

VOTES FOR WOMEN



A Brief
History

Fun Facts

Wāhine
Maori



The Salvation Army
NZ, Fiji, Tonga & Samoa
Women's Ministries

for His Sake.

CELEBRATING
SUFFRAGE 130

SUFFRAGE: A BRIEF & FASCINATING HISTORY



After years of hard work from thousands of suffragists, women in Aotearoa New Zealand became the first in the world to vote - but only after the Prime Minister bungled his backdoor dealings.

Suffrage is the word we use for the 'right to vote'. You'd think everyone would have this simple right - but in the 1800s most countries only allowed land-owning *European* men to vote. This meant that in New Zealand, only about 25 percent of people could have a say on who governed them.

Kate Sheppard cared deeply about the needs of women. As head of the Christian Women's Temperance Movement, she began mobilising women throughout New Zealand. She challenged the belief that women were too delicate for the 'tough' world of politics.

★ FUN FACT

KATE SHEPPARD WAS ONE OF THE FIRST WOMEN IN THE COUNTRY TO TAKE UP CYCLING, AND WAS A FOUNDING MEMBER OF A LADIES' CYCLING CLUB IN CHRISTCHURCH, IN 1882. IT CAUSED A SCANDAL, AS THEY CYCLED IN KNICKERBOCKERS INSTEAD OF SKIRTS.

✦ IN HER OWN WORDS

Kate hit back at accusations that suffragists were being ‘unwomanly’, neglecting their homes, and - worst of all - ‘strong-minded’!

‘We are tired of having a ‘sphere’ doled out to us, and of being told that anything outside that sphere is “unwomanly”,’ she said. ‘We want to be natural, just for a change ... We must be ourselves at all risks.’

Channeling 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Kate argued that men and women were ‘members of one body’: ‘If one half of the body politic is artificially cramped and numbed, the other half must suffer. But when the restrictions are removed ... each part will benefit all the other parts.’

A true pioneer, Kate even defended the right of women to earn a wage, and had a vision for equal pay: ‘How manifestly unfair then to have two rates of pay for the same work, merely because one of the workers is a woman,’ she said in 1892.

We must be
ourselves at
all risks

KATE SHEPPARD

✦ FUN FACT

KATE SHEPPARD WAS THE EDITOR OF *THE WHITE RIBBON*, THE FIRST NEWSPAPER TO BE OWNED, MANAGED AND PUBLISHED BY WOMEN.

✦ MERI & WĀHINE MĀORI

Māori suffragists saw the right to vote as a way to fight land confiscation and maintain rangatiratanga.

Meri Te Tai Mangakāhia (*Te Rarawa, Ngāti Te Teinga, Ngāti Manawa, Te Kaitutae*) was a leading light in wāhine rights: she fought against domestic violence, smoking, alcoholism, religion, single mothers, and advocated for the retention of traditional skills.

She made history as the first woman to speak at the Kotahitanga Parliament. This was a Māori parliament established in 1892 to fight for the preservation of Māori land rights. Only men could vote in this parliament, but wāhine Māori were often the primary carers of the land and were highly skilled in land management.

Meri boldly took her stand before the Parliament and urged them to give women the vote, saying:

‘Perhaps by [giving women votes] we may be satisfied concerning the many issues affecting us and our land. Perhaps the Queen may listen to the petitions if they are presented by her Māori sisters, since she is a woman as well.’

MERI TE TAI MANGAKĀHIA



✦ A MASS MOVEMENT

Over the course of 14 years, the Suffrage movement rallied, gathered and signed petitions. This was not easy, as many women travelled days on horseback to add their name to the cause.

Three times, petitions were presented before Parliament, and three times they were blocked. Despite rampant opposition, the Suffragists stayed the course.

In 1893, Kate and her fellow suffragists toured the country, and amidst a tidalwave of support, gathered almost 32,000 signatures - this was a quarter of all Pākēha women in the country. Suffrage had become a mass movement.

At last, a 270-metre long petition was presented before Parliament, and rolled out across the chamber with dramatic flair. It seemed like suffrage could not be stopped!

But Prime Minister Richard Seddon was determined to quash it ...



