

EUREKA
EDUCATION

—
WOMEN
AND
EUREKA

EUREKA
CENTRE
BALLARAT

ART GALLERY
OF BALLARAT



WOMEN AND EUREKA

image p.37:
ST Gill
Zealous gold diggers, Castlemaine
1852, [1872]
watercolour and pencil on paper.
Purchased 1891
State Library of Victoria

While the gold diggings were full of men searching for gold, alone or in small groups, some women and children also came to the goldfields. Women and young children did not have to pay for a gold licence, so they were free labour who could also dig for gold.

There were wild stories of miners striking it rich quickly and easily, which helped fuel the gold rush. The reality was very different. Once the easy surface gold was found, diggers had to tunnel underground to follow the gold leads and it could take a long time to find any gold. To help feed themselves and their families, women had to find other ways to make money. Some took on jobs such as teaching in the small schools that appeared on the diggings. Others ran businesses, such as selling groceries, illegal alcohol and other supplies from their tents, cooking meals or taking in laundry.

MAKERS OF THE EUREKA FLAG?

A local story claims that the Eureka Flag was made by Anastasia Hayes, Anne Duke and Anastasia Withers. Anastasia Hayes was a teacher at St. Alipius school and her husband Timothy Hayes was a key member of the Ballarat Reform League. Anne Duke was a miner's wife, pregnant with her first child and living in a tent near the Eureka Stockade. Anastasia Withers was an ex-convict and talented seamstress who was living in Bendigo at the time of the protests.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE COLONIES

Like many other organisations in the mid–19th century, the Ballarat Reform League did not think women should have the same democratic rights as men. Despite this widespread belief, a women's rights movement developed in Victoria. Despite the efforts of activists and their supporters in the Legislative Assembly, Victoria was the last state in Australia to give women the right to vote. Female suffrage was not introduced in Victoria until 1908–15 years after women in South Australian women had gained the right to vote.

THE ACCIDENTAL ENFRANCHISEMENT OF 1864

In 1863 the colony of Victoria introduced an Electoral Act that allowed all ratepayers listed on local council (Municipal) rolls to vote in the Legislative Assembly elections. It happened that many of the ratepayers were women. While married women were not allowed to own property until 1884, single women and widows could own property and had to pay rates and vote in their local elections. After many women used this right to vote in the 1864 election, the Victorian parliament quickly changed the law to prevent women from voting.

FEDERATION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

In 1901 when the Australian colonies became a single Federation, there was significant debate over the question of voting rights. Women had already been granted the right to vote in South Australia (1895) and Western Australia (1900). Would the new federal



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government take these rights away or would all women across Australia be given the same opportunity? Neither situation occurred. In 1902 the Commonwealth Franchise Act gave anyone the right to vote if they were entitled to vote in their state. This meant that women across Australia had different rights despite all living in the same country.

Maybanke Anderson, *The Sun*, 6 July 1912

‘In the politics of a democracy there should be no sex. A woman without a vote is an inferior, and thereby liable to be so regarded.’

FEMALE POLITICIANS

In the very next election, after miners gained the right to vote, the Eureka rebel leader Peter Lalor was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly. The same cannot be said for women. While South Australia allowed women to run for parliament in 1895, it was not until 1921 that a woman was elected to an Australian parliament when Edith Cowan was elected to the Lower House in Western Australia. Victoria did not allow women to stand for Parliament until 1923 and it wasn't until 1933 that Millie Peacock became the first female member of the Parliament of Victoria.

Edith Cowan, Debut speech in the House of Assembly (WA), 21 July 1921, Hansard, pp. 15–19.

A transcription of her full inaugural speech is available from the Parliament of Western Australia bit.ly/ecowantranscript

‘The views of both sides are more than ever needed in Parliament to-day. If men and women can work for the State side by side and represent all the different sections of the community, and if the male members of the House would be satisfied to allow women to help them and would accept their suggestions when they are offered, I cannot doubt that we should do very much better work in the community than was ever done before.’

Unknown photographer
Edith Cowan, member of the Legislative Assembly for West Perth, Western Australia 1922
photograph
Sourced from the collections of the State Library of Western Australia and reproduced with the permission of the Library Board of Western Australia



Activity 1

History and English 5–9

As a class, visit eurekacentreballarat.com.au and explore the Ellen Young poetry resource (primary or secondary).

Activity 2

History 5–9

History was traditionally written from the perspective of men. Therefore, men are usually presented as the main protagonists. The women who came to the goldfields often came with their husbands and are therefore were seen in the role of supporting characters. By the end of 1854, a third of the population of Ballarat were women and children and many of these women fought hard to achieve suffrage.

Imagine you live in a world where women were never given the vote. You are a women's rights activist. Create a persuasive presentation or essay outlining the reasons why you think women should be given the vote and the way in which you are going to achieve that.

Activity 3

Visual Arts 5–9

Women often made samplers, or embroidered cloths, with images such as flowers or words which related to a family event such as the birth of a child, a girls' birthday, a marriage. Some samplers featured religious sayings or moral messages to encourage good behaviour. Design and stitch your own sampler.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What would life be like for women who came to the goldfields. What challenges would they have faced? How would it be different from the way you live today?
2. Why do you think history is often looked at from the male perspective?
3. How do you think having different voting rights across states may have affected the balance of power in parliaments?

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Visit the Eureka Centre and participate in the Eureka! or Down with Despotism program.

Visit the Art Gallery of Ballarat and participate in the Hall of Debate program.

ACTIVITIES

WOMEN AND EUREKA

Pre-visit

Activity 1. Complete the review of the Ellen Young poetry book and the transcribed poems. After your visit write a poem about something you have learnt.

Post-visit

Complete Activity 2. Choose one the women featured in either the Art Gallery of Ballarat Hall of Debate program or the Eureka Centre program.

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