

## **The Post-1893 Political Environment for Auckland Women**

In 1893, women in New Zealand won the right to vote in parliamentary elections. During this time, the social, political, and economic environment for women was undergoing a period of great change. The end of the nineteenth-century saw women begin to attend university in greater numbers and enter the workforce more fully.<sup>1</sup> Women were holding positions as domestic servants, factory labourers and teachers, while some were beginning to forge their way into roles in the legal and medical fields. The passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1884 gave women the same financial rights as their husbands, finally giving married women the power to own their own property.<sup>2</sup>

However, change was slow to come, and women continued to carry the burden of social and political inequality well beyond 1893. Despite being awarded the vote, women remained barred from standing for Parliament. A woman's place was still firmly grounded in the home, with women expected to be dutiful mothers, wives, and homemakers.<sup>3</sup> As a result, by 1891 only 24% of women worked outside the home.<sup>4</sup> Rather, many women remained in the domestic sphere, where they continued to suffer with excessive rates of alcoholism among men and the inability to apply for divorce on the same grounds as their husbands.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, although the employment rate for women was increasing, they often faced low wages and terrible working conditions.<sup>6</sup>

The suffering and frustration felt by women provided an ideal environment for the emergence of women's political organisations. Auckland, a centre for women's political activism, saw the emergence of three such groups: the Auckland Women's Christian Temperance Union (AWCTU), the Auckland Women's Political League (AWPL), and the Auckland Women's Liberal League. These groups primarily consisted of middle- and upper-class Pākehā women who had the time to engage with politics.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, they did not always represent the specific interests of Māori, non-Western immigrants, and lower-class women, whose voices were distinctly absent from much of the political debate in settler society at the end of

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<sup>1</sup> Malone, "What's Wrong with Emma?," 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Dalziel, "The Colonial Helpmeet," 64.

<sup>4</sup> Dalziel, "The Colonial Helpmeet," 62.

<sup>5</sup> Dalziel, "The Colonial Helpmeet," 64.

<sup>6</sup> Olssen, "Women, Work and Family," 162.

<sup>7</sup> Grimshaw, *Women's suffrage in New Zealand*, 30.

the nineteenth-century. Although beyond the scope of this investigation, more research is needed into the political interests and behaviours of women outside of Pākehā middle-class Auckland. However, despite their lack of diversity, these groups gave many women a voice and supported them to advocate for their rights in a society that frequently ignored and belittled the political interests of women.

One of the areas where women advocated the hardest was over the Contagious Diseases Act 1869 (C.D. Act). The C.D. Act attempted to control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (then known as venereal diseases) by giving police the power to order prostitutes to undergo genital examinations at their request.<sup>8</sup> The C.D. Act was a controversial piece of legislation, particularly among women's political groups, who held various views on the status of the Act. This essay series explores the opinions held by the AWCTU, AWPL, and the Liberal League towards the C.D. Act, and questions what this situation reveals about the state of feminism in late nineteenth-century Auckland. Before considering their responses to the contentious matter of sexually transmitted diseases, I will introduce each of the three groups and their distinctive goals and politics.

### **Auckland Women's Christian Temperance Union**

Formed on February 4, 1885, the Auckland branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was the first to be established in New Zealand.<sup>9</sup> The Auckland Women's Christian Temperance Union (AWCTU) was formed under the guidance of Mary Clement Leavitt, a missionary sent from the American branch of the WCTU under instruction to form temperance unions throughout the world.<sup>10</sup> In conjunction with Leavitt, the Auckland branch of the WCTU was also founded by the New Zealand suffragists Amey Daldy – who soon became the founder of the Auckland Women's Franchise League – and Annie Jane Schnackenberg.<sup>11</sup> In 1889, Schnackenberg became the president of the AWCTU, holding this role until 1897. As a devout Christian and passionate suffragist, Schnackenberg held strong views around temperance, social morality, and achieving equality for women.<sup>12</sup> It was under Schnackenberg's leadership in the AWCTU that New Zealand women won the vote.