✦ NOT-SO-FUN FACT

OPPOSITION WAS FIERCE. HENRY WRIGHT WROTE THAT WOMEN SHOULD 'GO HOME, LOOK AFTER THEIR CHILDREN, COOK THEIR HUSBANDS' DINNERS, EMPTY THE SLOPS, AND GENERALLY ATTEND TO THE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS FOR WHICH NATURE DESIGNED THEM'.

✦ DIRTY POLITICS BACKFIRES

PM Richard secretly opposed Suffrage, but didn't want to admit it in case women ended up getting the vote and voted him out. Instead, he tried to force the hand of a pro-suffrage MP to change his vote to 'No', so that it would 'mysteriously' fall over at the last hurdle.

However, in an unexpected twist, two anti-suffrage politicians discovered the PM's dirty tactics. In protest, they changed their votes to 'Yes'.

And so, on 19 September 1893, the Electoral Act was passed by the narrowest of margins, making Aotearoa the first self-governing country in the world to give women the right to vote! At last, Kate could write:

'The news is being flashed far and wide ... civic freedom has been granted to the women of New Zealand.'

Less than two months later, 109,461 women enrolled in the 1893 elections - and lined up in their thousands to vote at the polling booths.

VOTING LINES AT THE 1893 ELECTIONS



★ WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF OUR TERRITORY?

Fiji

It was not until the 1963 elections that both women and indigenous Fijian men were able to vote. Before that, only European and Indo-Fijian men could vote. In 2018, an historic number of women became MPs, making up almost a quarter of the government. However, in 2022, elections were complicated by changes to voting registration. Advocacy groups say this prevented around 100,000 women from voting, and the number of women MPs plummeted to 10 percent.

Tonga

In 1951, Majesty Queen Sālote Tupou III made a milestone achievement for women when she amended the constitution, giving women the right to vote. However, since then, only six women have ever been elected to parliament. At the opening of the Women's Parliament earlier this year, Princess Tuku'aho urged Tonga to make a concrete plan to increase the number of women in parliament. Women still can't own land in Tonga, and advocacy is ongoing.



MAJESTY
QUEEN
SĀLOTE
TUPOU III



PRINCESS
TUKU'AHO

Samoa

In 1962, Samoa gained independence, and matais (chiefs) were granted voting rights. It was not until 1991 that both men and women in Samoa were given the vote. Only a matai can be a member of Parliament, and as women are rarely made chief, it remains extremely difficult for women to become MPs. But in an astonishing victory in 2021, Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa was elected Samoa’s first female Prime Minister!



PRIME MINSITER
FIAMĒ NAOMI MATA’AFA

★ FUN FACT

WOMEN DID NOT GAIN THE RIGHT TO STAND FOR PARLIAMENT UNTIL 1919, BUT IN HER LIFETIME KATE SHEPPARD DID SEE THE FIRST FEMALE MP ELECTED INTO PARLIAMENT, ELIZABETH MCCOMBS – 40 YEARS AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE.



White carnations were the symbol of Suffrage (but make them as colourful as you like)

SOURCES:

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- [HTTPS://GIVE KATE A VOICE.NZ](https://givekateavoicenz.com/)
- [NZ HISTORY: 'WOMEN & THE VOTE' & 'SO THAT WOMEN COULD GET THE VOTE'](#)
- [ARCHIVES NZ: THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE PETITION](#)
- [THE INTERPRETER: A NEW ERA OF DEMOCRACY FOR FIJI – BUT WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?](#)
- [DEVPOLICYBLOG: NO WOMEN ELECTED IN TONGA: TIME TO CHANGE THE STORY](#)
- [GLORBAL CITIZEN: MOST WOMEN EVER ELECTED TO SAMOAN PARLIAMENT AFTER SUPREME COURT RULING](#)
- [TWINKL.CO.NZ/KATE-SHEPPARD](http://twinkl.co.nz/kate-sheppard)

FAITH & SUFFRAGE



#OURWOMENPREACH



The Salvation Army
NZ, Fiji, Tonga & Samoa
Women's Ministries



Te Ope Whakaora