The 1920s: A Good Decade for Women in Politics

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Abstract: The work of Australian scholars in the field of between-wars feminism has allowed us to move on from the ‘wave’ metaphor of feminist activity over the past 120 years or so, which posited a trough of inactivity between gaining the vote and the ‘second wave’ cresting in the 1970s. Feminism’s journey is more aptly described as one taken on foot: slow and arduous in places, but always continuing. In such a journey, the 1920s represents something of a bend in the road. Following the more singular suffrage campaign, many feminist ideas in the 1920s clustered around a less singular, but still broad and in many ways unifying, set of beliefs about women’s work as homemakers and child rearers, usually described as maternal or maternalist feminism. The galvanising force of this widely accepted form of feminism was combined with new opportunities for women to enter, and assume leadership roles in, the public realm. This chapter examines the political lives of two women active in NSW politics in this turbulent, exciting decade: Mary Booth and Millicent Preston Stanley.

Keywords: 1920s, Anzac Fellowship of Women, Australia, child endowment, World War I, maternalist feminism, Mary Booth, Millicent Preston Stanley, parliamentary politics, women and leadership

Thanks to the work of scholars such as Marilyn Lake, Judith Smart, Patricia Grimshaw and Joy Damousi, to name just a few who have analysed the many permutations of interwar feminism, Australian historians have been able to eliminate the sense of a ‘trough’ between the two peaks of so-called ‘first wave’ and ‘second wave’ feminism. And yet the wave metaphor remains, sometimes just as an easy shorthand but obscuring the continuity between late nineteenth-century and post-suffrage feminism, a continuity which indicates that the first wave did not actually recede. This continuity seems particularly evident when we look at women and leadership in the 1920s, the decade that consolidated maternal or maternalist feminism as a strong political force. Maternalist feminism is defined by Lake as to some extent initiated by the joint arrival of federation with national woman suffrage, enabling women to work toward building a nation that enshrined the rights and wellbeing of women and children. This strain of feminist thinking is a direct descendant of ‘first wave’ feminism, in which women’s domesticity was a key component of the political success of the woman suffrage movement. The following
discussion is an examination, through the lives of two politically active women, Mary Booth and Millicent Preston Stanley, of this post-suffrage legacy as it enabled interwar feminists to take the next step after gaining the franchise: to give women a permanent voice in the political arena and to provide examples of political leadership for successive generations of women to emulate. Millicent Preston Stanley became the first female member of the New South Wales (NSW) Legislative Assembly, while Mary Booth, unsuccessful in her attempt at winning political office, nevertheless gained a prominent place in less formal political structures. Their successes in this decade are attributable to a combination of the widespread acceptability of maternalist feminist beliefs and the mechanisms by which women could further such beliefs.

Maternalist feminism and feminist politics in the 1920s

By the 1920s, women’s use of their right to vote can be seen in the number of feminist activist and lobby groups that had sprung up, as documented by the scholars I have mentioned, and the many other contributors to this field. By the 1920s, too, women were exercising their right to stand for political office in both Commonwealth and state legislatures, and thus push for reforming legislation that reflected maternalist principles. Because maternalist feminism took many forms, its impact on the polity was varied; at its most radical it took the idea of the ‘separate sphere’ of nineteenth-century domesticity and used it as the basis from which to claim women’s equality as citizens. More commonly, however, it was a broad church, the recognition of the value of women’s lives as wives and mothers forming the basis for political action to improve the quality of these lives and those of their children that was acceptable to both reformist and conservative political programs.