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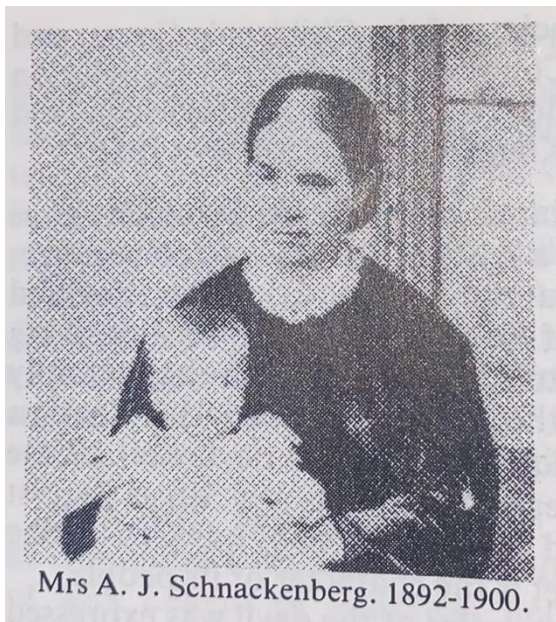
<sup>8</sup> Macdonald, "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution and the Passage of the Contagious Diseases Act (1869)," 21.

<sup>9</sup> Grimshaw, *Women's suffrage in New Zealand*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Grimshaw, *Women's suffrage in New Zealand*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Grimshaw, *Women's suffrage in New Zealand*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Te Ara: the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. "Schnackenberg, Annie Jane: Biography."



*Image 1:* Annie Jane Schnackenberg, president of the AWCTU from 1889 to 1897.

*Source:* Wood, Jeanne. New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union. *A Challenge Not a Truce : A History of the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union 1885-1985*. Nelson: Union, 1986.

Consisting of mainly middle- and upper-class Congregationalist, Methodist, and Baptist Pākehā women, the AWCTU was initially set up to address the issue of intemperance in Auckland.<sup>13</sup> While temperance remained the primary concern of the union, the AWCTU soon became a leader in the fight for women's equality and a strong voice for Auckland women's interests beyond attempts to ban the sale and consumption of alcohol. Meeting monthly in the Central Mission Hall on Albert Street, the AWCTU focused on several areas concerning women's rights.<sup>14</sup> Efforts included urging the Hospital Board to provide equal treatment for women with venereal diseases, advocating for the removal of 'women's disabilities' in matters of politics and employment, and encouraging the abolishment of female barmaids, which the Union considered degrading to women.<sup>15</sup>

### **Auckland Women's Political League**

The Auckland Women's Franchise League – as it was initially called – was founded in June 1892 by AWCTU member Amey Daldy and suffragist Annabel Knight.<sup>16</sup> As an existing member of the AWCTU, Daldy established the Franchise League as a separate institution designed to focus its efforts on the campaign for women's suffrage. Prominent members of the League included Annie Schnackenberg, the president of the AWCTU, Lizzie Frost

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<sup>13</sup> Grimshaw, *Women's suffrage in New Zealand*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Minute Book – Auckland, 1898-1902, New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union : Records, 79-057, 08/04, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Dalziel, Raewyn. "Auckland Women's Political League: 1894-1925," 79.

Rattray, a notable journalist and co-editor of the *New Zealand Graphic*, and Daldy herself, a forceful and passionate feminist dedicated to achieving equality for women.<sup>17</sup>



*Image 2:* Amey Daldy, president of the AWPL from 1892 to 1905.

*Source:* Emily Gibson Scrapbook, 1936-1947, MSS-Archives-2014/09, Special Collections University of Auckland.

