The Public Role of Women in Tasmania, 1803-1914

by

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submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
University of Tasmania, October 1989
The main alterations I have made to this thesis consisted of rewriting the Introduction to incorporate recommendations made by the examiners. The Introduction now contains a summary of general Tasmanian history, a brief economic history, and mention of Tasmanian political structures. It gives a brief survey of other work on the position of women in this period and details those works which I found most helpful. I have explained where I found my empirical data and given details on the method of locating this as requested. I have also discussed the approaches I could have taken when organising my material and explained why I structured the thesis as I did. As well, I made slight textural alterations as suggested and incorporated the extra books I read into the Bibliography.

After considerable thought I decided not to move Part Three, dealing with girls' education, the legal position of women and influences on Tasmanian women to the beginning of the thesis. I could see that this could have been a good idea, but I did not do so because I wrote this section last and it built on the earlier sections. Girls' education in particular was written after the section of Teaching and I tried not to duplicate any material, so one would probably need to read the earlier section first. The section on legal change was the last part of the body of the text which I wrote and takes general information included earlier for granted so I felt it too should be read last, and the section on Influences belongs with these two other sections. Were I starting on the thesis now, however, I would write these sections first and put them first.

I found the question of duplicating of material extremely difficult. I reread the thesis looking for this, but as I am so close to the material and know it so well that it all seems familiar. Perhaps this made me insensitive to 'duplicating', but my intent was to involve material, where it contributed to the theme currently under discussion. With respect, I do feel that the three mentions of Mrs Montgomery mentioned by one examiner are all needed in the areas they have been placed; no material about her is duplicated. As a university thesis is not a publication but a work providing information and establishing a general thesis I feel, again with respect, that duplication of material in this rather minor way is not the worst of crimes.

One examiner felt I should rewrite the conclusion. I would find it extremely difficult to do so. The conclusion was written at the conclusion of the research and said what I concluded from it; I do not conclude anything different now and feel I would only spoil it if I altered it. I feel I must stand by my original conclusion and that my subsequent reading has not altered my opinion of what the conclusion should say.
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text.

A. Alexander........
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Abbreviations

ADB  Australian Dictionary of Biography
AOT  Archives Office of Tasmania
HRA  Historical Records of Australia
MHA  Member of the House of Assembly
RS   Royal Society of Tasmania
THRA Tasmanian Historical Research Association
UTA  University of Tasmania Archives

Almanacs and Directories (e.g. Bent 1825): see Bibliography for full list

Census 1881: *House of Assembly Journals*  1883 paper 72
Census 1891: *Journals and Papers of Parliament*  1893 paper 67
Census 1901: *Journals and Papers of Parliament*  1903 paper 29
Census 1911: *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911*, vol 11, Commonwealth
Government Printer, Melbourne, 1914
Abstract

This thesis examines the position and activities of Tasmanian women from 1803-1914 in all areas outside purely domestic concerns. It concludes that most women were employed at some stage; that women contributed significantly to the economy and so had higher status than domestic activity alone would have achieved. Before the 1880s women took little part in public life and were involved in few, mainly charitable, organisations, though change did take place, slowly, as girls' education broadened from the 1870s and legal changes improved women's position. Both eventuated because of the British example rather than local demand. Women also followed Britain in attempting to be seen as ladies, though in Tasmania the term implied less delicacy and refinement and more activity and indeed work than Britain. Tasmanian women seemed content with their situation, with their relatively high status and considerable independence within the domestic sphere, and there was little proto-feminist agitation, as in Britain and America.

Rapid change took place in the decade 1885-1895, when outside influences brought overseas feminist ideas and encouraged Tasmanian women to activity. New schools provided academic secondary education for girls, many organisations for women were founded, and in three fields, temperance, public health and the suffrage, women challenged the authorities, sending deputations and petitions demanding change, demanding that their opinions be taken seriously. They did not achieve their stated aims, but did demonstrate that women could act independently in public affairs and organise and speak in public. From this date women's extra-domestic activity increased and by 1914 women could, and thousands did, join women's organisations in many fields and all areas of the state. Women's employment opportunities broadened, though they were often paid less than men; nevertheless, a career became an acceptable alternative to marriage.

First-wave feminism in Tasmania, though resulting in much the same benefits as for overseas and interstate women, was less theoretical and more practical. There was no group pressing for women's rights per se, no feminist leader, no women's press, no challenge by working-class women. Middle-class women wanted self-determination and autonomy, in practical matters rather than abstract rights. The two strands of feminism emanating from evangelicals and the enlightenment, though present in Tasmania as elsewhere, did not meet, and no cause united all women as the suffrage did in other places. The reasons for Tasmania's difference were its small size, isolation, lack of feminist leaders, the comfortable status women had enjoyed before the 1880s and the lack of threat to middle-class domination which elsewhere was a stimulus to feminism.