

Women in History: Essays on European Women in New Zealand. Edited by Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald, and Margaret Tennant. Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1986. 202pp., illus. NZ price: \$24.95 paperback.

WOMEN IN HISTORY is a collection of ten essays dealing specifically with Pakeha women in the period 1860–1939. Although the editors acknowledge that the collection possesses ‘gaps and silences’, they have, nevertheless, to use Dale Spender’s words, documented some very important absences in our knowledge of women’s history. Issues such as sexuality, fertility, childbirth, welfare, and nationality are dealt with in individual essays. However, the subtitle of this collection absolves the editors only in part from their obligation to be more comprehensive in their selection of essays, particularly as the book’s main title suggests an all-embracing treatment of women in the past. Their aim is ‘to encourage new ways of seeing the past so that a history without reference to gender will be unthinkable.’ It is to be hoped that a history without reference to race and gender would also be unthinkable. Although it is not the editors’ intention to make certain groups of women invisible, especially Maori women, there is still an onus on the editors to justify more fully their decision to focus on European women in this period.

The publication of *Women in History* in paperback form certainly helps the editors in their aim to make some of the recent scholarly work on women’s history more widely available. The collection includes conference papers and articles which have appeared in academic journals (three of them in this journal) since 1975. Most of the essays, however, have been written since 1980, which is a reflection, not only of the increase in appointments of women to academic positions, but also of the continued growth of interest in women’s history. Nevertheless, the study of women in New Zealand’s history is in its infancy, as is illustrated by the editors’ guide to further reading: articles and papers listed outnumber books by two to one. Of the theses produced in New Zealand universities, only three are doctoral dissertations. That is why collections of this kind are important: they encourage future research, and provide valuable teaching materials that enable historians to include women’s history as part of their mainstream teaching.

The essays written especially for this volume include Philippa Mein Smith’s ‘Mortality in Childbirth in the 1920s and 1930s’, Ruth Fry’s ‘“Don’t Let Down the Side”: Physical Education in the Curriculum for New Zealand Schoolgirls 1900–1945’, and Dorothy Page’s ‘Women and Nationality: Feminist Organisations in the Inter-War Period’. Philippa Mein Smith and Ruth Fry have provided fascinating insights into two key areas of women’s lives: childbirth and education. The essays on these and other topics complement and, to a large extent, relate to an already substantial Anglo-American historiography. The orientation of Dorothy Page’s essay is slightly different in that it offers an insight into an issue for which there is a less substantial body of secondary literature. Her research shows how a married woman’s nationality became a political issue for women in New Zealand after the First World War, especially as the 1914 British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act disenfranchised the British-born wives of aliens in New Zealand, and required them to register with the police. The issue became a matter of concern for women in Britain and the Commonwealth, and Dorothy Page has shown how women’s organizations in New Zealand co-operated with British feminists in lobbying for redress under international law.

A major advantage of this collection of essays is their focus upon a limited time span — a point missed by the choice of title and underplayed in the introduction. The essays complement each other extremely well, and offer a well-rounded picture of Pakeha

women. As it stands, the collection provides a very useful introduction to the lives of European women in this 80-year period and is a very worthwhile publication to add to our small, but growing, number of books on New Zealand women.

MAUREEN MONTGOMERY

University of Canterbury

Women's Suffrage in New Zealand. By Patricia Grimshaw. Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1987 reprint. 156pp., NZ price: \$27.95.

Women and the Vote. Edited by R. P. Hargreaves and T. J. Hearn. Victorian New Zealand Reprint Series No. 7, Hocken Library, Dunedin, 1986. 39pp. NZ price: \$5.50.

FOR MANY students of New Zealand history (myself included), the 1972 publication of Patricia Grimshaw's *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* provided a first acquaintance with women's history. It introduced us to an aspect of Pakeha women's experience that went beyond the one-dimensional image of the 'pioneer woman', stoically baking and breeding in the backblocks, while her man carved a farm out of the bush. It challenged the Reevesian notion that New Zealand women suddenly woke one morning in 1893 to find themselves enfranchised — courtesy of male legislators. In showing that a group of women activists, the majority of them associated with the WCTU, fought a long, energetic campaign for the vote, Grimshaw provided a model of scholarship for subsequent thesis writers and researchers. She raised questions about the motivations of these so-called 'first-wave' feminists and the subsequent fate of the women's movement in New Zealand.

In the fifteen years between the first publication of *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* and this paperback reprint, there has been little to supersede Grimshaw's research. While Grimshaw's focus was more often women's entry into new spheres of activity, and that strand of liberal feminism which emphasized equality between the sexes, later work by Raewyn Dalziel placed greater emphasis on sexual difference as the basis of women's claims to public influence. In a 1980 essay, Phillida Bunkle pointed out the very ambivalent nature of the WCTU's feminism, especially as it was directed to issues such as social purity. Other extensions of Grimshaw's work have been restricted to post-graduate theses, most notably Shelly Griffith's Otago dissertation, 'Feminism and the Ideology of Motherhood in New Zealand', which took the study of early New Zealand feminism beyond the suffrage campaign and beyond the 1890s.

In an interesting 'Afterword' to the reprint, Grimshaw reflects upon her earlier findings in the light of this more recent research, and the further conceptualization of women's history over the 1970s and 1980s. She gives greater weight than before to the contradictions in nineteenth-century feminism, but suggests that even arguments based upon maternal influence and sexual difference had radical potential, and were used to challenge traditional concepts of women's place. Grimshaw acknowledges that *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand* was not a work which challenged existing canons of historical significance. Placing women in the context of public life and political change in New Zealand, it falls into the category of women's history that has variously been described as 'contribution' or 'also there' history. Nonetheless, it did show the links between feminism and temperance in New Zealand's past, and it did make visible a number of important New Zealand women who had previously been overlooked by New Zealand historians. What is remarkable is how few publications there are to stand alongside *Women's Suffrage* in the 1980s. There have been theses and articles written on women's