Whilst the Franchise League played a vital role in petitioning parliament over women's suffrage, their role in helping women to exercise their newly found right continued beyond the success of the suffrage campaign. Rattray, the Secretary to the League, stressed the importance of women registering to vote and undertook efforts to help them do so.<sup>18</sup> These included instructing women on how to complete the necessary registration forms and providing members with a Justice of the Peace to witness their paperwork.<sup>19</sup> The League also held regular meetings with Parliamentary candidates before each election, giving women the opportunity to canvass and question those they intended to vote for.<sup>20</sup> On election day, the League provided child support for mothers intending to vote, and deployed members to stand outside polling stations to encourage women to enter.<sup>21</sup> Advising women of the importance of casting their ballot, Daldy stressed to "let not the babies, the wash-tub, or even dinners prevent the women going."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Grimshaw, *Women's suffrage in New Zealand*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> "The Women's Franchise." *The Auckland Star*, September 23, 1893.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

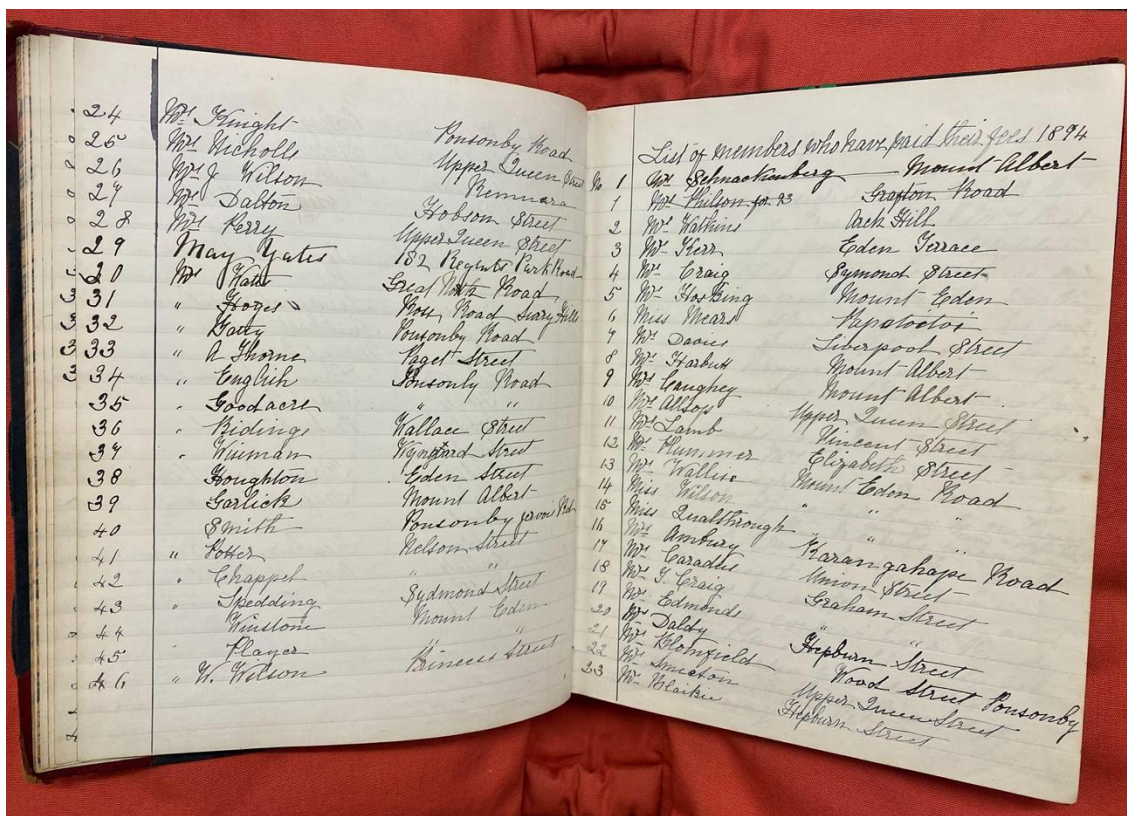
<sup>20</sup> Item 1, 1892-1898, Auckland Women's Political League Minute Books and Other Items, MSS Archives 2009/6, Special Collections University of Auckland, Auckland.

<sup>21</sup> "Political Addresses." *New Zealand Herald*, November 23, 1893.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*



In 1894, shortly after the enfranchisement of New Zealand women, the Franchise League was re-structured as the Auckland Women's Political League (AWPL), a group focused on the advancement of women's political rights more broadly.<sup>23</sup> The AWPL dedicated itself to advocating for women and working to achieve equality in areas such as employment, marriage and divorce law, education, health, and the ability to participate in parliament.<sup>24</sup> Like the AWCTU, the AWPL's monthly meetings at the Auckland YMCA were a time for women interested in social and political issues to congregate and develop plans for action. Presided over by Daldy, the AWPL regularly took action to advocate for women's rights. Such actions included sending letters to parliament advising ministers to make divorce law equal for both sexes, urging parliament to raise the age of consent to 21, and demanding equal pay for equal work.<sup>25</sup> The actions of the AWPL were important in continuing the momentum for women's rights following the enfranchisement of women in 1893.



