

KATE SHEPPARD

New Zealand WCTU Leader - Suffrage Campaign



The temperance cause was intertwined with the campaign for votes for women in New Zealand in the 1880s and early 1890s. At the time all women were denied the vote, along with ‘juveniles, aliens, lunatics and criminals’. **Kate Sheppard, the WCTU’s national franchise and legislative WCTU department’s superintendent** was a woman of courage and persuasion, filled with energy, passion and commitment to the aims of WCTU - For God and Home and Every Land. The WCTU had been established in 1885. They believed, along with some others, that if women had the right to vote, governments would be more likely to pass laws to reduce or ban alcohol consumption. Therefore Kate mobilised, encouraged and coordinated women across the country to sign the suffrage petitions in 1891, 1892 and 1893. Nearly 32,000 signatures were obtained which represented nearly 30% of the women in

New Zealand at the time. This resulted in New Zealand becoming the first country in the world in which women were granted the vote in general elections.

Those original signatures, on a long glued-together parchment roll, are now safely stored in a new depository and display cabinet in the National Library of New Zealand. The official opening of this new exhibition took place in Wellington, New Zealand on 19 May, 2017. Kate Sheppard, along with other early NZ history makers, was honoured.

In 1895 the WCTU began publishing its own newspaper, the White Ribbon. Kate Sheppard was the papers's first editor.



Kate had come to New Zealand with her mother and siblings in 1869 at 22 years of age, after the father had died. She and her sister soon became concerned about justice for women and children. She was an early cyclist, just like Frances Willard was, and helped modernise clothing for women. She travelled to and campaigned for women's suffrage in England and America. She married Walter Sheppard, a wealthy merchant and they had one son. She outlived both of them and her one granddaughter. Kate helped set up the National Council of Women in New Zealand and she became the first president in 1896.

Memorials, streets, bank notes, houses in schools, a play - have all been named in honour of this excellent lady. A number of green pedestrian lights in Wellington show her walking. She died in 1934, aged 87 years and is buried in Christchurch, New Zealand. She will long be remembered and is honoured on Women's Suffrage Day or White Camellia Day on 19 September each year.