Although many prominent women pursued maternalist feminist objectives from outside the party system, they also pursued them quite doggedly within it, although with fairly sporadic success before the 1940s. However, the measurement of success in parliamentary politics requires different criteria from those used to measure the success of non-party political campaigns. The initial low success rate in parliamentary politics can be attributed to a number of factors, and the reasons put forward by Kathleen Sherrard in 1943 are still pertinent. In canvassing the possibilities, Sherrard considers countries where the achievement of woman suffrage was followed by a greater female presence in houses of parliament than in Australia. In particular, she notes that before women won the vote here, there was a political culture of ‘an almost complete absence of women from posts of authority, such as in municipal councils, on juries or magistrates’ benches.’ With Sherrard, I would not count male dog-in-the-mangerism as necessarily
the overriding reason. Norman Mackenzie’s article on Vida Goldstein’s early galvanisation into action in federal politics is also still pertinent. In analysing the pitfalls of the political process, Mackenzie’s account of Goldstein’s first campaign for the Commonwealth senate – very successful in terms of the votes she did get – highlights how, in the post-suffrage decades, ideological splits within the feminist movement were just one factor that made success difficult in the more sophisticated political arena in which women were now competitors. By the early 1920s, standing for office in all state legislatures was also possible. The two subjects of this chapter, Mary Booth and Millicent Preston Stanley, had long and varied political lives which began well before the 1920s, but each responded quickly to the opportunity to stand for political office. Booth did so in 1920, the first election after the Women’s Legal Status Act 1918 (NSW) came into effect, and Preston Stanley very shortly after, in 1922. But only Preston Stanley won office.

Dr Mary Booth was born in Sydney in 1869, received a BA from Sydney University in 1890, and then briefly studied medicine at Melbourne University before transferring her medical studies to the University of Edinburgh. She returned to Australia in 1900. In 1901 she, along with Rose Scott, was one of the founders of Sydney’s Women’s Club, and a few years later she joined the National Council of Women. Her feminist credentials were therefore well established early in her career. Until the outbreak of World War I, her professional career as a physician was largely in the public school system, lecturing in hygiene for the NSW Department of Public Instruction from 1904 to 1909, then from 1910 to 1912 working with the Victorian Department of Public Instruction on the establishment of the first school medical service. She published on public health, particularly in relation to child health. These activities show the beginnings of her interest in ‘mental hygiene’ – related to, but not synonymous with, eugenics.

Booth’s interest in child health suggests a maternalist feminist leaning, social welfare for children being a key maternalist principle, but even though her aims often overlapped with those of the more dyed-in-the-wool maternalist feminists her interest was not especially in that direction. Instead, it was part of her concern for the improvement of ‘British stock’, bound up with the common fears of the time of ‘race suicide’. One way in which she sought to fight race suicide was through the domestic science movement, which was gaining momentum in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1911, while in Melbourne, Booth was briefly involved with the Emily Macpherson College of Domestic Economy. The link between domestic science and mental hygiene was drawn explicitly in material relating to her own domestic science college, which she opened in 1936 in the Sydney suburb of Kirribilli. Her views were more sophisticated than those of the less
medically informed eugenicists, into which category we could put the other subject of this article, Millicent Preston Stanley.

Preston Stanley was born in Sydney in 1883, the daughter of a grocer, Augustine Stanley, who deserted the family. Following her parents’ divorce when Millicent was twelve, her mother began incorporating her maiden name of Preston into her surname, hence Preston Stanley. The double barrel was probably a useful handle for Millicent as an aspiring politician of humble origins working among silvertails. Like Booth, Stanley was concerned with the problems of the ‘feeble-minded’, but Stanley’s views, often expressed in a column she wrote for Sydney’s Daily Telegraph newspaper, were somewhat more strident and included advocating segregation of the ‘mentally deficient’. Much of Preston Stanley’s early political education came from her work as an organiser. This began with the Women’s Liberal League, a feminist lobby group along political liberal lines with a branch-based structure, formed in New South Wales by Hilma Molyneux Parkes in 1902. In 1916 it changed its name to the Women’s Reform League.14 From about 1918, Preston Stanley’s other non-party political activity included her membership of Sydney’s Feminist Club, of which she became president in 1919. According to the political biography by Elizabeth Smith, Preston Stanley steered the Feminist Club along a more public political path than it had taken before.15

In the 1920s, each of these women consolidated the public life she had already established, and each acted upon the Women’s Legal Status Act 1918 (NSW) by standing for NSW Parliament shortly after its passage, as mentioned above. So, by the 1920s each woman had established herself as a feminist leader through non-aligned organisations, yet sought to extend her political influence through state parliament. Why?

