

1860-1990 Time Line of Events relating to women in New Zealand

1860

First Women's property Protection Act protecting earnings and inheritance of deserted wives. (In 1870 it was extended to cover women whose husbands were habitually cruel or drunken.)

1870

University of New Zealand founded. In 1870's Mary Ann Muller of Nelson under the name Femina wrote newspaper articles on women's rights and promoted women's suffrage among politicians she knew, despite her husband's disapproval. Mary Colough a teacher wrote singular articles in Auckland under the name Polly Plum.

1871

First state high school for girls in New Zealand started in Dunedin (fees 10 pounds per annum). Admission of women to the new University of Otago where they could get certificates, but not degrees.

1873

Canterbury University College established with classes open to women. (Most women attending not matriculated student, but fee-paying ladies). An Employment of Females Act restricted women's work in factories to 8 hours but was not policed.

1874

An Act said degrees could be granted to women at colleges affiliated to University of New Zealand.

1877

Kate Milligan Edgar of Auckland became the first woman to graduate from University of New Zealand. (First woman Bachelor of Arts in the British Empire). Women eligible to vote for and sit on education boards and school committees. Christchurch Girls High School and Auckland Girls High School founded.

1878

Attorney – General Robert Stout introduced an Electoral Bill which included provision for women ratepayers to vote and stand for Parliament. It was not passed.

1881

Helen Connon graduated as first woman MA with first class honors on English and Latin. (She married Prof. McMillan Brown in 1886 and continued as Principal of Christchurch Girls High School for a time.) Kate Edgar graduated MA at Canterbury College.

1883

Kate Edgar became founder-headmistress of Nelson Girls College, with her sister Lilian as assistant teacher. Wellington Girls High School started in a cottage in Abel Smith Street and Timaru Girls High School founded. Auckland University College founded.

1884

New Zealand Married Women's Property Act enabled all wives and divorces women to acquire, hold and dispose of their own property and earnings and to be sued as femme sole.

1885

Mary Leavitt, a missionary from the World Women's Christian Temperance Union arrived in New Zealand and by 1886, 15 branches of the WCTU had been started. Making it first New Zealand nation women's organization.

1887

Sir Julius Vogel of the Liberal Government introduced a Women's Suffrage Bill, which was passed in the Elected House of Representatives but did not get through the appointed Legislative Council. Kate Sheppard of the WCTU presented 350 signatures to Parliament in a first Suffrage Petition that year.

1888

Petition of about 800 names presented by Kate Sheppard and WCTU. Auckland Grammar School Board took over responsibility for the defunct Auckland Girls High School.

1889

Harriet Morison started the Tailoresses Union in Dunedin, the first women's trade union.

1890

Harriet Morison started a Domestic Servants Union which was short-lived. A Commission of Enquiry into Sweating (sewing done by women in their homes at starvation rates of pay) was held which brought in reforms in working conditions in factories and shops. In the 1890's only 15% of all women were in the paid workforce.

1891

During the first Liberal Government under John Balance, Sir John Hall introduced a Women's Franchise Bill and an amendment to an Electoral Bill, both of which failed.

1892

Harriet Morrison and others formed the Women's Franchise League in Dunedin. More Franchise Leagues were formed which moved the women's campaign for the vote outside the middleclass.

Suffrage Petition which more than 19,000 women signed. First Ladies Golf Club founded in Dunedin

1893

Another Suffrage Petition signed by nearly 32,000 women – between a fifth and a quarter of the female population. The Suffrage Bill passed by Legislative Council – 20 to 18. 90,290 women voted for the first time, in the election held in November 1893.

Grace Neill, first female Factory Inspector appointed.

1895

Minnie Dean, a Winton baby farmer, was hanged for murder.

1896

Emily Siedeberg became the first New Zealand women medical graduate. Foster homes for children were licensed. 1896 New Zealand National Council of women formed, founding President Kate Sheppard. Many members had worked for women's Suffrage in previous decade. Part of wider movement for women's rights which spread across Britain, and its colonies. Europe and the USA (where ICW formed in 1888).

1897

Wellington's Victoria University College founded. Margaret Cruickshank second woman in New Zealand to graduate as a doctor and first G.P. in Waimate. An Act enabled women to practice law. Ethel Benjamin of Otago University qualified, first in British Empire. (By 1962, only 6 women had qualified).

