

Victorian Women Vote 1908–2008

The Monster Petition of 1891

In 1891, Premier James Munro said he would introduce a bill for women's suffrage if it were demonstrated that ordinary women wanted this right. The first suffrage bill was introduced in 1889 – the first time such a Bill was introduced anywhere in the British Empire.

The Victorian Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Victorian Women's Suffrage Society took up the challenge, joining forces to organise a petition.

Embarking on a door knocking campaign across Victoria, they collected almost 30,000 signatures in six weeks.

Among the signatories was Jane Munro, wife of the Premier.

Other notable women included:

- *Margaret McLean* (as Mrs William McLean), head of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and campaigner for women's rights and the vote;
- *Margaret Higinbotham*, wife of George Higinbotham, who was a controversial politician and lawyer;
- *Bessie Lee*, a working-class woman who became famous as a temperance campaigner and author.

Why was it called the Monster Petition?

The Women's Suffrage Petition is also called the 'Monster Petition' owing to its tremendous length.

It is about 260 metres long and 200mm wide and is made of paper pasted to cotton or linen fabric backing, rolled onto a cardboard spindle that rests on a stand.

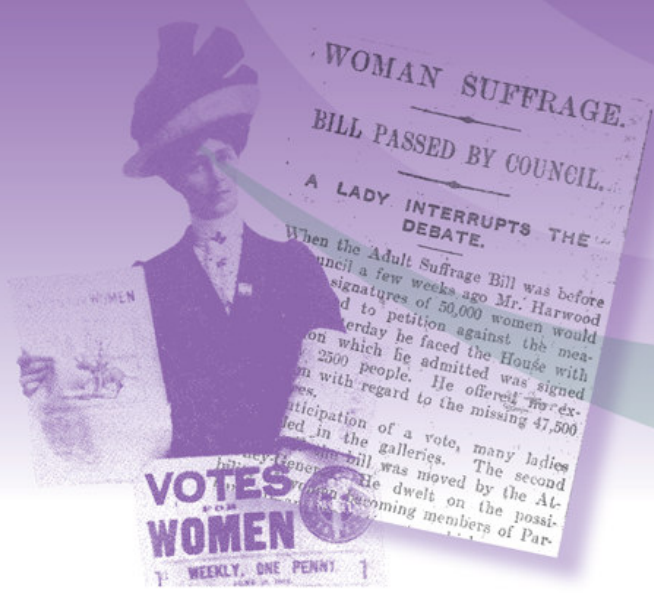
Several attendants were required to carry it into Parliament where it was tabled in September 1891.

The petition sought that 'Women should Vote on Equal terms with Men'.

Although women in Victoria did not gain the right to vote in state elections until 1908, this petition was instrumental in raising the profile of the women's suffrage movement.

The Monster Petition today

Through the combined efforts of the Genealogical Society of Victoria, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the Public Record Office Victoria and the Parliament of Victoria, the Women's Suffrage Petition has been digitally transcribed and developed into a database.



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It is now possible for anyone to search the database to find out whether their female ancestors were among the courageous women who signed the petition and made a significant contribution to women's rights today.

The Monster Petition is held by the Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) and was added to the Victorian Heritage Register in August 2007.

The Monster Petition will be on public display for the Grand Finale of the celebration of Victorian women's suffrage on November 2008, at Parliament House Open Day.

For more information and to search for signatures on the Monster Petition, log onto:

<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/WomensPetition/background.htm>

<http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/petitions/women.asp>

Image Vida Goldstein courtesy Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Image The Age courtesy Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria.