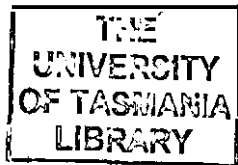


**WHITE-RIBBONERS: THE WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN  
TEMPERANCE UNION OF TASMANIA,  
1885 – 1914**

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**A thesis submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of  
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Thesis  
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2001



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## ABBREVIATIONS

LTL	Loyal Temperance Legion
MHA	Member of the House of Assembly
NCW	National Council of Women
NCWT	National Council of Women of Tasmania
WCTU	Woman's Christian Temperance Union
WSL	Womanhood Suffrage League
WWCTU	World Woman's Christian Temperance Union
YWCTU or 'Y' Union	Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union

## PHOTOGRAPHS

- Photograph 1 - 1899 WCTU Annual Convention in Hobart
- Photograph 2 - 1900 WCTU Group Photograph
- Photograph 3 - 1913 – 1921 Delegates to WCTU Annual Convention

## ABSTRACT

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was active in Tasmania from 1885 till 1914 and beyond. Members included women from all walks of life but generally later middle aged, middle class, Protestant women who believed in alcoholic temperance. The WCTU was an international organisation founded on the belief that alcohol abuse was the cause of major defects and evils in society; it was the ultimate goal of the WCTU to establish prohibition in every country of the globe. The Tasmanian WCTU worked to establish prohibition or local option, which would have allowed partial prohibition, without great success. Members involved themselves in many areas of work including outreach to the community, the rights of women and the welfare of children. To have greater success they realised that they needed political strength; to gain this they needed the vote. The WCTU was the first organisation to begin a fight for womanhood suffrage in Tasmania. Members fought for eleven years before they were finally granted this privilege.

The WCTU was important for Tasmanian women. It was the first female organisation that told women to transcend the private sphere of home and family and move into the public sphere, to take up issues and be involved in the legislation and laws that affected them. The impact that the WCTU had on Tasmanian society is difficult to judge, because its work in many respects was of a kind that is not measurable, for example in attempting to rehabilitate drunks. The media in Tasmania wrote about WCTU conventions and meetings but its activity did not provoke the kind of public debate that other women or organisations created. The WCTU members were sometimes misunderstood but generally ignored as they went about their work.

The work of WCTU members in Tasmania was important and groundbreaking in many respects. They worked in areas that were not of interest to men and in areas that were traditionally not the place of respectable women. Due to the WCTU in Tasmania the welfare and rights of prostitutes and neglected children were helped, anti-juvenile smoking laws were created and temperance principles were taught. The WCTU had an impact in areas of Tasmanian society that were of little interest to other groups or even the government in some instances and this thesis analyses that impact.



## INTRODUCTION

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) first emerged in America in 1873 under the leadership of Francis Elizabeth Willard. Willard was the first female president of an American University and the organiser of the WCTU's worldwide network.<sup>1</sup> The WCTU was formed by a group of women who had been involved in the Woman's Crusade, which had spread across the United States.<sup>2</sup> The WCTU was founded on a desire to establish prohibition, firstly in America and then later around the world. It was believed that alcohol was the cause of all 'evils' in society: addiction to alcohol took food off the table, broke up families, meant that children were neglected and wives were mistreated. In its desire to uplift society, the WCTU believed that women had a moral purity that men lacked and therefore it was their Christian duty to take up such issues as women's rights, children's welfare, and above all, temperance. Temperance movements had a long history both in America and Australia. The first temperance movement was established in America in 1808. It was followed by the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, and in 1826 the American Temperance Society was born. England was first introduced to temperance reform in 1829 and then the Foreign Temperance Society was formed in 1831.<sup>3</sup> The WCTU of Australia said in 1901:

During the past fifty years the Temperance cause has gone forward by leaps and bounds; societies innumerable have sprung up on every side; the seed sown in much weakness has borne 'much fruit'; the little one had become a thousand. Instead of a handful of followers it has its millions.<sup>4</sup>

This period in western history, when temperance movements emerged, was also marked as a time when women mobilised in a way never before seen. First wave feminism as it is called, was a phenomenon of the 1880s till around 1914.<sup>5</sup> During these years women became progressively more active in the public sphere, and

<sup>1</sup> J.R. Henderson., *The Strength of the White Ribbon* (West Perth, 1992) p. 1

<sup>2</sup> *People's Friend* 1 March 1884, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Non-State (NS) 337/10, Minutes of the ninth annual convention, 1901 p. 16

<sup>4</sup> AOT, NS337/10 p. 17

<sup>5</sup> K. Spearritt, 'New Dawns: First Wave Feminism', K. Saunders and R. Evans, *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville, 1992) p. 325

increasingly began to question their traditional roles in the private sphere. Women's position in society was altered. Education became more widespread, primary education became compulsory and secondary education was more available. New professions opened up for women such as medicine, teaching and nursing. They began to play sports such as basketball and hockey. Women also began to demand equal rights, equal divorce and custody rights, property rights and the right to vote.<sup>6</sup> The WCTU was very much a part of this movement in Australia especially.<sup>7</sup> Australian women were told for the first time that they had a duty as Christians to take up public questions, and to work in the public domain for social reform. The WCTU believed that 'none had the right to be a modest violet'<sup>8</sup> and espoused this view to all members.

The constitution of the World's WCTU (WWCTU) was adopted by all affiliated countries. The original motto; 'For God and Home and Native-land' was changed early on in the organisation to 'For God and Home and Humanity'. 'Humanity' was seen as being more encompassing.<sup>9</sup> The name 'Woman's Christian Temperance Union' was decided on after much debate; 'Woman's' was chosen as it embraced the entire gender, of whatever colour, nationality, age or position. The WCTU believed that any woman could do the work of the union, as long as her heart was filled with self-sacrificing love.<sup>10</sup> 'Christian' was important as members saw themselves as servants of God above being temperance advocates. Willard added further insight to this in her *Do Everything Book*, published to help WCTU women in their temperance fight. She explained, 'They considered not including [Christian] as it would exclude Jews, they decided that since there was no creed test that it would not matter if non-Christians wanted to join.'<sup>11</sup> 'Temperance' was used as it covered the work the union was seeking to do, not purely alcoholic temperance but in regard to all excesses, like gambling, smoking, food and clothing.<sup>12</sup> Finally, 'Union' was used as it denoted the women as a cohesive group. All members of the WCTU wore a white ribbon as a

<sup>6</sup> A. Alexander, 'A Turning Point in Women's History? The foundation of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Australia', *Tasmanian Historical Studies* (Forth Coming, 2001)

<sup>7</sup> K. Dunstan, *Wowsers* (North Melbourne, 1968) p. 57

<sup>8</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 15

<sup>9</sup> J. Ackermann, *Methods of Work* (Sydney, 1893) p. 1

<sup>10</sup> *People's Friend* 1 July 1892, p. 4

<sup>11</sup> F. Willard, *Do Everything Book* (Microfilmed in Canberra), p. 15

<sup>12</sup> *People's Friend* 1 July 1892, p. 4

badge to denote themselves as members, because white was seen as a sign of purity. The women referred to themselves as 'White Ribboners' or sometimes as 'Comrades of the White Ribbon Army'. At meetings they often sang what they called their 'temperance doxology':

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise him who heals the deepest woe:  
Praise Him who leads the temperance host:  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.<sup>13</sup>

The objects of the WCTU were set out clearly in the constitution of the Union:

The objects of this Union shall be to educate public sentiment up to the standard of total abstinence, to train the young, to save the inebriate, to secure the legal prohibition and complete banishment of the liquor traffic and of gambling in every form, and to discourage the use of all narcotics.<sup>14</sup>

Any woman could become a member of the organisation by signing the constitution and pledging herself to do all in her power for the advancement of the temperance cause.<sup>15</sup> She would also have to pay two shillings and six pence per year. Men could become honorary members by paying the same amount. The fee was important but not vital to a woman's involvement in the union. It was known of in Tasmania to allow women to stay members when they could not afford the fees.<sup>16</sup>

American women missionaries brought the WCTU's gospel to Australia. New South Wales was the first state to form a branch in 1882. This branch was organised by a visiting American temperance lecturer, Mr. Eli Johnson. Johnson's wife had been active in organising the first British affiliate.<sup>17</sup> Tasmania and Queensland were the next to establish unions in 1885 when Mary Clement Leavitt, an American WCTU missionary (and divorcee from Nebraska<sup>18</sup>), toured Australia and New Zealand. In

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<sup>13</sup> AOT, NS337/1, p. 2

<sup>14</sup> AOT, NS337/1, p. 2

<sup>15</sup> The Pledge read: "I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, including wine, beer, and cider, as beverages, and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same." AOT, NS337/1, p. 2

<sup>16</sup> AOT, NS337/75, Minutes of the Launceston Branch 19 November 1907

<sup>17</sup> J. Pargeter, *For God, Home and Humanity* (South Australia, 1995) p. 10

<sup>18</sup> I. Tyrrell, *Woman's World Woman's Empire* (USA, 1991) pp. 1 and 11

1886 another missionary, Jessie Ackermann travelled to Australia and established unions in South Australia. Ackermann was the WCTU's 'Second Round the World Missionary' and Australasian President of the WCTU between 1891 and 1894.<sup>19</sup> The next WCTUs were established in Victoria in 1887 and later in Western Australia in 1892 on Ackermann's second visit. Ackermann reorganised the Tasmanian union in 1892 as work had lapsed. She became the first Australasian President of the National WCTU of Australia. The strong organisational structure of the WCTU allowed it to work effectively in every state, country and worldwide.<sup>20</sup> Each branch had a president, vice-president, recording and corresponding secretaries, and treasurer and each department of work had a superintendent. Enrolled members elected these positions annually. Whilst each state had a president, senior to them was the Australasian President who oversaw all the branches. Every year the states held local conventions and the branches held monthly meetings. There was a triennial convention held Australia-wide, to which states often sent delegates to report on their activities and successes. Biennial world conventions were also held, usually in America or England with WCTU delegates present from all over the world.<sup>21</sup> Tasmanian delegates attended both the Australia-wide conventions and occasionally the world conventions. Mrs. Grace Soltau the Tasmanian WCTU President in 1891 attended the first inter-colonial convention held in Victoria and presented a report on the Tasmanian Union's progress and activities.<sup>22</sup>

This thesis will be exploring the influence and impact of the WCTU on Tasmanian society between 1885 when the first Tasmanian branch was created, and 1914, the beginning of a time when larger events were impacting on society at the onset of the First World War. Unlike the male temperance organisations of the time, the WCTU believed that women had the responsibility to elevate Tasmanian society, because women were morally superior. It was their role to uplift the morality and purity of all Tasmanian men, women and children. Their activities impacted on every sector of

<sup>19</sup> Tyrrell, *Woman's World*, p. 317 and Pargeter, *For God, Home and Humanity*, p. 18

<sup>20</sup> V. Pearce, 'A Few Viragos On A Stump: The Womanhood Suffrage Campaign in Tasmania 1880-1920', *Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association* Vol. 32 No. 4 (December 1985) p. 151

<sup>21</sup> F. Willard, 'Address Before 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the National WCTU, 1895' History of Women Reel 619, mfm 1424, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

<sup>22</sup> Minutes and Proceedings of the First Inter-Colonial WCTU Convention, Melbourne Victoria, 1891. State Library of Victoria.

society. They believed that alcohol was the cause of much suffering of women and children. However, they knew that the only way they would be able to protect the helpless adequately was to have political influence, hence their campaign to gain the vote. In 1893 the WCTU, in forming its franchise department, created the first womanhood suffrage league in Tasmania. The Union's fight was assisted only by a handful of influential men for eleven years. During these years they received defeat after defeat, until they had all but given up, when in 1903 the Legislative Council yielded and the women of Tasmania were enfranchised. With this achieved, the WCTU did not make a fuss; members simply began their work anew with their new political strength. The WCTU was not only concerned about alcohol, although this was ever present in its actions. Members reached out to the down trodden in Tasmanian society, working in departments for prostitutes, mothers, sailors, foreigners, and children. They worked against gambling, narcotics and alcohol abuse. They desired total prohibition in Tasmania, but failing that, they wanted local option. Their influence and impact on Tasmanian society was greater than the Woman's Sanitary Association which began its work in 1891<sup>23</sup> or the National Council of Women which was first organised in 1899.<sup>24</sup>

There is a substantial amount of primary source material on the WCTU of Tasmania. The Archives Office of Tasmania holds in its collection the programmes of the annual convention from 1892 till 1904, and minute books from the Hobart, Launceston and Burnie branches, some of which continue to the 1980s.<sup>25</sup> There are problems involved with the sources written by the WCTU as these women were always optimistic in their outlooks and often tried to present the silver lining to their clouds. Early on in the history of the WCTU Willard proposed that every branch should keep its records in the forms of scrap books and minute books, which the colonial branches carried out faithfully.<sup>26</sup> This helps to explain the wealth of source material on the WCTU in relation to other women's organisations of their time. It also helps us to understand the style of the WCTU's documents. These women knew that all WCTU records were being preserved and it appears that in their documents they attempted to

<sup>23</sup> S. Petrow, *Sanatorium of the South?* (Hobart, 1995) p. 108

<sup>24</sup> Pearce, 'A Few Viragos On A Stump', p. 152

<sup>25</sup> The WCTU is still active in Tasmania with two branches in operation, one in Scottsdale and one in Moonah. The Moonah WCTU meet monthly at the Moonah Baptist Church. Their 109<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention will be held in Scottsdale in March 2002. Mrs. Netta Roberts, Moonah WCTU Secretary.

