

*Ellen Chandler*



**100**  
**YEARS OF WOMEN'S**  
**SUFFRAGE**  
1908-2008

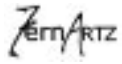


*Reflection and Celebration*





*Ellen Chandler*



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& School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning

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Project Partners: Women's Electoral Lobby and League of Women Voters Victoria

Adjunct Professor Judith Smart background material on women's suffrage in Victoria

Shawn Callahan of anecdote for opening question techniques

Meg Minos for background material on bookbinding

Jackie Ralph for transcribing

Interviewee: Ellen Chandler

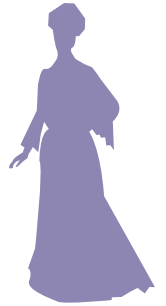
Interviewed by: Emma Brelsford and Diana White

Designed By: Sarah Costanzo

Interview of Ellen Chandler edited by Emma Brelsford

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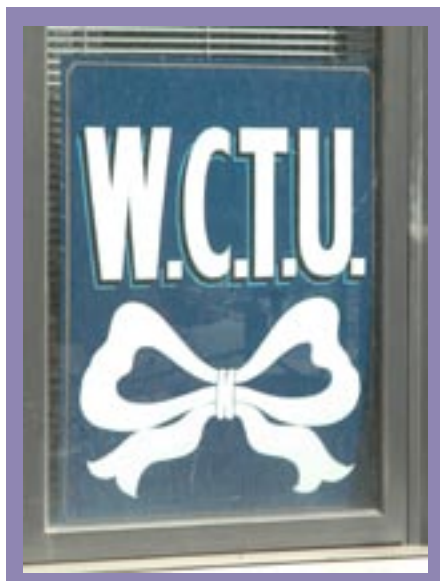
*I would like to dedicate this to all women fighting for equality*

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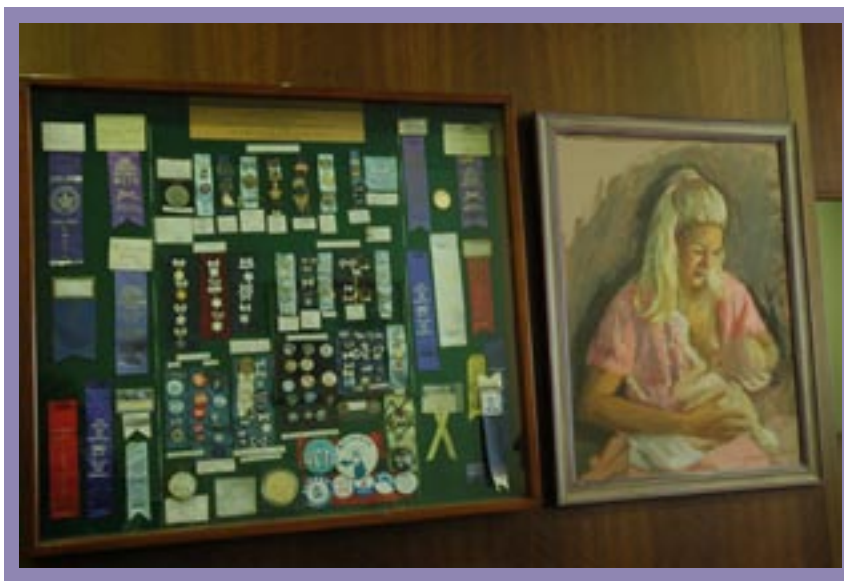
Sarah Costanzo



# Mementos

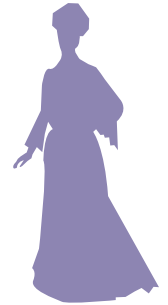


World wide symbol of the woman's christian temperance union



WCTU mementos collected at various world conventions plus a modern painting by one of the associate members Dr Donald Cameron

# Introduction



The 24th of November 1908 marks the day when the Legislative Council passed a suffrage bill enabling women for the first time to vote in state elections of Victoria, Australia. For the centenary celebration Liam Fennessy and Soumitri Varadarajan, RMIT Industrial Design Program, Kerry Lovering Women's Electoral Lobby, Sheila Byard Victoria League of Women Voters Victoria and artist Fern Smith worked in partnership; facilitating RMIT students to produce handmade limited edition books of twelve significant women in Victoria.

Four students Emma Brelsford, Sarah Costanzo, Cara Jeffery and Diana White conducted twelve two hour interviews with Gracia Baylor, Elleni Bereded-Samuel, Ellen Chandler, Angela Clarke, Ursula Dutkiewicz, Beatrice Faust, Pat Goble, Professor Patricia Grimshaw, Mary Owen, Marian Quartly, Associate Professor Jenny Strauss and Eleanor Sumner.

