



Suffrage stories

For isolated rural women the local annual Agricultural and Pastoral Association show was the highlight of the social calendar. Women were active exhibitors at the event. 'Ladies Committees' were formed to award prizes for demonstrations of domestic skills in growing vegetables, creating handiwork, producing jams and preserves, and baking cakes and bread. The more artistic ladies entered competitions for flower arrangements and butter sculptures!

The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was formed in branches throughout New Zealand from 1885. They campaigned against alcohol and the social problems it created for women. The WCTU had a presence at the Canterbury A&P Association's Metropolitan Show from at least as early as 1885. From 1887 they ran a booth selling food and liquid refreshments 'of the kind which do not inebriate'. This booth was an important part of the show as a safe place where female visitors could rest and socialise with other women. In 1892, Kate Sheppard distributed pamphlets promoting the women's franchise from the WCTU refreshment tent at the Metropolitan Show.

Politicians had always used A&P shows to 'forward their interests with the electors and the electors' wives and babies'. After women gained the right to vote in 1893, A&P shows became an even more valuable opportunity to attract the support of female voters. To this day, A&P shows are a place where town and country come together and private and political interests meet.

Suffrage at the Show



■ (TOP) The Women's Christian Temperance Union luncheon tearooms at the A&P show, November 1910. Credit: *The Weekly Press*, Bishop collection, Canterbury Museum, 1923.53.679.

(ABOVE) Indoor view of butter sculptures at the A & P show, c.1900. Credit: Tyree Studio Collection, Nelson Provincial Museum.



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Collecting signatures for the women's suffrage petitions was difficult in rural areas. On high country stations, women were often confined to their homes for months by inaccessible roads and bad weather. Rose, Lady Hall, wife of Sir John Hall, collected signatures in Hororata, Canterbury. She observed, 'People live so far apart in this neighbourhood that it takes time to visit all the people'.

Rural women may not have been able to sign the women's suffrage petitions easily, but that doesn't mean they weren't strong, independent and self-reliant. It was a woman's job to feed the family and workers, bring up children, keep a vegetable garden and manage domestic staff.

Isolation for rural women continued into the 20th century. The cob homestead at Esk Head Station, a Category 1 building on the New Zealand Heritage List, was built in 1863. Eileen Trumper lived there during the 1950s. At 5am she lit the coal stove in her kitchen. At 6am she started the diesel engine which powered the deep freeze, fridge and washing machine. Eileen made butter, washed and cooked for five musterers, and preserved eggs. Water came from a spring and the bathroom was in an outside washhouse.

The weather could be extreme, as Eileen recalls. 'When there was a heavy storm you could hear the boulders coming down the river. We were shut in by floods for a week or fortnight.' It was a hard, busy life, but Eileen had no regrets. 'My family wondered what I was doing but I loved it out there.'

Isolation and Independence



■ (TOP) Eileen Trumper in her kitchen, c. 1950s. Credit: *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*.

(ABOVE) Esk Head Station cob homestead, 2014. Credit: *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*.



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Hannah Hayes wasn't afraid of taking risks. Although she didn't sign the 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition, this strong rural woman challenged prevailing social norms to support her family.

Hannah Eleanora Pearson married Ernest Hayes in 1881 in England. By 1882, the couple and their baby boy set off for a new life in Otago, New Zealand. On board the *Taranaki*, Hannah astounded other passengers by taking the ship's wheel. Ernest wrote in his diary: 'She was actually strong enough to steer on a course north east. I was pleased to see how [she] handled a fine ship like this ... the passengers have been congratulating her'.

The Hayes moved to Oturehua, Central Otago, in 1886 to run the Ida Valley flour mill and eventually a small farm nearby. Life would have been busy for Hannah. She lived in a small cottage, caring for and feeding her nine children. Once the flour mill closed up, Ernest Hayes started manufacturing labour-saving farm tools from 1895. Hannah supported the new family business by cycling around surrounding farms to take orders for this equipment. She travelled through the Maniototo and Vincent counties, and into the Mackenzie country. It was a brave endeavour as women cyclists of the time were often viewed with suspicion.

By the 1930s, the Hayes had developed a successful business with a worldwide reputation, providing farmers with everything from wire strainers to windmills. Today, the Hayes Engineering Works and Homestead is cared for by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga and open to visitors.

Hannah Hayes née Pearson 1862-1946



■ (TOP) Ernest and Hannah Hayes with their children, c. 1919. Back row from left, Bernard, Juanita, Llewellyn, Ernestine, Stanley. Front row from left, Myrtle, Ernest, Olive, Hannah, Irving and Gilbert. Credit: *Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*. (ABOVE) Hayes Homestead, 2016. Credit: *Grant Sheehan/Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga*.



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