<sup>26</sup> I. Mc Corkindale, *Torch Bearers* (South Australia, 1949) p. 64

present the best version of themselves for posterity. A good example of this practice can be seen in the report given at the Annual Convention for 1895 on coffee rooms: 'The work still progresses at Richmond. The tide of opposition is strong, so that the numbers are not so great as before but those who attend seem to fully understand the benefits of the room.'<sup>27</sup> They mention opposition in Richmond but do not give any detail; the silver lining is that those who did use the room understood the benefits. When examining the WCTU's documents it is important not to take the optimism at face value. The WCTU did experience many problems, but it is only through other forms of evidence that these are discovered.

Tasmanian local newspapers were generous in their reporting of WCTU activity, especially the *People's Friend*, a temperance newspaper published monthly; barely a month passed without a mention of the WCTU. *The Mercury* and *Launceston Examiner* were also consistent in their reports of the WCTU. The annual conventions are reported in alternative years, either in the *Examiner* in the years the convention was held Launceston, or in *The Mercury* when the convention was in Hobart. Other newspapers mention the WCTU when particular issues arose, such as the franchise debate, the curfew bell or the juvenile smoking bill. Parliamentary debate is a valuable source and, although the debates do not specifically mention the WCTU, it was at their insistence that several bills were before parliament. Secondary sources on the WCTU of Tasmania are not as copious as the primary documents. There are no published works specifically on the Tasmanian WCTU, although there are on branches in the other states of Australia. Marilyn Lake talks about the WCTU in *Getting Equal* and she refers to the Tasmanian Union but only in regards to the efforts in the suffrage movement. Alison Alexander has written the most substantial work on the Tasmanian WCTU in her PhD thesis *The Public Role of Women in Tasmania*. Her work on the Tasmanian WCTU is primarily covered in one chapter. The most recent work on the Australian WCTU was written by Anna Blainey in her 2001 PhD thesis *The Fallen Are Every Mothers Children*. Blainey concentrates on the Australian WCTU's fights for suffrage, temperance and sexual reform but she only covers the years between 1885 and 1905. There is some dissension amongst historians on the impact of the WCTU on society, for example the victory of

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<sup>27</sup> AOT, NS337/4, p. 26

womanhood suffrage in Tasmania. Some historians suggest that the WCTU members were apathetic to the extension of the franchise and were selfish in their motives for desiring the extension, while others refute this assumption. According to Taylor:

There was little suffrage agitation among Tasmanian women. The WCTU, being composed of middle class churchgoers, was in any case only concerned with giving to women of the professional and propertied classes and only for the limited purpose of altering the liquor laws.<sup>28</sup>

This statement is incorrect. The fact that the WCTU campaigned for the franchise after 'propertied' women won the right to vote in municipal elections supports this, but it does show how the WCTU has been perceived. The fight for womanhood suffrage will be discussed fully in chapter two. There are numerous theses and books that discuss the WCTU in relation to specific issues such as local option in Tasmania, the *Neglected Children's Act* or gambling. There are also numerous articles that discuss the WCTU contribution to Tasmanian society.

Other sources are generally kind in their appraisals of the WCTU Australia wide and more specifically of the Tasmanian branch. As an Australia wide organisation they have been described as; 'The largest and most important of late nineteenth century Australian women's organisations'.<sup>29</sup> On a local level, the Tasmanian union was said to be: 'with branches in the capital, Launceston and fourteen country centres, it was probably the largest, and certainly the most militant, woman's organisation in the colony.'<sup>30</sup>

The WCTU of Tasmania was formed on 24 July 1885, the result of a resolution passed at a public meeting addressed by Miss Atkins, of an English Women's Organisation.<sup>31</sup> There were eleven people present and Miss Greenwood was appointed the first president. In March of 1886 during the visit of Mrs. Leavitt to Tasmania, a meeting was held with ten members and forty visitors present; the

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<sup>28</sup> A.R. Taylor, 'Mrs. Henry Dobson: Victorian 'do-gooder' or sincere social reformer' Unpublished BA Hons thesis, University of Tasmania 1973, p. 19

<sup>29</sup> I. Tyrrell, *Deadly Enemies: Tobacco and Its Opponents in Australia* (Sydney, 1999) p. 26

<sup>30</sup> H. Reynolds, 'The Island Colony-Tasmania: Society and Politics 1880-1900' Unpublished MA thesis, University of Tasmania 1963 p. 110

<sup>31</sup> Clipping 11 August 1910 in AOT, NS337/30, 25 August 1910

constitution of the American WCTU was formally adopted and twenty-four new members gained. The interest in the work lapsed for a short period of time early in 1889, but with the arrival of Jessie Ackermann in 1892 the work of the Union was more thoroughly organised. Ackermann organised the constitution and by-laws of the union.<sup>32</sup> The number of branches around the state changed from year to year, with new ones created and old ones disbanding. In 1893 the branches included: Hobart, Launceston, Beaconsfield, Evandale, Sheffield, Latrobe, Devonport, Penguin, Burnie, Wynyard, Waratah, Ross, Richmond and New Town.<sup>33</sup> Other branches that came and went between 1885 and 1914 included Franklin, Hagley, Strahan, Westbury, Derby, Campbell Town, Forth, Tunbridge, Zeehan, Sorell and Geeveston.<sup>34</sup> The highest membership seems to have been in 1899, with 354 paid members and fifty-six honorary members, but numbers fluctuated each year.<sup>35</sup>

The first President of the Tasmanian WCTU after the reorganisation was Mrs. Grace Soltau of Launceston. Soltau and her husband, a Baptist pastor, had moved to Launceston in the 1880s. Soltau was responsible for the city's first successful rescue home.<sup>36</sup> She was replaced in 1894 when she moved with her husband to Sydney.<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Annie Blair became the next president until 1898. Blair was married to Robert S. Blair, whose occupation is unknown. They were also from Launceston and were not wealthy.<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Jessie Rooke became president in 1898<sup>39</sup> and stayed so until her death on 4 January 1906. Rooke was one of the first women to gain prominence outside of Tasmania. She was the wife of Dr. Charles Rooke of Burnie. Rooke was President of the Tasmanian WCTU for five years and the Australasian President for three years. As well as being WCTU president, she was also an active member of the National Council of Women (NCW).<sup>40</sup> After Rooke's death in January 1906 The *White Ribbon Signal*, the official organ of the national WCTU, published lengthy

<sup>32</sup> *People's Friend* 1 January 1892, p. 3

<sup>33</sup> AOT, NS337/2, p. 3

<sup>34</sup> AOT, NS337/2, 3, 4, 7 and 10, *passim*

<sup>35</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 21

<sup>36</sup> A. Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women in Tasmania 1803-1914' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania 1989' p. 230

<sup>37</sup> *People's Friend* 1 March 1894

<sup>38</sup> Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women', p. 231

<sup>39</sup> There are conflicting dates about Jessie Rooke's Presidency. Her obituary in *The White Ribbon Signal* states that she came to Tasmania in 1900. The *People's Friend* 1 April 1898 records that she became president in 1898. She could not have become Tasmanian President until she arrived in Tasmania.

<sup>40</sup> Pearce, 'A Few Viragos On A Stump', p. 159



tributes to Rooke. She was a kind, serene, gentle woman, whom everyone seemed to love.<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Breeton-Braham took over as acting president after the sudden death of Rooke, and was soon officially elected president. She resigned as State President in 1912, when Mrs. E. P Woods took over. Breeton-Braham was from Launceston and her husband was a storekeeper.<sup>42</sup> She remained Launceston president until 1914 when she finally resigned due to serious illness.<sup>43</sup> The President's position was clearly stated in the constitution of the WCTU and it was a certain type of woman who was offered the role. These women were all revered within the WCTU. They had been active members for some time and, although they were all married, they did not have family constraints. They were all educated and had an understanding of the procedures of parliament and council. Each of these women appeared to enjoy the position and their resignations were generally due to ill health, or their departure from Tasmania.

The Tasmanian WCTU had a wide area of interest. In 1893 at the Third Annual Convention twenty-one separate departments for work were listed. These included Scientific Instruction, Hygiene and Hereditary, Influencing the press, School Savings Banks, Sailors, Work among Foreigners, Sunday schools, Cottage meetings, Drawing room meetings, Literature, Franchise, Coffee rooms, Purity, Legislation and petitions, Unfermented wine and Narcotics. Members also worked with children in the Loyal Temperance Legions and Young WCTU's. Many of the WCTU departments produced little or no progress. Hygiene and Hereditary sounds grand, but it was created to educate women about correct food handling practices and general hygiene around the home as the superintendent noted:

It is the Opinion of many noble men and women of the present day, that if the laws of hygiene were scrupulously adhered to there would be fewer drunkards in the world ... Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and if we are destroying our bodies by our manner of living, what then?<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> AOT, NS337/88, *The White Ribbon Signal* 1 February 1906, passim

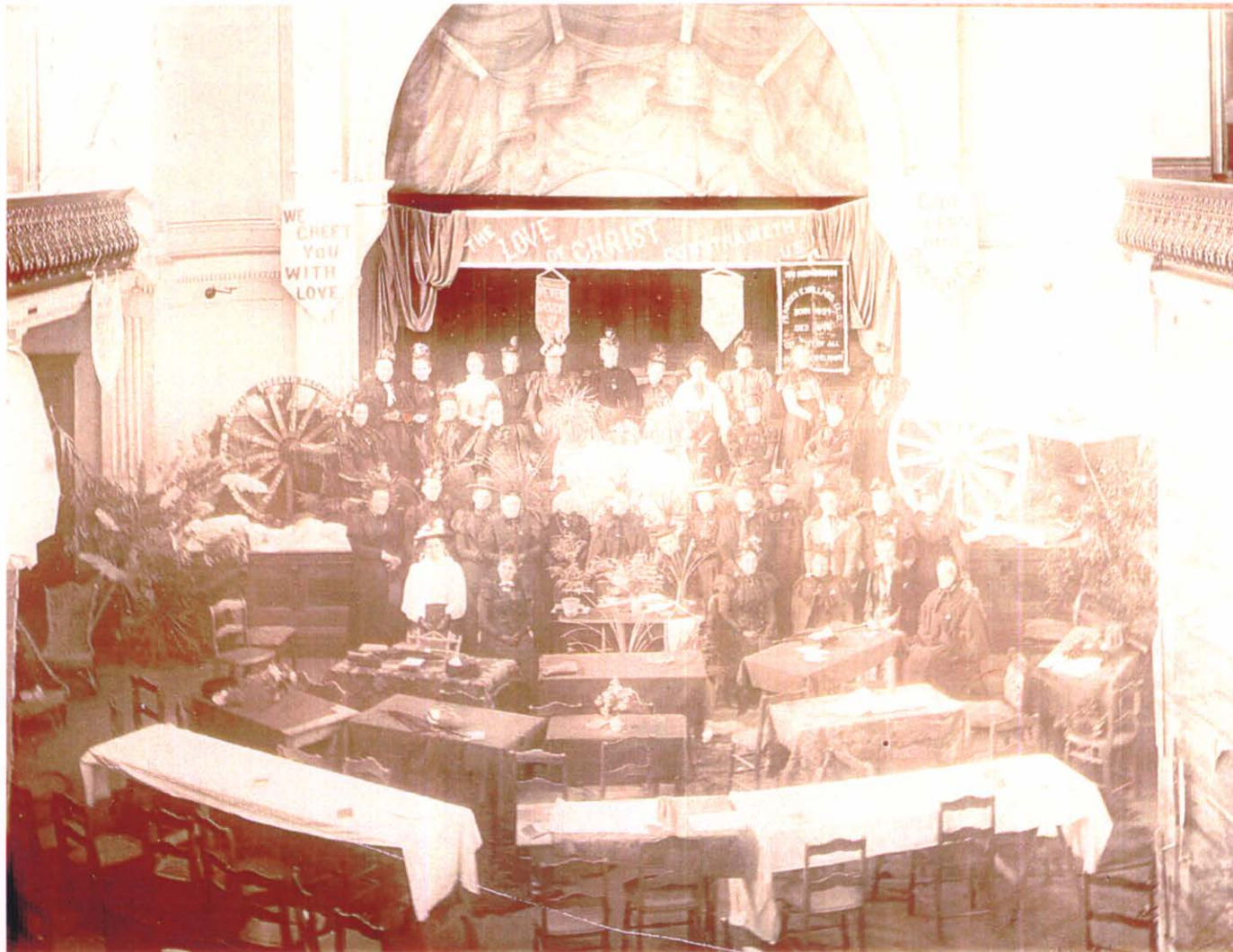
<sup>42</sup> Tasmanian Post Office Directory, 1899

<sup>43</sup> AOT, NS337/76, Launceston Branch Minute Book, 18 August 1914

<sup>44</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 25

However, nothing was achieved in this department of a substantial nature between 1885 and 1914.

The success of the WCTU is difficult to assess. Its areas of influence do not show obvious results. The numbers of reformed drunks, for example, were not compiled in a database. The WCTU won the franchise in 1903, but since the federal franchise was extended in 1902 it has been assumed that Tasmanian women were granted the vote in 1903 because it became inevitable. Although the WCTU was interested in children's welfare, the 1896 *Neglected Children's Act* was passed with its approval, but not due to its insistence. The WCTU wanted a curfew introduced for all children found on the street, but this was not instituted. The impact of the WCTU should be seen as more than the particular legislation it instigated. The importance of women's unions such as the WCTU had an infinite impact on the women involved. These women were some of the first disciples of first wave feminism in Australia. The Union's actions and activities may not seem radical in the twenty-first century but by nineteenth century standards these women were unique. They began to invade male orientated areas, and this was not received well. The impact of the WCTU on Tasmanian society was significant but can be difficult to fully understand. Members worked in a wide variety of areas, always trying to achieve their primary goal, the abolition of the liquor traffic.