Maternalist feminist views had the capacity to speak to widespread concerns on both sides of the political fence, giving feminism acceptability across the spectrum, and leaving behind groups that did not embrace at least some feminist principles. For instance, the conservative lobby group, the Australian Women’s National League (AWNL), which had been edging towards feminism since 1910, nevertheless persisted in opposing the idea of women standing for office and lost members because of it.16 This defection from the AWNL is one indication of the widespread acceptability of women in politics. The increasing acceptability of feminism was due to some extent to the increasing belief in the importance of women’s role in raising children in a beneficial home environment. For all this mainstream acceptability, this view could be used as the basis to argue for something akin to political equality – bearing in mind as we must that the notion of ‘equality’ is itself problematic, as Nancy Cott has discussed.17

Anthea Hyslop articulates the fine line trod by feminists as both agents and objects of domestic or maternalist values. Taking up a point raised by
Anne Summers, who viewed with second wave feminist eyes the domestic focus of much of the suffrage movement and therefore regarded it ‘a large part of female oppression’, Hyslop argues that it was quite possibly this domestic outlook that helped Australian women secure the vote relatively early. The same could be said of the transition from the domestic feminism of the suffrage campaigns to the wider leadership roles offered by political activity on broader maternalist issues. Discussing the feminism that evolved following the achievement of woman suffrage at the Commonwealth level, Merrindahl Andrew also focuses on the unifying aspect of maternalist feminism, saying that ‘the 1920s push for motherhood and childhood endowment was distinguished by a remarkably broad but shallow consensus. Ambiguity about the precise form of the measure allowed all major organised interests to support the idea.’ In other words, as acceptable as maternalist feminism was, the question of how women’s role in the family should be acknowledged – whether as non-wage-earning dependents, as citizens deserving independent recognition and recompense for their role as mothers, or something in between – was less a matter of consensus.

That the earliest payment to mothers, the Maternity Allowance introduced in 1912, was a ‘one-off’ payment on the birth of a child, and that the eventual universal system of an ongoing benefit system was a child, rather than motherhood, endowment, and that it was not introduced until the 1940s, does not belie the power of the ‘broad but shallow’ consensus described by Andrew. The range of attitudes expressed in submissions to the 1927–29 Royal Commission on Child Endowment indicates just how a ‘broad but shallow’ commitment to the principle of supporting women’s maternal role could split on a number of different issues within that commitment. It sums up much of the variation in maternalist feminism generally, which meant different things to different feminists, as well as to voting people – male and female – outside the feminist movements. Perhaps the most notable split in the evidence given to the Royal Commission was that between more ‘conservative’, ‘traditional’ or ‘mainstream’ views (perhaps the best summary of those of the commission itself) that mothers necessarily belonged to a patriarchal family and the more radical ones expressed, for instance, by Irene Longman representing the National Council of Women in Queensland, who stated baldly that a motherhood endowment should enable women to live apart from their husbands if they wished.

Part of the broad acceptability of maternalist feminism was that, although at its most radical it challenged the patriarchal family, it also offered stability at a time when Australia was dealing with the cataclysm of World War I and its aftermath, fears about the Bolshevik revolution, and postwar economic recession. Of these, World War I and its aftermath were the most significant in bringing far-reaching changes to Australian society, including
the movement of greater numbers of women into the public sphere than before. There was also a considerable feminising of war grief in the 1920s, documented in *Sacred Places*, Ken Inglis’s detailed account of how Australians set about the task of commemorating their war dead, and in a very different study by Joy Damousi of the hard work of grieving, *The Labour of Loss*.23 Damousi demonstrates how this decade, shaped so profoundly by the war, opened a door for women to the male world of heroism and sacrifice – before the door was unceremoniously slammed shut in the 1930s. In the decade following the end of the war, archetypal images abounded of figures such as the Sacrificial Mother who, having given her son in the service of her country, earned a respected place in national mourning. In the 1930s, however, maternal grief came to be considered an intrusion on what was increasingly being seen as the real sacrifice made in war: dying on the battlefield. Mothers and wives lost their specific sacrificial status and became women in general who could only be observers, not participants.24

