

A.Z. Women

VF: WOMEN - NEW
BEARND

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Nancy Ann Müller



1885

BY SARAH GRIFFITHS

MARY ANN MULLER

Mary Ann Muller was one of New Zealand's early suffragettes. She was also my great, great, great grandmother.

*Scattered introduction
- 1849 -*

In 1820 Mary Ann Muller was born to Mr and Mrs Wilson in London. At the age of twenty two she married James Whitney Griffiths and had two sons. Their marriage was not a happy one and she left her husband because of her husband's violence. (This action by a woman was extremely unusual in the 19 century) After Mary left her husband she arranged to travel to New Zealand with her two small boys.

On the 9th of August 1849 the Pekin sailed from Gravesend with 105 passengers. In those days a long journey by boat was a gruelling experience. Lots of people died. The fact that Mary Ann Muller made this harrowing journey alone with the two boys is perhaps a testament to her strength and courage. After his wife died on the journey to New Zealand, she provided support and friendship to Stephen Muller, who was the ship's surgeon. Later, they were to marry.

The Pekin arrived in Nelson in January 1850 and there Mary looked after her own two children as well as the four children belonging to Stephen Muller.

Mary and Stephen married in December 1851 after James Griffiths' death in England. Her new husband became Resident Magistrate, and Provincial Secretary in Nelson.

Mary Ann Muller was an attractive and highly educated women who read and thought a lot. She was especially interested in womens' rights and considered many aspects of the law particularly unfair to women. She was unable to express her views in her home or in

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public as her husband strongly disagreed in these views and particularly women achieving the vote. However, after making friends with the editor of the Nelson Examiner she wrote many articles under the pen name of **Femina**. Doing this, she was putting herself in an awkward position as she was dependant on her husband financially.

In her articles she continually addressed the question of why should a woman have no power to vote, no right to vote, when she has all the things needed that qualify a man to vote. Why should sex disqualify her?

She made many political friends and in 1860 some of her views were incorporated into the Married Womens' Property Act. Her political friends were: E.W Stafford, Sir David Monro, Alfred Domett, Sir W. Fox, and Alfred Saunders.

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In 1869 on Saturday the 3rd Mary Ann Muller compiled a pamphlet called *An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand*, the first feminist pamphlet for New Zealand and in that same year she received a congratulatory letter from John Stuart Mill who has been described as possessing the keenest mind of the century.

Following is the text of the pamphlet:

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We ask you, our rulers; to disembarrass yourselves of those tenents of Government built up during the ages upon a system of credulous trust in those principles which guided our ancestors. Women are now educated, thinking beings, very different from the females of darker ages. Let the laws be fitted to the people and the times. Do you still persecute for religious opinions? Do you still burn for witch craft? Why when the broad road of progress is cleared for so many human beings, is the juggernaut car of prejudice still to be driven on, crushing the crowds of women beneath it's wheels?

Why have women no power to vote, no right to vote, when she happens to posses all the requisites which legally qualify a man for that right? She may be a householder, have large possessions, and

pay her share of taxes toward the public revenue; but sex disqualifies her. Were it a question of general knowledge and intelligence as compared to men, women might submit unmurmuringly; this is not the case.

The point is, is she as capable as our bullock drivers, labourers, and machanics? It may surely be confidently asserted that when a women is possessed of sufficient skill and management to retain unassisted the guidance of her family, and remain a householder she developes more than a moderate capability. The true position is that educated thinking members of the state are degraded below the level of the ploughman, who perhaps can neither read nor write.

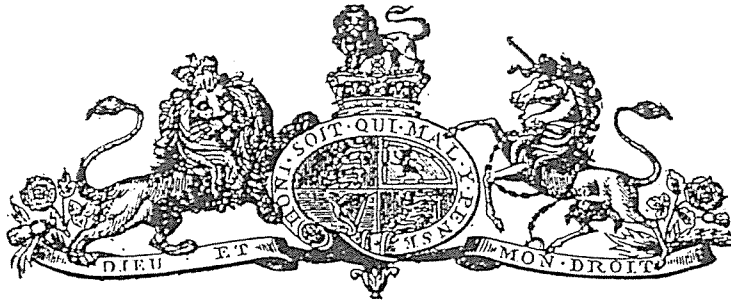
Our women are brave and strong, with an amount of self reliance and freedom from conventualities eminently calculated to form a great nation. Give them scope. At present their grasp and power of the mind is "cribbed, cabined and confined" to one narrow grove. It is weakend and famished by disuse, and only a close observer can detect the latent force, the unspent energy lying dormant in many seemingly ordinary characters. Mark the sudden questions of a bright eager girl, or the quiet remark of some sensible matron upon a political matter in the newspaper before her, and see the cold stare of surprise, or hear the rebuke about women seeking to step beyond their province, with which the paterfamilias stops the innovation, and can you marvel that the girl turns to gossip about new fashions, or the mother takes refuge in discussion upon servants, sewing machines and other minor domestic details?