Delegates to WCTU annual convention in Hobart 1899 at the Temperance Hall. Wording on banners: "We Greet you with Love", "The Love of Christ Constraineth Us", "God Bless Our President", "We Were Brought Up Together", "In Memoriam Francis Willard". Archives Office of Tasmania NS337/57.

## CHAPTER ONE

### TEMPERANCE

‘... Lads who came for the invigorating and harmless cup of tea’<sup>1</sup>

Temperance was a worldwide phenomenon; Britain, America, Canada and New Zealand were all active countries with respect to the temperance cause. The temperance activities of the WCTU were its primary area of concern, even above that of womanhood suffrage: ‘We know what we want; it is nothing less than prohibition, and though we may stem a great way off that, we will not aim at anything lower.’<sup>2</sup> The WWCTU published a ‘Wet and Dry map of the World’ in 1920 as a propaganda statement, which helps to illustrate the worldwide interest in temperance. Dry countries or countries with prohibition were America, Canada and Russia. Wet countries were Latin America, Britain, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Greece and others. Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland and Scotland came under a separate heading allowing local option,<sup>3</sup> a law that allowed individual areas to decide on their own liquor laws. The WWCTU organised and distributed what was known as the *Polyglot Petition* which appealed to all governments of the world to introduce prohibition. The petition went to over fifty countries, including Tasmania, and collected in excess of one million signatures.<sup>4</sup>

In the years between 1885 and 1914 the WCTU of Tasmania actively pursued temperance in the forms of petitions, education, local option, the suffrage movement and public awareness. Temperance was the driving force behind the union and the reason that many Tasmanian and Australian women became members. The growth of the WCTU in Australia in the 1890s can be attributed to the fact that the American missionary women who brought the movement to Australia tapped into an existing interest in male dominated temperance reforms. Since the 1850s temperance advocates had been campaigning against colonial drinking habits, and by the 1890s large numbers of male organisations held meetings to persuade drinkers to ‘sign the

<sup>1</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Non-State (NS) 337/9, Minutes of the eighth annual convention, 1900 p. 26

<sup>2</sup> *People's Friend* 1 September 1890

<sup>3</sup> I. Tyrrell, *Woman's World Woman's Empire* (USA, 1991) p. 257

<sup>4</sup> F. Willard, *Do Everything Book* (Microfilmed in Canberra) p. 17

pledge'.<sup>5</sup> In Tasmania specifically the Tasmanian Temperance Alliance (founded in 1842)<sup>6</sup>, Citizen's Moral and Social Reform League, formed by Bishop Mercer,<sup>7</sup> the Benevolent Society and the City Mission were the most significant groups and often supported the WCTU. The WCTU's protest against alcohol was against the alcohol business and not individuals. The WCTU was aiming to stop publicans, brewers, distillers and wine makers. This in turn would have prevented individuals from drinking.<sup>8</sup>

Male-focussed temperance groups throughout Australia supported the imposition of total abstinence on their members and converts as well as advocating prohibition, but this was only seen as a distant prospect. Their immediate concerns were with the numbers of liquor outlets, shortened trading hours and local option laws.<sup>9</sup> These concerns were shared with the WCTU. Oldfield says that WCTU members:

Would have come from families where the male was either active in or sympathetic to the temperance cause. The Union offered women an opportunity, acceptable even to conventional husbands and fathers, to move out 'into the world' – an opportunity that they seem to have seized with alacrity.<sup>10</sup>

This statement is accurate, although it was not the case for all members. This period in Australian women's history is marked by the movement of women from the private to the public sphere. For the first time women like Jessie Ackermann were telling women it was their duty as citizens to take up public issues and move out of their homes into the public arena. This was not an easy transition for women. It would have been very difficult for a woman to publicly support a cause that her husband or father was against. It is likely that the women involved in the WCTU had the support of their husbands and families. In the 1890s there was a higher proportion of females than males in Tasmania and this gave them an increased importance, especially in temperance work. Cooney suggests that this implied that a sizeable number of

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<sup>5</sup> A. Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia* (Cambridge, 1992) p. 180

<sup>6</sup> C. Evans, 'Protecting the Innocent: Tasmania's Neglected Children, Their Parents and State Care 1890-1918' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1999 p. 37

<sup>7</sup> Petrow, *Sanatorium of the South?* (Hobart, 1995) p. 189

<sup>8</sup> A. Blainey, 'The 'Fallen' Are Every Mother's Children', Unpublished PhD thesis, LaTrobe University, 2000 p. 203

<sup>9</sup> Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, p. 180

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180

women had no domestic commitments and were able to involve themselves in temperance activities.<sup>11</sup> This was not the case with the WCTU; most members were married.<sup>12</sup> The WCTU members were criticised for their efforts in all their departments of work but especially for their temperance work:

The WCTU were oftentimes severely criticised for holding and seeking to propagate what were regarded by some as extreme views on the question of total abstinence: they were told they were trying to interfere with the liberty of the subject, that they could not make people sober by act of parliament; but they said they could, they could make it easier to do right and harder to do wrong by removing temptation out of the way of the weak.<sup>13</sup>

The temperance activities of the WWCTU were manifested in a number of ways and Tasmania was no exception. The most prominent of these were coffee rooms, established in a number of towns across Tasmania as an alternative for young men who would otherwise attend pubs to socialise. Booths were used at the Regatta and Agricultural Show grounds in Hobart and set up at sporting facilities to supply tea to young men as an alternative to drinking alcohol. Between 1885 and 1914 the WCTU sent numerous petitions to parliament, and memorials to the licensing bench. One example of this was in 1890, when the WCTU presented a petition signed by 2208 women of Tasmania to the Legislative Council asking for ten o'clock closing of all public houses.<sup>14</sup> In many cases their memorials seem to have made a difference because rarely was a request to the licensing bench to refuse a licence denied. The WCTU had departments for temperance that included unfermented wine, in which it was the goal to stop wine being used for communion; the abolition of barmaids, which aimed to make the employment of women as barmaids illegal; and scientific temperance instruction, in which they aimed to educate children about the evils of alcohol. Each of these activities will now be discussed.

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<sup>11</sup> D. Cooney, 'Local Option In Tasmania: The Temperance Question 1884-1908' Unpublished BA Hons thesis, University of Tasmania 1973 p. 26

<sup>12</sup> A. Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women in Tasmania 1803-1914' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1899 p. 235

<sup>13</sup> *Launceston Examiner* 25 March 1897

<sup>14</sup> *People's Friend* 1 September 1890

The work done with regard to coffee rooms seemed very promising in its early years but this aspect of the Union had died out completely by 1914. The idea was so well received that private traders opened coffee shops and the need for the WCTU in this area ceased. Coffee rooms established by the WCTU began to flourish in the north of the state, especially at Penguin. It was reported in 1894 at the Annual Convention that: 'Much good has been done by means of the coffee room ... by keeping young men out of temptation's way on Saturday evenings.'<sup>15</sup> Similar success was reported at Richmond, Sheffield, Derby and Duck's Marsh, but by the next year the success had already begun to wane. Many of the coffee rooms were reported to have been successful in summer but enjoyed less patronage over the winter, when many of the rooms closed. Coffee rooms were opened at Burnie, Campbell Town and Launceston but did not survive long. In 1897 the reports were more optimistic. Burnie members reported that their coffee room was used frequently by thirty-three men, twenty-five of them having signed the pledge.<sup>16</sup> Sheffield reported a new hall and coffee room being erected by the WCTU, which included a lending library with temperance literature.<sup>17</sup> This is where the reports of success stop.

For the next few years the reports on coffee rooms are scarcer and suggest little work; by 1903 the mention of coffee rooms cease altogether. The Sheffield WCTU reported in 1900: 'there are several shops where meat pies and tea and coffee are sold so the room is of less importance.'<sup>18</sup> This seems to have been the trend statewide, with private coffee rooms opening around the state.<sup>19</sup> The WCTU's impact with regard to coffee rooms seems to have been minimal. Perhaps the young men who frequented these facilities did so out of novelty value in their early days and then became bored with the temperance message. It seems in opposition to the image of the stereotypical Australian male to be sitting drinking tea when his mates were at the local pub. Undoubtedly, some men were encouraged and helped by the WCTU's efforts to establish and run these rooms, but it is impossible to know with any certainty the actual benefit. The WCTU records are not extensive in their departments and the

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<sup>15</sup> AOT, NS337/3, p. 18

<sup>16</sup> AOT, NS337/6, p. 27

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27

<sup>18</sup> AOT, NS337/9, pp. 32-33

<sup>19</sup> *Emu Bay Times* 24 March 1898

women were ever the optimists. Instead of stating how few visited the rooms or how the general community received them, they simply reported that they hoped to have more success next year.

Unlike coffee rooms, the Department of Work for Booths and Shows was focussed mainly in southern Tasmania. The Hobart branch began work in this department on Regatta Day 1899 and from that year on reported successes at the regatta and at the Agricultural Show. Liquor consumptions at the Regatta had been an issue for temperance organisations for some time; a member of the clergy was quoted in 1838 describing the Regatta as 'a device of the Serpent himself' and the liquor booths as 'the Devil's Playground'.<sup>20</sup> The WCTU attempted to provide a non-alcoholic alternative to regatta visitors. On Regatta Day 1900 the WCTU reported that they were too busy: 'A noticeable feature was the large number of men and lads who came for the invigorating and harmless cup of tea.'<sup>21</sup> In 1909 the Hobart branch paid £30 for a tent of their own, so they would not have to rent one each year.<sup>22</sup> The work in this department continued each year. In 1910 the importance of the booths was noted as it was seen as being the most visible work that the Hobart branch did for temperance and showed the public what was being done.<sup>23</sup> This visible work of the union was noticed, by the *Tasmanian Mail*, which reported in 1901 that, 'The good work the WCTU had been doing, such as providing refreshments ... at the Regatta ground ... on each occasion the efforts this put forth were attended with success.'<sup>24</sup> It is not until 1914 that the Regatta Day booth was abandoned due to a lack of volunteers.<sup>25</sup>

The first 'dry' regatta was held in Huonville in 1915 and was a success. By 1918 the Hobart regatta liquor stalls were completely designated to temperance societies with the purpose of selling soft drinks.<sup>26</sup> The WCTU briefly mentioned booth work at Penguin in 1899, 1900 and 1902,<sup>27</sup> and by the Burnie branch in 1899 but this was not

<sup>20</sup> C. Cowling, 'The Royal Hobart Regatta: Tasmania's National Festival', Unpublished BA Hons thesis, University of Tasmania, 1971 p. 29

<sup>21</sup> AOT, NS337/9, 1900, p. 26

<sup>22</sup> AOT, NS337/30, February 25<sup>th</sup> 1909

<sup>23</sup> AOT, NS337/30, 28 April 1910

<sup>24</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 8 June 1901

<sup>25</sup> AOT, NS337/30, 29 January 1914

<sup>26</sup> Cowling, 'The Royal Hobart Regatta', p. 44

<sup>27</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 29; NS337/9, p. 26 and NS337/11, p. 12



mentioned again.<sup>28</sup> It appears that, while the smaller towns had success in the department of coffee rooms, a larger area like Hobart did well at the large-scale community activities such as the Annual Regatta and the Agricultural Show. Both of these forms of temperance activity allowed the WCTU to reach the public on a personal level. Members were able to meet with the public and supply them personally with temperance information and alternatives to alcohol. Other aspects of their temperance activity did not allow for this contact.

The Department for Unfermented Wine was active in its early days and then ceased when its goal was primarily achieved. Between 1893 and 1896 the ministers of many churches were written to, regardless of denomination, and asked to use non-alcoholic wine in communion. The WCTU believed that, 'many a former drunk had succumbed anew through temptation presented at the Lord's Table.'<sup>29</sup> In 1896 it was reported that all ministers now used unfermented wines, except the Church of England.<sup>30</sup> This fact did not change and the reports of this department were no longer recorded with any detail in the convention minutes.

The WCTU attempted to reduce the high numbers of public houses and hotels in Tasmania. In 1895 the WCTU took an informal census of the public houses around the state. At the annual convention held for that year it was recorded that twelve branches responded to the census. In those twelve towns there were 182 public houses, with Hobart and suburbs having 107 and Launceston having fifty-two. The highest recorded number of public houses in one unspecified township was five.<sup>31</sup> Between 1892 and 1914 the WCTU sent over twenty letters, memorials and petitions to parliament, local councils, the licensing bench or the police commissioner. The Union campaigned for the refusal of liquor licenses and by this process helped to prevent hotels and public houses being opened at Sheffield, Burnie, Penguin, Campbell Town and Evandale, the Springs, Beltana, Risdon and Dunalley, as well at the canteens of army barracks and other areas not mentioned by name.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 29

<sup>29</sup> M. Lake and F. Kelly, *Double Time: Women in Victoria— 150 Years* (Victoria, 1985) pp. 119-120

<sup>30</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 24

<sup>31</sup> AOT, NS337/4, p. 21

<sup>32</sup> It is a habit in the minutes to record that petitions or memorials have been sent to the licensing bench without mentioning the actual hotel.

The Department of Work for the Abolition of Barmaids was not active in Tasmania. The Tasmanian Parliament had stipulated that it was an offence for any licensee to allow a women under the age of twenty-one, other than his daughter, wife or sister, to sell liquor in a licensed bar. It had further been stipulated in 1899 that women could not serve alcohol after 10pm.<sup>33</sup> The WCTU were not against women working, and felt sure that barmaids would easily be able to find new work.<sup>34</sup> The problem was the exploitation of the women as sex objects, there to help sell the alcohol, and the unfair unequal wages. The WCTU also felt barmaid work was 'unwomanly'. The Tasmanian legislation against barmaid work was mirrored from the New South Wales legislation, which preceded it.<sup>35</sup> The Tasmania WCTU, except for a few brief mentions of the need for anti-barmaid legislation, did not pursue this issue; its efforts with regard to temperance were needed elsewhere.