**Mary Booth**

This is a good point at which to discuss in greater detail our first woman, Dr Mary Booth. At the outbreak of war in 1914, Booth attempted to turn her medical qualifications toward active service. But while female nurses could enlist, female doctors could not.25 I see the thwarting of Booth’s desire for active service as significant to the direction she took in her home front war work. An inheritance had permitted her studies in Edinburgh, and appears to have also freed her from the need to remain in paid employment thereafter.26 Booth played an active part in the feminising of war grief, beginning with her Anzac Day ceremonies held from 1918 at Sydney’s Wharf No 1 at Woolloomooloo.27 This was the wharf from which women farewelled their departing loved ones.28 After the war, in 1922, Booth’s Centre for Soldiers’ Wives and Mothers unveiled a memorial drinking fountain in the rock face opposite the wharf.

During the war, Booth’s charitable work on the home front had begun by providing support to the families of servicemen in organisations such as her Centre for Soldiers’ Wives and Mothers, but she very quickly branched out to support the servicemen themselves, with the establishment in 1915 of her Soldiers’ Club in the centre of Sydney.29 She did not abandon the cause of soldiers’ families, but there is a discernible shift in priorities. Why did she not devote all her energies to a cause that might seem to be the most pressing to a feminist, the needs of the dependants of soldiers? Although I think that there were several reasons, at this stage I am prepared to venture just a couple of possibilities. First there is the possibility that the Soldiers’ Club offered vicarious access to the war service she had been denied. The second is more
tentative: Booth is possibly an example of a suffrage feminist, one whose feminism found its strongest expression in the fight for the vote. While identifying as a feminist through membership of organisations such as the National Council of Women, there is some suggestion that, even as early as the 1920s – the time when she seems to have done so much to stake a claim for women in postwar Australia – Booth’s feminism had some competition for the captaincy of her soul. This competition was her strong commitment to the cause of Empire.

In 1918, Booth was appointed OBE, the admission of women to honours being a response to the work they did on the home front during World War I. During the early 1920s, she began to link herself to the commemoration of Anzac. In 1921, under the regulations of the *War Precautions Repeal Act 1920* (Cth), she successfully applied for permission to use the word ‘Anzac’ in the name of the organisation that became the very successful Anzac Fellowship of Women. This is quite an achievement, the result of strenuous lobbying of the Hughes government.

Founded on Anzac Day 1921, the fellowship was open to all who had engaged in war work. Its aims, as set out in its constitution, were as follows:

a. To promote the comradeship of women who were engaged in war work during the Great War.
b. To foster the spirit and traditions of Anzac Day.
c. To have regard for the welfare of the soldiers and their bereaved.
d. To be helpful and friendly to newcomers from the Old Country.
e. To enlist the sympathy of others who are sympathetic with the above objects.

The conception of the organisation was, therefore, fairly elastic; its most important elements were the values it espoused rather than the activities it pursued. This elasticity also applied to the role of women – it could not be described as a feminist organisation inasmuch as it was not formed ostensibly to promote feminist ideas. Yet it can be seen as part of the feminisation of war grief described by Inglis and Damousi. It is part of the feminist spectrum in that it reflects Booth’s concept of women’s place in the war effort and the commemoration of it.

And its *raison d’être* extended well beyond the war. For Booth, the meaning of Anzac was Empire loyalty, and the Anzac Fellowship of Women’s aim of being ‘helpful and friendly to newcomers from the Old Country’ grew in importance through the 1920s and 1930s. While there is not scope here to do justice to Booth’s concept of what constituted Empire loyalty, it is nevertheless worth remembering, as noted earlier, that it was allied to her interest in child health, and with her emphasis on preserving ‘good British stock’, expressed through her Empire Service Hostel for
immigrant British boys. These views were of course very widespread and crossed ideological lines, and also accorded to some degree with the views of the official historian of World War I, C.E.W. Bean, an occasional visitor to Booth’s Empire Service Club.33 Thus from the early 1920s, the aspects of Booth’s political values that could be described as maternalist feminist were already being harnessed to this more overarching political commitment to the idea of Australia as a member of the British Empire.

