



Suffrage stories

Lily was born in Auckland but moved to Wellington aged eight. She was well educated, speaking fluent German and French. Committed to social service, she taught English to Chinese immigrants and reading to factory girls. Lily became involved in the Women's Christian Temperance Union movement (WCTU) in 1885.

She strongly believed that women had supreme influence in their homes to mould young minds and change society.

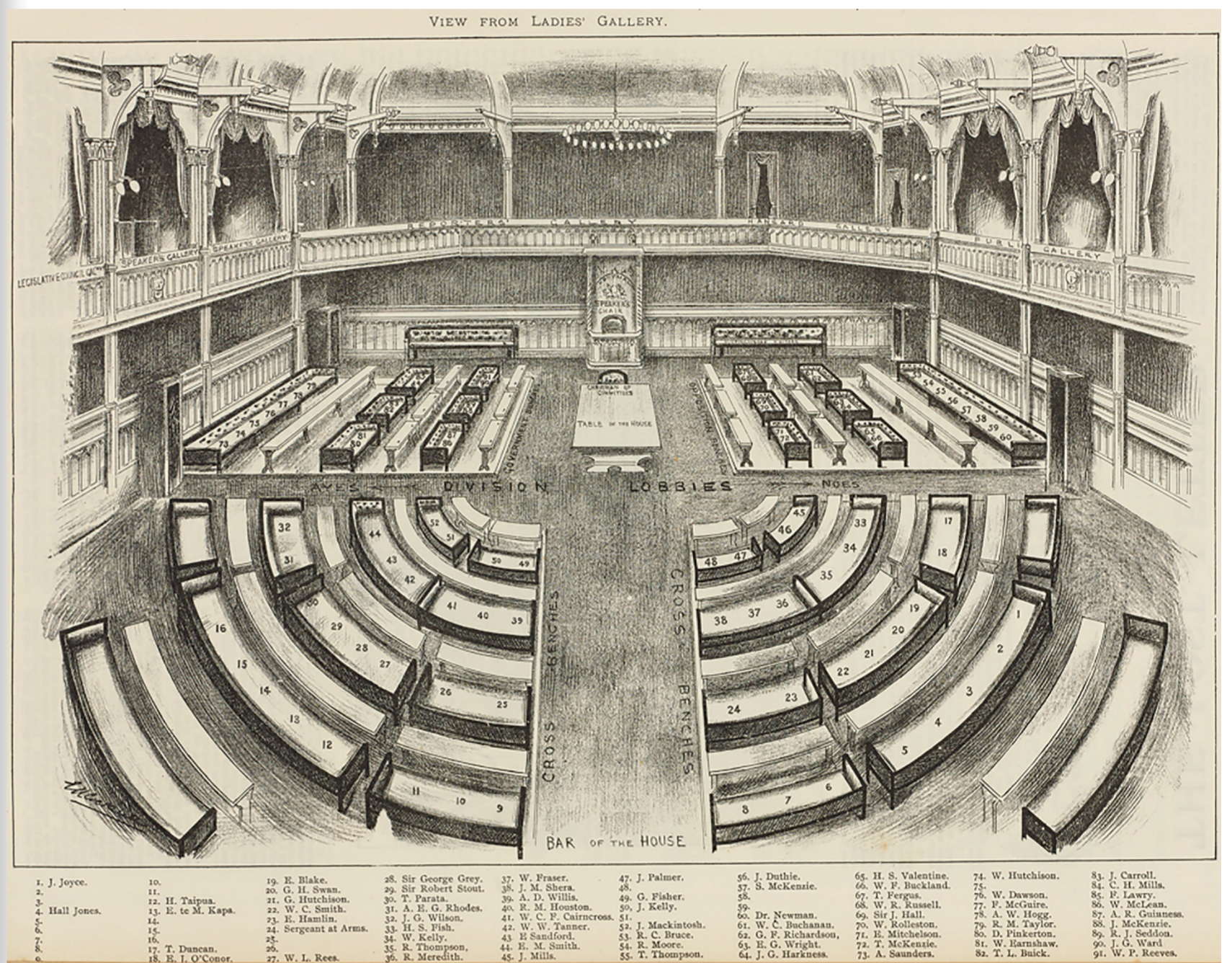
During the campaign for women's suffrage Lily was a popular speaker around Wellington. She delighted listeners with her 'bright and racy manner'. Her many hours spent sitting in the gallery of the House of Representatives gave her invaluable parliamentary knowledge. She ably briefed the WCTU on bills which affected women and children.

Throughout her suffrage and temperance work Lily worked closely with Wellington barrister Arthur Atkinson. They became engaged and Arthur described his fiancée as a 'prodigy of talent, public and private ... a beautiful platform speaker'. The couple saw themselves as colleagues engaged in a crusade.

Throughout her life Lily argued for the value of women's contributions to society. She fought for the rights of illegitimate children and divorced women. Her zest for campaigning continued up until her sudden death at home in Wellington, aged 55.

Lily May Atkinson

1866-1921



■ New Zealand Parliament – House of Representatives. View from Ladies Gallery. New Zealand Graphic (15 July 1893). Credit: NZG-18930715-657-1, Sir George Gray Special Collections, Auckland Libraries.



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