The WCTU was concerned about the sale of alcohol to minors on licensed premises. In 1899 a letter was sent to the new Commissioner of Police about Sunday trading, selling alcohol to children, and supplying licenses to single women.<sup>36</sup> The Police Commissioner responded by sending the women a copy of the Police Report for 1899 which stated that the sale of alcohol to children was 'not of frequent occurrence' and no law prohibited such sale 'to persons under the age of 16 years, when not consumed on licensed premises.'<sup>37</sup> This episode is a good example of the process and work done by the WCTU. It shows the women expressing an area of concern, investigating to see if there are any grounds to their concerns, and then appealing through the appropriate channels.

Another example of this process was in 1913 when the Hobart branch became interested in the sale of alcohol in army canteens. This began as a rumour and was investigated more thoroughly. At the monthly meeting held in March of that year, Miss Lodge, long serving, well respected and active member of the Hobart branch, reported that, from reliable information received, it had been ascertained that liquor was supplied at the canteen and could be obtained by the boys on Sundays. The

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<sup>33</sup> D. Kirkby, *Barmaids: A History of Women's Work in Pubs* (Cambridge, 1997) p. 129

<sup>34</sup> Kirkby, *Barmaids*, p. 110

<sup>35</sup> Kirkby, *Barmaids*, p. 129

<sup>36</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 26

<sup>37</sup> AOT, NS1591/1, Copy of Report, Office of Superintendent of Police, Launceston, 7 March 1899

guidelines of the *Defence Act* were then read which proved that this was contrary to the regulations. It was then proposed and seconded that a copy of this report be forwarded to the Minister of Defence without delay.<sup>38</sup> The outcome of this is not reported.

The ultimate goal of the National WCTU was total prohibition, with individual states and members more or less favouring this proposal.<sup>39</sup> The WCTU of Tasmania wanted prohibition, with local option as the next best reform.<sup>40</sup> Local option allowed people to vote on the question of liquor licences in their local town, area or state. A variety of local option laws came into existence in the Australian Colonies from the 1870s. Temperance organisations, including the WCTU, saw local option as a step on the road to achieving prohibition.<sup>41</sup> In 1900 Elizabeth Nicholls (South Australian WCTU and Australasian President) said: 'In Australia, we seek to obtain prohibition by the will of the people, by means of local veto laws, under which men and women electors can vote on the question, and nothing less should be demanded.'<sup>42</sup>

The first local option bill was introduced in Tasmania in the late 1870s, and by the 1880s the idea of popular control over alcohol traffic had majority support in parliament. The first local option league was formed in Launceston in 1888.<sup>43</sup> In 1889 the *Licensing Act* was introduced which allowed ratepayer in the neighbourhood of a public house the opportunity to have a license refused if they could provide evidence that the publican could not hold a license. Neighbourhood was defined as being within 200 yard radius of the public houses' front door.<sup>44</sup> In the 1890s local option lost most of its popular support but after Federation this support was renewed. In August 1905 alone thirty-three petitions were presented to the Legislative Council on local option.<sup>45</sup> In 1906 and 1907 the local option question attracted much public debate. The *Mercury* printed several letters to the editor on

<sup>38</sup> AOT, NS337/30, 27 March 1913

<sup>39</sup> *People's Friend* 1 September 1890

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 March 1913

<sup>41</sup> J. Pargeter, *For God, Home and Humanity* (South Australia, 1995) p. 27

<sup>42</sup> Pargeter, *For God, Home and Humanity*, p. 27

<sup>43</sup> Cooney, 'Local Option in Tasmania', p. 62

<sup>44</sup> S. Petrow, 'Andrew Inglis Clark as Attorney-General' in R. Ely (ed.), *A Living Force: Andrew Inglis Clark and the Ideal of Commonwealth* (Hobart, 2001), pp. 57-58

<sup>45</sup> 'Abstract of Petitions Presented to the Legislative Council', Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament 1905, Vol. 52

local option from different points of view.<sup>46</sup> One from Frank Boreham, a Baptist Minister, proclaimed, 'we do not believe in Prohibition ... we asked for local option. We desire that the wishes of the great drinking (or abstaining) public shall be ascertained and respected.'<sup>47</sup>

Local option was mentioned many times in the minute books of the Hobart and Launceston branches, but not as much in the Annual Convention minutes. Whenever it was mentioned it either related to educating the public about it or expressing disappointment that it was not passed. At the monthly meeting of the Hobart branch for 25 June 1908 it was mentioned that a public meeting should be held when the Local Option Bill was before the House.<sup>48</sup> At the meeting for October 1911 the women organised a large pamphlet drive with thousands of papers on local option being distributed.<sup>49</sup> In the minutes of the Launceston branch in 1906 and 1907, disappointment was expressed at how badly local option was received<sup>50</sup> and then more disappointment that the Bill was not passed. However it was hoped that next year it would be more successful.<sup>51</sup> A Local Option bill was passed in Tasmania in 1908, but in a weakened state, so that only a few undesirable public houses in the state could be closed.<sup>52</sup> The first local option poll was not held in Tasmania till 1917, nothing was achieved and the bill was terminated.<sup>53</sup>

As Australia did not favour prohibition, the WCTU seems to have realised that local option was a more realistic reform. Its chances of success would be greatly increased if women were enfranchised. As much as the WCTU women believed that prohibition was the answer to the problems in society, the public did not see things in quite the same way. Temperance was the most important issue for the WCTU, and the reason for its foundation. The WCTU women knew that if they were to wield influence in this area they needed political strength. Until women could vote, they would not be represented in politics. In 1893 the WCTU founded the first

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<sup>46</sup> *Mercury* 5 September 1906, 7 September 1906, 2 October 1907

<sup>47</sup> *Mercury* 2 October 1907

<sup>48</sup> AOT, NS337/30, 25 June 1908

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, October 1911

<sup>50</sup> AOT, NS337/75, 25 September 1906

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 October 1907

<sup>52</sup> Cooney, 'Local Option in Tasmania', p. 71

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74

womanhood suffrage league in Tasmania when they commenced their department for the franchise.



WCTU 1900  
Archives Office of Tasmania NS337/58

## CHAPTER TWO

### FRANCHISE MOVEMENT

‘Taxation without representation is tyranny, we pledge ourselves by all proper means to make earnest effort to secure the franchise.’<sup>1</sup>

The struggle to win the franchise for all Tasmanian women was the largest task undertaken by the WCTU. From 1893 to 1903 members campaigned for all Tasmanian women to have the chance to vote. It was the strong belief of the WCTU that it would be impossible to influence temperance reform, and protect women’s rights and children’s welfare without this first essential agent. The vote was seen as the first step for women to gain control over their homes, bodies and lives. The womanhood suffrage movement in Tasmania is often surrounded with an ‘historical amnesia’.<sup>2</sup> Some have questioned the effort that Tasmanian women actually put into winning the vote. As the federal franchise was extended to Australian women in 1902, some historians have assumed that the state extension of this privilege became inevitable, and even contemporary politicians believed this. In 1903 the *Constitution Act* was passed by the House of Assembly and the Legislative Council and the franchise was granted to the women of Tasmania. In the WCTU’s minutes the only reference to this historic event was the founding of a league to help women choose whom they would vote.<sup>3</sup> In the minute books of the Hobart branch for 1903 the franchise is not mentioned at all<sup>4</sup> and in the Launceston branch minute books it was only referred to with the hope that all women will exercise their right and privilege on election day.<sup>5</sup> This silence in the minute books does not mean that the gaining of the franchise was not welcomed. It appears that newspapers rather than minute books were the preferred method of recording this event.

The fight for the franchise was an Australia-wide movement from the 1880s and early 1890s. Only in Victoria did a suffrage group predate a WCTU franchise department. These were progressively established across Australia after 1887. The Victorian

<sup>1</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Non-State (NS) 337/3, Minutes of second annual convention, 1894 p. 14

<sup>2</sup> K. Spearritt, ‘New Dawns: First Wave Feminism’, K. Saunders and R. Evans, *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation* (Marrickville, 1992) p. 331

<sup>3</sup> AOT, NS337/13. p. 13

<sup>4</sup> AOT, NS337/29, *passim*

<sup>5</sup> AOT, NS337/74, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1903

Woman's Suffrage Society, which began first in Victoria in 1884, was organised by Harriet<sup>6</sup> Dugdale.<sup>7</sup> She was a twice-married secularist and author of the utopian novel *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*.<sup>8</sup> Victoria had the longest struggle for the vote, and was the last state to be enfranchised in 1908. Other states such as South Australia and New South Wales had the Womanhood Suffrage League (WSL) or National Council of Women (NCW) which were supported by the local WCTU's but not run by them. Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania had no other suffrage organisation other than their local WCTUs.<sup>9</sup> South Australia was the first to be granted the franchise in 1894, Western Australia followed closely in 1899, New South Wales won the vote in 1902, Tasmania in 1903, and Queensland in 1905.

The WCTU's fight for the franchise in Tasmania began in 1893 when they established a franchise department at the Annual Convention. This first step is seen by Pearce to be quite historic:

The whole-hearted decision by the WCTU to fight for womanhood suffrage by 1893 is somewhat remarkable. While the daily press had always reported the activities of the international women's movements, not always flatteringly, the local temperance press had only reported on suffrage in relation to temperance issues. Undeterred by opposition and stirred on by the New Zealand victory of 1893, the WCTU alone championed the suffrage cause till 1899 when the National Council of Women was formed and assisted in the battle.<sup>10</sup>

The National Council of Women of Tasmania (NCWT) was an organisation made up from delegates of affiliated groups. They began in May of 1899 with the goal of promoting greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose between women workers of all classes, parties and creeds, and to further the application of the golden rule to society, custom and law.<sup>11</sup> Many members of the WCTU were members of the

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<sup>6</sup> Harriet is also called Henrietta depending on the source. P. Grimshaw, M. Lake, A. McGrath, M. Quartly, *Creating A Nation* (Ringwood, 1994) p. 170 and M. Lake, *Getting Equal* (St. Leonard's, 1999) p. 23

<sup>7</sup> V. Pearce, 'A Few Viragos On A Stump: The Womanhood Suffrage Campaign in Tasmania 1880-1920', *Papers and Proceedings of the Tasmanian Historical Research Association* Vol. 32 No. 4 (December 1985) p. 153

<sup>8</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 23

<sup>9</sup> A. Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia* (Cambridge, 1992) p. 181

<sup>10</sup> Pearce, 'A Few Viragos On A Stump', p. 152

<sup>11</sup> AOT, NS579/13, History of the National Council of Women of Tasmania, p. 1



NCWT. The women worked with a united goal of ensuring the franchise for all Tasmanian women but fractures did show between the two groups. In 1905, two years after the franchise was extended, an incident arose involving a WCTU member and later president, Mrs. Breeton-Braham. The details are unclear but involved a discourtesy to the NCW president, Emily Dobson.<sup>12</sup> The disagreement found its way to the columns of the *Daily Telegraph* where Breeton-Braham presented her side of the story and later a Mrs. Bisdee from the NCWT refuted Breeton-Braham's claims.<sup>13</sup> The disagreement was not damaging to the relationship between the WCTU and NCWT but the incident shows two strong unions in conflict about who had the prerogative to make decisions. There is no evidence of conflict with regard to the suffrage campaign.

Tasmanian women ratepayers were granted the right to vote in Municipal Council elections in 1893. At the WCTU Fifth Annual Convention, reports were read from various branches about women voting at these Municipal elections.<sup>14</sup> Although the WCTU did not campaign for the municipal franchise, it was extended the year they began the fight for the state franchise. They did however take advantage of this extension and attempted to assist women with this new privilege. In Hobart reports were made of the Municipal Elections and a special meeting with members of the Woman's Sanitary Association to discuss the candidates. A few members of the WCTU were present at the Town Hall on Election Day to 'show sympathy and render assistance to the women voters.'<sup>15</sup> When women were originally granted the Municipal franchise some expressions of dissatisfaction were expressed about the female voters but it was assumed that this would wear off according to the *Clipper*;

For the first time likewise have women voted at the municipal elections in Hobart ... on the alert for the petticoats, and the spinsters, and the generally more buxom widow had a lively, if not a merry time ... Some expressions of dissatisfaction were to be heard against the feminine voters: but doubtless this will wear off.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> AOT, NS325/8, National Council of Women of Tasmania minute book, 12 August 1905

<sup>13</sup> *Daily Telegraph* 18, 21, 29 November 1905

<sup>14</sup> AOT, NS337/6, pp. 21, 22, 23, 31, 32

<sup>15</sup> AOT, NS337/6, p. 21

<sup>16</sup> *The Clipper* 9 December 1893

The issue of womanhood suffrage was at times, a topic of heated debate in Tasmania. It had its supporters but also its opposers. The *Tasmanian Mail*'s Alix, who wrote the column *Our Hobart Ladies Letter*, presented differing views on the franchise issue. She made comments such as:

It is really rather unnecessary for women to demand the franchise for their sex, for indirectly they have now more influence than they could gain directly; if they would be a little patient and take the trouble to be as charming as possible when asking a favour they would get all that they want, without the trouble and inconvenience of having anything to do with voting themselves.<sup>17</sup>

