

NATIONAL WINNER
TAS YOUNG HISTORIAN



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THE FRIENDS SCHOOL

MAKING A BETTER WORLD:
VIDA JANE MARY GOLDSTEIN

2017 National History Challenge

'Making a Better World'

Vida Jane Mary

Goldstein



'A Leader of Her Time'

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Descriptor: 'A Leader of Her Time' discusses Vida Jane Goldstein's outstanding contributions to the advancement of women in our society in addition to the development of the Australian nation as a whole. It documents Vida's political journey, showing how her actions catapulted the newly formed Commonwealth into the fully-fledged democracy that we see today.

Living as a woman in the 21st century is far less difficult than it has been in the past. Women are now openly allowed to live their life in an environment of religious freedom, have a powerful voice in the government supported by their taxes and most importantly, sustain a relationship without becoming enslaved by another person. However, the staggering changes brought about for women in family life, education, employment and government did not happen overnight. During the 1800s, women were largely thought to have no other purpose than to marry and raise children. The few women who were able to work not only struggled to find paid employment, but also had to take responsibility for all housework and childrearing duties. So, what gave rise to the increased movement of Australian women towards full citizenship? This is due entirely to Vida Goldstein's vision of equal opportunities for men and women, driven by her steadfast determination to bring about change in the minds and attitudes of the Australian people.

Vida Goldstein was born on the 13th of April 1869, in the city of Portland on the south-west coast of Victoria.¹ As a pioneering member of the first wave of feminists between the years of 1880 and 1941, she represented a new generation of Australian women² who believed in "equality of opportunity for both sexes."³ Although her contributions to the women's suffrage movement were substantial, she is best known for her position as the first "woman candidate for national parliament in the British Empire".⁴ Her campaign to broaden the influence of women beyond the home and into the public domain, in addition to her advocacy for increased career opportunities, not only instilled a sense of confidence in Australian women, but was the impetus for change on a global scale. Vida also contributed significantly to political life through her repeated candidature for seats in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. An achievement that would catapult the newly formed Commonwealth into the fully-fledged democracy that Vida has envisaged. In addition to her involvement in politics and the suffragette movement Vida was also interested in social reform, in particular the predicament of the lower classes. This interest would eventually lead to the establishment of the Victorian Children's Courts and bring about a change in the definition of a basic wage

¹ Australian Dictionary of Biography 2006, *Goldstein, Vida Jane (1869-1949)*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed 7 August 2017, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldstein-vida-jane6418/text10975>>.

² Bomford, J 1993, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, p. 222.

³ *ibid.* p. 222.

⁴ Sawyer, M & Simms, M 1993, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, p. 47

and the needs of the average Australian family. In this way, Vida carved “a place for herself in Australian history”⁵ in a time when women were still heavily controlled by the constraints of society.

In 1900, following two decades of continued involvement, Vida Goldstein became the first paid employee of the Australian women’s suffrage movement.⁶ By this stage, she had already assumed responsibility for the United Council of Women’s Suffrage (UCWS) and had established a reputation as an ardent supporter of the political and social rights of women everywhere. In addition to her participation in these two organisations, Vida was also a lifelong member of the Women’s Suffrage League, with which she had raised significant funds for the Queen Victoria Hospital, an enterprise that employed female doctors and provided free medical care to those in need. Vida’s strong social conscience, although surprising at times, was hardly extraordinary given the fact that she had been born into a family of activists, whose interests included philanthropy and social reform. As such, from a young age, Vida had become involved in a multitude of charitable endeavours, such as the National Anti-Sweating League and the Charity Organisation Society.

Born into a wealthy middle-class family, Vida was the eldest child of Jacob and Isabella Goldstein. Her father, who had migrated to Australia at an early age, was the son of a Jewish freedom fighter involved in the Polish independence movement. While he was strongly opposed to the idea of women’s suffrage he encouraged his four daughters to achieve independence on both an economic and intellectual level. By comparison, Vida’s mother was one of the earliest Australian feminists, advocating for the rights of both Australian women and the lower classes. Isabella was also a devout follower of the Australian Church, founded by Reverend Charles Strong, and frequently spent time working in the slums of Collingwood. Vida accompanied her mother on many of her charity missions and as a result was exposed to the utter deprivation of poverty. She never forgot the suffering and chaos of the slum houses, where women were forced to watch over large families, suffering abuse and cruelty at the

⁵ Bomford, J 1993, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, p. 224

⁶ The Encyclopaedia of Women & Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia 2014, *Goldstein, Vida Jane*, Australian Women’s Archives Project, accessed 19 August 2017, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0160b.htm>>.

hands of uncaring husbands, while their children starved in the streets.⁷ It was here that Vida truly understood the inequality endured by women, consequently resulting in her decision to dedicate her life to improving the position of women and children in Australian society. By the turn of the century, Vida's lifelong vision to advance the roles of women in society was well under way.⁸ In an attempt to achieve this goal, Vida made the unorthodox decision to renounce marriage entirely, instead choosing to sacrifice her own happiness to improve the lives of women in the public sphere. While this was a ground-breaking decision at the time, Vida's focus was otherwise consumed with collecting signatures for a petition organised by the women's suffrage movement.⁹ Over the next six weeks, Australian suffragists collected 30,000 names, making it the largest petition ever received by the Victorian government.¹⁰ Looking back on the campaign in later life, Vida remembered "a few very conservative men and a few sheltered women"¹¹ as the main sources of resistance. However, "very rarely were refusals made by wives of working men and by women who took part in social reform work outside the home."¹²

With her trademark determination, it was only a matter of time before Vida rose to public prominence as a symbol for the new age of women's independence and freedom. She was of particular interest to the media as she challenged every stereotype associated with militant women of the time: "small, but not stout, she is not untidy, she is not loud-voiced, she is not pedantic, and she is not terrible."¹² In 1902, Vida's continued efforts payed off when Australia became the first country to grant women the right to vote, in addition to allowing them to stand for national parliament.¹³ Not long after, Vida received an invitation to attend

⁷ The Encyclopaedia of Women & Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia 2014, *Goldstein, Vida Jane*, Australian Women's Archives Project, accessed 19 August 2017, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0160b.htm>>.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Australian Dictionary of Biography 2006, *Goldstein, Vida Jane (1869-1949)*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed 7 August 2017, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldstein-vida-jane6418/text10975>>.

