



# Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

## The anti-suffrage movement

Anti-suffrage was a political movement composed mainly of women who were against women being given the right to vote. The movement was closely associated with 'domestic feminism', more commonly known as the doctrine of 'separate spheres' – the belief that women had the right to complete freedom within the home but not in the public sphere outside the home.

The Women's Anti-Suffrage League of Victoria was founded in July 1900. Its aim was to mount a petition in support of those members of the Victorian Legislative Council who intended to reject, for the second time that year, the pro-suffrage bill referred to the Upper House by the Legislative Assembly.

The League's founders were Miss Carrie Reid and Miss Freda Derham, daughters of a Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) and the President of the Chamber of Manufacturers, respectively.

They initially placed the petition for signatures in a Collins Street tea-room. Copies were later placed in railway stations, local newspaper offices and fashionable shops in the suburbs and in country centres.

While *The Age* called the petitioners 'pampered and overdressed girls' and 'social climbers', the Anti-Suffrage League's petitions drew a massive response, with 22,978 signatures gathered in only eight weeks.

Exactly how the petitions were managed is not clear, although it appears that sympathetic gentlemen organised and addressed meetings on the petitioners' behalf, and probably financed the hired help that must have been necessary to collect the signatures.

Anti-Suffrage Petitions are held by the Public Record Office Victoria. They were presented to Parliament on 11 and 25 September 1900.



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The petitions state:

*The petition of the undersigned women, resident of Victoria, humbly sheweth: - That there is a bill before your honourable House to confer the parliamentary franchise on women. That your petitioners are convinced that this measure will not be for the good of the State for the following reasons: It will be the cause of dissension in families... it will force women from the peacefulness and quiet of their homes into the arena of politics and impose a burden upon them... The women of Victoria have never yet expressed their opinion upon the subject of women's suffrage...and we believe if they had the opportunity of so doing they would be against its adoption<sup>1</sup>.*

A Declaration of Dependence by the anti-suffrage movement was presented to parliament in 1908 with 3500 signatures in response to the 21,000 signature petition in support of women's vote.

To see an original online, visit [http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/peopleparliament/doc\\_gallery.asp](http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/peopleparliament/doc_gallery.asp)

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<sup>1</sup> PROV, VPRS 02599/P0, Unit 193, Anti-Suffrage petition 1900.

*Image Vida Goldstein courtesy Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.  
Image The Age courtesy Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria.*