This was regarded as flippant and ignorant and a retraction was published.<sup>18</sup> The *Tasmanian Mail*'s interest did not stop here. Alix attended a WCTU suffrage meeting to see for herself what was happening. She found the experience far from moving; 'I left the hall with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment.'<sup>19</sup> *The Clipper* likewise found the suffrage issue less than serious, claiming that only five Tasmanian women were concerned about the franchise.<sup>20</sup> In Launceston a letter to the editor of the *Examiner* about the WCTU and its involvement in politics began a heated debate that lasted two months. One correspondent called 'X Ray' wrote, 'let Christian women train the hearts of childhood, and they will do infinitely more ... than if they were all to become 'Prime Ministers' of the State.'<sup>21</sup> Walter Edmunds, a friend and supporter of the WCTU, wrote in response that, 'He is either grossly ignorant of, or wilfully misinterprets, the purposes, aims and achievements of these splendid women...'<sup>22</sup> So the discussion continued until Edmunds became confounded at 'X Ray's' unwillingness to give his real name, and the discussion ended.<sup>23</sup>

WCTU activity to obtain the franchise began at the Annual Convention in 1893; the need for the franchise was mentioned several times at the three-day convention. The women expressed the opinion that taxation without representation was tyranny and

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<sup>17</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 30 May 1891

<sup>18</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 16 June 1891

<sup>19</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 28 April 1894

<sup>20</sup> *The Clipper* 1 August 1903

<sup>21</sup> *Launceston Examiner* 25 March 1899

<sup>22</sup> *Launceston Examiner* 29 March 1899

<sup>23</sup> *Launceston Examiner* 31 March, 4 April, 6 April, 12 April, 14 April, 15 April 1899

pledged themselves by all proper means to make efforts to win the vote.<sup>24</sup> Thanks were extended to certain prominent men for their support. At the evening session, a woman's suffrage meeting was presided over by Mrs. Nicholls, the Australasian President. Mrs. Nicholls declared that women claimed the right to vote on the grounds that they were taxpayers; they had to obey the laws and therefore should be able to have a voice in making those laws. She pointed out that, while in some elections an ignorant woman possessing some property could vote, a highly intelligent, educated woman could not because she had not had the time to acquire property.<sup>25</sup> In these early days of the WCTU in Tasmania there was no lack of enthusiasm and supporters for womanhood suffrage. Each year there were similar reports made about the franchise at the annual conventions. There are infrequent references made in the Hobart branch's minute books about the work done for the franchise, although the reports sent by the Hobart branch to the annual convention each year shows that they were active in Hobart in this regard.<sup>26</sup> At the Third Annual Convention on 27 March 1895 the Superintendent of the Franchise Department recorded that:

It is the great satisfaction to be able to report that the first legal step has been ~~take~~ in this department, viz. a promise has been secured from the Hon. A. J. Clark, Attorney-General, to bring a bill for the Woman's Suffrage during the next session.<sup>27</sup>

Branches around the colony shared this early enthusiasm. Suffrage meetings were reported at Richmond, Launceston, Burnie, Campbell Town, Ross, Evandale, Longford, Westbury, Deloraine, Penguin, Wynyard, Oatlands, Epping and Tunbridge.<sup>28</sup> At the suffrage meeting held at the Fourth Annual Convention in 1896, many people, men and women, spoke in favour of the franchise but nothing new was resolved or reported.<sup>29</sup> In Launceston it was reported that the WCTU women canvassed the city obtaining signatures for petitions on woman's suffrage to be presented to both Houses of Parliament. They were happy to find public opinion in

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<sup>24</sup> AOT, NS337/3, p. 14

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>26</sup> AOT, NS337/30, *passim*

<sup>27</sup> AOT, NS337/4, p. 28

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>29</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 21

their favour.<sup>30</sup> The Burnie union was active this year reporting efforts to obtain signatures for a franchise petition and a public meeting held in July. This was the first public suffrage meeting to take place in Burnie and it was largely attended and well received.<sup>31</sup> *The Wellington Times* reported, "The building was filled with an appreciative audience."<sup>32</sup> A final report on suffrage for this year was given by Campbell Town who, like Burnie, reported a pleasing canvass to obtain signatures and a well-attended public suffrage meeting, lead by Mrs. R Kermode, of Mona Vale, Ross and wife of a wealthy landowner Rt. C. Kermode, J.P. She had accompanied Jessie Rooke to the triennial convention in Queensland in 1897.<sup>33</sup> Other branches may well have also conducted franchise work and meetings but, as frequently occurred, did not send a report to the annual convention.

In 1897 the WCTU prepared a petition to be presented to the Legislative Council by a northern and southern member for the extension of the franchise to all women. All branches in Tasmania took up this petition and managed to obtain 2280 signatures. This was one of the largest petitions the WCTU of Tasmania presented to Parliament; usually only small numbers signed their petitions, for example an anti-Tattersall's petition was presented with sixteen signatures and a local option petition was presented with 248 signatures.<sup>34</sup> As a comparison, in 1891 the Woman's Sanitary Association gained 5,736 signatures on a petition for a Metropolitan Drainage Board but that was seen as a life or death issue.<sup>35</sup> It is apparent that the Tasmanian WCTU actively sought the franchise. In 1899 the activity of the different branches slowed down. The official franchise report began, 'we regret that so little interest has been shown in this department and therefore little work has been done.'<sup>36</sup> As this was the year the NCW was established in Tasmania, its efforts for the franchise might have meant the WCTU franchise work began to fold. Moreover, women ratepayers were able to vote in some elections and it must have been hard to continue through the setbacks. The Legislative Council rejected the *Constitution Act* three times after it had

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<sup>30</sup> AOT, NS337/6 p. 22

<sup>31</sup> AOT, NS337/6, p. 23

<sup>32</sup> *The Wellington Times* 15 July 1897

<sup>33</sup> AOT, NS337/6, p. 23, AOT, NS337/5, p. 3 and Tasmanian Post Office Directory, 1899

<sup>34</sup> 'Bank of Van Diemen's Land Lottery Bill', Tasmanian Journals and Papers of Parliament 1893 Vol. 29 No. 85 and 'Women's Franchise Petition', Tasmanian Journals and Papers of Parliament 1896 Vol. 35 Pt. 2 No. 68

<sup>35</sup> S. Petrow, *Sanatorium of the South?* (Hobart, 1995) p. 170

<sup>36</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 28

passed the House of Assembly on the grounds that it 'was deemed inefficient and not favourable to all classes of women'.<sup>37</sup>

In 1902 all white Australian women were granted the right to vote in Federal elections<sup>38</sup> but the WCTU activity continued for the state franchise. At the Tenth Annual Convention it was reported that the WCTU had joined with the United Council of Woman's Suffrage in sending a request for adult suffrage throughout the Commonwealth to Federal Parliament.<sup>39</sup> There was also mention of preparations for a Woman's Suffrage Conference to be held in Washington, USA in February 1902. The WCTU collected and sent all information relating to its suffrage work to the National Council of Women for the Australian delegate to take to the conference. The Australian representative to the conference was the prominent female rights advocate from Victoria, Miss Vida Goldstein, who was not a member of the WCTU but an adamant supporter. Goldstein was the first woman in the British Empire to nominate for national parliamentary selection campaigning for equal divorce, child custody and pay.<sup>40</sup> Even though Goldstein was probably the most vocal female advocate of her time, the National WCTU stopped short of endorsing her as a political candidate. The *White Ribbon Signal*, published in Victoria, wrote of Goldstein: 'While a woman would be as well or better qualified than the present members, to nominate a woman would cloud the suffrage issue because the time was not ripe for a woman parliamentary candidate.'<sup>41</sup> The WCTU was probably wise not to push too many issues at once; it was logical to gain the vote for all Australian women before nominating them for parliament.

The WCTU was spurred on by the success of gaining the Federal vote in 1902. Rooke noted that the women must not be discouraged in the battle for the state franchise and 'like the proverbial spider, "try, try, try again", until we attain what we desire.'<sup>42</sup> In 1903 it was reported that a memorial was sent to the House of Assembly and Legislative Council asking for their support to the amended *Constitution Act* to

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>38</sup> A. Alexander, *A Wealth of Women* (Potts Point, 2001) p. 75

<sup>39</sup> AOT, NS337/11, p. 23

<sup>40</sup> Saunders and Evans, *Gender Relations in Australia*, p. 334

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in J.M Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman - Vida Goldstein* (Melbourne, 1993) pp. 56-57

<sup>42</sup> AOT, NS337/12, p. 16

confer the franchise on all Tasmanian women. The WCTU reported that this was carried in the House of Assembly by eighteen votes to fourteen but again was not discussed by the Legislative Council.<sup>43</sup> Suddenly and unexpectedly in 1903 the franchise was extended to women without fuss or ceremony. Just one month before the bill was finally passed, Rooke spoke to the WCTU about the imminent failure of the bill once more:

Have you noticed that Womanhood suffrage is one of the measures to be considered by our State Parliament? We cannot but think that it will, as heretofore, meet with favour in the House of Assembly. But if past experience is any indication of how it will be received by the Legislative Council, opposition awaits it. We must do our best once more, collectively and individually, to influence the members of the Upper House to pass a measure we believe to be just and right.<sup>44</sup>

On the 16 September Premier William Propsting moved the second reading of the *Constitution Act* with the object of conferring the franchise on women. He said that, 'there were 38,000 women in Tasmania who had the right of exercising the franchise at the next federal election. That being so, it was an anomaly not to extend the same privileges to them in respect to the elections in the state parliament.'<sup>45</sup> This was the view held by most of the politicians who responded. David Storrer, a protectionist liberal independent, MHA<sup>46</sup> said that women had not asked for the franchise, but they should get it, as was their right.<sup>47</sup> Thomas Hodgman, an anti-socialist MHA, and member of the licensing bench<sup>48</sup>, said he did not believe in universal suffrage and John Hope, also an anti-socialist and an independent MHA<sup>49</sup> said he would support suffrage now as women were taking more of an active role in affairs.<sup>50</sup> The *Constitution Act* conferred the franchise on Tasmanian women by changing one word;

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>44</sup> *People's Friend* 1 September 1903

<sup>45</sup> *Mercury* 16 September 1903

<sup>46</sup> S and B. Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851-1960* (Canberra, 1980) p.156

<sup>47</sup> *Mercury* 16 September 1903

<sup>48</sup> Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament*, p. 84

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85

<sup>50</sup> *Mercury* 16 September 1903

‘The word “man”...is hereby expunged, and the word “person” is hereby inserted into the said first line in lieu thereof’.<sup>51</sup>

The WCTU fought for the franchise for eleven years. It is true that at certain times the struggle was more or less put on the back burner but at all times gaining the franchise was a primary concern of the WCTU of Tasmania. This said, however, it is curious that after the final franchise report of 1903, the actual day the vote was won was not recorded in the minute books. Some historians assume that the WCTU was apathetic to the vote. In 1904, winning the vote was not mentioned, only that women were able to use the privilege for the first time. Rooke addressed four meetings in September of 1903 on the use and privilege of the vote. It was also recorded that a Woman’s Suffrage Association was formed in Hobart and Launceston with candidates for federal election addressing meetings. The first use of the Federal vote was also recorded: ‘At the Federal election the women had the privilege, for the first time of recording their votes, and it was a matter of surprise to many of the opposite sex that so great a number used this new-born privilege’.<sup>52</sup> After 1904 the minutes of the annual conventions were no longer preserved and it is only possible to refer to the minute books of the Hobart, Launceston and Burnie branches. The Hobart branch made no mention of the franchise in 1903 or in subsequent years except for minor mentions of elections or candidates’ addresses.<sup>53</sup>

It is an irony that an event that women today see as one of the most significant advances for equal rights was only briefly mentioned by the women whose campaigning helped to bring about that decision. It is not unreasonable to expect a mention of this achievement at the monthly meeting after it occurred for example. In fact, the WCTU did celebrate winning the vote. Rooke published a letter in the *People’s Friend* for the month after the *Constitution Act* was passed:

Is not the action of the legislative council in passing the clause in the constitution bill enfranchising the women of Tasmania on the same terms as men, a cause for great thankfulness. The many efforts we have used to gain this privilege have been slowly but surely, bringing us this consummation. For it we thank God and

<sup>51</sup> Tasmania Acts of Parliament, Edward VII No. 17, Constitution Act 1903

<sup>52</sup> AOT, NS337/13, p. 13

<sup>53</sup> AOT, NS337/29, *passim*

take courage, and surely go forward in the belief that He who has given us the victory in this one phase of our work will do so in others, and bless us in our service for Him. With fresh courage we can work for the overthrow of the liquor traffic, and when the time comes use our vote against this monstrous evil.<sup>54</sup>

The WCTU did not see the franchise as solely important for equal rights; members needed the vote as a tool in their other areas of work. The WCTU recognised the impact that legislation had at a personal and domestic level. It whole-heartedly supported the suffrage campaign which would allow members to vote for the male candidates who would support their ambitions.<sup>55</sup> The impact the WCTU had on Tasmanian society in the battle for the franchise is problematic. It is conceivable that the franchise would have been conferred on Tasmanian women anyway, even if the WCTU had not been involved. Once the Federal franchise was extended, it was only a matter of time before the state franchise was extended as well. The WCTU's impact was in educating and enlightening men and the wider public on franchise issues. Without the WCTU preaching the benefits, privilege and basic human rights that the vote entailed, then perhaps hundreds of Tasmanian women would not have been equipped to use the vote once it was granted. Once the franchise was gained, the WCTU moved straight into other, more important aspects of its work. The vote was certainly important to women; in some electorates women formed more than half of the voters, but the vote alone did not correct the social injustices and exploitation of women and children.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *People's Friend* 2 November 1903

<sup>55</sup> Pearce, 'A Few Viragos On A Stump', p. 155

<sup>56</sup> S. Petrow, 'The Furies of Hobart: Women and the Tasmanian Criminal Law in the Early Twentieth Century' in *Australian Journal of Law and Society*, Vol. 11, 1995. p. 69



## CHAPTER THREE

### OUTREACH

'This effort, we trust will be greatly blessed by God'<sup>1</sup>

The WCTU was not interested in temperance to simply establish prohibition; members were active in helping the victims of alcohol and moral degradation. They believed evil in society came from alcohol and substance abuse, so they worked in departments that educated high-risk groups about temperance and worked with the fallen to rehabilitate them to the ways of both temperance and God. This work was carried out in Tasmania in departments for sailors, foreigners, prison and prostitute work, narcotics, gambling and mothers' meeting. Meetings of mothers involved more social activity than rehabilitation. Each of these departments was of limited size in Tasmania and undoubtedly had more success in the larger mainland colonies on the mainland. The Tasmanian WCTU was not unique in its outreach work as all WCTU branches worldwide worked in similar departments. As with most of the Tasmanian Union's work, these departments showed early success and then began to decline both in union and community interest. This early success and the impact of that success is worth discussing in relation to what the WCTU was trying to achieve in Tasmania, where it saw a need for intervention that was not being initiated by the government or larger charity organisations. The WCTU of Tasmania was not interested in Aboriginal civil rights. The WCTU's silence in the 1890s and after the passing of the federal franchise on the rights of Aboriginal women was total.<sup>2</sup> This was partially because of the limited numbers of Aboriginals in Tasmania and partially because they were not a part of the WCTU sphere of influence.

