was given this position without any choice in the matter,' she told them. At the 1901 conference of the State Teachers' Union Clara asked:

'The male teachers are glad to get the lady teachers to join their associations. But what have they done for them?'... the men always took themselves as the standard and the point of reference, and did not recognise that some women found it difficult to see things from that vantage point.<sup>56</sup>

Clara joined other women's organisations such as the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society and later the Woman's Political Association. Vida Goldstein lent support to the campaign for equal pay for women teachers. Marilyn Lake reports that it was the activism of Clara and her sister Alice in the Victorian Lady Teachers' Association that was influential in linking feminism with industrial issues in ways not so apparent in campaigns in other colonies:

'When suffrage is granted to women,' proclaimed the annual report of the Victorian Lady Teachers' Association in 1898, 'the claims of the female teachers will receive greater consideration.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Judith Biddington, 'The Weekes Family' in *Not so Eminent Victorians*, ed. R.J.W. Selleck, and Martin Sullivan (Melbourne University Press: Melbourne, 1984), p.145.

<sup>57</sup> Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p.43.

In 1907 the Lady Teachers' Association reaffiliated with the State Teachers' Union. The equal pay campaign did not go away. In July 1913 a mass meeting of women's associations was held to discuss the equal pay issue. For female teachers the issue was very clear though their response strategy was not. In 1883 female teachers had received three-quarters of a man's salary for the same work. By 1913 female teachers received just half a man's salary, for more work. The Association decided to campaign for reinstatement of the three-quarters of male salaries they had held in the 1880s, drawing criticism from other equal pay campaigners including Vida Goldstein, who regarded it as a tactical mistake. (A third strategy was also put forward: that women should unite to campaign for a legal minimum wage for women rather than equal pay.) It was many years before female teachers achieved pay equity with men. A public service regulation stipulating that female teachers must resign when they married was still enforced in the 1960s.

The Lady Teachers' Association remains a very early example of women recognising that men could not or would not best represent their particular interests. In choosing association with one another as the means for publicly pursuing their agenda, these women also expanded their understanding of the importance of association by coordinating activities with other associations of women, to best achieve the mutual good.

A different case is the Victorian Trained Nurses' Association, established in 1901, which was an example of a group of women who were determinedly non-feminist. The stated role of the Association was to improve and protect nursing by registering trained nurses, to introduce a uniform curriculum of training and examination, to look after the welfare of nurses by establishing a benefit scheme and generally to promote the interests of nurses. But the effect of their association was less to advocate their rights as a professional organisation of women than to promote an image of nurses as women who were the Victorian archetype: selfless, dedicated, womanly and of unblemished character.

The inaugural meeting of the Victorian Trained Nurses' Association was held at the Melbourne Hospital on 19 April 1901 and the first Council was elected on 12 June 1901. The prefix 'Royal' was obtained by Royal Charter in 1904 from Edward VII. The Charter was sought at the suggestion of the first President of the Victorian Trained Nurses'

Association, Dr John William Springthorpe, after Queen Alexandra expressed interest in the work of nursing associations.

In a brief biography of nineteenth-century Melbourne nurse Marie Magill, Monica Mackay records that nurses had long rejected efforts by feminists and other social reformers to improve their shocking working conditions because they believed that the status of their profession derived from recognition of the 'responsibility and selfless dedication of its practitioners.' As *Una: Journal of Nursing* expressed in 1903:

When the professional feeling is absent, and the mercenary spirit only in evidence, truly the modern nurse is a very poor specimen of womanhood...<sup>58</sup>

When Vida Goldstein attempted to raise the issue of the long hours worked by nurses she was rebuked by Elizabeth Glover, founding member of the association:

we are professional women and work for the benefit of mankind not for twelve hours but twenty-four hours if the necessity arises.<sup>59</sup>

The nurses continued to resist efforts to improve their working conditions until well into the 1930s. The Association is a manifestation of the peculiarity of 'feminist anti-feminism': the female membership claimed public space for their association and a public voice for their agenda, yet strenuously resisted any action of representation that might cast them as other than perfectly womanly. More peculiarly, it was also a union dedicated to preserving the shocking and exploitative working conditions endured by its members.

A different kind of women's association focused on the travails of middle-class working women. The Women's Industrial Guild was formed in 1891 in NSW. The Guild was modelled on a British organisation, and acted as a kind of employment agency, aiming to 'assist gentlewomen in distressed circumstances by procuring them orders for work of

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<sup>58</sup> Cited in Monica Mackay, 'Marie Magill: Not Such a Brilliant Career,' in *Double Time*, Lake and Kelly (eds) p.138.

<sup>59</sup> Mackay, 'Marie Magill,' p.138.

various kinds.<sup>60</sup> In addition, from its premises in the Imperial Arcade, it sold women's produce, including eggs, cakes, needlework and flowers.

The Guild was to be run by volunteers, including a voluntary management, however this quickly led to financial difficulties. In 1894 Louisa Macdonald's companion, Evelyn Dickinson, took on the role of Treasurer. It became readily apparent what the source of the difficulties was:

[the] 'indigent gentlewomen' whose duties were to sell goods and hand over the money received to the Treasurer, and to pay the workers after deducting commission with money given for the purpose ... seem to keep no accounts; they pay over to Evelyn money as it occurs to them; they pay the workers out of any money they have whether it has been paid in or given out, then, when things go wrong and there is a deficit they wring their hands feebly, and declare 'they quite forgot.'<sup>61</sup>

Ultimately the Guild was formally wound up in 1894, with considerable debt to be discharged.

The Women's Co-operative Silk Growing and Industrial Association of NSW was an enterprising attempt to find an imaginative solution to the difficulty women had finding employment in the depression years of the 1890s. Formed in 1893, it was claimed as 'the first industrial organisation in the colony.'<sup>62</sup> Lady Darley was the President and Maybanke Wolstoneholme was one of its members. It became an affiliate of the National Council of Women.

The expertise for the venture lay with a woman named Miss Ottmann who was the governess in Lady Duff's household, and owned shares in the enterprise. However after she returned to England with Lady Duff when Sir Robert Duff died suddenly, the venture

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<sup>60</sup> Janice Beaumont and Vere Hole, *Letters from Louisa: A woman's view of the 1890s, based on the letters of Louisa Macdonald, first principal of the Women's College, University of Sydney* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1996), p.107.

<sup>61</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.108.

<sup>62</sup> Beaumont and Hole, *Letters from Louisa*, p.108.

withered. The Association was wound up in 1900, and the silk growing farm at Wyee was sold.

The Women's Co-operative Society of NSW was formed in 1911 with the intention of providing support and encouragement to business women. The objects and powers of the Society were to 'cover all matters of benefit or interest to women, with special reference to the following departments', which were then listed, and included residential, industrial, financial, educational and social dealings. Membership was explicitly restricted to women.

The Society imitated many similar establishments of men who sought social or commercial advantage from their membership of certain business-oriented organisations. Unlike the many male versions however, this society had – as its name implies – a co-operative rather than a competitive approach and intent.

Like the Women's Cooperative Society, the Queen's Club in Sydney copied a male example and was established in the tradition of the British Metropolitan Clubs which typically catered for men only, and provided a 'town house' which accommodated members on sojourns into the city. Accordingly, Rule One of the Queen's Club stated:

The name of the Club shall be the Queen's Club, and it shall be exclusively for social and non-political purposes, and with the object of providing accommodation from the funds of the Club for club members and their guests in the clubhouse and premises.<sup>63</sup>

The Club was founded in 1912 as a result of a meeting in 1911 at Condover, the home of Mrs Salusbury, for the purpose of founding a Ladies' Club. The meeting was presided over by Mrs Edward Knox, with Mrs Salusbury acting as Secretary. The founding members consisted of six more women, with Lady Barton installed as the first President. The Club was situated at 'The Towers' on the corner of Macquarie and King Streets. There were three male directors.

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<sup>63</sup> E.M. Tidesley, 'Foreword,' *A History of the Queen's Club* (Sydney: Halstead Press, 1969), p.v.

The Queen's Club represents a particular strain of women's clubs which drew inspiration almost solely from the traditional men's clubs established in Britain since 1693, and in Australia since 1838, for social purposes, with little significance in terms of intellectual, artistic, or professional pursuits. Indeed the only significant difference between this and the men's clubs seems to be its decision not to sell liquor on the premises, a resolve enforced for the first thirty-four years of its existence.

The Club hosted its first overnight guest on 25 January 1912, and maintained its residency at 'The Towers' for the next fifty years. While there is no evidence of any startling activity undertaken by the undoubtedly affluent membership, this is an interesting club for its mimicry of an all-male institution, affording women the place and opportunity and implicit right to stay away from home and family and husband for no other reason than recreation. This was a right that had been long assumed by wealthy men who used their membership of their club as a tool of social prestige or business advantage, and whose right to absent themselves from their homes was arrogated.

It is fallacious to regard women as an homogeneous group, though this has been a frequent assumption of historians and commentators in the past. Differences between individual women and groups of women can be traced to circumstances of class, race, religion, environment and more. The comparison of the women's associations that were dedicated to pursuing the particular issues of working women shows the range of different ideologies, approaches, and agendas of the women involved. However, like the intellectual and benevolent organisations previously described, the groups in all their variety nevertheless all contributed to the task of expanding the public consciousness of women's place in the changing world of the *fin-de-siecle*. Focussing on this as the really significant trait of women's groups, Chapter Six will revisit the remaining cluster of women's groups, which has already received a significant quota of attention from historians of the period: the suffrage and political groups.

## POLITICAL AND SUFFRAGE GROUPS

### I

*'Home is the centre of our sphere, but not its circumference'*

The groups devoted to winning the vote for women have enjoyed considerable attention from historians of the period, effectively distracting the gaze from the intellectual, benevolent and working associations considered in Chapters Four and Five. This focus on the work of the suffrage groups is understandable. The political has traditionally been considered valuable or important in historical terms. The story of women's efforts to gain the right to vote contains drama, intrigue, and sometimes even violence. The individuals involved were intelligent, audacious, charismatic women. That the campaign for the vote has become a kind of single issue, token women's topic for conventional histories is not the fault of the women members who were, as has been seen, involved across a spectrum of activity devoted to women. The women in the other non-political organisations, especially the intellectual groups, were nevertheless pursuing an even more political and subversive agenda than gaining the vote. The vote was one important tool in a bigger social movement. However the women had an understanding about the nature of their society that has been validated by the treatment accorded them by history: they understood the value conferred on the political by the dominant culture, as true now as it was in their time. They recognised that to achieve the kind of reform they sought, legislative change would be a necessary component. They undertook to gain the vote as a means to an end, and drew on the skills practised in their literary and debating groups for their campaigns.