Women of the middle class suffer most from this open, systematic 'putting down: . . . We do but begin now: still, having begun, let us make good strides in the noble race for knowledge - knowledge of all kinds tending to the welfare of our community, and some knowledge of and share on the government of our country is imperative. And where, in what land upon the face of the earth, was there ever a finer feild for educating people in the art of government?

FEMINA 1869

Her campaigning continued until in 1860 the Married Women's Property Act was passed by parliament. This Act was to do with the property rights of the deserted wife.

THE ACT



TRICESIMO TERTIO ET TRICESIMO QUARTO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

No. XXXVII.

ANALYSIS.

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| <p>Titlo.
Preamble.
1. Short Title.
2. Provisions of "Married Women's Property Protection Act 1860" extended.</p> | <p>3. Custody of children under ten years of age.
4. Maintenance of children may be ordered.
5. Time to be defined in order.
6. Destitute Persons Relief Act to apply.</p> |
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AN ACT to extend the Provisions of "The Married Women's Property Protection Act 1860." Titlo.
 [12th September 1870.]

WHEREAS it is expedient to extend the powers given to Resident Magistrates and Justices of the Peace in Petty Sessions by section two of "The Married Women's Property Protection Act 1860" hereinafter called "the said Act" to other cases besides that which is mentioned in the said section Preamble.

BE IT THEREFORE ENACTED by the General Assembly of New Zealand in Parliament assembled and by the authority of the same as follows—

1. The Short Title of this Act shall be "The Married Women's Property Protection Act 1870." Short Title.

2. In addition to the case provided for by the second section of the said Act the same section and all other the provisions of the said Act shall extend and be held to apply to the following cases that is to say— Provisions of "Married Women's Property Protection Act 1860" extended.

- (1.) When a wife is subjected by her husband to cruelty without adultery
- (2.) Where the husband of any woman shall be guilty of living in open adultery
- (3.) Where the husband of any woman shall be guilty of habitual drunkenness
- (4.) Where the husband shall habitually fail to provide a maintenance for his wife and children without such failure being caused by sickness or other unavoidable cause

Two important points gained by the Act were:

1. A wife deserted by her husband may at any time after such desertion apply to the Resident Magistrate or to Justices of the Peace. " . . . for an order to protect any money or property she may acquire by her own lawful industry, and property which she may become possessed of after such desertion"
2. The wife shall during the continuance of the order be considered as a *femme sole* (women alone) with respect to property of every description which she may acquire and such property may be disposed of by her in all respects as a *femme sole* .

Then she achieved a further Act in 1870 which was to allow a mother exclusive custody of her children: boys to age ten, girls to age eighteen.

The legislation before the 1860 and 1870 acts were passed meant that women had no independence, no status, no property rights. They were literally owned by their husbands - 'to love, honour and obey' as it says in the traditional marriage ceremony. If a woman didn't obey their husbands they were liable to get kicked out on the streets

At the age of seventy eight Mary wrote to Kate Sheppard who was also fighting for women's suffrage:

New Amersfoorte,
Blenheim.
14th March, 1898.

My dear Mrs Sheppard,

I thank you very heartily for the "Idea" of the 8th February, just to hand. It had gone to Nelson. I like to feel in touch with those carrying on this struggle. Old and failing, it is cheering to watch the efforts of the younger and abler women striving bravely to succeed in obtaining rights, so long unjustly withheld. It was a triumph to obtain the suffrage; The Married Woman Property Act

was to me even greater, for I had suffered greatly. The effort will give us a freedom that thousands yearn for.

A dear friend, an Archdeacon's widow, even suggests that the female members of the church should for a season withdraw their presence and support, in order to make Synod realize the true position. Concerted action would be imperative and difficult to effect, but it would perhaps solve the question. I have read your words with keen interest, and again thanking you, I am

Yours truly and gratefully,
Mary Muller.

Her husband Stephen Muller died in 1889 and it wasn't until then that Mary's identity became known. A notice and a photo in the White Ribbon gave the first announcement about who she was and what she had been doing for the last sixty years or so.



In 1893 the Government finally passed the Act giving women the right to vote so long denied them. In this, they had equal rights to men.

Mary Ann Muller died in 1901 but her influence in obtaining improved rights for women was very important.

How I researched my project:

I wanted to find out about Mary Ann Muller as she is my great great, great, grandmother.

The information I had already had came from my mother's book, *New Zealand Women and Petticoat Pioneers* that I borrowed from the Public Library.

publisher
date of
publication.

Further material was obtained from the National library. I first went to the general information centre and looked up hundreds of files to see if they had the information I wanted in the actual library. Then I went to the newspaper room to try and find copies of the *Nelson Examiner* as Mary Ann Muller had written many letters in it but the index I went through was too primitive.

In the archives room I obtained obituary articles that were newspaper clippings collected by Mary Ann Muller's own son Norris and I found the pamphlet, *An Appeal to the Men of New Zealand* and the rest of the books I used to complete my project

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- 12 The Book of New Zealand Women Ed. McDonald, Penfold, Williams
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