Mothers and Cottage meetings were perhaps the most benign of all the WCTU work. These meetings were held periodically around the state by a member who invited women to her home or to a hired space; in Hobart meetings were often held in schoolrooms.<sup>3</sup> The meetings discussed issues that the WCTU believed women and

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<sup>1</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Non-State (NS) 337/5, Minutes of Fourth Annual Convention, 1896, p.30

<sup>2</sup> P. Grimshaw, 'Gender and Race and Citizenship in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Australia' *Australian Feminist Studies* Vol. 13 No. 28 (1990) p. 205

<sup>3</sup> AOT, NS337/30, October 1908.

mothers needed to be aware of as well as performing charitable activities. At the 1895 Annual Convention it was reported that:

Mothers meetings are found to be a blessing in many of our unions. At New Town about 11 poor women have been gathered together and helped. 104 garments have been made, and loving council given to the women.<sup>4</sup>

The continued success of these meetings is not reported. Each year at the conventions until 1904 the mention of these meetings decreases in the minute books for Hobart, Launceston and Burnie. From 1904 till 1914 only the Hobart branch continues this work spasmodically. It was reported in 1901 that meetings had fallen off as many of the churches were beginning to hold similar meetings that did not leave much scope for the WCTU.<sup>5</sup> Mothers' meetings began again in Hobart in 1908 but that was the last year they were recorded.<sup>6</sup> Presumably after this year the meetings were either not held or were not deemed significant enough to minute. Either way they were not a primary activity of the Tasmanian WCTU. The impact of these meetings is impossible to ascertain as a social event. In the smaller more rural areas especially, they would have been a good source of contact and socialisation. However, since the meetings did not continue for long they cannot have been a priority to the women who attended.

Work among foreigners was a department with quite limited scope in Tasmania. The only foreigners available to be helped were a small number of Chinese and only one of these was a woman. The Chinese who came to Tasmania did not come as settlers. They saw themselves as visitors, seeking quick wealth, and did not settle in one place but moved around the state looking for work.<sup>7</sup> The first mention of this work was in the 1894 Annual Convention minutes; by 1899 the work was no longer viable. In 1894 it was reported that ten Chinese men were being taught English by five WCTU women. The Chinese men were reported as being, 'all quick learners and exceedingly

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<sup>4</sup> AOT, NS337/4, p. 21

<sup>5</sup> AOT, NS337/10, p. 2

<sup>6</sup> AOT, NS337/30, November 1908

<sup>7</sup> B.V Easteal, 'The Chinese in Tasmania, 1870-1900', Unpublished BA Hons thesis, University of Tasmania 1966, p. 30

polite to the women.’<sup>8</sup> Classes were established in Burnie and Launceston and their success was reported in the convention minutes for 1896 and 1897.<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Eliza Paton, wife J.C Paton Junior, and WCTU superintendent of work with foreigners<sup>10</sup>, reported that she had formed a close bond with ‘the only Chinese woman in Hobart’.<sup>11</sup> She reported that they spent a large amount of time talking together about Jesus and singing hymns.<sup>12</sup> This one Chinese woman was literally the only Chinese woman in Tasmania until 1901 when three Chinese women were recorded.<sup>13</sup> In 1899, when the final report on work with the Chinese was given at the convention, it was reported that, ‘all classes have stopped as the Chinese men are leaving the larger towns to look for work.’<sup>14</sup> The WCTU was concerned that without English lessons these men could not be taught Christianity. This is one of few examples of the WCTU actively attempting to convert people to Christianity. Its work was based in Christian principles but members were not always as interested in evangelical activity. Another example of this work was the Department for Rescue and Prison work.

Prostitution presented a problem for the WCTU. Members preached a high standard of sexual morality for both men and women and needed to keep their belief of the superior morality of the female intact. Members tended to see prostitutes as the victims of men the seducers, and society, which did not easily allow women to earn a living.<sup>15</sup> The WCTU attacked women who complacently accepted the double standard: women would extend friendship to a man of position without regard to his character, and shun his victim.<sup>16</sup> The WCTU of Tasmania was not publicly vocal about the plight of prostitutes until 1890 but members did attempt to rehabilitate them, within the bounds of the existing system. Nationally, first wave feminists protested against the compulsory health checks for suspected prostitutes and not their male clients.<sup>17</sup> Lock Hospitals were established to subject women to these forced examinations. The Tasmanian Lock Hospital was established in 1879 as a result of the

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<sup>8</sup> AOT, NS337/3, p. 21

<sup>9</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 29, NS337/6, p. 30

<sup>10</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 3, *Tasmanian Post Office Directories*, 1899

<sup>11</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 29

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

<sup>13</sup> J. Alcock, ‘The Middle People: A History of the Launceston Chinese Community’, Unpublished BA Hons thesis, University of Tasmania 1998, p. 50

<sup>14</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 29

<sup>15</sup> A. Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia* (Cambridge, 1992) p. 207

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207

<sup>17</sup> M. Lake and F. Kelly, *Double Time: Women in Victoria – 150 Years* (Ringwood, 1985) p. 122

*Contagious Diseases Act*, which was later reinforced in 1882 and remained until 1903 when it was repealed.<sup>18</sup> The Lock Hospital was created and maintained in response to pressure from the British Navy, which used Hobart as a summer base. The navy threatened to discontinue its visits unless a clean prostitute population could be guaranteed. This would have meant a considerable economic and social loss to Hobart.<sup>19</sup>

The WCTU only hesitantly became involved in this issue in 1894 when it unsuccessfully petitioned Parliament.<sup>20</sup> A second petition was sent to Parliament in 1896, also with no effect. The WCTU wanted 'the repeal of these abominable laws, which sanction and make vice easy, and are a degradation to women.'<sup>21</sup> The WCTU's distaste for the Act came from the government regulation of prostitution rather than from the denial of civil liberties to prostitutes; it was a concern of social purity rather than anything else.<sup>22</sup> Any interest the Tasmanian WCTU showed in the *Contagious Diseases Act* seems to have come from national rather than local concerns.<sup>23</sup> The cessation of the Act in 1903 was due to changing medical thinking rather than the actions of the WCTU or other public pressure.<sup>24</sup> There is no evidence in the WCTU's records from 1885 until 1914 that the WCTU of Tasmania protested about the Lock Hospital. It seems that the female criminal and prostitute population were assisted in other ways.

Members of the WCTU visited the prison and Lock Hospital. The women apparently looked forward to the visits of the WCTU members, some showing signs of wanting to live a better life and some actually signing a pledge to stop drinking alcohol.<sup>25</sup> The WCTU responded to the assertion that women should not be granted the vote on the grounds that there are more bad women than bad men; "Prison statistics prove the fallacy of this assertion. There are ... 100 men in the Hobart gaol, and only seven

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<sup>18</sup> C. Evans, 'Protecting the Innocent: Tasmania's Neglected Children, Their Parents and State Care 1890-1918' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1999 p. 46

<sup>19</sup> Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, p. 207

<sup>20</sup> K. Daniels, 'Prostitution in Tasmania During the Transition from Penal Settlement to 'Civilized' Society' in K. Daniels, ed., *So Much Hard Work: Women and Prostitution in Australian History* (Sydney, 1984) p. 78 and AOT, NS337/3, p. 15

<sup>21</sup> *Mercury* 26 March 1896

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Daniels, 'Prostitution in Tasmania', p. 78

<sup>24</sup> Daniels, 'Prostitution in Tasmania', p. 77

<sup>25</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 30

women.”<sup>26</sup> The benefits of work in this department are as impossible to assess as most of the WCTU activity, although the Hobart branch members felt that their efforts had begun to reap successes. They reported in 1899:

We are glad to report that there is a decrease in the numbers of women prisoners, and we should rejoice at this evidence of the diminution of crime amongst the women of Tasmania, and take it as an encouraging sign that some of the seed sown is bearing fruit.<sup>27</sup>

Whether this decline was coincidental to the activity of the WCTU is impossible to assess, but members certainly felt they had made a contribution in this area. Apart from a few brief mentions in 1900 and 1903,<sup>28</sup> there were no further records of significant work done. Most of the work in this department was done in Hobart, being the largest centre for the prison and the location of the Lock Hospital. The Burnie branch did report briefly in 1897 that it was doing good work in this department, with one girl being ‘rescued’ and another helped with no good result.<sup>29</sup>

The work in the Department for Sailors was of a different kind to the prison work, with the emphasis being on temperance education rather than rehabilitation. Francis Willard was quoted as saying; ‘every sailor should have a mother in every port, someone to take an interest in him, keeping him free from harmful shore leave activities.’<sup>30</sup> The Hobart, Burnie and Launceston branches took this on board, all being active in this area. This work was firstly and primarily taken up by the Launceston union, which gave the credit to Mrs. Turner, a dedicated, seventy-year-old member.<sup>31</sup> The work in this department primarily involved the distribution of literature to the wharves and to specific vessels as well as meetings and socials held for the sailors. Between 1895 and 1903 the reports of the work with sailors refer to visits being made and the distribution of leaflets and books by the three major unions. After 1903 and the end of the annual convention minutes that have survived, the information in this department ends. None of the minute books for Hobart,

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<sup>26</sup> AOT, NS337/6, p. 30

<sup>27</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 35

<sup>28</sup> AOT, NS337/9, p. 31, NS337/12, p. 25

<sup>29</sup> AOT, NS337/6, p. 30

<sup>30</sup> J. R. Henderson, *The Strength of the White Ribbon* (West Perth, 1992) p. 2

<sup>31</sup> AOT, NS337/4, p. 30

Launceston or Burnie mention the work done in this area. It can be assumed that it continued, for there is no apparent reason for it to cease.

The outreach activities of the WCTU included a minimal amount of work to oppose gambling, specifically relating to Tattersall's, the lottery system in Tasmania. The WCTU was interested in abolishing gambling because like alcohol, it took money away from the family that should have been spent on feeding and clothing children. Premier Edward Braddon, a believer in free trade, allowed Tattersall's to Tasmania.<sup>32</sup> He allowed Tattersall's access in an attempt to dispose of the Bank of Van Diemen's Land's assets through a lottery. The *Suppression of Public Betting and Gambling Act, 1896* came out of these proceedings. Braddon was able to suppress the existing facilities by refusing them licenses under the new Act, while supporting Tattersall's, which could be carefully supervised.<sup>33</sup> There were apparently hundreds of betting shops around Tasmania and this legislation helped to control them.<sup>34</sup> The first mention of the protest against Tattersall's was in 1893 when a petition against the Van Diemen's Land Lotteries Bill was presented to the House of Assembly. Christian groups from Hobart, including sixteen signatories from the WCTU, signed the petition.<sup>35</sup> In 1897 a second petition was sent to parliament and was rejected.<sup>36</sup> In subsequent years Tattersall's was discussed in numerous meetings but the WCTU were never successful in having it terminated. Tattersall's had powerful allies in the government and the WCTU was not influential enough. In 1904 Rooke travelled around the state in her capacity as state president and noted of the Tattersall's influence:

During a visit to the West Coast I found that Tattersall's was very much in evidence. From one district for one sweep alone £800 passed through Tattersall's, business people [are] suffering through this large amount of money going out.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> S. and B. Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851-1960* (Canberra, 1980) p.18

<sup>33</sup> J. O'Hara, *A Mugs Game: A History of Gambling and Betting in Australia* (Kensington, 1988)p. 101

<sup>34</sup> T. Wilson, *The Luck of the Draw: A Centenary of Tattersall's Sweeps 1881-1981* (South Yarra, 1980) p. 91

<sup>35</sup> Journals and Printed Papers of Parliament 1893 Vol. 29 Paper No. 16, Petition Against Bank of Van Diemen's Land Lottery Bill.

<sup>36</sup> AOT, NS337/6, p. 21

<sup>37</sup> AOT, NS337/13, p. 8

At a meeting of the Hobart Branch in September 1904 it was reported that Mrs. Sarah Overall (President of the Hobart branch) lead a deputation to the premier about Tattersall's. The WCTU claimed that members of parliament intended to ignore the fact that 1905 was the time limit for Tattersall's in Tasmania. According to Overall, parliament passed an act to make Tattersall's lasting for all time and she expressed her regret that 'only town members were manly enough to raise their voices in protest against this violation of contract on the part of their own legislation.'<sup>38</sup> Tattersall's was not thrown out and this was the end of the WCTU's activities in this area.