In the suffrage groups women engaged with the public sphere in a way that was designed to attract attention and arouse interest. Unlike the suffrage campaigners in the United States, Australian women had no recent history of activism, yet they successfully met the challenge of confronting the public sphere. It is immensely significant that so many of the women who were members of suffrage groups were also members of literary groups. There was a

commonality of purpose to the various women's groups; even when suffrage groups had a specific immediate objective, their longer-term aim tended to coincide with the broad aims of the intellectual and other women's groups: to expand the sphere of women and improve their lives. In the literary groups the women developed skills and a feminist consciousness; in the suffrage groups they put them to work. The most obvious example of this connection between women's other groups and the suffrage groups is in the work of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU).

The WCTU was a forum for debate and a meeting ground for like-minded women. Its members were schooled in meeting procedure, record-keeping and followed well-documented organisational principles. By championing the suffrage campaign the WCTU lent that cause an organised network of committed women and a great deal of practical support. Established in Australia in 1882 the WCTU quickly established a commitment to the political reform of women's suffrage, creating Franchise Leagues in most colonies.

The 'Franchise Departments' propagated the belief described in notes from the Dawn Club, that

the misery arising from the evils of strong drink related so closely to Women and Children as well as homelife, would never be put down until the ballot was placed in the hands of the women. They pressed home this claim, and pointed out what could be done in making the world cleaner for Men, wider for Women, and safer for Children.<sup>1</sup>

The Franchise Department of the WCTU in NSW was administered by 'Colonial Superintendent' Mrs Ward, who operated out of the WCTU headquarters at Temperance Hall in Pitt Street Sydney. The newsletters quoted prominent Australian and international commentators on the issue of woman's suffrage, for example, Louisa Lawson:

Men tell us we are responsible for the home, and the education of children, and that the morals of society are in our keeping; they have bound our

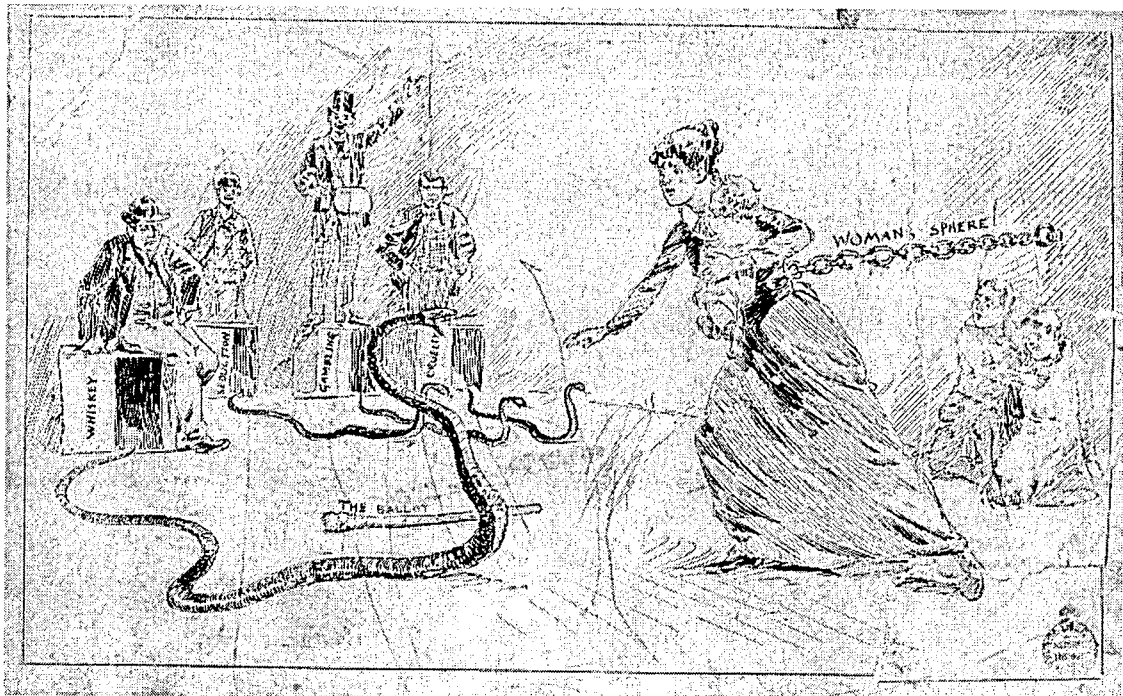
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<sup>1</sup> Collected papers of The Dawn Club on microfiche, Mitchell Library.

hands and placed us in the front rank of the battle against intemperance, gambling and impurity; they hold us responsible, and yet take away the only weapon with which to fight!<sup>2</sup>

Also, Alice Stone Blackwell: 'Always do the thing to which your enemy particularly objects'; Maybanke Wolstoneholme: 'As wife, mother or sister a woman may be loved and toiled for by her male relations, but no amount of love will enable them to express her opinions'; and Rose Scott, who quotes George Eliot: 'Those that trust us educate us, and I would say to men, trust the women of your country; they will not fail you.'

The struggle for the franchise was often described in terms of how unjust it was that women should be confined to the domestic sphere, lacking the first step towards the public, political arena (see for example, the political cartoon, 'Just out of reach'). The work and publications of the WCTU also give some evidence of how ideas from overseas were imported and promoted in Australia.



*Just out of reach*, 1891, B.E. Minns, 1864-1937, reproduction rights held by the State Library of New South Wales.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in 'Scraps from the Speeches of Men and Women of NSW,' WCTU pamphlet, no date. (ML)

A Victorian Women's Franchise League was founded in 1894 by Marie Kirk and others. It was a fairly conservative manifestation of the various WCTU Franchise Leagues. In 1903 it refused to support Vida Goldstein's first attempt to stand for parliament. The WCTU's Victorian journal, *White Ribbon Signal*, wrote that for women to stand as candidates was clouding the suffrage issue 'because the time was not yet ripe for a woman parliamentary candidate.' However, Victoria was condemned by the national executive for this stance, reminding the state, through the official publication *Our Federation* that their position was 'contrary to the union's motto of "No sex in citizenship" and ... women had never won improvements by sitting down to wait for them.'<sup>3</sup>

Formed in 1892, the Western Australian branch of the WCTU was testimony to the energy of that pan-Australian proselytist Jessie Ackerman. After her inspirational tour of the eastern states she founded six new branches of the WCTU in the west, and organised the first Colonial Conventions. The Western Australian WCTU shared the aims of the international WCTU, that is, to promote sobriety and Christian morality. However, the First Annual Convention in 1893 also stated that it believed women to be equally entitled to the suffrage with men. A public meeting was convened to discuss the issue and a deputation met with the Premier, Sir John Forrest.

In 1894 a powerful suffragist propaganda strategy was devised. The WCTU in Western Australia made a petition demanding female suffrage on a piece of cloth a mile long, containing tens of thousands of signatures which they presented to the Western Australian Legislative Council, generating huge publicity. In 1895 a Women's Franchise Department was established in the WCTU to lobby members of parliament, pressure unions, disseminate literature and arrange public debates on the question. Throughout 1896-1898 the WCTU (along with other women's groups) kept public interest in the issue alive. In 1898 the

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Janette Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.57.

Premier finally announced the intention of the Government to extend the vote to women, which was granted in 1899.<sup>4</sup>

The WCTU had been established in Tasmania since 1885. Jessie Ackerman's national tour in 1892 had seen over twenty new branches open around the colony. In Tasmania, as elsewhere, women's suffrage was a major focus, being the main tool for achievement of the social reforms desired by the members. Membership of the WCTU provided women with training in public sphere skills, including meeting procedure, lobbying strategies and record keeping.

In 1896 they copied a strategy used to such great effect in Western Australia and presented the Parliament with a petition of over 2000 signatures from women supporting female suffrage. In 1897 Georgina Kermode, the colonial superintendent of the Franchise Department, was sent to South Australia to learn new strategies to further the cause. A second petition in 1899 collected 5 542 signatures. They held public meetings, distributed suffrage literature and lobbied parliamentarians.

The WCTU eventually joined forces with the Tasmanian branch of the National Council of Women to campaign for the vote for women. Under the energetic presidency of Jessie Rooke, it was also active on other agendas including stopping gambling, repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, restriction of barmaids' working hours, suppression of indecent publications, prevention of juvenile smoking and appointment of female inspectors for factories employing women.<sup>5</sup> In some but not all of these endeavours, the Tasmanian WCTU can be seen following the lead of the WCTU in other states.

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<sup>4</sup> It is generally accepted that the only reason Forrest's government gave in on the suffrage question was political expediency: the Government believed that it could rely on women to increase the anti-Federation vote, according to Rachel Cleland in *Carrying the Banner: Women, Leadership and Activism in Australia*, ed. Joan Eveline and Lorraine Hayden (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1999); and the government was anxious to balance the conservative vote of the land-owning Perth and South-West electorates against the increasing size of the goldfield's electorates (where there were very few women), according to Williamina Ross, cited in Gail Reekie, 'With Ready Hands and New Brooms,' *Hecate*, Vol.7, No.1 (1981).

<sup>5</sup> Vicki Pearce, 'A few viragos on a stump: The Womanhood Suffrage Campaign in Tasmania, 1880-1920,' *Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (December 1985).

Local branches of the South Australian WCTU were established by Mary Leavitt, the 'world missionary' from the United States, in 1886. In the course of her Australian tour in 1889, Jessie Ackerman also established new branches. These two imported the organising principles of the WCTU as well as its commitment to the cause of women's suffrage. The colonial convention saw Serena Lake appointed as the colonial superintendent, with colonial president Elizabeth Nicholls and secretary Hannah Chewings. All three women were also active in the Women's Suffrage League.

The WCTU in Queensland was a major force behind the campaign for women's suffrage. By 1891 there were seventeen branches in Queensland and their platform was winning political rights for women as well as abolishing alcohol consumption. Agnes Williams was the colonial Vice-President and a leading campaigner for women's political rights: 'perhaps the best-known speaker in the state.'<sup>6</sup>

In 1891 a Suffrage Department was established, and in 1893 the doughty Mrs Trundle was elected as its superintendent. She was responsible for organising a large public meeting on the issue of women's suffrage, held at the Protestant Hall in February 1894. This attracted huge public interest and was widely reported in the newspapers. The meeting was addressed by Leontine Cooper, Sir Charles Lilley and Dr William Taylor. As a result of this and subsequent meetings a Franchise Association was created.