The students had never interviewed, edited nor produced handmade books it is a fantastic achievement with in a twelve-week semester. Their background work informed from in-kind assistance of historian Adjunct Professor Judith Smart; expert in narrative techniques and director of Anecdote, Shawn Callahan; writer, artist and bookbinder Meg Minos.

For all of us who have participated in the project it has given us time to reflect on the achievements and persistent struggle toward gender equality in Victoria. What shines through these twelve wonderful interviews is the strength, persuasive insistence for equality within our community and their huge generous hearts.

Fern Smith 2007



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The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) is the oldest women's organisation in the world. We're going to the world convention in a couple of weeks actually where 35 different countries will be represented. It is quite an amazing thing. At the convention we will elect new officers but we will also establish what we call the resolutions, which are put forward at each convention. The resolutions are written for individual countries to present to their governments or whatever authority they see fit.

FOETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME (FAS) has been a hobby horse on the WCTU agenda for the last 30 or 40 years and is one resolution we will continue to lobby for the government to pick up. Not many medical practitioners will speak out about it and very little research has been done [on a full research scale] which definitely holds things back in the sense of having a diagnosis recognised and having rehabilitation or remedial work for the child. Also at this stage the food standards of Australia and New Zealand are studying a submission that was put forward by New Zealand to have warning labels to be put on all alcohol containers regarding FAS. Well it remains to be seen how that goes but the theory is that without Australian research to back up submissions it won't be successful. Yet France you'd say is the wine drinking capital of the world, but they had three women, maybe it was two years ago who brought an action against the government for not warning them about the effects

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of alcohol on the foetus. So the French government's response to that action has been to put very graphic health warning labels on all the alcohol in France. Then there are the statistics that say a lot of young women who are becoming pregnant didn't have any intention of becoming pregnant, but they've been binge drinking and lost control of what they're doing. I think there's something about the feminist movement in this problem in that, I think well the men have been drinking for years, or certain men have been drinking and that it's our right as women to do the same sort of thing.. To behave like men.

**"It's a big problem. We're still women and we have our strengths and weaknesses"**

Yet I think the first women of the WCTU were really the first feminists in that they were prepared to accept that change would only come by making changes to the law, and changes to the law would only come if women had the vote. Yes, power through the ballot box and those sorts of things. As a teenager, Emily Pankhurst sort of inspired me, to think that someone would get chained up or thrown in jail just because they wanted the vote! But time has passed hasn't it? And the privilege has been forgotten and to think here in Melbourne they had classes for women as to what to wear to the



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ballot box, how to behave, what to do with your children, that sort of thing. It was a very serious thing and they had to be seen as taking it seriously, that they knew what they were doing, that they weren't just silly women who were going to vote the wrong way.

**“But the early WCTU thought that women should also have the vote to bring a moral voice into the public sphere”**

They also saw that alcohol was the cause of many social problems and that it was only by restricting the availability of alcohol or having control of the availability of alcohol that some of the social problems could be eradicated. In America the WCTU started out as a group of women who really just rampaged around the saloons. I mean they set fire to them, they broke windows, they did everything which was quite radical. I don't know that they were thrown in jail which was a bit surprising, but they were very hot tempered and very much concerned about getting rid of alcohol, but there's a point where you learn to I suppose, work with alcohol, if I can put it that way.

Over the years, and in earlier times I think we were very effective in the line of lobbying governments and I think we had very strong communication, or you know a network. The WCTU thought so and well there was a very strong influence back then



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in the early 1900's. But I think we're downhill now. Other than the fact there's been a bit of a change in society, and I think there's more respect for non – alcohol things, in line with all the papers which have been running great cover stories and so on about alcohol, like "alcohol, a time bomb waiting to happen". Well you would never have got that on the cover of The Age five or ten years ago. And there've been journalists writing articles which have been almost like a campaign that the WCTU would have liked to have set up.

### **"So there's movement in society for different standards I guess"**

I grew up in Ballarat and I married in Ballarat and I think I was only married for a couple of years when a lady asked me if I would like to join the WCTU, and I said yes. So I joined up but I wasn't actively involved, I just saw myself as supporting something that was effective. I was involved in other things at that stage. Then when we moved to Melbourne which was when our eldest son was 7, we went to a Methodist church and a lady there said to me "Oh would you join the WCTU?" and when I said I'm already a member she thought she'd struck gold. But I didn't become active at that stage either, I kept the membership going and I worked for the church and did different things at different stages, and then when my contract with the church finished I decided that I'd finished work as such and my husband and I were supervisors then at a retirement



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community then so we had a different lifestyle, and I more or less became active in the WCTU as an expression of myself. So it was the start of a new beginning. That was about 1996, so I haven't been active in the WCTU all that long.

