

Kate Sheppard

1 **Women's Rights Activist, Activist (1847–1934)**

5 *"We are tired of having a 'sphere' doled out to us, and of being told that anything outside that sphere is 'unwomanly.' We want to be natural just for a change ... we must be ourselves at all risks."*

— Kate Sheppard



10 Kate Sheppard was a leader in the New Zealand women's suffrage movement, helping women gain the right to vote in New Zealand.

Synopsis

15 Born on March 10, 1847, in Liverpool, England, Kate Sheppard moved to New Zealand in the late 1860s. In 1885, she founded the Women's Christian Temperance Union and, two years later, became leader of its suffrage campaign. Several suffrage bills failed before New Zealand Parliament finally granted women the right to vote in 1893. Sheppard was later active in woman suffrage movements in other countries. She died in New Zealand in 1934.

Early Years

20 A pivotal figure in making New Zealand the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote, Kate Sheppard was born Catherine Wilson Malcolm on March 10, 1847, in Liverpool, England.

25 The daughter of Scottish parents, Sheppard moved with her family at a young age to Scotland, where she was subsequently raised and educated. In 1862, Sheppard's father died. In the late 1860s, she moved with her mother, two brothers and a sister to New Zealand, where she soon met and married a shopkeeper named Walter Allen Sheppard. The couple went on to have one a child together, a son named Douglas, born in 1880.

Political Life

30 Active in the Trinity Congregational Church, Sheppard also immersed herself in the temperance movement and, in 1885, co-founded New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union. For Sheppard, the work with the organization immediately shed light on the need for women to secure the right to vote. Two years after the WCTU's creation, Sheppard was named leader of its suffrage campaign.

40 Over the next several years, Sheppard threw her weight and support behind a number of women's rights issues, from the advantages of contraception and the right to divorce, to the guardianship of children and the abolishment of corsets. Additionally, Sheppard promoted the benefits of bicycling and other physical activity for women.

45 With the support of her husband, Sheppard was a tireless worker, churning out pamphlets, delivering speeches and pushing a series of petitions before Parliament in an effort to secure the right to vote for women. A number of them failed, including an 1892 effort that contained the signatures of more than 20,000 supporters.

50 A year later, however, Sheppard returned to Parliament with what she described as a "monster" petition, as it contained more than 30,000 signatures. On September 19, 1893, Governor Glasgow (Sir David Boyle) signed the bill, making New Zealand the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote.

55 The accomplishment, however, hardly marked the end of Sheppard's activism, and she wasn't one to rest on her laurels. In 1896, she co-founded the National Council of Women, and was elected its

60 first president. As head of the organization, Sheppard fought for equality in marriage and the right for women to run for Parliament seats.



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Later Years

Poor health forced Sheppard to resign from the NCW presidency in 1903. Health issues, in fact, would continue to plague her the rest of her life. Tragedy did, too. Her son, Douglas, died in 1910, and her husband, Walter, passed away five years later. In 1925, Sheppard married an old friend,

70 William Sidney Lovell-Smith. Their union lasted four years, until his passing in 1929. A year later, Sheppard's only granddaughter, Margaret, died.

Kate Sheppard died on July 13, 1934, in Christchurch, New Zealand. Her influence and legacy, however, have endured. Not only is her image displayed on New Zealand's \$10 note, the Kate

75 Sheppard Memorial in Christchurch was unveiled in 1993—the centennial of New Zealand's passage of the women's suffrage bill.

