

Two of the editors, Barbara Brookes and Margaret Tennant, attempt to construct an overview of the lives of Maori and Pakeha women in New Zealand history. There has not been a bold attempt to construct a model of New Zealand women's identity, such as Anne Summers and Miriam Dixon did for Australian women in the 1970s, and perhaps in a post-modern age, with its distrust of meta-narratives, no congenial climate any longer exists for the development of one. However, the fragments of women's lives that these writers offer in their short studies invite some synthesis, which some courageous scholar may attempt at a later date. Meanwhile this collection reveals women's history in New Zealand to be already established on a firm footing. The editors are to be congratulated on their initiative.

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Woman Suffrage in Australia. A Gift or a Struggle? By Audrey Oldfield. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992. 263pp. Aust. price: \$29.95.

THE MAJOR PROBLEM in writing a history of women's suffrage in Australia, and presumably the reason why no-one has attempted it before Audrey Oldfield, is that you have to deal with not one but several campaigns. The struggle, for Oldfield presents it as a struggle, went on first in six colonies, subsequently in four states, at the conventions on federation and, in a limited way, in the federal Parliament. And yet because the Australian colonies became Australia, there is a feeling that somehow the story must have a unity, must be of a piece.

Oldfield has dealt with this difficulty by dividing her book into two parts. Part I covers the individual campaigns; Part II attempts to answer some general questions relating to the politics of suffragism, the social composition of the suffrage movements, the arguments and issues involved and the aftermath of suffrage at home and abroad.

W.P. Reeves' dismissive account of Australasian women's role in gaining the vote cast a long shadow over the historiography of the women's suffrage. In 1972 Patricia Grimshaw's book, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand*, exploded the myth Reeves had purveyed as far as this country was concerned. It has become increasingly clear, through biographical studies, articles and theses, that Reeves was just as wrong for Australia. Australian women's enfranchisement was no gift; it was a matter of argument, contest and campaign. Each area had its own struggle and in each area remarkable women emerged to formulate the claim and direct the campaign. Oldfield's book presents the first complete picture of this struggle.

South Australia was, in 1894, the first Australian colony to give women the vote and to enable them to stand for election to Parliament (incidentally it was the last state to elect a woman to its legislature). Victoria, which had unwittingly enfranchised women ratepayers in 1863 and disenfranchised them two years later, was the last to fall into line in 1908. As in New Zealand, the Women's Christian Temperance Union was a major player in all the colonies, except New South Wales. The WCTU was joined by what Oldfield describes as 'open' societies, usually run by elite women, which, as the campaigns stretched on, increasingly took over the work. Politics played a significant role everywhere but political forces were not the same. In South Australia the 'confluence' of Liberal and Labor forces after the general election of 1894 was a factor in the victory. The

Western Australian government is seen to have been influenced by fear of the voting power of goldfield radicals. Victoria's staunch opposition is explained partly in terms of the threat of the coming Labor party to the right-wing Liberals and the Conservatives.

Oldfield is good on campaign and political narratives. She tells the story clearly, weaving in the individuals, their various organizations, conflicts within the movement, tactical problems, the external support and the opposition. Inevitably the separate campaign narratives lead to some repetition, sometimes of fact, often of similar debates and events, albeit with different actors. The structure of Part I nevertheless minimizes the opportunity to discuss the interconnections, the women's networks and the domino effect that women's suffrage had in the antipodes. The impression of territorially and politically discrete campaigns is given some credence by the 1901 comment of a New South Wales Legislative Councillor that women voters in the 'three small villages' of New Zealand, South Australia and Western Australia scarcely mattered. However other, largely unexplored, observations show that this was not the case and Oldfield tries to pull the threads together in the second part of the book.

Oldfield argues that the fundamental position of Australian suffragists was that women as individuals and citizens should have the vote as a matter of justice but there is no sustained examination of the actual writings and speeches of suffragists. And this is where the book ultimately becomes less than satisfying. Its strength, the overview of the campaign, is achieved at the expense of detail and argument. The book in the end has a journalistic quality seen in such phrases as: 'Quite remarkable are the sturdy elderly women who chose the speaking platform instead of the chimney corner' (p.184) and in the summary discussion of why Australian politicians were so susceptible (compared to those in Europe and North America) to the arguments and weight of the woman's movement. Indeed there is a sense that the question being posed in the book is why did the politicians cave in, as if somehow the weakness of politicians is a more interesting historical phenomenon than the suffrage movement and the women and men within it.

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A Healthy Country: Essays on the Social History of Medicine in New Zealand. Edited by Linda Bryder. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1991. 252pp. NZ price: \$29.95.

LINDA BRYDER is to be congratulated for presenting us with New Zealand's first book of essays on the social history of medicine. As the publisher claims, this book breaks new ground. Focusing on four subject areas, the rise of the medical profession and alternative practitioners, health institutions in the form of hospitals, asylums and sanatoria, public health and women's health, *A Healthy Country* places the history of medicine and health care firmly within New Zealand social history, and in so doing achieves its purpose of demonstrating what the social history of medicine is all about.

This collection, with the spirited sense that it conveys of work in process, signals new research directions and provides a resource for teaching at all levels. Captured in the title is the central theme: a questioning of New Zealand's image as a healthy country, an image that has become integral to our national identity and culture and has featured in promotional literature since European settlement. All the contributors query this view as measured against the realities of health status and health policy. Given the importance of