**“There’s more women working than ever before and so I think women’s organisations really have to re-think the way they’re going if they want to get members”**

The WCTU probably feel that short term project supporters are the way to go and we've been able to enlist a fair few supporters on the e-mail for this FAS campaign. And a lot of the work our organisation started off with are still issues which are relevant today. But things have fallen backwards I suppose. Independent committees and government departments took over from the ideals and initial projects of the WCTU and we've backed off the sort of things like childcare places and kindergartens.

But of course there comes a time every now and again that governments in particular need reminders that this standard is not good enough. It was amazing that they see those things in society that were needed and now they are things that we take for granted. You know exercise in schools instead of just learning the three R's and chaplaincies. Quite an amazing network of people doing things. Like the country shows

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and the Melbourne show they had refreshment tents and the men had a beer tent but the women didn't really have anywhere to go or relax so they just stayed at home, whereas that was changed and the show became something for the family.

**“Women’s rights have sky rocketed at some level I think and women have a lot more rights now than some years ago”**

In the early days we had women of influence as members of the WCTU, women who would have been upper class you know living in huge mansions with servants and what have you, who had their own sphere of influence. So they probably carried more weight when it came to putting certain agendas to government. When you have these kinds of women presenting a petition or argument or want, I mean they wanted all sorts of things which might seem trivial to us but you can understand it. Like at railway stations the men were spitting their tobacco out on the platforms and the women in the long frocks were taking objection to the tobacco spitting because it was getting on their frocks, so they had that brought in as a by law. Yes but it was a good thing when hem lines came up a bit, but at that stage it wasn't move the hem line, it was move the men!

**No spitting.**



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They did have a sphere of influence but I think at the same time they knew that they didn't really have rights. A number of them were married to wealthy business men and they would be sitting around at a table saying "how are we going to do this campaign?", we haven't any money to do it and on one meeting in particular it's recorded that they agreed to sell a proportion of all their jewellery to raise funds for a campaign. Now these were women whose husbands by and large could have written a cheque to cover the campaign, but they were aware they didn't have that right. If they wanted to get rights for women or something changed they had to raise the money to do it and I suppose marriage is a different situation now to what it was then.

But many of them wouldn't have had their husbands support for the campaign in general and many of them would have been in a difficult position even when it came to going out to a woman's meeting or something. That's hard to understand really. My husband has always been very supportive of my involvement.

**"I would like to create awareness in young women, that people fought for this privilege and that it is a privilege to celebrate"**

It has been passed down the line to be able to vote, to be able to say yes or no to certain things because, not that we all had to get militant in a political party or any-

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thing but we do have the right to because we have the right to vote, we also have the right to protest in a sense to the parliament or to your local member. So it is cause for celebration. We have, as an organisation just got sponsorship from the Melbourne City Council to hold a function in the Yarra room there which we hope will bring women from many organisations to the function to celebrate the 100 years of women's suffrage. We are planning to have a hat parade because hats sort of show the state of women at the time. When you think of, well we don't wear hats now and we have all that freedom to say we don't want to wear a hat. But when they had to wear hats you know whether they were the big elaborate ones or the little austere ones or even the Salvation Army bonnets, it says something about society.

I suppose that it is not only about seeing it as a privilege but also take some joy in that privilege. Like the American's are very nationalistic and we need to be, women need to be a bit more outgoing to pass on the message to children that it is wonderful that we can do this. Not just "oh I have to go and vote tomorrow".

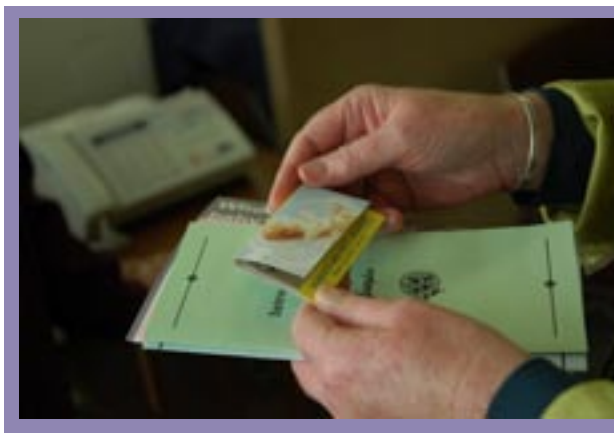
Overall I would like our organisation at the present time to be known as existing in the past but not being people of the past who just say you must not do this, you don't do that, but we are people who care. In a situation you always have a choice and it's by caring what happens, that's the most important thing whether you are an individual or



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an organisation, whether you care about society. And if you do you'll take some action. If you care about yourself and your own body you'll make choices that are appropriate.

# Mementos



Holding "seedsticks" to raise awareness of foetal alcohol syndrome "for-get-me-not-mummy, when you drink I do too"



Copy of invitation to victorian president of WCTU to celebrate in connection with federation in 1901



# Final Notes

Ellen Chandler has worked for the Women's Christian Temperance Union since 1996 and tirelessly campaigns for a variety of women's issues through her involvement with this organization.