The Women's Equal Franchise Association was launched at a second meeting organised by a sub-committee of the WCTU Suffrage Department, held in March 1894. The Association began contentiously with members split over whether to pursue suffrage on the same terms as men held it in Queensland, that is, plural voting based on property qualifications, or one woman – one vote. Men were asked to withdraw from the meeting and allow women only to vote on the constitution. Leontine Cooper and Kate Macfie (Emma Miller's daughter) were elected Vice-Presidents and Emma Miller was elected a Councillor. The Australian Labour Federation pledged its support and its journal, the *Worker* (edited by William Lane) offered to use the network of male members to collect signatures for petitions. However just two

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1999), p.26.

days later Leontine Cooper made public her resignation from the Women's Equal Franchise Association, and one month later announced the formation of a breakaway suffrage organisation, the Brisbane Women's Franchise League.

Leontine Cooper's organisation was formed on 17 April 1894. Its object was 'to secure Parliamentary franchise for women on the same conditions as it is or may be granted to men.'<sup>7</sup> Leontine Cooper's real problem with the Women's Equal Franchise Association was the support of the Australian Labour Federation which she did not trust. Unlike Emma Miller, Leontine Cooper was reluctant to hold out for women's suffrage on a one woman – one vote principle, preferring to campaign for what she regarded as the more achievable goal of suffrage as it was available to men (that is, plural voting). She accused the Women's Equal Franchise Association of having Labor Party links, which Emma Miller denied in a letter to the press.

Later in 1894 Emma Miller, as the new President of Women's Equal Franchise Association, wrote to the Women's Franchise League suggesting united action would be the best way forward. In 1895 the *Worker* records the three main groups working together to form new suffrage branches, and details a meeting at which Mrs Trundle, Emma Miller and Leontine Cooper all spoke.

The WCTU was not alone in working for women's suffrage as a stepping stone to achieving other social reform. One of the earliest suffrage groups in Australia was the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society, which was formed on 22 June 1884 with Henrietta Dugdale as president, and Annie Lowe as a foundation member. Annette Bear and Isabella Goldstein were other early recruits. Henrietta Dugdale was a radical secularist. A member of the discussion group, the Eclectic Society, which was formed in the 1870s to discuss controversial topics, she was also a member of the Australasian Secular Association. She was a socialist, a republican and a radical atheist. She believed in reform of women's dress and designed her own 'rational' clothing. She also did her own carpentry, wore her hair cut short and grew all of her own food.

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Pam Young, *Proud to be a Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1991), p.103.

Under Henrietta Dugdale's presidency the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society pursued a far broader agenda than just lobbying for women's suffrage. Marilyn Lake asserts that the culture of violence against women in Melbourne was one of the precipitating factors in the formation of the Society:

'The laws for offences against property were very severe, but for brutal offences against women they were not,' the fifty women and twenty men who attended the first meeting were told.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting to speculate whether the protean nature of the society's agenda, which was also a feature of the other suffrage groups in Victoria (and there were several) may have contributed to the length of time it took to achieve suffrage for the women of that state.

In 1888, the birth control campaigner, Brettana Smyth led a group that broke away from Henrietta Dugdale's Victorian Women's Suffrage Society to form the Australian Women's Suffrage Society. The title was a misnomer in two respects: it was not in any sense a national organisation; nor was it primarily concerned with achieving the vote for women. Smyth's main work was the promotion of contraceptives. Her desire to see women gain the vote was so that they could then use it to vote down laws preventing access to contraception. This had been an unpopular position for the more conservative Victorian Women's Suffrage Society committee members who objected to Brettana's commitment to raise family planning on suffrage platforms.

Brettana Smyth was a widow and a small businesswoman who ran a drapery and unlicensed chemist shop in North Melbourne. She shared many of Henrietta Dugdale's interests, as a free thinker and a sceptic, and used her time as a member of the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society to conquer her fear of public speaking and develop skills to launch herself as a public figure. A tall and commanding woman, she became a popular and entertaining public speaker.

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<sup>8</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p.23.

Despite the split focus of the Australian Women's Suffrage Society, it was responsible for first introducing a bill into the Victorian Parliament in 1889 (which failed) to give women access to the vote. The MP responsible was a male member of the Australian Women's Suffrage Society, Dr William Maloney.

The creation of the Women's Suffrage League in South Australia grew out of the Social Purity Society, as described in Chapter Five. Mary Lee became the secretary for the life of the association. Other ex-Social Purity members took on prominent roles: Rosetta Birks was made treasurer; Serena Lake was a councillor. Lady Mary Colton became its President in 1892, taking over from Edward Stirling<sup>9</sup> who downgraded his role to Vice-President in recognition that this women's movement would best be led by a woman. The most prominent of South Australia's activist women, Catherine Helen Spence, joined the movement quite late in its life, in 1891, becoming a co-Vice-President with Edward Stirling. Catherine Spence's real interest was a proportional representative voting system, but she was drawn into the suffrage work and soon became identified most strongly with it. She toured America in 1893 and was received with acclaim by American women including Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who described Spence as 'a strong liberal-minded woman,' and Susan B. Anthony. On reaching Britain she was welcomed by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, and on her return to Australia in 1894, the year the vote for women in South Australia was granted, South Australian suffragists gave her a tumultuous welcome home.

While many other women's groups in South Australia were involved in the campaign for women's suffrage, only the Women's Suffrage League made winning the vote its single goal. The constitution of the League contained four provisions:

1. That the women of the country should have a voice in the choice of representatives to the Houses of Legislature.
2. That all women, whether married or unmarried, over the age of 25 should be entitled to the franchise.
3. That they be admitted on the same property and residential qualifications that presently apply to manhood suffrage.

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Stirling MP was the brother-in-law of John Stuart Mill.

4. That, while women's suffrage is desired, no claim is put forward for women representatives.<sup>10</sup>

The League became a focus for much of the sound and fury around the issue of female suffrage, and the women members developed skills to cope. Mary Lee had addressed the first meeting with a stirring speech, and subsequently developed a reputation for thrilling (and occasionally pugnacious) oratory. The women made use of tactics they had devised in the Social Purity Society. They petitioned and organised and lobbied. They formed deputations and created new branches. They wrote letters to newspapers and to national and international sister associations. Helen Jones cites Elizabeth Nicholls' list of the various strategies employed by the League, demonstrating that the campaign was skilful and well-orchestrated:

Addresses from Public Platforms.

Drawing room meetings.

Tactful suggestions to debating societies that they should discuss the suggestion and send a reply giving the result.

Literature on the subject widely recommended and sold, booklets and leaflets written and distributed in thousands and especially sent to members of, and candidates for Parliament, also to all kinds of societies and churches.

Petitions to both Houses of Parliament.

Good use made of the press which was favourable, publishing generous reports of meetings, also articles on the subject and opening its columns now and then to vigorous correspondence.

Strenuous work in opposing objectionable measures in the House and supporting those approved.

Full attendance of women in the Galleries when the question was being debated in the House.

Co-operation with advocates of all political and religious creeds and all social levels so long as they kept to the one subject.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Register*, 24 July 1888, cited in Elizabeth Mansutti, *Mary Lee 1821-1909: Let her name be honoured* (Women's Suffrage Centenary History Sub-Committee: South Australia, 1994), p.17.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Jones, *In Her Own Name: A history of women in South Australia from 1836* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1994), p.143.

The women exploited the mainstream press and were aided in their efforts by Rosetta Birks' familial connections. Her family owned the *Observer* and the *Register*, both of which gave consistently sympathetic coverage to the women's suffrage campaign. The perception that it reflected poorly on a woman to have her name in the newspaper was challenged frequently by the number of eminently respectable women who were prepared to have their names printed in the suffrage cause. Furthermore the cause attracted powerful support from the highest echelons in society. Many men were members of the League, including MPs, and many of the women members were married to, or were daughters and sisters of MPs, church elders and professional men whose standing in the community lent the movement further support.

One move that more than any other hastened the winning of the vote for women was the forming of a strategic alliance between Mary Lee and Augusta Zadow. Mary Lee had strong ties with working women; she was responsible for the founding of the women's trade union, and had been secretary of the Working Women's Trades Union. It was in this role that she met and established a working relationship with Augusta Zadow who was treasurer of the Working Women's Trade Union and a delegate to the United Trades and Labor Council. Their cooperation ensured a unanimity that represented a major force. It was also an example that was not duplicated in either NSW or Victoria, where women and women's groups with strong union or Labor ties tended to be set up in competition rather than cooperating for the achievement of the common goal. Similarly, temperance women were allied to the movement both in spirit and literally in the figures of Elizabeth Nicholls and Serena Lake who maintained prominent roles in both the Women's Christian and Temperance Union and the Women's Suffrage League.

The women in the Women's Suffrage League posed extreme tests of the boundary between the spheres. In 1883 Alexander Hay MP argued that women should not vote but should

'stick to their own spheres of life.'<sup>12</sup> 'We recognise that the home is the centre of our sphere, but not its circumference,' said Serena Lake.<sup>13</sup> Mary Lee expanded:

Most thoughtful women, while holding that home is woman's sweetest, most privileged sphere, are yet happy in believing that however and wherever woman can be of best and widest usefulness to her fellow men and women, there, by God's providence, is her allotted sphere ...<sup>14</sup>

In Queensland the Women's Suffrage League was formed at a meeting on 4 February 1889 held in the home of Mrs Elizabeth Edwards. Guest at the meeting was Hannah Chewings from Adelaide: a prominent suffragist, whose recommendation it was that a suffrage organisation be formed. The first annual meeting was subsequently held at the Town Hall Council Chambers. Mrs Reading was elected President of the League; Mrs Clark and Mrs Brooks were Vice-Presidents. Committee members included Leontine Cooper and May Jordan.

The League failed to generate support from the Women's Christian Temperance Union or the Australian Labour Federation despite their pro-suffrage platforms. By May 1891 most members had resigned and many pursued the suffrage cause through membership of other groups.

It is curious that the single issue focus on suffrage nevertheless led to some of the most volatile and divided groups of women. New South Wales was home to the explosive politicking of the Womanhood Suffrage League and its various splinter groups.

