Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0734

The Australian Women’s Suffrage Society

(1888 - 1970)

Born	18880101, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Died	19700101, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Occupation	Women's Rights Organisation

Summary

The Australian Women’s Suffrage Society was founded in 1888 by Brettena Smyth. Smyth had previously been a member of the Victorian Women’s Suffrage Society but some members apparently objected to her outspoken opinions on birth control precipitating her decision to form a breakaway suffrage group. The new Society was very much linked with Smyth’s advocacy of every woman’s right to information about and access to contraceptives and she distributed advertisements for contraceptives, which she sold from her drapery and druggist shop in North Melbourne, at the Society’s meetings. Smyth had become convinced that the major problem facing most women was not the lack of political rights so much as frequent and involuntary childbearing. The Society had both male and female members. Particularly, Dr William Maloney, a member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly who introduced several (unsuccessful) women’s suffrage bills into parliament between 1889 and 1894. The Society apparently disbanded with Brettena Smyth’s death in 1898.

Details

Archival note:
As of 2003, it appears that there is no specific collection of papers relating to the Society or any of its principal members. Its activities were, however, extensively reported in the Melbourne press and women’s journals.

Published resources

Book
Woman suffrage in Australia : a gift or a struggle?, Oldfield, Audrey, 1992

Votes for women : the Australian story, Lees, Kirsten., 1995

The Australian Woman's Sphere, 1900-1905

Thesis
The 'Woman Question' in Melbourne, 1880-1914, Kelly, Farley, 1983

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
[Pamphlets relating to Australian women's suffrage]

Author Details
Jane Carey

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