1901

Ellen Dougherty, World's First Registered Nurse. New Zealand was the first country to start Registration. England began registration in 1919, the year Ellen died. First Matron of Palmerston North Hospital 1893

Sybylla Maud started the District Nursing Association, working for prevention of TB etc. rather than cures. Health Camps were started.

1905

Stella Henderson Allen, MA LLB, became the first women parliamentary reporter and correspondent in New Zealand.

1906

The National Council of Women went into recess.

1908

New Zealand Nursing Journal Kai Tiaki founded by Hester Maclean. Harriet Morison was appointed in charge of Women's Employment Bureau of Department of Labour Auckland. A Domestic Workers Union was refused registration under the Arbitration Act because domestic work was not an industrial occupation.

1909

Registered Nurses Association founded

1912

Dr Ada Patterson became one of the first medical officers for school inspection and later Director of School Hygiene.

1913

Hester Maclean became Matron in Chief of an Army Nursing Service which served in England, Serbia, Egypt and France, including the trenches.

1914-1918

Ettie Rout, an MA from Canterbury College, campaigned against venereal disease among Australasian troops in the Middle East, Paris and London.

1915

Alice Parkinson, a domestic servant in Napier, shot and killed the father of her illegitimate child when he deserted her. Women's organization took up her case and got her released from prison in 1921

1916

The National Council of Women of New Zealand was revived by Kate Sheppard and others.

1919

New Zealand women became entitled to stand as candidates in general elections.

1921

The New Zealand Federation of University Women was founded (after 1st Conference in the International Federation of University Women held in London in 1920). The Country Women's Institute was also founded.

1923

Aunt Daisy (Maud Basham) took part in one of first experimental radio broadcasting programs in New Zealand. Her job was needed to support her family.

1925

A Child Welfare Act looked at the health of foster children.

1930

Unemployment Act of 1930 excluded women from relief programs. Single women who registered were given food and 7/6d if they agreed to train as domestic servants.

1931 to 1935

131 women died of septic abortion, of 42 of them in 1934.

1933

First women elected to the New Zealand Parliament, Mrs Elizabeth McCombs.

1936

An Inquiry held into the Problem of Abortion in New Zealand. Compulsory Unionism introduced by first Labour Government brought influx of women into trade unions. (That year only 3% of married women were in paid jobs). Jean Batten made first solo flight from England to New Zealand in 11 days.

1939-1945

War brought an end to Paid Domestic Service in New Zealand as many jobs opened up to women.

1942

Female tram conductors achieved equal pay with men.

1947

First woman New Zealand Cabinet Minister, Miss Mabel Howard (elected to Parliament in 1943, previously Secretary Canterbury General Laborers Union and on Christchurch City Council).

1954

Yvette Williams set world record for the long jump with a leap of 20 feet, 7 and a half inches

1960

Dr Alice Bush became President of the New Zealand Family Planning Association when BMA still forbade its doctors to work for FPA Clinics. Second Labour Government brought in the Government Services Equal Pay Act. A Council for Equal Pay and Opportunity was established. (By 1966; 20% of married women in paid jobs.)

1972

Equal Pay Act extended this provision to the private sector.

1973

A Domestic Purposes Benefit was introduced for women bringing up children alone.

1976

NZ Matrimonial Property Act recognized women's unpaid contribution to the family, providing equal shares in matrimonial assets on break-up of a marriage. 32% of married women in paid jobs.

1977

Human Rights Commission Act made all sexual discrimination illegal (except in private clubs).

1977-1978

Before 2020 abortion in New Zealand was heavily restricted and criminalized under the Crimes Act 1961, with significant changes occurring in 1977 and 1978 to allow abortions under specific circumstances.

1980

Maternity Leave and Employment Protection Act passed.

1986

21% of women with 1 child under 1 were in the paid workforce.

1990

63% of women aged 15-64 were in the paid workforce.

2000s

Before 2020 abortion in New Zealand was heavily restricted and criminalized under the Crimes Act 1961, with significant changes occurring in 1977 and 1978 to allow abortions under specific circumstances.

Comment – the reference source for the information in this document came from a piece of paper amongst other papers handed to me by someone who thought it was important. There were no sources given.