Formed in 1891 after Sir Henry Parkes' failed in his attempt to include womanhood suffrage within the scope of his Electoral Reform Bill, the Womanhood Suffrage League was founded by Dora Montefiore. Her successful contribution to the founding of Sydney University's Women's College, and her exploitation of the networks created by that effort, meant that in 1891 she was able to assemble quite an illustrious group of women and male

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Jones, *In Her Own Name*, p.127.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, *In Her Own Name*, p.123.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *In Her Own Name*, p.140.

sympathisers in her home on Darlinghurst Road to plan the creation of the League. At a second meeting in Quong Tart's Tea Room, Maybanke Wolstoneholme read aloud a letter from Jessie Ackermann, suffragist and temperance worker. As was noted in Chapter Two, it was resolved at that meeting that Mrs Wolstoneholme should interview Jessie Ackermann who was currently in Australia, and a week after that interview the first public meeting of the Womanhood Suffrage League was held on 8 June 1891. Members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Dawn Club quickly signed up. Lady Windeyer was the first President and the ubiquitous quartet of Rose Scott, Maybanke Wolstoneholme, Louisa Lawson and Dora Montefiore were Secretaries. Lizzie Ashton sat on the Council, though she was forced to resign as a result of a controversy later that year.<sup>15</sup> Louisa Macdonald became a member,<sup>16</sup> and was able to contribute her knowledge and experience of British suffrage groups and helped establish networks with them through her personal relationships with many of Britain's leading suffragists. This process of spreading information from the international scene was further assisted by Dora Montefiore's return to England to work first with Millicent Fawcett and later the Women's Social and Political Union.

The League aimed to educate the public on women's suffrage and agitate for extending the franchise. It also became a place for some women to practise political skills of organisation, lobbying and public speaking. It was as a member of the Womanhood Suffrage League that Maybanke Wolstoneholme made her first public speech, in 1891, which was widely and positively reported.

In 1892 a deputation from the League waited on the Premier, Sir George Dibbs, to urge him to put legislation before the Parliament to enfranchise women. In 1895 a similar deputation from the League met with the Premier, George Reid, who stalled then, as he continued to do so until 1900. The League sent a deputation to the first session of the National Australasian

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<sup>15</sup> As has previously been noted, the Womanhood Suffrage League never coped well with issues that were not explicitly related to suffrage. Lizzie Ashton's controversy was discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>16</sup> She refused an offer to be a Vice-President in 1894 'on account of its political nature,' though her companion, Evelyn Dickinson, was elected to the Council in 1893.

Convention in Adelaide in 1897, petitioning that the franchise be granted 'without any distinction or disqualification on the ground of sex.'<sup>17</sup>

Within the League, Rose Scott urged women to avoid political parties and instead unite as a sex because women's issues would never be the focus of political parties dominated by men:

Men desire to make their country Rich and Powerful; women would endeavour to make their country as they would their children: Rich in honesty and Morality.<sup>18</sup>

Membership of the League often inspired the women to become politically active for other causes as well. A conflict arose within the Womanhood Suffrage League when Rose Scott began to campaign against Federation, and allowed her point of view to be interpreted as representing the view of the League in general.

Other executive members of the Womanhood Suffrage League declared that the League had no position on any matter other than suffrage, and Rose Scott herself made the point (whether voluntarily or not we do not know) of publicly announcing this. Having done so, however, she added the comment on one occasion that the most democratic members of the Womanhood Suffrage League happened (like herself) to oppose the Constitution Bill. In the midst of this dispute, her fellow Anti-Billite within the suffrage movement, Belle Golding, announced that the Newtown Branch of the Womanhood Suffrage League had in fact adopted an Anti-Billite position, and so the dispute ... went on.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, pro-Billite Maybanke Wolstoneholme resigned as President of the League in 1897 to take up a new position heading the Women's Federal League in 1898. The dispute

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<sup>17</sup> Ann Millar, 'Feminising the State' in *A Woman's Constitution: gender and history in the Australian Commonwealth*, ed. Helen Irving (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1996), p.130.

<sup>18</sup> cited in Damousi, Joy, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890-1955* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.11.

<sup>19</sup> Irving, ed., *A Woman's Constitution*, p.10.

seems to have been based on a fear on the part of the 'Anti-Billites' that Federation would divert attention from the cause of women's suffrage, and the belief on the part of 'Pro-Billites' that Federation would inevitably bring with it women's suffrage.

This was not the first conflict endured within the Womanhood Suffrage League, and was in fact the second major split that had been experienced. The first had happened when Lady Mary Windeyer resigned acrimoniously in 1893. Lady Mary had been the first president of the Woman Suffrage League, albeit she was the second choice (see Chapter Three, p.131, footnote 28). In her President's Report of 1893 she claimed 'There is no weedy prejudice so hard to uproot as sex bias' and thanked 'those men who believe in us and help us to gain our liberty'. She resigned later in 1893 with Louisa Lawson over an issue concerning the setting up of new branches of the Womanhood Suffrage League, and an amendment of the constitution to allow eighteen year-olds full membership (as recounted in Chapter Two). Lady Mary's emotional resignation was based on the belief that the new members opposed her and that Rose Scott was supporting the new membership. She took up a leadership position with the Women's Christian Temperance Union as the head of the Franchise Department, and was replaced in the Womanhood Suffrage League by Emma Palmer. Thereafter the new suffrage paper, *The Australian Woman*, attacked both Rose Scott and Mary Wolstoneholme, while favourably profiling Lady Mary in an 1894 edition.

After Maybanke Wolstoneholme's resignation in 1897, the League gradually disintegrated into factions. The Golding sisters (Annie and Belle) and Nellie Martel led a major splinter group to form the Women's Progressive Association with Louisa Lawson. This was seen as an implicit attack on Rose Scott's prominence in the League, and in particular on her policy of non-alignment with existing political parties.



The Womanhood Suffrage League of NSW, 1892. Back row, standing (L to R) Mrs Jackson (President of the Redfern Branch), Mrs Wynn (President of the Annandale Branch), Miss Caldwell (Camperdown), Mrs T. Parkes (President of the Toxteth League), Mrs Hansen (President of the Newtown Branch). Middle row, seated, Mrs McDonald (President of the Glebe Branch), Miss Annie Golding (Organising Secretary of the United Branches), Mrs Chapman (Secretary of the Redfern Branch). Front row, seated, Mrs C. Martel (Recording Secretary of the Central League), Miss Belle Golding (Secretary of the Newtown Branch), Mrs Dickie (ex-President of the Newtown League), Mrs Dwyer (Secretary of the Camperdown Branch). Freeman Studio, Sydney – studio portraits, ca. 1874-1908, collection held by the State Library of New South Wales.

Obviously the work of the Womanhood Suffrage League was concentrated on its single-issue political agenda though it was an important example of a women's club for other reasons too. It was the centre of an astounding network of local, inter-colonial and international women all focused on the same goal. It was another venue for women to practise their developing skills as participants in the public sphere. It generated much media and academic attention for its controversial agenda and loudly-voiced opinions. The Womanhood Suffrage League also had credentials as an intellectual organisation – albeit

aspiring – for it attracted visits from some of the most esteemed thinkers of the period and it applied itself to the study of the philosophy, thought and ideology driving influential intellectual and political figures.

The task of the Women's Federal League in Sydney was to persuade men to support Federation in the referenda of 1898 and 1899, because women in NSW did not yet have the right to vote themselves. Formed in 1898 by Maybanke Wolstoneholme who had recently resigned as President of the Womanhood Suffrage League, another industrious Women's Federal League was soon formed in Hay in the Riverina district of NSW.

The Women's Federal Leagues were arms of the Australian Federal League which was led by Edmund Barton. Maybanke Wolstoneholme shared a platform with him addressing a ladies' meeting on the issue of Federalism in April 1898, and received attention from the press. The experience she had gained from her membership of the Women's Literary Society, the Womanhood Suffrage League, the Australian Home Reading Union and as editor of the *Woman's Voice* made her an organised and effective lobbyist for the cause of Federalism. Her biographer, Jan Roberts, records that her branch of the League was able to decline financial support from the national league because it was essentially self-supporting.<sup>20</sup> Records of correspondence, transactions and circulars evidence the organised strategist Maybanke Wolstoneholme had become.

For Maybanke Wolstoneholme, participation in the Women's Federal League was a necessary step on the path to achieving women's suffrage. This threw her into opposition with women such as Rose Scott who saw federalism rather as an interruption to the efforts to gain the vote for women. In fact they were both right and wrong. Promises about suffrage made to women by politicians in order to gain their support for federation were broken. On the other hand, the granting of the vote to women in federal elections made suffrage for women in NSW state elections inevitable.

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<sup>20</sup> Jan Roberts, 'The Domestic and the Public' in *A Woman's Constitution*, ed. Irving, p.35.

Formed in 1901 by Labor sisters Kate Dwyer (formerly Golding) and Annie and Belle Golding, the Women's Progressive Association demonstrated the preparedness of some women to work with established political parties to achieve goals for women. The Women's Progressive Association was aligned with the Labor Party, and in this respect stood in opposition to the Womanhood Suffrage League. The sisters had disagreed with the determinedly non-party-political stand of Rose Scott's stewardship of the Womanhood Suffrage League, and membership of the Women's Progressive Association at the beginning consisted largely of Labor women who believed that the best way to achieve change for women was overt alignment with an established political party.

Other members of the Women's Progressive Association included more one-time members of the Womanhood Suffrage League: Louisa Lawson, Cara Mallett (later Lady Edgeworth David) and Nellie Martel. In 1903 Nellie Alma Martel stood for election to the NSW senate. Louisa Lawson gave her a great deal of support especially by chronicling her activities in *The Dawn*. For her efforts to promote closer ties with the labour movement she received close attention from *The Dawn* until 1904 when she left Australia for England and immediately took up with the Pankhursts and Dora Montefiore in the Women's Social and Political Union. She is recorded as speaking at public rallies for the WSPU on 15 July 1906 and 21 June 1908. In 1913 she published a book entitled *The Women's Vote in Australia*.

Many of the members of the Women's Progressive Association were also members of the Women's Central Organising Committee of the Political Labor League.<sup>21</sup> In this, as in its pro-federal stance (and later, Nellie Martel's participation in the WSPU) the Association lay in direct opposition to Rose Scott. The feud that had begun in the Womanhood Suffrage League worsened during the lifetime of the Women's Progressive Association which was seen as a competitor with Scott's next vehicle, the Women's Political and Educational League. It also forced other women into the unfortunate position of 'taking sides.' Judith Allen records that the antagonism even made itself felt across state boundaries, drawing Vida Goldstein into the fray. At the time, Vida Goldstein was the editor of the *Australian Women's Sphere* which enjoyed national circulation, and was accustomed to reporting on the activities

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.197.

of women's groups around the country, including the Women's Progressive Association, 'not dreaming that Scott "could possibly be hurt by that."'

In response to Scott's affront, Goldstein informed her that she had decided to give the two leagues' reports first place in alternate months, published separately. This did not satisfy Scott, who promptly informed Goldstein of 'lies', 'false claims' and 'misinformation' in the Women's Progressive Association report just published in the *Australian Women's Sphere*. Goldstein replied: 'I am almost in despair about the Women's Progressive Association business; the only thing I can suggest is that when mis-statements or downright falsehoods are made, that you or someone else should write and give the facts. I will publish any letter sent to me.'<sup>22</sup>

Shortly after, Goldstein informed Scott that she had received a furious letter from Miss Golding 'complaining about me regarding Miss Scott as the head and front of the suffrage movement in NSW and stating that "the *Sphere*" is run as an advertisement for Miss Scott.' The Women's Progressive Association declined therefore to send a report of its activities.

It was partly in retaliation against the betrayal by the Golding sisters that Rose Scott formed the Women's Political and Educational League in 1902. After Kate Dwyer and Annie and Belle Golding had split the Womanhood Suffrage League by leaving to create the Women's Progressive Association, Rose Scott needed a new platform. The Women's Political and Educational League was born into a post-suffrage political landscape, at a time when Scott's concerns had moved from gaining the vote to educating women on its effective use.

Women's Political and Educational League branches were quickly established all over the state. The League attracted many of the women who had been involved with the campaign for suffrage, and who agreed with Rose Scott's determinedly non-party-political stance. Unlike the Womanhood Suffrage League its membership was exclusively female. Branch locations were based on electorate boundaries, and each new branch had to have at least twenty members. Monthly meetings were held, and an Annual Conference which was

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<sup>22</sup> Allen, *Rose Scott*, pp.198-99.

opened by a presidential address delivered by Scott. These addresses included topics such as the Women's Political and Educational League's non-party stance, the economic position of women in marriage, the Girls' Protection Bill, the principles of peace and arbitration and the need for police matrons.

The Women's Political and Educational League only existed until 1910, but it had begun to fail as early as 1906. Rural branches succumbed to active campaigning for members from political parties, enticing members away from the non-party aligned Women's Political and Educational League. In the city, not only the Women's Progressive Association, but also the Women's Liberal League were competitors for members. Often the anti-party stance of the Women's Political and Educational League was interpreted as anti-Labor – an impression that was encouraged by the Women's Progressive Association. The Women's Political and Educational League was formally disbanded in 1910 following the enactment of the Girls' Protection Bill, for which it had been a vocal campaigner.

While networks and friendships provided a supportive scaffold for women preparing for engagement with the public sphere, so the conflict in and between the women's associations can be seen as important training also. If the women seem volatile or prone to altercation in their private dealings with one another, it was minor in comparison with the often aggressive public attacks made on them by powerful men and the male-operated press.

## II

*'To stand together as women apart from all considerations of class and party'*

For all the examples of groups built on dissension, some were explicitly created to foster unity. Founded in 1894 by Annette Bear-Crawford, the United Council for Women's Suffrage was a scheme to coordinate the efforts of the various suffrage groups already active in Victoria. The three major political goals were: to amalgamate the existing suffrage groups and coordinate lobbying of parliamentarians about suffrage; to educate the public about women's suffrage; and to train women to speak publicly to address meetings about the issue. By 1900, thirty-two Victorian suffrage groups had amalgamated.

Annette Bear-Crawford died suddenly of pneumonia while she was in Europe representing Victorian women at the Women's Congress in London. Vida Goldstein had deputised for her in her absence and was seen as her logical successor, but there was some resistance from members of the United Council for Women's Suffrage who saw her as radical and threatening. Nevertheless on 1 August 1900 Vida Goldstein was elected General Secretary and took on responsibility for organising the United Council for Women's Suffrage. One month later she began publishing the monthly journal *Australian Woman's Sphere* which effectively became the organ of the United Council for Women's Suffrage. Vida's role as General Secretary was the first full-time paid position for a suffrage worker in Australia. She downgraded her own role in the United Council for Women's Suffrage in 1901 when she resigned as Secretary and took on a lesser position. She was replaced as General Secretary by Lilian Locke, who was renowned as a fiery public speaker with Labor sympathies.

Much of the recruitment work of the United Council for Women's Suffrage was carried out in small private drawing-room meetings of invited women. The bigger public Town Hall rallies were less frequent because of a shortage of skilled speakers. Vida Goldstein recalled her own initial fear and reluctance as a public speaker, and a focus of the *Australian Woman's Sphere* was on 'improving communications and strategy and on encouraging women to take practical political and economic initiatives.'<sup>23</sup>

In 1903 the United Council for Women's Suffrage was renamed the United Council for State Suffrage. Although the United Council for State Suffrage continued, Vida Goldstein became frustrated with its lack of vigour and more interested in forging allegiance with existing political parties to pursue the women's agenda. Rather than risk having women's issues subsumed by a male party machine though, she chose instead to form a separate women's party: the Women's Federal Political Association, which was non-party-political. It was from this support base that she made her first bid to enter federal parliament.

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<sup>23</sup> Kelly, *Double Time*, p.175.

The Women's Federal Political Association was formed in 1903 after Vida Goldstein had returned from America filled with enthusiasm for the effective organisation of women's groups there, and a commitment to non-party politics. A platform for the Association was drawn up by a committee of ten men and women, including some male MPs. Vida Goldstein was elected President and Lilian Locke was Secretary. The new Association was not seen to be in competition with other women's political groups because of its insistent non-party platform. Vida also hoped that this would prevent women having to choose between women's issues and party issues: the Women's Federal Political Association would be a force for unity. However the Liberal Party regarded it with suspicion as implicitly connected to Labor, and Labor-sympathiser Lilian Locke eventually resigned because the Association had 'incurred the hostility of certain labour organisations.'<sup>24</sup>

In August 1903 the new Women's Federal Political Association, with a membership of 450, voted to back a campaign for Vida Goldstein to enter the Senate as an independent candidate. The campaign drew huge interest as it was the first attempt by an Australian woman to nominate for Parliament. Vida saw it as an important opportunity to educate newly-enfranchised Australian women by raising their awareness of political procedure. She maintained that women needed to be represented in the parliament as representatives of the home:

To Goldstein, the interests of the home were political: 'the interests of the State and the home are linked by the closest possible ties.' Although Goldstein used the rhetoric of the time, which idealised the home, her view of the issues relevant to the home went far beyond the garden gate, into the realms of labour conditions, education, industrial affairs and social concerns. Goldstein claimed a space in the public sphere of masculine politics for these interests of the home.<sup>25</sup>

Despite Vida's failure to get elected, the now seven-hundred strong Women's Federal Political Association became resolutely devoted to representing the special interests of

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<sup>24</sup> Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p.53.

<sup>25</sup> Bomford, 'The Lady Politician: Vida Goldstein's First Senate Campaign,' *A Woman's Constitution*, ed. Irving, p.59.

women and family, including equal divorce and child custody laws, and equal pay. The primary task for the re-named Women's Political Association was to educate women about politics so that their newly-won (federal) vote would not be wasted. To this end they held a Woman's Parliament in 1904 that tried to educate women about parliamentary procedure and current politics. Others were conducted in subsequent years, with Vida Goldstein typically taking on the role of Governor-General or Speaker. Farley Kelly comments that the press were generally 'ill-disposed towards this experiment':

The press ... complain[ed] variously that the women were too earnest, too frivolous, or too unrealistically good-natured in argument.<sup>26</sup>

The Women's Political Association maintained club rooms at the Arlington Chambers in Collins Street and conducted 'at-homes' there every second Sunday. Some of the women set up a theatrical group. A fund-raising shop sold homemade goods and a Women's Political Library demonstrated the commitment to women's political education. Membership grew steadily with new branches opening all over Victoria.

The Women's Political Association platform consisted of seventeen issues. Raising the age of consent from sixteen to twenty-one years for both sexes was one of their long-fought campaigns and resulted in setting the age of consent at seventeen for girls in Victoria. Similar campaigns were being fought simultaneously in other states. Another successful battle was to create police matron and later female police officer positions. A fund was opened to support the efforts of the WSPU in England. Support for the English militant suffragettes was regularly expressed in the journal of the Women's Political Association, the *Woman Voter*, but this was at a cost of some local membership: men and women inclined to support the political enfranchisement of women were often nevertheless disapproving of the tactics of the WSPU.

With the advent of war, the Women's Political Association maintained an anti-war position, calling on other women's groups nationally and internationally to adopt a similar stance:

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<sup>26</sup> Kelly, *Double Time*, p.175.

This Association hopes that women everywhere, the lifegivers of the world will work henceforth with one mind to destroy the perverted sense of national honour and demand that international disputes shall be adjusted by arbitration. This Association resolves to cable to the President of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, asking that women of all nations be urged to support the actions of President Wilson and plead for immediate arbitration.<sup>27</sup>

The anti-war stance was maintained at further cost to membership. A meeting was held which added 'Opposition to Compulsory Military Training and Militarism' to the already crowded platform. Some of the more moderate members supported the war and resigned from the Women's Political Association as a result, including Angela Booth, a prominent campaigner for equal pay. This left the organisation with a much stronger socialist core than before: ideologically committed women such as Adela Pankhurst, Jennie Baines, Cecilia John, Lucy Paling and May Brodney were prominent members at the time.

The core work of the Women's Political Association continued through the war, though the anti-war campaign diverted a great deal of time and energy. In addition, the Women's Political Association threw its support behind demonstrations against the rising prices of food and in support of industrial campaigns by the Wharf Labourers' Union.

In 1915 Vida Goldstein launched another women's group, the Women's Peace Army, which was intended to capture membership that was opposed to the war but may have been deterred from joining the Women's Political Association because of its non-party platform. Many Women's Political Association members also joined the Women's Peace Army, and by the end of the war the two organisations were effectively merged.

The Women's Political Association and its publication the *Woman Voter* were eventually disbanded in 1919 when Vida Goldstein made an extended trip to Europe. The Women's Political Association had expanded hugely on the brief of the various Victorian suffrage

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<sup>27</sup> Cited in Lake, *Getting Equal*, p.63.

groups from which it had been born. Like Rose Scott's Women's Political and Educational League, the Women's Political Association was formed as a result of gaining suffrage<sup>28</sup> rather than in order to fight for it, and this meant its focus was more towards education of its members than single-issue lobbying. At various times the Women's Political Association was lauded and derided by the press, but the most commonly used tactic, (particularly by the *Age* and the *Argus*) was to simply ignore the efforts and activities of the women and thereby deny them publicity in the mainstream.

