

Women's Suffrage Petition 1894

The petition with some 11,600 signatures was presented to the Parliament by the then Member for North Adelaide, the Hon. George Hawker, in August 1894, requesting that women in the colony be granted the right to vote. The petition is able to be viewed in Parliament House, Adelaide.

The Petition is commonly referred to as the Women's Suffrage Petition. It is officially Petition No. 38 of 1894.

The wording of the Petition is as follows:

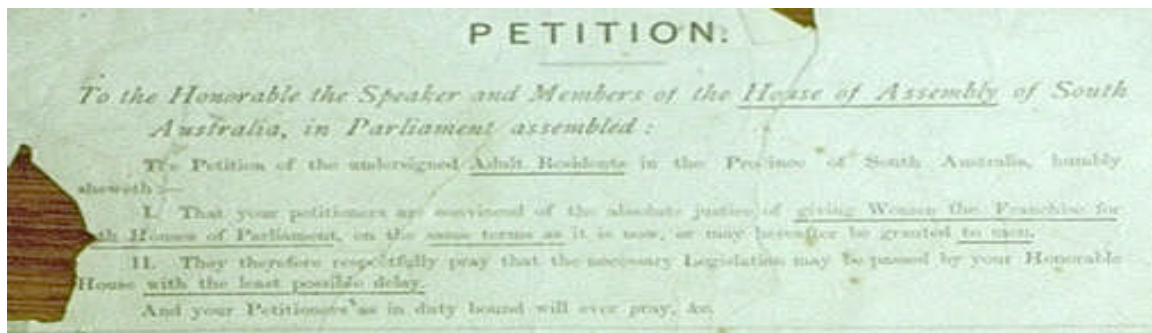
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly of South Australia, in Parliament Assembled:

The Petition of the undersigned Adult Residents in the Province of South Australia humbly sheweth:-

I That your petitioners are convinced of the absolute justice of giving Women the Franchise for Both Houses of Parliament on the same terms as it is now, or may thereafter be granted to men.

II They therefore respectfully pray that the necessary Legislation may be passed by your Honourable House with the least possible delay.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.



The Constitutional Amendment Act 1894

Below is information of the passage of the Constitution (Female Suffrage) Bill 1894 which provided for women's suffrage in South Australia. This information and images were taken from The National Archives site www.foundingdocs.gov.au

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ANNO QUINQUAGESIMO SEPTIMO ET QUINQUAGESIMO OCTAVO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

A.D. 1894.

No. 613.

An Act to amend the Constitution.

[Reserved 21st December 1894]

BE it Enacted by the Governor of the Province of South Australia, with the advice and consent of the Legislative Council and House of Assembly of the said province, in this present Parliament assembled, as follows:

1. The right to vote for persons to sit in Parliament as members of the Legislative Council, and the right to vote for persons to sit in Parliament as members of the House of Assembly, are hereby extended to women. Extension of franchise

2. Women shall possess and may exercise the rights hereby granted, subject to the same qualifications and in the same manner as men. Qualifications.

3. All Constitution and Electoral Acts and all other laws are hereby amended, so far as may be necessary to give effect to this Act. Acts amended to give effect to this Act.

4. (1) Every female voter, whether she has reason to believe she will be absent from the electoral district or not, shall be entitled at any time after the issuing of the writ to apply for a certificate in one of the forms, as the case may be, of the Schedule A to "The Absent Voters Electoral Act, 1890," from the Returning Officer that she is registered as a voter upon the electoral roll and entitled to vote at the forthcoming elections. Mode of voting.

(2) The

Certified that this Bill originated in the Legislative Council, and has finally passed both Houses.

E. Mackinnon

W. S. ...

President.

Clerk of the Legislative Council and Clerk of the Parliaments.

*I reserve this Act for the signature of Her Majesty's pleasure
Governor*

(2) The application hereinbefore mentioned need not contain the matters set forth in paragraph 3 of the application in Schedules A and B of the Act No. 577 of 1893; but in lieu thereof the applicant shall declare that she is resident more than three miles from the nearest polling-place, or that by reason of the state of her health she will probably be unable to vote at the polling-place on polling day.

(3) The provisions of "The Absent Voters Electoral Act, 1890," and the said Act No. 577 of 1893 shall, except so far as inconsistent with the provisions in sub-sections (1) and (2) of this clause, apply to every female voter.

