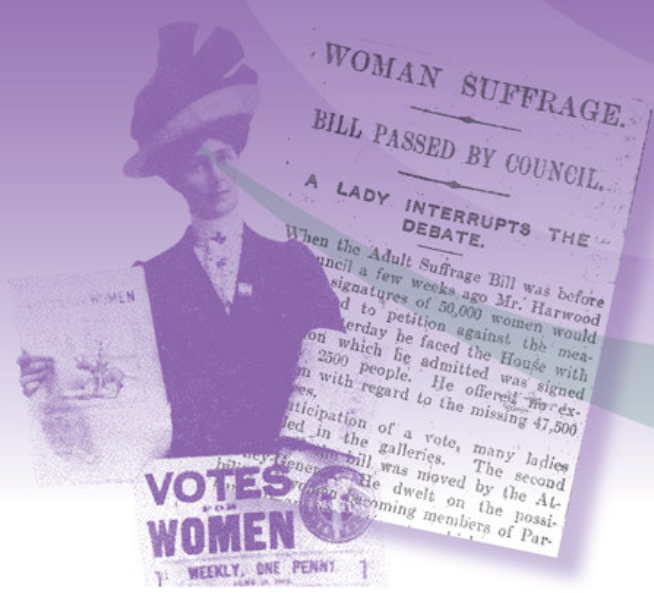


Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008



Short History

The title of suffragette was given to members of the women's suffrage movement, originally in the United Kingdom. The term comes from the word suffrage, which means the right to vote.

The word was originally coined to describe a more radical faction of the suffrage movement in the UK, mainly members of the Women's Social and Political Union, headed by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst.

Suffragist is a more general term for members of the movement, whether radical or conservative, male or female.

The fight for the right to vote

Victoria's Constitution of 1855 did not give women the right to vote.

Women first received the vote in Victoria by default in 1863.

In a piece of faulty legislative drafting, the *Electoral Act* allowed all ratepayers listed on local municipal rolls to vote. Some of those women on the rolls used their votes in the General Election of 1864.

However, in 1865, the Legislative Assembly changed the clause to restrict the vote for parliamentary elections strictly to male ratepayers.

Between 1865 and 1908, women fought for the right to vote.

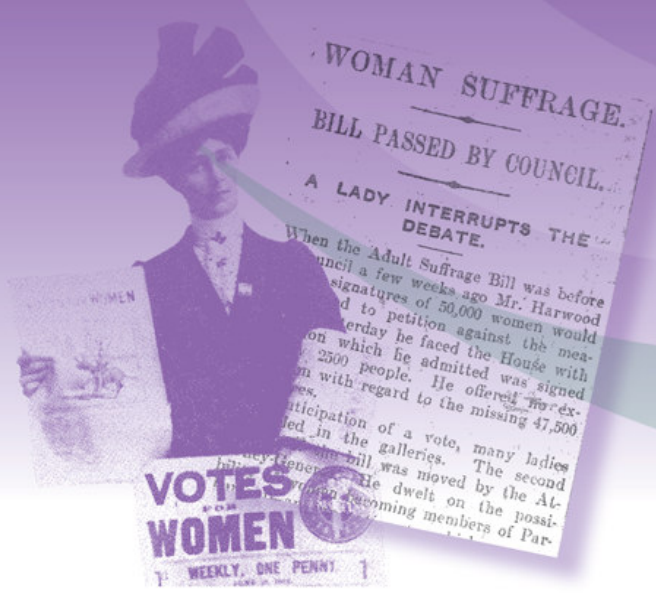
During this time, parliamentarians were elected on the 'plural' vote, a practice whereby one person would vote multiple times, generally due to property ownership. How many votes a man had depended upon how much property he owned; a wealthy squatter could have up to a dozen votes.

Along with women, others were also excluded from voting, including those of "unsound mind". Indigenous men were not specifically excluded, but Victorian legislation barred voting for people who received charitable relief, a term which was routinely applied to residents of Aboriginal reserves.

In 1908, when Victorian women were enfranchised as a group, Aboriginal women were included. However, the vote continued to be denied to those in receipt of charitable relief, which disadvantaged most Aboriginal women.

The suffragists of the 1890s were supported by organisations and individuals representing a wide array of political and ideological platforms, including the Labor Party, unions, evangelical reformers from the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and woman-identified reformists with strong reservations about the help that could be expected from men in bringing about change.

A controversial issue for the women's suffrage movement was whether advocates should argue for the vote on the same conditions as men, or whether they should first seek abolition of the property vote.



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In some ways, these campaigns signaled the start of women's participation in the Australian political process.

It took 19 Bills, with the first one presented in 1889, until most women in Victoria finally won their right to vote on 18 November 1908 when the Adult Suffrage Bill was passed. Victoria was the last Australian State to enable non indigenous women to vote in state parliamentary elections.

Victoria and the rest of Australia

Australian women, who struggled for the franchise on a colony-by-colony basis, were amongst the first in the world to win the right to vote. South Australian women gained the franchise in 1894, a year after New Zealand became the first nation to admit women to the vote.

Ironically the battle for women's voting rights in Australia began later than in Britain or the United States, success was achieved earlier.

State	Right to vote	Right to stand
South Australia	1894	1894
Western Australia	1899	1920
New South Wales	1902	1918
Tasmania	1903	1921
Queensland	1905	1915
Victoria	1908	1923

The federal franchise was extended to all white women over the age of 21 in 1902, largely as a result of the success of the campaigns in South and Western Australia.

By the time they could vote in state elections, from 1909, when the Act was proclaimed, the women of Victoria had already voted in two federal elections.

Indigenous Victorians had to wait until 1962, for the repeal of the 1902 Commonwealth Act which gave Aborigines in all states, with the exception of Queensland, the vote.

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