Returning more specifically to Booth’s activities related to the war effort, I venture that they represent more than a feminisation of war grief. Damousi mentions how war work enabled Booth and women like her ‘to claim a public place in the memory and sacrifice of war’.34 I would like to put the case more strongly and say that Booth politicised the role of women in ‘the memory and sacrifice of war’. By the 1930s, as the door slammed shut on so many women seeking to share their own war grief with returned servicemen, Mary Booth used a combination of single-mindedness and political acumen to wedge her foot in the path of that closing door by establishing a power base in the early postwar years. The Anzac Fellowship of Women survived, albeit in many different forms, until the late 1960s. The public place that Booth thus gained some control of was not, therefore, limited to the war grief of women, but extended to political leadership in general.

In the light of this achievement, Booth’s unsuccessful bid for a seat in the NSW Legislative Assembly at the same time seems perhaps rather insipid. But it is an important indication of her aspirations as a public figure. Campaign material from the 1920 NSW election to the Legislative Assembly, when she stood as an independent ‘women’s’ candidate, shows a marrying of her beliefs about public health with policies that might be considered maternalist feminist.35 Addressing a meeting in the Sydney suburb of Manly, Booth stated that much of the work of the home had been handed over to the state. She singled out health laws for specific mention. Women had very little say in framing the relevant laws, she said, therefore women needed to get elected so they could have more. In the same address, she raised the teaching of ‘domestic economy’, transport infrastructure, slums, employment of ex-servicemen and ‘the proper care of the mentally deficient’ as issues.36 In an election brochure set out as a letter to voters, she drew a strong link between the experience of the war and the race suicide fears of the time, with mothers positioned as the custodians of the race, thereby appealing to mainstream maternalist feminist arguments.37 At the same time, I think, maternalist feminism was already waning in its political appeal for Booth. Her platform was more specific to issues of mental hygiene and environmentalism that were to remain a priority until her death in 1956.38 The travails of war widows were, ultimately, less important to her than the development of good British
stock in Australia. Maternalist feminism was more often a vehicle than a goal in itself.

Following her unsuccessful attempt at state politics, she seems not to have sought parliamentary office again. It is likely that at some point in the early 1920s, Booth decided that her energies would be more effectively used if she gave up trying to enter parliament and continued with her work outside of it.

Let us look now at Millicent Preston Stanley, who did get inside the castle gates.

**Millicent Preston Stanley**

The 1920s saw some women gain political office in state elections. Edith Cowan, a Nationalist Party candidate, entered the Western Australian parliament in 1921 and May Holman, a Labor one, in 1925, while Irene Longman entered Queensland parliament with the Country and Progressive Nationalists in 1929. In these women we see varying colours of the maternalist feminist spectrum. In a decade in which all Australian women finally won the capacity to run for state parliaments, the picture we have of the 1920s is a healthy one for women’s political leadership, despite the small numbers.

Between 1918 and 1920, Millicent Preston Stanley was an organiser for the Queensland Nationalists. She then ran with the Nationalist–Progressive Coalition for the NSW Legislative Assembly in 1922 and was narrowly defeated. In the following 1925 election, she ran on a Nationalist ticket and was successful. Her advocacy of issues that can be described as maternalist feminist was complemented by her belief in the principle that women should be in political office to represent constituents generally, a belief shared by other women who entered the parliamentary arena. Accordingly she at times favoured logic over sentiment to win electors over, or invoked history to persuade her audiences of the rightness of her aims as a feminist politician. For instance, in an election brochure produced for her 1922 campaign, she stated:

To those who say that woman should have no place in Parliament, let it be remembered in Anglo-Saxon times woman played her part in the Legislative Councils of Old England...

It is an insult to women to say that woman is unfit for Parliament. Many women are; so are many men.