The temperance work of the WCTU was not restricted to alcohol; members also preached temperance of other addictive substances. The Department for Narcotics was not as grand as the name made it sound. Some branches of the WCTU across Australia were interested in the opium trade, with the WCTU of New South Wales reporting in 1890 their aims as 'prohibiting the traffic in liquor, vice and opium'.<sup>39</sup> In Tasmania the area of concern was cigarettes, particularly boys smoking under the age of sixteen years. The work in this department was not extensive. In 1900 the Hobart union sent fourteen letters to schools asking teachers to educate children on the evils of smoking, but only two favourable responses were gained.<sup>40</sup> Despite this minimal response, the WCTU trusted, 'our request has not been in vain.'<sup>41</sup> In this year they protested against an advertisement for ladies cigarettes, which claimed, 'ladies of the Royal household, ladies of nobility, famous actresses and singers, indulge in the fragrant weed as a restorative for lassitude.'<sup>42</sup> The firm which produced this advertisement was firmly admonished by the WCTU, not for the style of the advertisement, but for its lack of judgment in encouraging women to smoke.

The most substantial achievement in the Narcotics Department came in this same year when the Legislative Council passed a bill to raise the age of smoking to fourteen years. Frederick Piesse MHA, a long time supporter of the WCTU and temperance

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<sup>38</sup> AOT, NS337/29, 29 September 1904

<sup>39</sup> B. Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary-Ann* (Melbourne, 1975) p. 26

<sup>40</sup> AOT, NS337/9, p. 21

<sup>41</sup> AOT, NS337/9, p. 21

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21

advocate<sup>43</sup>, presented a petition on 5 October 1900 to the Legislative Council, from Jessie Rooke and Annie Blair.<sup>44</sup> The petition was in favour of the Juvenile Smoking Suppression Bill. Dr. Crowther had moved the second reading of the bill on the grounds that smoking was detrimental to children. He said: 'It stunted the growth, prevented brain development and was most mischievous.'<sup>45</sup> Parliament debated the merits of the bill on the grounds that children under thirteen years would not have a strong understanding of the law and if caught could not pay a fine. Some members preferred: 'a few stripes with the cane upon the child being taken home to the parents, or the fact reported to the school master.'<sup>46</sup> The bill was eventually passed seven to one in the affirmative,<sup>47</sup> with the penalty no more than five shillings.<sup>48</sup> After this victory, the work done by this department carries on with minor concerns recorded and notes on the numbers of cigarette pledge cards received.

The WCTU of Tasmania worked in a large area to try to reach out to the public, and educate people about the issues of addiction to alcohol, smoking and gambling. They worked with mothers, sailors, Chinese, prostitutes, criminals and the general public. This occurred through contact, and through the petitions and legislation that members fought to have brought into effect. The full weight of the WCTU's activities are impossible to assess because its activities were so varied, and in some cases, seemingly insignificant. There can be no doubt that members did good work in the communities where they operated but the good they did is impossible to quantify accurately. The WCTU worked for the welfare of children, as demonstrated in its support of the Juvenile Smoking Suppression Bill; this was however, only a small part of some very important work.

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<sup>43</sup> Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament*, p. 133

<sup>44</sup> AOT, NS1591/1, Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Friday October 5<sup>th</sup> 1900, p. 115 and p. 118

<sup>45</sup> *Mercury* 29 September 1900

<sup>46</sup> *Mercury* 6 October 1900

<sup>47</sup> AOT, NS1591/1, p. 118

<sup>48</sup> Tasmania Acts of Parliament, Victoria No. 27, *Juvenile Smoking Suppression Act*, 1900





Delegates to the WCTU annual convention. Dated between 1913 and 1921.  
Archives Office of Tasmania NS337/53

## CHAPTER FOUR

### NEEDS OF CHILDREN

‘One little girl was sent to the Home after her mother was persuaded.’<sup>1</sup>

On a national level the WCTU was involved with the rights and welfare of children. For example, the WCTU of Victoria had phenomenal success in working for children’s rights, which set precedents in Australian law. In 1893 the Union helped to secure an amendment to the *Crimes Act* that increased the age of sexual consent from twelve years to sixteen years of age and for the first time defined incest as a criminal offence.<sup>2</sup> In 1900 the Victorian union began a campaign to have separate courts established for children so they would not be subjected to the influence of the hardened adult criminals; in 1906 the first of these courts was introduced. In 1906 the union set up municipal playgrounds in Melbourne’s more crowded districts and in 1909 helped to establish the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria, opening the first free kindergarten in Richmond.<sup>3</sup>

The WCTU of Australia held beliefs about the importance and sanctity of motherhood, which linked with views on childhood. The first duty of members who were mothers was to take care of their own children and to train them in the ways of temperance, pure living and thinking. To be truly effective in mothering, it was seen as important to lead by example, and required women to have a good moral state as well.<sup>4</sup> The Union saw women’s family role as potentially having great force, both in politics and society, Annie Blair said:

Organised motherhood is a force, the strongest, the most deeply rooted, the most steadily enduring, that the planet knows. If mothers of the world were banded together for the protection of their homes and children, humanity would be immeasurably the greater.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Archives Office of Tasmania (AOT), Non-State (NS) 337/5, Minutes of fourth annual convention, 1896 p. 30

<sup>2</sup> M. Lake, *Getting Equal* (St. Leonard’s, 1999) p. 24

<sup>3</sup> M. Lake and F. Kelly, *Double Time: Women in Victoria – 150 Years* (Ringwood, 1985) p. 124

<sup>4</sup> C. Evans, ‘Protecting the Innocent: Tasmania’s Neglected Children, Their Parents and State Care 1890-1918’ Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1999 p. 45

<sup>5</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 30

The WCTU redefined motherhood in ways that equated it closely with male traits, specifically those traditionally used to justify men's political power.<sup>6</sup> The national WCTU was always conscious of moral purity. The Union held that 'good' mothers should have control over their children and provide clean bedrooms, sensible good quality clothing and wholesome literature.<sup>7</sup> Members of the WCTU took a purity pledge when they joined the union and encouraged other women to do the same. The pledge read;

I Promise, God helping me, to discountenance all impurity in conduct, language, literature, and art, and rude jesting in relation to the other sex. To hold out helping hands to my brothers and sisters, and companions, obeying the Divine injunction, 'Let thy garments be always white'.

Tasmania was no exception to the ideals and expectations of the national WCTU, although it operated on a smaller scale.

The WCTU of Tasmania was active in its Loyal Temperance Legions (LTL) and 'Y' Unions. The former was for children, to teach them about temperance and God, and the latter for young women, to train them in temperance and hopefully encourage them to become members of the WCTU later in life. The WCTU played an important role in the introduction of the *Neglected Children and Youthful Offenders Act, 1896*,<sup>8</sup> the first of its kind in Tasmania. It attempted to establish school saving banks as compulsory for children and attempted to reintroduce the curfew bell. This will be discussed shortly.

'Y' Unions, sometimes called the Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union, were established in Tasmania in 1899. The convention minutes of that year commented that, 'Every Union was written to urging the members to interest the girls and young women in our work, and if possible to form 'Y' unions.'<sup>9</sup> The girls involved in these unions did much the same work as the WCTU. They helped in

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<sup>6</sup> A. Blainey, 'The 'Fallen' Are Every Mother's Children' Unpublished PhD thesis, LaTrobe University, 2000 p. 14

<sup>7</sup> Evans, 'Protecting the Innocent', p. 45

<sup>8</sup> Tasmania Acts of Parliament, Victoria No. 24, *Neglected Children and Youthful Offenders Act, 1896*

<sup>9</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 30

charitable ways, attended the conventions, sang hymns and assisted the WCTU whenever the need arose.<sup>10</sup> These unions did not experience great success. There were never more than five groups in Tasmania and the maximum enrolment was only seventy-four.<sup>11</sup> Loyal Temperance Legions were organised in the same way that a Scout or Girl Guide group would be organised. Adult leaders supervised large numbers of children in fun activities. Children were encouraged to join; their parents were encouraged to make them join as well as to take an interest in the activities. The first LTL's were organised in Ross and Richmond in 1895. They began with thirty-five and thirty-six members respectively.<sup>12</sup> The LTL's were popular in their first few years, with the pinnacle being in 1902 when there were around 850 members state-wide in about twenty-three different groups. There were LTL's at Richmond, Burnie, Beaconsfield, Don, Campbell Town, Waratah, New Town, Devonport, Evandale, Beltana, Longford, Franklin, St. Helens, Wynyard, Ross, Invermay, Zeehan, Romaine, Strahan, Hagley, Launceston and two in Hobart.<sup>13</sup> Beaconsfield had the largest LTL in Australia with an excess of 343 members.<sup>14</sup>

The success of the LTL's was relatively short lived. In 1903 and 1904 the reports given at the annual conventions were brief with only four and five leagues responding. The LTL received brief mentions in the minute books of the Hobart and Launceston Branches but only in relation to new leaders being assigned. The large numbers of children involved with the legion in its early days shows its widespread appeal, although this was only brief. The WCTU does not state the reason for the decline in interest in the LTL's. This was the pattern for most of their activities, early success and enthusiasm before interest waned and departments closed. It is also likely that children grew tired of the temperance message.

Joining the LTL was simple. The children had to sign a special pledge, one for girls and one for boys. The boy's pledge read;

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30

<sup>11</sup> AOT, NS337/9, p. 35

<sup>12</sup> AOT, NS337/4, p. 21

<sup>13</sup> AOT, NS337/9, p. 33

<sup>14</sup> A. Alexander, 'The Public Role of Women in Tasmania 1803-1914' Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tasmania, 1989, p. 231

I pledge my brain to God's thoughts to think; My lips no fire or foam to drink,  
from alcoholic cup, nor link with pure breath tobacco's taint; for have I not a  
right to be as wholesome and pure as she who [Francis Willard] through the years  
so glad and free moves gently onward to meet me? A knight of the New  
Chivalry, of Christ and Temperance, I would be, in nineteen hundred, come and  
see.

The girl's pledge was different;

I promise my God's help to be as brave as any boy you'll see; Drinking and  
smoking I'll eschew Decollette dress and waltzing too: Gossip and gum alike I'll  
shun, my mind improve that I may come with furnished brain and steady hand,  
firm nerves and temper at command; pure mind, strong body, heart most true to  
him to whom all this is due. I'll ask of him the same that he will ask to have  
fulfilled in me; together we will firmly stand Pray, work and vote for Native  
Land.

The pledges were different for boys and girls because the WCTU expected different behaviour from them. With regard to adults, the WCTU was focused on alcohol and purity. Children seem to have had further restrictions placed upon them. An example of this is the line of the girl's pledge, which states, 'drinking and smoking I'll eschew, decollette<sup>15</sup> dress and waltzing too: Gossip and gum alike I'll shun....'<sup>16</sup> The WCTU ideals of purity restricted girls from dancing, wearing certain clothing and gossiping with their friends. While girls had to fulfil the stereotype of a pure princess, the boys were little knights: 'A knight of the New Chivalry, of Christ and Temperance, I would be ...' This hope of morality and purity, which would be seen as unrealistic today if not in the 1900s, was an important influence in the child welfare legislation that the WCTU was instrumental in bringing about.

In 1896, the *Neglected Children and Youthful Offenders Act* established Tasmania's Neglected Children's Department.<sup>17</sup> This was partly in response to a new emphasis on the discipline of juveniles, which began with moral panic started by 'a small army of

<sup>15</sup> Decollette or 'décolleté' is a dress with a low neckline.

<sup>16</sup> Address before 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the National WCTU, Baltimore October 18<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> 1895, History of Women reel 619 No. 4927 – 4937. National Library of Australia. mfm 1424

<sup>17</sup> Evans, 'Protecting the Innocent', *passim*

prudes.’<sup>18</sup> The WCTU was influential in the creation of this Act, and its members were probably the ‘prudes’ mentioned. The Act was seen by parliament as dangerous legislation that would interfere with the liberties of citizens.<sup>19</sup> Piesse believed that the Act would protect the state against pauperism and incipient criminals.<sup>20</sup> One politician took exception to the clause allowing for the corporal punishment of boys and not girls:

Why should not the girls receive corporal punishment as well as the boys?  
(Derisive laughter) Is not this the age of female suffrage, when women are going to be equal to men? Then let us educate them in their infancy. (More laughter)  
Girls are always more troublesome in training schools ... than boys.<sup>21</sup>

At the Fourth Annual Convention held in 1896 it was reported that forty-six women from prisons had been visited and all appeared to be alcoholics. Although some were helped, all fell off the wagon. The WCTU gave special attention to the plight of the children of these women. The WCTU believed it was better to remove the child than rehabilitate the mother. The superintendent for the Department of Prison and Rescue Work reported:

In some cases I feel something ought to be done to get the children from these women, one little boy especially is becoming an adept in the art of deceiving, and morally speaking the outlook of that child’s future is awful. One little girl was sent to the Home after her mother was persuaded.<sup>22</sup>

In that same year a report was given by Annie Blair on the state of street children: ‘the wretched homes from which these poor waifs come and find that drunkenness and impurity reign, instead of these poor children being shielded by their parents, they are in so many cases driven to sin.’<sup>23</sup> The Act defined a neglected child as being under the age of fifteen years and found wandering, soliciting, begging or

<sup>18</sup> S. Petrow, ‘Arabs, Boys and Larrikins: Juvenile Delinquents and their Treatment in Hobart, 1860-1896’ *Australian Journal of Legal History* Vol. 2, 1996 p. 56

<sup>19</sup> *Mercury* 19 August 1896

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Mercury* 20 August 1896

<sup>22</sup> AOT, NS337/5, p. 30

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18

living with thieves or working after set times in the summer and winter months.<sup>24</sup> Some street or orphaned children undoubtedly benefited from the new legislation. The WCTU's preoccupation with purity and morality had a negative impact on children by removing those who might have had a better life living with their birth parents. The emphasis on children's innocence and need for protection denied them self-protection, the right to live with their families, to earn a living and to be visible members of society.<sup>25</sup> The *Neglected Children and Youthful Offenders Act* was meant to remove children from parents who were considered morally unfit; the most common cause of moral unfitness was poverty.<sup>26</sup> This meant it was primarily poor children being taken from their parents, placed into foster homes and then apprenticed until they were of age and could attempt to forge a life for themselves. The apprenticing of foster children was not as grand as it sounds. It simply meant being placed with a family to work for room and board and a small allowance, which was sometimes paid.<sup>27</sup>

The efforts made by the WCTU in the creation of the *Neglected Children and Youthful Offenders Act* were an important first step in recognising the needs and welfare of children. Perhaps some of its activity was misguided but this legislation was the first step on a learning curve. In 1918 the *Children's Charter* was implemented to prevent mistreatment of wards of the state.<sup>28</sup> In particular, restrictions were placed on the foster parents and frequent inspections of the children's living and working conditions were introduced. Violence to children was defined as neglect, but the charter could not legislate for the kind treatment of children. The system was primarily concerned with control of the children and the protection of their carers.<sup>29</sup> Even with the 1918 amendments, the Act still had further problems to correct. This first legislation for the welfare of children was part of a learning curve; the WCTU should be applauded for its intentions, even if the results were not as faultless as they could have been.