Many of Melbourne's most intelligent and politicised women were members of the Women's Political Association at some point in their lives. Bella Lavender wrote lyrics for an anthem for the association called *The WPA March*. Doris Hordern joined as a young woman in 1911 with her mother and three sisters. She became Vida Goldstein's campaign manager for the 1913 election and worked in the Book Lovers' Library run by Elsie Champion (nee Goldstein). In the Women's Political Association she learned a great deal about political activism, organisation and strategy. Later, as Doris Blackburn she became Australia's second female MHR.

Several women's political groups were formed after the campaign for suffrage was already won, because the women perceived a need for education of other women in how to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the vote. One such example was the Australian Women's National League (later the Australian Women's Liberal Club), formed on 10 March 1904, when forty women met at the Melbourne Town Hall at the behest of a core of six women, 'public-spirited women who held Liberal political principles,'<sup>29</sup> and founded the Australian Women's National League. Their overt motivation was the perceived need for women to be politically aware, following the creation of new opportunities for women in national politics since Federation and the vote. However, some commentators see in the formation of a politically conservative women's group an implicit challenge to the Women's Political Association formed by Vida Goldstein. Even though the Women's Political

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<sup>28</sup> Federally, that is. Women in Victoria still had five more years of campaigning before Victoria finally became the last state to permit women to vote in state elections in 1908.

<sup>29</sup> The six founders were Mrs Eva Hughes, Mrs A.E. Clarke, Mrs H.P. Douglas, Mrs W. Kidgell, Mrs C. O'Brien, Miss Sara Derham.

Association was avowedly non-party aligned, and indeed maligned by the Labor Party for that position, conservatives believed it to be a radical tool of the Left.<sup>30</sup>

The meeting declared the aims of the League were:

1. To support loyalty to the Throne and Empire
2. To combat socialism by strongly advocating equality of opportunity for all classes, and opposing the nationalisation of industries
3. To educate women in politics
4. To safeguard interests of the home, women and children.

Their motto was 'For God and Country'; their colours were gold and purple; and their emblem was wattle and sarsparilla. They were ostentatiously conservative in all respects, from their political agenda to their social activities, even opposing the vote for women in Victoria. Their anti-socialism has been interpreted by some contemporary historians as a reaction to the radicalism of some of the suffragists, including Vida Goldstein. Katie Spearritt identified the Australian Women's National League as 'the most successful and powerful women's group in Australia':

Explicitly anti-socialist and defensive of women's domesticity, the Australian Women's National League nonetheless encouraged women to enter public debate.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See for example, Katie Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism, 1880-1914,' *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Sydney: HBJ, 1992), p.334; Bomford in *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p.73, observes that 'If the suggestion is correct that this league was established to counter the potential threats to conservatism posed by Vida, then Vida had unleashed a formidable opponent.' She recounts an episode that illustrates the competition between the two organisations: at the Royal Melbourne Show in 1910, members of the AWNL deliberately located their promotional tent alongside the WPA site, and ostentatiously handed out their journal for free. Despite the challenge, Vida Goldstein refused to give away the *Woman Voter* for free, maintaining that it was too good a publication 'to be thrown away after a careless glance from the unthinking, indifferent citizen.' (p.102)

<sup>31</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns,' p.334.

Two months after the original gathering a second, larger meeting was held at 'Cliveden,' the East Melbourne home of Janet, Lady Clarke, at which that lady was installed as the first President.

A women's league had been under consideration for some time; indeed in 1903 a group of over two hundred women had gathered at Cliveden to discuss the desirability of such an association but the impetus was lost and nothing further happened. It was not until 1904 that Eva Hughes (Lady Clarke's sister) decided to muster the skills she had developed as a political wife (her husband was then the mayor of St Kilda) and organise the successful March meeting.

In seven years the membership expanded to over 24 000, eventually reaching a peak during the First World War (and becoming the largest political organisation of women in Australia). Any woman could join the League if she agreed to the constitution and undertook to belong to no other political organisation. The League refused to take any part in religious denominational efforts, and did not permit discussion of religious topics.

The League proved to be a valued meeting place for country and city women, and its agenda catered for the social as well as the political interests of its members. Classes were formed to give instruction in public speaking and to educate women for special campaign work at election times. In 1912 a debating club was established which further honed the skills of the emergent political speakers. It established evening and afternoon classes for political speakers, and held a monthly 'At Home' with music and a speaker on current politics.

A journal was created in 1907, called *The Woman*, which detailed the work of the League. From 1905 an annual patriotic rally at the Melbourne Town Hall was held to celebrate Empire Night on the 24th of May. Annual Conference was a 2-3 day event which usually gained extensive coverage in the general press.

After the death in 1909 of the President, Janet, Lady Clarke, her sister Eva Hughes was prevailed upon to become the new President. 'Her voice and opinion rapidly became synonymous with the name of the Australian Women's National League,' records Judith

Smart in her chapter on Eva Hughes in Lake and Kelly's *Double Time*. Indeed Eva Hughes was something of a paradox, observed a later President, Elizabeth Couchman:

... the League saw itself as a staunch defender of the domestic ideal, though members insisted that indirect political influence through their menfolk was all the power they needed. [Second President] Eva Hughes was one of those paradoxical women in public life who leave the nest unattended in order to defend it, demonstrating by her own actions that women were competent political operators at the same time as she proclaimed that women's place was in the home and not [in politics].<sup>32</sup>

For the duration of the Eva Hughes' years the Australian Women's National League defined itself in opposition to socialism and took a position opposing liberalism. It discussed the concept of the 'spheres' of men and women and determined that it firmly upheld the separate spheres, concluding that the education of women about politics that formed its third objective should consist of education in how to best guide a husband's actions. Mrs Hughes believed that 'our best power lies behind the throne,' guiding 'right-thinking men to act for us - amending laws relating to women and woman's honour, framing new ones as will safeguard her interests.' To Eva Hughes, woman was 'ever the weaker vessel' and should in all important things defer to men.

Eventually the Australian Women's National League was renamed The Australian Women's Liberal Club. It maintained affiliations with various other associations of women, including the National Council of Women. A splinter group formed when the League became openly affiliated with the Liberal Party, of members who were primarily opposed to the merger with men. They constituted a separate women's organisation under the presidency of Lady Knox (daughter of the League's first president, Janet, Lady Clarke), retrieved the old name and constitution and (nevertheless) declared their support for the new Liberal Party.

The Australian Women's National League is representative of the women's groups that formed around political agendas, in this case with a particularly conservative ideology. It was

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<sup>32</sup> Kelly and Lake, 'The politics of purity: the private sphere strikes back,' in *Double Time*, p.108.

anti-socialist, pro-Empire and anti-feminist. Its consciously limited and traditional definition of the women's place was elaborated in the Australian Women's National League's objectives:

The members of the League do not seek place or power; they do not wish to send women into parliament. They wish to educate themselves and others to use consciously and intelligently the vote the country has given them.<sup>33</sup>

In spite of its 'feminist antifeminism,' the Australian Women's National League was, nevertheless, very consciously a women's group, created to educate and empower women politically where there had been no previous attempt to do so in any organised fashion. Once the battle for the suffrage was won, it remained for women to learn how to use their new opportunities for power, and to be schooled in the tools of politics: debate, public speaking, chairmanship (as they called it), meeting procedure, and so on. The Australian Women's National League provided an invaluable training ground for politically aware and active women, even while it encouraged them not to use their skills for themselves.<sup>34</sup>

The South Australian Woman's League was founded in 1895 after the vote was won, to try and use the enfranchisement of women to achieve women-centred aims:

To stand together as women apart from all considerations of class and party and to interest ourselves specially in questions relating to women and children.<sup>35</sup>

Conceived by Lucy Spence Morice (niece of Catherine Spence) and with the support of Catherine Spence and other members who also held membership of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the League was intended to be primarily educational. Lucy was very

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<sup>33</sup> Cited in Judith Smart, 'Eva Hughes: Militant Conservative,' in *Double Time*, Kelly and Lake (eds), p.184.

<sup>34</sup> Unpublished manuscript by Dame Elizabeth May Ramsay Couchman, entitled *The Australian Women's National League 1904-1945*, dated 14 February 1969. (Australian Women's National League materials held in the Latrobe Library.)

<sup>35</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns,' p.337.

idealistic and ambitious for the League: she wanted to increase women's understanding of social and political affairs so as to better lobby or otherwise influence male parliamentarians. A programme was developed and several meetings held before lack of membership led to its disbanding in 1897.

The precipitate failure of the League is an interesting reflection on the particular character of South Australian women's groups. The educational function of so many of the literary and other groups in other colonies/states simply was not a priority in South Australia. Women were prepared to join and work hard in groups which served particular communal causes but were either too busy or disinclined to join a group devoted to personal development.

Women in Queensland also saw a need for a suffrage society after the federal vote was won, to educate women in how to best use their new political tool. The Queensland Women's Electoral Union was formed in 1903 by Margaret Ogg and Leslie Corrie. A name change to replace the word 'Union' (with 'League') in its title betrayed the anti-socialist inclination of the group. Professional women were drawn to the association. The franchise for women had only been won federally but the state franchise was not part of the platform for the Queensland Women's Electoral League. Indeed it eventually emerged that the aim of the organisation was primarily to capture votes for the conservative male candidates.

At first the Queensland Women's Electoral League admitted male members and its first council consisted of nine men and nine women. Its literature did not indicate a particularly woman-centred programme. The Queensland Women's Electoral League opposed the federal divorce law of 1903. It actively campaigned for conservative parties, ignored the issue of the plural vote, supported the 'white Australia' policy and protested against compulsory arbitration.

Unlike the Women Worker's Political Organisation (see below; formed in response to the conservatism of the Queensland Women's Electoral League) the activities of the Queensland Women's Electoral League received a great deal of press coverage and were given financial backing from the government.

In NSW, formed around the same time and for similar reasons was the Women's Liberal League (later Women's Reform League), created on 6 December 1902 by Mrs (Clara) Molyneux Parkes, and based on the second floor of the Equitable Buildings at number 14 George Street.<sup>36</sup> Once the vote had been won the suffrage leagues were dissolved and replaced by other organisations such as this, devoted to ensuring that the female vote was put to good use. The Women's Liberal League was one of the largest and best organised of these next-wave political groups. It had branches state-wide and its own journal, which adopted the title of the old Maybanke Wolstoneholme publication, *Woman's Voice*.

