



Introduction

Audio transcript

In 1900, women were second-class citizens, denied the right to vote, the right to open bank accounts, take bank loans. They had a hard time gaining tertiary education. Marriage was seen as the only career for middle-class women.

Working class girls worked like dogs. They left school at 13 or 14, worked as housemaids or shop girls from dawn to dusk, married young, and as there was no contraceptive advice, (it was actually illegal to sell contraceptives), they could raise as many as 14 or 16 children on the wages of a working man, which were very small.

Men did all the really interesting things. Men controlled the law, medicine, the arts, science-related subjects. Sport was exclusively male. Women were banned from the Olympics until 1912, and then they were only allowed to enter the swimming and the archery, because it was seen as immoral for women to be seen in public, perspiring.

The law treated them like children or domestic pets, and so they really had a great deal to overcome, in order to get any sort of parity with men. The thought that they could possibly be paid the same seemed ludicrous at the time. They were paid half the wages of a man for doing the same job.

So women wanted a wide range of things, ranging from more independence, to better working conditions. In 1900, all Australian women received the federal vote as part of federation, and in 1905, Queensland became the second-last Australian state to grant women the right to vote in state elections.

Obtaining the vote was the key to financial independence for women, it was part of a gradual process of change, which would affect the lives of all women. But don't think for a moment that getting the vote changed things overnight, it didn't.