**Image 3:** Members list for the Auckland Women's Christian Temperance Union, 1884. Includes Annie Schnackenberg (line 1) and Amey Daldy (line 20).

<sup>23</sup> Dalziel, Raewyn. "Auckland Women's Political League: 1894-1925," 79.

<sup>24</sup> Item 1, 1892-1898, Auckland Women's Political League Minute Books and Other Items, MSS Archives 2009/6, Special Collections University of Auckland, Auckland.

<sup>25</sup> Item 1, 1892-1898, Auckland Women's Political League Minute Books and Other Items, MSS Archives 2009/6, Special Collections University of Auckland, Auckland.; Item 2, 1898-1911, Auckland Women's Political League Minute Books and Other Items, MSS Archives 2009/6, Special Collections University of Auckland, Auckland.

Source: Minute Book – Auckland, 1892-1898, New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union: Records, 79-057, 08/03, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

### **Auckland Women's Liberal League**

Initially known as the Auckland Women's Political Reform League, the Auckland Women's Liberal League was founded in 1894 by Eliza Collings.<sup>26</sup> A former secretary of the AWPL, Collings believed her former League had become too conservative after it openly criticised the Liberal Government's overseas borrowing scheme.<sup>27</sup> As such, Collings left to form her own political group, along with 20 former members of the AWPL. This number continued to grow, and in 1896 the Liberal League was recorded as having 220 members.<sup>28</sup>

In some ways, the AWPL and the Liberal League were noticeably distinct in their ideologies. Unlike the AWPL, which made little reference to class, the Liberal League made it clear that it would focus on issues of class as well as gender. Vice-president Collings stated that the Liberal League represented the "working women of Auckland along with the working men of Auckland", and that "they could not separate the two".<sup>29</sup>

The overall purpose of the AWPL and the Liberal League, however, remained similar. In the first unofficial meeting of the Liberal League, it was stated that the group's main objectives included "education and consolidation of the female vote in the common interest of labour, temperance and moral reform...to secure the workers of both sexes and equal wage and equal service...to secure justice for women by equal laws and one moral statutory code for both sexes".<sup>30</sup> Like the AWPL, the Liberal League advocated to make the terms of divorce equal for both sexes and for women to be "eligible for office in every public body".<sup>31</sup> Whilst these issues mirror those campaigned for by the AWPL and AWCTU, the Liberal League remained a rival group in terms of ideology, holding contesting views that would eventually prove to be highly controversial in Auckland and beyond.

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<sup>26</sup> Keating, "The Defection of Women," 16.

<sup>27</sup> Dalziel, Raewyn. "Auckland Women's Political League: 1894-1925," 79.

<sup>28</sup> Dalziel, Raewyn. "Political Organisations," 56.

<sup>29</sup> "Women's Political Reform League." *New Zealand Herald*, September 19, 1894.

<sup>30</sup> "A.W.P.R.L." *Daily Telegraph*, August 25, 1894.

<sup>31</sup> "Women's Political Reform League." *Press*, December 20, 1894.

## **A shared goal? Contestation around the C.D. Act**

The AWCTU, AWPL, and Liberal League were all guided by the desire to achieve equality for women. Focusing on achieving equal rights in marriage law, employment law, health, and political participation, all three groups shared many common goals. However, this commonality ceased when it came to prostitution and venereal disease in Auckland. Although a matter of great concern for all three groups, their differing opinions on the methods Auckland should take to combat such issues proved divisive. Particularly controversial was the campaign around the Contagious Diseases Act (C.D. Act) 1869. A contentious topic relating to issues of health, inequality, and morality, the fight over the C.D. Act revealed two distinct forms of feminist thought in Auckland.

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