As the name suggests, the Women's Liberal League was an overtly political group, and highly organised with stated objectives and a published constitution and rules. The primary objective was 'Political education with a view to the intelligent exercise of Federal, State and Municipal Franchise.'<sup>37</sup>

The second stated objective was to advocate a range of platforms, concerning Federal and State issues. The main planks of the Federal platform were:

1. modification of tariffs
2. opposition to any scheme of preferential tariff, in keeping with a commitment to free trade
3. removal of restrictions on desirable immigration.<sup>38</sup>

The main planks of the State platform covered an interesting array of topics, ranging from political to moral, some of which were of specific concern for women:

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<sup>36</sup> Papers of the Women's Liberal League held at Mitchell Library

<sup>37</sup> Objects, Constitution and Rules, 1902. (ML)

<sup>38</sup> Objects, Constitution and Rules, 1902. (ML)

1. economical administration of the public funds
2. substantial reduction of members and true majority rule
3. liquor traffic reform
4. equal pay for equal work, and equal opportunities for all citizens
5. improvement in laws directly affecting women
6. legislation calculated to minimise social evils.<sup>39</sup>

Likewise, the 'General planks' encompassed politics, education, and morality:

1. the Hare-Spence (proportional representation) system of voting
2. local government
3. up-to-date training school for teachers and scientific agricultural training for women
4. political education with a view to the intelligent exercise of the franchise
5. opposition to class legislation and State monopolies
6. support for liberal and patriotic men of high principles as candidates for both Federal and State parliaments – especially those who are pledged to the main planks of the Women's Liberal League platform
7. support for all reforms calculated to relieve 'the heavy burden of taxation'.<sup>40</sup>

The League consisted of Members, Honorary Members and Associate Members. Any woman over 18 could become a Member, and any man over 18 could be made an Associate. Membership cost one shilling per annum. An Honorary Member was simply a Member who donated a guinea per annum. A Council governed the League, consisting of a President, six Vice-Presidents, one Organising Secretary, one Assistant Secretary, one Treasurer, one Relieving Officer, one Canvassing Officer, one Collector, six Councillors and Delegates. Male members were not eligible for holding office but could sit on temporary committees formed for special purposes. Only women members could vote on any question. Voting was conducted by a show of hands, unless at least five people demanded a ballot.

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<sup>39</sup> Objects, Constitution and Rules, 1902. (ML)

<sup>40</sup> Objects, Constitution and Rules, 1902. (ML)

The *Constitution and Rules* state that the Women's Liberal League may combine with other Leagues if they are 'managed solely by women,' for the purpose of gaining any common object, on the principle that 'Union is Strength.' Extra meetings could be arranged by the Council for educational lectures and addresses, other than those given at the ordinary and regular (monthly) meetings. At regular meetings current topics were discussed, supplemented by a sewing bee for the local hospital or some other charity. The real work of the League was done at election time: 'our One Day of Power.' A leaflet describing how to form a branch of the Women's Liberal League, exhorts women to realise their influence in the political system, even if they cannot vote or stand as candidates: 'If women realised their power none but good and able men would sit in the Parliament.'<sup>41</sup>

Following a name change – to 'The Women's Reform League' in 1911 – a leaflet describing the history and objects of the League was published. This contained a summary of the achievements of the League over the years of its existence, as well as listing the various objections to the League that had been raised. The leaflet gives a useful insight into this women's group, as it is one of the few examples of the women's groups publicly justifying its own existence, and explicitly refuting the social arguments against women in the public sphere. In terms of achievement, the League saw itself as instrumental in raising the age of consent and in keeping electoral reform on the political agenda. The work of the League in supporting all movements calculated to 'minimise social evils' was evident in campaigns for early closing of hotels, establishment of Inebriate Homes, eradication of venereal disease, and against the 'legalisation of vice.' The League also protested against the White Slave Traffic, resulting in a clause being inserted into the Immigration Act dealing with the question, and promoted the desirability of attaching women to the police force, with the result that two female constables were appointed in Sydney.

According to the leaflet, the League had identified itself with 'most of the movements for social betterment in New South Wales.'<sup>42</sup> The Bush Book Club was founded by a sub-committee of the League. An attempt to found a Red Cross Society foundered in 1910 because the membership could not be persuaded of the possibility of war. Other meetings

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<sup>41</sup> Leaflet No.12, 'How to form a branch,' no date. (ML)

<sup>42</sup> History and Objects, no date, p. 3. (ML)

had been held on behalf of Bush Nursing, Kindergartens, Women in Horticulture, After Care of the Insane, and more. The League was represented in various other associations, including the National Council of Women, the Public Morals Association, the Health Society, the Women's National Movement, the Red Cross Society, the Prisoner's Aid Society, the Protection of Native Races, the Professional Women's Association, Burnside Homes, Immigration and Social Service, Proportional Representation, Bush Book Club, Civics Association, Soldiers' Convalescent Home, Town Planning, Harbour Lights, District Nursing Association, and Horticultural and Home Industries. According to the leaflet, the League was at that time involved in arguing for the establishment of Children's Courts and the appointment of Police Court Matrons.

The leaflet goes on to deal with two main objections raised to the existence of the League: the first being that the President was a woman; the second that women's meetings were held apart from men. To the first objection the response was offered that the members held to the principle that women's organisations should be officered and controlled by women. The second objection was attributed to those who thought 'women should only attend meetings with their husbands or fathers, and be guided by them.' The response was that women must hold special meetings to discuss matters from the woman's point of view and form opinions before taking action with the men. The League was satisfied that critics had been effectively silenced, and that they had served as trail-blazers for other women's groups:

We are thankful to say *both* these principles for which we have fought and suffered are now recognised as the essential basis of women's organisations and that women's meetings and conferences, and women presidents are now instituted by other bodies.<sup>43</sup>

In a speech to the men and women of Brisbane in 1909, Women's Liberal League representative Laura Bogue Luffman addressed the issue of why women needed their own organisations:

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<sup>43</sup> History and Objects, no date, p. 4. (ML)

It is in order to give the political world the full benefit of this precious new element that we maintain the principle of Woman's Associations – acting with, but not under the men – Associations free to make their own laws, think their own thoughts, and work out their own political salvation ... Although firmly pledged to Liberal principle, we are not the blind supporters of anybody of men.<sup>44</sup>

In Tasmania, Jessie Rooke established the Women's Suffrage Association in Hobart and Launceston in response to the granting of the vote for women in federal elections in 1903. Like similar organisations in other states, she saw a need for women to be better educated in how best to use their new vote. Jessie had an association with Vida Goldstein that had begun when Jessie was the Tasmanian delegate to the International Women's Suffrage Committee in 1902.

The Women's Suffrage Association was completely separate to the WCTU and adopted a non-party stance. The Launceston *Examiner* reported that its aims were to be 'educating women in their electoral duty, encouraging women to enrol and keeping free from party feeling.'<sup>45</sup>

At some point the Women's Suffrage Association changed its name to the Women's Political Association, making plain its connection with the Victorian and South Australian groups of the same name. The Women's Political Association produced Tasmania's first female political candidate, Alicia O'Shea Peterson. Campaigning in 1913 as an independent candidate for women, Alicia was subjected to ferocious attacks from her opposition. However she returned to fight another (also unsuccessful) campaign in 1922.

A number of non-party-political organisations of women emerged after the struggle to achieve the vote was concluded. Among the first was the Women's Service Guilds of Western Australia (later the Australian Federation of Women Voters), founded in March 1909. The organisation was open to all women, regardless of political affiliation. The first

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<sup>44</sup> Spearritt, 'New Dawns,' p.336.

<sup>45</sup> Pearce, 'A few viragos on a stump,' 1985.

meeting on 25 March was presided over by Lady Gwenyford James who was elected the first President of the organisation. Other officers included names made familiar by membership of the Karrakatta Club: Edith Cowan, Bessie Rischbieth, Dr Roberta Jull. Jean Beadle, 'Grand Old Lady of the Labor Party', jurist, feminist, and activist joined later that year. The aim of the association was to provide a common meeting ground for women for action on non-party lines, on the grounds that 'the things that unite women are greater than the things that divide them'<sup>46</sup>:

It was not their intention to preclude members from exercising their vote according to their political convictions, but it was a call to women within the Parties to use their influence for the purpose of gaining equality of citizenship with men.<sup>47</sup>

'By love we serve' was adopted as the motto for the organisation. The agreed objectives were:

1. To educate women on social, political and economic questions.
2. To support, from the standpoint of women, any movement to protect, defend and uplift humanity.
3. To be loyal citizens of State, Commonwealth and Empire.
4. To establish equal rights of citizenship for both men and women.
5. To seek public good and not personal advantage.<sup>48</sup>

The first Annual General Meeting was described in the *West Australian* of 4 April 1910, and tabled a report from a Conference called by the Guilds and presided over by Mrs J.M. Ferguson of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The Conference agreed to take up the cause of a proposed Maternity Hospital, and also referred to issues such as marriage and divorce laws, the admittance of women to the Bar, and the discrimination against women in the State and Federal Public Service.

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<sup>46</sup> Bessie Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women* (Perth: Paterson Brokensha, 1964), p.12.

<sup>47</sup> Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women*, p.12.

<sup>48</sup> Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women*, pp.13-14.

Bessie Rischbieth writing in *March of Australian Women* observed that at this stage the newly federated states remained 'to a great extent, in the Colonial stage of separateness,<sup>49</sup> and that as a result, women's work remained somewhat local and domestic. However, the effort to unite women's groups in the non-political guilds in Western Australia caught on in other parts of Australia. In July 1909, Catherine Helen Spence in South Australia presided over a meeting to form a Women's Non-Party Political Association. Gradually all the other states created similar non-party groups.

These forums worked in each State to educate, not only women but public opinion, on the value of non-party political action, for the removal of all legal, economic and other inequalities between men and women.<sup>50</sup>

The next obvious step was for the various state groups to connect, 'having ultimately in view a chain of women voters. This was in order to take united action at Federal level, which could not be made effective at State level.<sup>51</sup> The Australian Federation of Women Voters (Non-Party) was eventually formed in 1921, and affiliated with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. In this way, says Bessie Rischbieth, 'the aims of the non-party idea were widened to contact, not only Australian women, but women of all nations.'<sup>52</sup>

The Women's Service Guilds were overtly feminist organisations, but at the same time they were often conservative in their responses to women's issues, particularly those concerning sex. Edith Cowan ultimately resigned from the Guilds over Bessie Rischbieth's right-wing leadership on sex education programmes, the treatment of prostitutes and the spread of syphilis. (The personal dispute between Edith and Bessie was discreetly handled in public, and their rift was mended when Edith decided to stand for state parliament and sought the united support of women.)

A journal was established by the Women's Service Guilds in 1920, edited by Bessie Rischbieth and entitled the *Dawn*.

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<sup>49</sup> Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women*, p.11.

<sup>50</sup> Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women*, p.11.

<sup>51</sup> Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women*, p.11.