However, she could also appeal to sentiment. In her first public speech after being elected, which was at the opening of a women’s handcraft exhibition in a Sydney department store, Preston Stanley described the home as ‘the citadel of the nation’. This kind of lofty cliché, while not restricted to feminists of
conservative political persuasion, nevertheless more readily fit a conservative set of values than the more reformist analyses presented by spokespeople such as Longman, mentioned earlier. Elsewhere, Preston Stanley expressed suspicion of rhetoric that sought to cloak in sentimental garb women’s actual work as mothers. Debating child endowment in NSW Parliament in 1927, she expressed impatience with politicians who were inclined to ‘always speak very glibly about the sanctity and sacredness of motherhood’. As observed by John Murphy, Preston Stanley got very directly to the issue at stake in the child endowment debate by stating simply that ‘the most important function performed by any person for or on behalf of the State is that performed by the working mothers of the community in bringing into the world and rearing children’.44

The spectrum of views on the family presented by women’s groups to the Royal Commission on Child Endowment reflects the piquant mélange that was 1920s feminism. As Marilyn Lake has shown, maternalist feminism at its most radical was a formidable assault on the patriarchal family. In this radicalism, she concludes, the non-party approach ‘produced results’.45 In the parliamentary system, by contrast, she states:

aspiring women politicians were caught in an impossible situation. They were either offered preselection by the major parties in unwinnable seats ... or they faced defeat as Independents.46

Mary Booth stood as an independent and lost; Millicent Preston Stanley won a seat with the Nationalists. However, Preston Stanley survived for only one term, because of lack of support from her party, although this lack of support was not entirely due to sex discrimination.47 The political process is particularly hard on outsiders trying to break in. In her history of American feminism Nancy Cott cites the editorial of the Woman Citizen of 1922, which described political office as the means by which parties pay political debts or strengthen the party. This reward system had consequences for women, who rarely brought to a party any of this kind of influence, so that the ‘record of women who gained national political office in the 1920s paled before the number who tried and failed’. The experiences of women in early Australian party politics reflect this observation. Cott goes on to state ‘at the local and state level women did better, especially in nonpartisan contests or in the rare cases when they got the endorsement of the reigning party’,48 showing comparable results to those of women in Australian politics, where the early successes were in the state houses.

Women faced an uphill battle to enter parliament – we would be surprised if they had not – but the battle was nevertheless won on occasions. We need to know more about why and how women made the decision to follow this thorny path. What did such a choice offer in terms of women’s leadership, and was it more effective than the path trod by Mary Booth? The
appeal for women active in non-party groups of moving to the risky formal arena of political representation had to be sufficient to offer a foil to the difficulties of political representation. These difficulties are not linked to time and place: any activist who seeks to exchange lobbying for parliamentary career experiences the age-old dilemma of political life, the choice between the luxury of political principle and the many compromises of parliamentary politics. That women who did try to enter the parliamentary system were few in number, and those who succeeded even fewer, does not mean that aiming to enter parliament was futile. Like a duck paddling, the seemingly undisturbed view from the surface of the water belies the amount of activity below the water that is necessary to propel a body forward. Women did attempt the parliamentary option, and were sometimes successful.

Nevertheless, if they did manage to make it into parliament, feminists could find themselves torn between their feminism and their broader political beliefs. For instance, Preston Stanley supported the principle of child endowment but not its application to all children. Furthermore, as a conservative she opposed levying a special tax on employers for this purpose. The Labor Daily newspaper criticised her position as indicating she was not a sincere feminist. For all these difficulties, political representation was a price that Preston Stanley and other women thought worth paying – both those who succeeded in winning office and those who did not. By the 1920s it was a price that could be paid. Last – but by no means least – it was a price that had to be paid. Once this avenue was open to women, restricting political activity to lobbying from the sidelines was no longer tenable if feminism was to maintain political credibility and relevance.

