



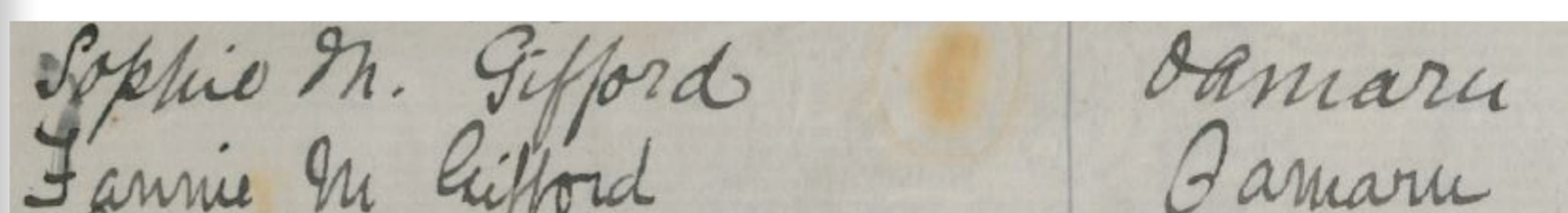
Sophie & Fannie Gifford

Suffrage stories

Sophie and Fannie Gifford were daughters of the Reverend Algernon Gifford, the founding minister of St Luke's Anglican Church in Ōamaru. The Gifford sisters signed sheet 3 of the 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition. Like many women who signed, their personal history is largely unknown. It is only by sifting through newspapers of the time that we learn a little more about their lives.

The only direct description we have of them is at their eldest sister's wedding in 1873, where they were bridesmaids, attired in 'a cloud of muslin and tulle ... as nearly perfection as possible'. The sisters were likely members of the Young Women's Christian Temperance Union as Sophie is recorded as singing at the organisation's concert in 1892. Like many church-going women, their decision to sign the suffrage petition probably arose from the hope that women would have a moral and purifying influence on New Zealand politics.

Sophie and Fannie never married. Instead they were devoted church workers at St Luke's. Fannie did paintings for the church sale and was local secretary of the Scripture Union. Sophie was very musical. She sang in the church choir, was a member of Ōamaru Musical Society, and took singing and music students. Both sisters taught Sunday School classes.



■ TOP: Gifford Sisters, Sophie at left, Fannie at right. Credit: 1576P, North Otago Museum.
ABOVE: Gifford sisters' signatures. Credit: 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition, sheet 3.



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