<sup>52</sup> Rischbieth, *March of Australian Women*, p.11.

Finally there were some groups that pursued their particular objectives using political means. Affiliated to the Victorian group of the same name, the Women's Political Association of South Australia was established in 1909 to lobby specifically for uniform marriage and divorce laws across the states. As its foundation President, Catherine Helen Spence spoke at its first meeting: 'Women may well share in housekeeping the State without neglecting their own homes.'<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Nicholls and Lucy Morice were among the membership. The party remained small but dynamic and saw several victories in the early years, including making adultery grounds for divorce for women as well as men, ensuring adequate provision for the wives and children of men who died intestate, and permitting mothers to share with fathers the proceeds from the estate of a dead child.

Though membership remained small, the Women's Political Association in Western Australia was active and maintained strong connections with similar associations in Victoria and Tasmania. The association underwent several name changes, to the Women's Non-Party Political Association, then the League of Women Voters and survived with that title until 1979.

The women of the *fin-de-siècle*, in Australia as elsewhere, were learning new ways to engage in a new world. They sought to be useful citizens, cognizant of the issues facing their gender. Achieving the vote and participating in politics was one tool for the engaged citizen. But citizenship is a personal and intellectual position as well. The women in the suffrage groups drew on their own and their colleagues' experiences in other types of women's groups. They drew on the skills identified and practised in the literary groups; they drew on the knowledge of politics and the world; and they drew on the understanding that women could be effective public operators.

The political and suffrage groups have been the final focus of this argument because they are already known. It has been strategically necessary to position these groups at the end to allow for reflection on previous understandings in light of the new information concerning

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<sup>53</sup> Kay Daniels and Mary Murnane (eds), *Uphill all the Way: a documentary history of women in Australia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980), pp.285-6.

women's activity in other groups operating at the same time; particularly the literary and intellectual groups. In describing them the intention is not to fill a void in the history but to encourage a reconceptualisation of these groups, based on the new information about the other groups that existed alongside them. Suffrage and political groups need to be interpreted as one part of a larger social movement. They were the public, activist face of first wave feminism, but behind them sat a network of intellectual support; an intellectual underpinning or framework for feminism.

## CONCLUSION

*Our daughters and our grand-daughters, who stand in the dawn of the twentieth century – the women's century – will say: 'These women had not our education, they had few of our advantages, few of our privileges. They only tottered on the narrow path which has merged into the broad road on which we walk so freely.' But we hope they will say, if they remember the little band of women who stand here tonight, 'They did what they could.'*<sup>1</sup>

Maybanke Wolstoneholme has been a constant presence throughout these pages which have sought to insert the associational activity of Australian women around the end of the nineteenth century into the historical record. Maybanke is an appropriate representative for these women. In the life of this one woman can be seen many of the themes examined in this argument. She belonged to several of the earliest and most significant women's clubs in New South Wales. She acknowledged that the groups were an excellent 'training ground' for women who were driven by their politics and ideologies to engage with the public sphere. She networked with women in other parts of Australia and internationally, and consciously shared overt and covert messages of feminism. She was a relatively under-educated woman who was nevertheless lauded as an intellectual and who supported educational causes throughout her life. She spoke publicly about her political beliefs and published a radical journal. She divorced a husband and earned a living. And, as the epigraph to this chapter shows, she believed she was part of the creation of a better world for women. She saw herself as a forebear, an ancestor for future generations of women who would draw on the tradition she helped to build.

In those *fin-de-siècle* years of the nineteenth century, notorious for creating and embracing flux, women in Australia began to organise themselves into clubs and societies on a scale not witnessed before. These were mostly women-only clubs, created for various purposes, which met regularly in commercially leased premises. The often unspoken agenda of the clubs was to give women a space to practise the skills of the public sphere: speaking, engaging in

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<sup>1</sup> Maybanke Wolstoneholme, 6 May 1891, in Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Marrickville: Hale and Iremonger, 1993), p.12.

association and commerce. The groups often published journals. Occasionally they attracted public attention for their controversial agendas, or simply for rendering themselves visible to the public. Women often belonged to more than one group. The activity of these women subverted the boundaries of the public/private spheres. In particular, for women, daring to seek a voice in public was seen as a political act, whether as orators or as writers and publishers of written words.

The networks constructed by these women reinforced their efforts and were intersected and replicated by similar networks globally. This evidence of their organisation and impact on one another is the reason they are so often described as the first-wave feminists: they were the first to have attempted a sustained social movement of women, for the benefit of women.

The groups centred around New South Wales and Victoria primarily, though there were also some active in Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland. Many of the groups continued into and beyond the 1920s. New groups with different agendas were created, and continue to be created. Some groups that were formed in the 1890s still exist today.<sup>2</sup>

While each group was by definition a collective, it is also possible for the groups to be regarded collectively and each seen as a small part of a larger whole. My argument has been that in the existence of these groups, and in their activities, we find the genesis of an intellectual tradition of feminism for Australian women. Feminism was the collective movement within which all of the groups were operating separately (although as noted, there were connections between many of them). The groups' work and aims may seem trivial in isolation, but gain strength, power and cohesion when they are brought together as parts of a bigger whole.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the National Council of Women, the Lyceum Club, the Alexandra Club, the Karrakatta Club.

In a sermon delivered in 1895 entitled 'Concerning Women,' the enlightened Reverend Charles Strong made some potent points about the women's movement. He observed that, by that time, it had not made more progress because women viewed the movement

individually and provincially ... it was too narrowly associated with the suffrage and the right of women to ride bicycles when its concerns should be much broader ... He advocated a Sisterhood in God which would embrace all women and all classes and work 'unselfishly for uplifting, enriching and spiritualising all human life.'

When Vida Goldstein came to form organisations for her political and suffrage work, she recalled Strong's emphasis on the need for education and organisation. In 1904 she wrote:

Although I regret that the broad basis of the Women's Federal Political Association is not acceptable to Labour women, I rejoice to see women organising on any lines, even on Conservative lines, for organisation means education and enlarged interests, and I would sooner see women educated in views diametrically opposed to mine than not educated at all, and displaying the too prevalent apathy and indifference to important social and political questions.<sup>3</sup>

The conventional belief that the vote was the focus of the earliest women's movement, must be re-examined and recognised as a reductive interpretation of history that falls into a masculinist trap of seeing only the political as noteworthy. Certainly women organised to achieve the vote (which was nowhere handed to them on the platter described by Ian Turner). However, suffrage was never seen by the women as an end unto itself. They invariably sought the vote as the means to other ends. Without the vote they could not achieve the woman-centred agendas they formulated in their clubs and societies.

The first wave feminists were much more than suffragists; they were intellectuals constructing a new social movement: an ideology that placed women at the centre, that

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.67.

entailed new strategies and frameworks for participation in a newly theorised society. The women's groups around the end of the nineteenth century should be understood as the site of intellectual development and argument. They were enclaves in a male-dominated society, and became incubators for the development of women's intellectual confidence and strategic skills.

Linda Kerber notes that women's insertion of themselves into public space as orators did not begin (in America) until the antislavery and women's rights movements of the mid-nineteenth century; and comments that 'indeed, the presence of women in public argument has only recently begun to be normalised.'<sup>4</sup> The challenge taken up by the clubwomen of the nineteenth century is still resonant. Adrienne Rich has described the 'women's university-without-walls' – the intellectual component of the 'second wave' women's movement – as thriving 'in the shape of women reading and writing with a new purposefulness, [in] ... feminist bookstores, presses, bibliographic services ... libraries, art galleries ... all with a truly educational mission.' Women continue to claim separate space for the intellectual development of feminist ideology, thereby drawing on a feminist tradition that has its roots in the nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle*.

Babette Francis of the now defunct conservative group formed in the 1970s, Women Who Want to be Women (WWWW), says this in her chapter of Lake and Kelly's *Double Time*:

WWWW feminists regard themselves as representing a third stage of feminism in this [twentieth] century, the first two stages being emancipation and liberation. Perhaps the word 'realist' would best describe the third stage. In many ways Women Who Want to be Women are far more the heiresses of the original wave of feminists, who sought to raise men to the same standards of women, than are the liberationists who demand the same licence as men.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Linda Kerber in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsack, (eds) (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.351.

<sup>5</sup> Babette Francis in *Double Time: Women in Victoria – 150 Years*, ed. Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1985), p.444.

It is somewhat disheartening to realise that the women of this research – *my* women – can be claimed as the foremothers of Babette Francis' sympathisers. The women set an example of courage in breaking conventions and subverting the dominant culture. They embarked on a deliberate quest for intellectual challenge and fulfilment, and they strove to build networks and structures that are the basis of an enduring tradition of feminist consciousness. And, for all their naivete and earnestness, none of them ever belonged to a group with a name as profoundly embarrassing as 'Women Who Want to be Women.'

It is an unpalatable fact however, that realities do not always perfectly fit theories. The women in this research were not all as easy to admire as Maybanke Wolstoneholme. Often they were embarrassingly conservative, racist, insular, class-bound. The subjects of this research were creatures of their own time, not ours. We can enjoy them with a smug twenty-first-century amusement at their inability to see their own pedantry and hypocrisy; their failure to see beyond their own constricted spheres; for their middle-classness and servility to aristocracy. Or we can attempt to view them through the historical lens as creatures of their own time. In their intellectual work, they were looking backwards too. They deserve the dignity attached to forebears even when their own behaviour was sometimes undignified or their ambitions ridiculous.

This means accepting inconsistencies and resisting the temptation to homogenise for the sake of a neat theory. It means enduring some lack of cohesion and disclosing some gaping holes in the primary evidence. And it means acknowledging that the women speak to a contemporary spectrum of women as widely diverse as themselves.

The so-called first wave was made up of many smaller undercurrents. To torture the metaphor further: suffrage and politics were major swells, but other streams of thought and endeavour contributed to the wave. In seeking to understand the constraints of patriarchy, these women pursued many lines of enquiry. They sought political freedom to make electoral choices. They sought societal freedom to exist and associate in the public sphere. They sought intellectual stimulation and claimed the right to analyse the canon and the imagination to range beyond it. They sought sexual freedom: to divorce and to access contraception; freedom to choose not to marry or to marry according to different rules.

They travelled and sought other influences and connections. They chose their own role models. Most significantly, in their clubs and societies they claimed the freedom of thought.

It has been a mistake to view the 1890s as the period of first wave feminism on the basis of women's suffrage work alone. This has constrained our ability to see their broader achievement. In their associations, the women of the *fin-de-siecle* created a separate space between the public and private spheres, for the intellectual evolution of Australian feminism to take place.

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