Short title.

5. This Act may be cited as "The Constitution Amendment, 1894."



21st December 1894.

Sir,

I have the honor to report for the information of His Excellency the Governor with reference to a Bill for an Act to amend the Constitution that I am of opinion as it provides for an alteration in the Constitution of the Parliament of South Australia it is necessary under the provisions of section 34 of the Constitution Act of 1855-6 that His Excellency the Governor should reserve the same for the signification of Her Majesty's pleasure thereon.

The Honorable
The Chief Secretary

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The second and third readings have been duly passed in both Houses by absolute majorities and there is no objection in point of law to the Bill being now forwarded in due course for the signification of Her Majesty's pleasure. ~~H~~

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your Obedient Servant.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'A. G. G.' or similar, with a large flourish at the end.

Attorney General

Significance

The documents shown are the Bill passed by the South Australian Parliament in 1894 to grant women the right to vote and stand for election in the Colony's Parliament, and a letter from the Attorney-General dated 21 December 1894 advising Governor Kintore that Royal Assent would be required to enact the Bill. The Bill was enacted when Queen Victoria signed her Assent on 2 February 1895. These documents show that South Australian women won the vote in 1895, not 1894 as usually stated. They were the second to gain the vote, after New Zealand women who secured this right in 1893, and the first in the world to gain the right to stand for election. Thus **Catherine Helen Spence's** candidacy for election as a Federation Convention delegate was the first such in the world.

The Act also had a more generous provision for absent voting by women than by men, in that women could get an automatic postal vote if they were more than three miles from the nearest polling booth or if they felt the state of their health prevented them from voting on the day.

History

South Australia had granted voting rights in local government elections to women property owners in 1861. But it took eight attempts and another 30 years before the parliamentary franchise was extended to all adult females. After Private Members Bills had failed, the Government of Charles Cameron Kingston (who had originally opposed such a measure) adopted the proposals of the Women's Suffrage League. They were carried, with a monster **petition** in favour of over 11 000 signatures influencing the course of the difficult debate. The postal voting provision had been included by opponents as an amendment to the Bill in the vain hope that the Government would not accept it and abandon the measure.

The annotation by Governor Kintore on the Bill states that the 'Act' is reserved to be signed by Her Majesty and he duly forwarded the Bill to the Marquess of Ripon at the Colonial Office on 26 December 1894. The Bill was placed before Queen Victoria at the Privy Council meeting at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight on 2 February 1895 and was signed into law. It was proclaimed to operate in South Australia from that date by gazettal on 21 March 1895. The signed Assent copy of the Act has not been located

Sources

Jaensch, Dean (ed.), *The Flinders History of South Australia: Political History*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1986.

Oldfield, Audrey, *Women's Suffrage in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1992.

Parkin, A and Patience, A (eds), *The Dunstan Decade*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.

Richards, Eric (ed.), *The Flinders History of South Australia: Social History*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, 1986.

PETITION.

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II. They therefore respectfully pray that the necessary Legislation may be passed by your Honorable House with the least possible delay.

And your Petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray, &c.

NAME.	ADDRESS.
41 J. Warby	Brompton park Hindmarsh
42 J. Evans	Compton St Adelaide
43 J. Tanner	North Adelaide
44 J. Tanner	North Adelaide
45 H. Brettenden	North Adelaide
46 E. Ault	Prospect
47 J. Ault	Prospect
48 Jane Reid	North Adelaide
49 Maria Reid	North Adelaide
50 J. Woodroffe	North Adelaide
51 E. Cause	Tower St off Gover St N. A.
52 J. R. Cause	Tower " " "
53 J. Sharp	North Adelaide
54 L. Kingay	Adelaide
55 A. Hughes	W Adelaide
56 M. Rudrick	Semaphore
57 E. B. Jelfer	Port Lincoln
58 Elizabeth Dillon	North Adelaide
59 W. A. Briggs	Bowden
60 Jack Newman	Bowden
61 Thomas Newman	Adelaide
62 John James	Kingston
63 Tom Nabob	Adelaide
64 James Thomas	Adelaide
65 Thomas Jones	Port Adelaide
66 Edw. Chinnor	Angaston.
67 R. Giddens	Adelaide