Conclusion

Mary Booth and Millicent Preston Stanley were active in feminist politics in very different ways. Their activities overlapped considerably, and they are almost certain to have met, but so far I have not found evidence of this. Although their names were often linked with some key feminist organisations, I categorise both women as feminists – at least during the 1920s – whose politics were rooted in a concept of women as public, rather than maternal, citizens. While the sustained campaigns of the successful non-aligned feminist groups demonstrate the robustness of post-suffrage feminism, Mary Booth and Millicent Preston Stanley shed light on other aspects of this robustness that were finding expression in the 1920s, including the need perceived by both to mount an assault on the male arena of parliament.

It could be argued that both women achieved more outside parliament than they could within it. Preston Stanley only lasted one term, but went on to campaign successfully on another maternalist feminist platform, custody of
Booth made a lasting impact on Australian public life through her activities in connection with the Anzac Fellowship of Women, particularly in the area of immigration. These activities took, on the one hand, the familiar form of women’s voluntarism as an adjunct to the political realm of men. On the other hand, Booth demonstrates a capacity for employing maternalist values as a part of a political strategy that was not specifically feminist in all its aims.

In the 1920s, a number of elements came together to advance women’s progress as both party and non-party politicians. Maternalist feminism extended and expanded the status of the domestic feminism of the suffrage generation toward greater equality as members of the polity. This resulted in women taking a more public role in political activity, both party and non-party. And legislation was finally effected in all states that allowed women to enter state, rather than the more difficult federal, politics. For these reasons, the 1920s was a good decade for women in politics.

References:


2. See, for example, Judith Allen’s conversation about the origins of twentieth-century feminism in articles such as ‘The “Feminisms” of the Early Women’s Movements, 1850–1920’, *Refractory Girl* (March 1979): 10–16.  


8. This had already occurred before federation with the colonial governments of South Australia and Western Australia. New South Wales was relatively slow in doing this, with the passage of the *Women’s Legal Status Act (NSW)* in 1918.
13 See Box 3, items 1–3 MSS2109, Mary Booth papers 1905–57, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.
20 See, for example, the discussions in works cited above, such as Lake, ‘The Independence of Women’.


Damousi, The Labour of Loss, 26–38. See also Inglis, 292 on the fate of the Queensland Women’s War Memorial.


Mary Booth file, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, Canberra.

‘At the Farewell Gates: Permanent Tribute Unveiled’, Sydney Morning Herald, 26 April 1922, 12.

Inglis, 132.


See Series A432/86, Item no 1929/3484, Pt 16, Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department files, National Archives of Australia.

See box 13, folder 10, MS2864, Mary Booth papers.

‘Empire Service Club’, box 12, folder 11, MS2864, Mary Booth papers.

Damousi, 81.

Colin A. Hughes, and B.D. Graham, Voting for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly (Canberra: Department of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, 1975), 181.

Sydney Morning Herald, 4 March 1920, 7.

[Election Booklet] ‘Letter from Dr Mary Booth, OBE’, box 12, folder 7, MS2864, Mary Booth papers.

For example, Booth was the instigator of a movement to preserve a piece of land on the Kirribilli foreshore of Sydney Harbour for recreational purposes, which is now known as the Dr Mary Booth Lookout; Vertical File: ‘Dr Mary Booth Lookout’, Parks and Playgrounds of New South Wales Annual Report, October, 1948, Stanton Library of North Sydney, Sydney.

Roe suggests that Booth attempted to stand for the Commonwealth Senate in 1922, but was unable to secure the necessary support, Roe, ‘Booth, Mary’, 346. I have not yet found evidence of this attempt.

For example, Edith Cowan, Fitzherbert, 153.

Election Brochure, [1922], box 1, folder 1, MS9062, Mary Booth papers.

News cutting [n.t.], 5 June 1925, box 1, folder 3, MS9062, Mary Booth Papers.


Lake, _Getting Equal_, 149.

Lake, _Getting Equal_, 151.

Fitzherbert, 158–9.

Cott, 110.


A campaign flyer of Preston Stanley’s among the Mary Booth papers at the NLA is the only evidence so far, and this could well be something Booth received in the mail.

Radi, 286.