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<sup>24</sup> S. Petrow, 'Juvenile Delinquents in Launceston: 1860 to 1896' *University of Tasmania Law Review* Vol. 17, 1999, p. 160

<sup>25</sup> Evans, 'Protecting the Innocent', *passim*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



Other attempts by the WCTU to protect the welfare of children were not as successful and did not impact greatly on Tasmanian children. The attempt to introduce school savings banks did not have any success at all. Schools savings banks were seen as important to give children experience in saving, to teach them the value of money and to ensure each child had a small fund to assist them when they left school. In 1894 the first step was to address the Premier, Henry Dobson, Liberal MHA.<sup>30</sup> The Upper House had promised aid but unfortunately the report written by the Director of Education on school savings banks had been lost and Government could not proceed without it. The WCTU decided that, 'the first step is to ask the House to decide that it be found before they can proceed.'<sup>31</sup> The lost report was not found and this department quickly ended with nothing achieved. School Savings Banks was not a unique idea; in 1892 the *People's Friend* recommended, 'we should like to see the same thing done in our own State Schools [Savings Banks]. Deposits might be received on one day in the week, say Friday, after school ... the press and pulpit might well give more attention to this point than they do.'<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the WCTU attempted to introduce the curfew bell. The curfew bell was proposed in 1910 by the Children's Protection Society (formed in 1903) but the WCTU had suggested it much earlier. The Children's Protection Society included members of the WCTU and Emily Dobson, wife of Henry Dobson, a women's rights advocate and philanthropist active in many public issue associations such as the Woman's Sanitary Association, and Ministering Children's League. She joined the WCTU in 1912 but her membership was only intermittent.<sup>33</sup> Dobson was the most active and powerful of the executives of the NCW.<sup>34</sup> The proposal was that a bell would indicate the time that all children would have to go home or face being arrested. The WCTU first proposed this idea in 1899,<sup>35</sup> but even in 1899 all did not agree to the suggestion. The WCTU recorded that the City Fathers' attention was drawn to the fact that large numbers of boys and girls were roaming the streets at a

<sup>30</sup> S and B. Bennett, *Biographical Register of the Tasmanian Parliament 1851-1960* (Canberra, 1980) p.46

<sup>31</sup> AOT, NS337/3, p. 19

<sup>32</sup> *People's Friend* 2 May 1892

<sup>33</sup> I. A Reynolds, Emily Dobson (1842-1934), *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 8 1891-1939 CL-GIB, (Melbourne, 1981), pp. 310-311

<sup>34</sup> A.R. Taylor, 'Mrs. Henry Dobson: Victorian 'do-gooder' or Sincere Social Reformer' Unpublished BA Hons Thesis, University of Tasmania 1973, p. 78

<sup>35</sup> AOT, NS337/8, p. 27



late hour. The WCTU said, 'Some were in favour, but others considered it an unnecessary and obsolete custom.'<sup>36</sup> Public opinion seems to be adequately summed up in this quotation. The *Daily Post* agreed with the idea of a curfew but did say that the children needed somewhere to go.<sup>37</sup> The *Mercury* suggested that places for children should be created where:

They may dance and sing and rejoice in their young lives, with just as much supervision as is absolutely necessary, but without interfering with their sense of freedom, and the need for legally restrictive measures will largely disappear.<sup>38</sup>

This utopianism may have attracted the *Mercury's* readers' sympathies but it was not the most likely solution to the problem of street children. The curfew would have encouraged the interest of government officials in the children, instead of them remaining invisible to the state. The WCTU did not insist on the curfew bell, because they knew public opinion was not on their side and it was not going to be legalised without the support of the public or government. A large amount of the opposition to the curfew was in part opposition to Emily Dobson. The amount of work she instigated in Hobart for women and children cannot be overestimated;<sup>39</sup> she was a powerful woman, with powerful connections but some of her ambitions made her unpopular in the community. Dobson wanted, 'more authority [to be] given to inspectors to enable them to keep girls from the evils of the streets and take them to their homes.'<sup>40</sup> This attracted strong response as letters to the *Daily Post* suggested; 'Mrs. Dobson's words or inferences are too absurd to discuss. I would like to see that party try to take our children from us.'<sup>41</sup> 'Just Fancy! A curfew bell... Sir, the workers haven't any time to be immoral. They have to slave too hard making wealth for the classes represented by the NCW.'<sup>42</sup> 'Too much of the old high-handed tyranny of the Norman Dynasty ... parents will probably resent the imputation that they are

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Post* 9 February 1910

<sup>38</sup> *Mercury* 21 February 1910

<sup>39</sup> Evidence of Emily Dobson's impact on Tasmanian Society can be seen at 99 Bathurst St. Hobart, a building named 'Emily Dobson House'.

<sup>40</sup> *Daily Post* 18 February 1910

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Post* 24 February 1910

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

unable to trust, or control their own children.’<sup>43</sup> The issue of the curfew, when it resurfaced in 1910 was Dobson’s project and the WCTU followed her lead.

As with other groups of first wave feminism, the WCTU was interested in the welfare of, and to a lesser extent, the rights of all children. It helped children of the upper classes in the LTL and ‘Y’ union’s. Members taught values of morality and purity and expected these principles to be the standard for all children. They helped to create and introduce the *Neglected Children and Youthful Offenders Act*, which was the first legislation of its kind in Tasmania, taking the interests of the morally degraded, always poor, children into consideration. The unfortunate consequence of this important Act was that children who should have been helped, but left with their birth parents, were removed into the often harsh foster care system. The WCTU’s focus was correct. The Union was trying to look after the needs of children. Members wanted each child to have moral values, and to have a savings account, which would teach them the importance of saving as well as giving them a small amount of money for their later lives. Although the WCTU wanted all children to be safe in their homes at night, the fact that many children did not have safe homes to go to meant that the curfew bell was not going to succeed. It was important for the continuing debates about children’s welfare that these issues were continually raised and kept before the public. Debates that ensued in the local papers when the curfew bell was again proposed in 1910 were examples of this. The WCTU’s impact on child welfare issues was minimal in isolation but, when combined with women like Emily Dobson or groups like the NCW, its power and influence was greatly increased and it was able to influence Tasmanian society on a greater scale.

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<sup>43</sup> *Tasmanian Mail* 8 June 1901.

## CONCLUSION

The period 1885 to 1914 for the WCTU of Tasmania was one of immense growth and achievement. It influenced Tasmanian society in many ways. The Union had a shaky beginning; it was not until 1891 after Jessie Ackermann's second visit, that the most significant activities of the union began. The WCTU worked in a vast and varied range of departments in Tasmania and the most significant of these have been discussed. The WCTU has been described as the most vocal and militant woman's organisation in Tasmania for this period.<sup>1</sup> Considering the importance of other organisations such as the Women's Sanitary Association and the NCW, this is quite a compliment. The Union's temperance beliefs lead it to demand prohibition for all Tasmania and Australia. This was not achieved but it pursued local option vehemently during this entire period. Male temperance organisations had previously been the primary temperance advocates in Tasmania until the WCTU was established. The WCTU worked by Francis Willard's catchphrase 'Agitate, Educate, Legislate'.<sup>2</sup> Members established coffee houses, booths and stalls, wrote to churches, tried to abolish barmaids as a profession and pursued local option.

From 1893 until 1899 the WCTU was the only suffrage organisation in Tasmania. After 1899 the NCW took up the fight for the franchise. Historians have not always been kind to the achievements of the WCTU in this regard. Contemporary politicians claimed that women had not asked for the vote. However, if they really believed this, they were ignorant of the women in their constituencies, as the WCTU again, agitated, educated and legislated to gain the vote. When one politician, David Storrer, had the courage to stand up in parliament and say that hundreds and thousands of women in Tasmania had asked for the vote, his statement was met with dissent.<sup>3</sup> Storrer's estimate of the number of women in Tasmania was highly optimistic but he was correct that Tasmanian women, through the WCTU, had asked for the vote. The WCTU agitated for the vote for eleven years before it was finally granted. This victory was lessened by the federal vote being granted the previous year, making the state extension inevitable. This does not minimise the WCTU's achievement,

<sup>1</sup>H. Reynolds, 'The Island Colony – Tasmania: Society and Politics 1880-1900' Unpublished MA thesis, University of Tasmania 1963 p. 110

<sup>2</sup>A. Alexander, *A Wealth of Women* (Potts Point, 2001) p. 72

<sup>3</sup>*Mercury* 16 September 1903

however. Parliamentary debate was occupied with the fact that women were taking a more active interest in politics;<sup>4</sup> this was the WCTU's influence.

The WCTU impacted on Tasmanian society directly in its outreach work. In many of its departments the WCTU had personal contact with individuals that it perceived needed help. The WCTU worked with mothers, sailors and prostitutes. It worked to abolish gambling and to raise the age of smoking. Its work for the welfare of children was, in many respects, ground breaking as it helped to create the Neglected Children's Department. Members worked to educate children against the dangers of alcohol abuse and attempted to keep all children safe at night with the curfew bell. Blainey concludes in her thesis that the Australian WCTU was acting as a maternal organisation. They were acting as mothers protecting their sons from alcohol and their daughters from sexual exploitation. They did not act to protect themselves. Blainey sees it as an irony that as the WCTU attempted to protect they inadvertently restricted. By attempting to abolish women barmaids, they limited the sphere of women's work further and perhaps forced some women into prostitution to live.<sup>5</sup> The Tasmanian WCTU acted similarly. They were the protectors of the innocent.

Unlike the Victorian Union primarily discussed in Blainey's thesis, despite all the work the WCTU undertook to improve Tasmanian society, its influence and impact did not grow to allow it any substantial power. The WCTU was certainly respected in the temperance world but outside of that sphere it met with criticisms and misunderstanding about its work and remained unheard of in some circles. The link that the WCTU provided between womanhood suffrage and prohibition was enough to turn many men and women away from the womanhood suffrage question, but this was not enough to delay the granting of the franchise.<sup>6</sup> There are not as many examples of ridicule of the WCTU in Tasmania as might be expected. It was only from occasional letters to the editor of certain newspapers that any idea of 'anti-WCTU' feeling existed. The debate that ensued in the *Launceston Examiner* from 'X Ray's' comments show that the WCTU was perceived as dabbling in areas it should have left to men. The remarks made were not particularly critical or wounding. The

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<sup>4</sup> *Mercury* 16 September 1903

<sup>5</sup> A. Blainey, 'The 'Fallen' Are Every Mothers Children', Unpublished PhD thesis, LaTrobe University, 2001, pp. 205-206

<sup>6</sup> A. Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia* (Cambridge, 1992) p. 181

work of the WCTU did not upset people. Perhaps it did not make a big enough impact in the areas where members worked. They worked to change society; either society did not notice them, or did not care.

It cannot be denied that the WCTU made an impact on Tasmania between 1885 and 1914. Why was that impact not more substantial or sustained? There are several possible reasons. Firstly, it can be seen time and again how the WCTU began work in an area and then for various reasons lost either the interest or the ability to do further work. This was the case in its work with coffee rooms, mothers meetings, the franchise, booths and shows, as well as for the repeal of the *Contagious Diseases Act*, the curfew bell and school savings banks. The Tasmanian WCTU seems to have lacked the ability to sustain a department for a prolonged length of time. This was partly because its numbers were small, and partly because members worked in areas where success was difficult to see and they became discouraged. Because they worked in so many different departments perhaps they were not able to focus all their attention on one issue.

Secondly, the establishment of the National Council of Women in 1899 diminished the prerogative sphere of the WCTU. The NCW was an organisation more universally interested in women's rights and status, rather than the WCTU whose primary concern was temperance. The NCW was made up of affiliate organisations not solely concerned with temperance. It may be that the WCTU lost potential members when the NCW began work.

Thirdly, Emily Dobson's activities diminished the WCTU's impact on Tasmanian society. As mentioned previously, Emily Dobson was a strong, powerful and influential woman. She established and worked with numerous community organisations, including the WCTU. The numerous criticisms made about her activities show that she was impacting on and affecting society in a way that the WCTU was not able to do.

The WCTU provided hundreds of Tasmanian women with the opportunity to be involved with an international organisation. It demanded that women take up public issues, transcend the private sphere, leave the home and become involved in

something bigger. The impact of the WCTU on its female members is immeasurable. The impact on society was important, but that should not be measured in finite terms. The impact and influence of the WCTU on those it helped cannot be fully comprehended.

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