¹⁰ Bomford, J 1993, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, p. 58.

¹¹ Waterworth, E 1937, 'How Women Got the Vote'. *The Argus*, 28 October, p. 7, accessed 21 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove. ¹² *ibid* p. 7

¹² 'Vida Goldstein: Australia's Stateswoman Visits Western Australia' 1906. *The Daily News*, 26 February, p. 4, accessed 19 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

¹³ The Encyclopaedia of Women & Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia 2014, *Goldstein, Vida Jane*, Australian Women's Archives Project, accessed 19 August 2017,

the International Woman Suffrage Conference in America. As the only delegate in attendance that could offer information about life in an enfranchised country, Vida was elected secretary and spoke before a committee of the United States Congress.¹⁴ On her return to Australia, she became one of the first women to be nominated for a national parliament in the British Empire. Although Vida had polled 51,497 votes by December that year, she was unsuccessful and faced significant criticism of her candidacy from daily newspapers such as the *Argus* and the *Age*.¹⁶ However, the loss of the election proved to be a valuable lesson for Vida, who realised the need for improved education and organisation between different factions of the suffragette movement. As a result, the *Woman's Sphere* was created with the sole aim to emphasise the importance of “putting women in Parliament to secure the reforms the required.”¹⁵ During this period, she gained the support of Justice Higgins, who went on to use her calculation of a minimum wage in the renowned Harvester Judgement of 1908 - a decree that would entitle Australian workers to fundamental rights, such as a basic wage.¹⁶

Following the failure of all five of her election campaigns, Vida founded the Women's Peace Army, a pacifist group aimed at combatting the growing Australian war mentality. However, her uncompromising opinions on pacifism created a divide between her and party supporters and in response, the press misrepresented her and completely ignored her ideas.¹⁷ Despite this, it is evident that Vida's candidature was driven solely by her sincerity, moral integrity and a desire to create a better world for the women of the future. Unfortunately, as her views were in blatant contrast to those of the time, she would come to be considered as a danger to the country, resulting in her being subject to censorship and security surveillance.¹⁸ After the war, Vida travelled to Europe to represent Australia at the Women's Peace Conference in

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0160b.htm>.

¹⁴ Australian Dictionary of Biography 2006, *Goldstein, Vida Jane (1869-1949)*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed 7 August 2017, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldstein-vida-jane6418/text10975>>. ¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵ Waterworth, E 1937, 'How Women Got the Vote'. *The Argus*, 28 October, p. 7, accessed 21 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

¹⁶ The Encyclopaedia of Women & Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia 2014, *Goldstein, Vida Jane*, Australian Women's Archives Project, accessed 19 August 2017, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0160b.htm>>.

¹⁷ Australian Dictionary of Biography 2006, *Goldstein, Vida Jane (1869-1949)*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed 7 August 2017, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldstein-vida-jane6418/text10975>>.

¹⁸ The Encyclopaedia of Women & Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia 2014, *Goldstein, Vida Jane*, Australian Women's Archives Project, accessed 19 August 2017, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0160b.htm>>.

Geneva, the purpose of which was to decide upon what women wanted incorporated into the peace treaty.¹⁹ When she returned to Australia three years later, the political climate had undergone some significant changes in her absence. This new environment was completely foreign to Vida, who felt that she no longer had anything to contribute and withdrew from public life in 1922.²⁰ Over the course of the interwar years, while not publicly prominent, Vida continued her involvement in social activism, focusing on birth control and indigenous rights while still maintaining her pacifist principles.²¹ From then, up until her death, she was denied recognition for her numerous contributions to the political and social environment of Australia. In fact, she was largely forgotten by the Australian population and died in relative obscurity in 1949.²² It was not until 1984, more than three decades after her death, that the Australian Federal Government created an electorate in her name, granting her the honour that she rightly deserved.²³

Thirty years later, it can be said that Vida Goldstein, as one of the first women to be nominated for federal parliament, paved the way for women to achieve independence in both the Australian political and social arenas. Despite her continued efforts to obtain a seat in the Australian Federal Parliament, she never found success. However, her endeavours broke new ground by changing the role of women in Australian society, which had previously been confined to domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. Her actions catapulted the newly formed Commonwealth into the fully-fledged democracy that we see today. Although many of her goals may have seemed impossible at the time, through her pioneering methods, her achievements and even her failures, she provided inspiration and leadership in a time when women faced a litany of obstacles. Consequently, Vida would later come to be recognised as the founder of modern feminism, an important figure in Australian history who helped to bring about a new age for women's rights. As such, it is evident that Vida made a significant contribution not only to the advancement of women in our society but more broadly to the development of the Australian nation.

¹⁹ The Encyclopaedia of Women & Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia 2014, *Goldstein, Vida Jane*, Australian Women's Archives Project, accessed 19 August 2017, <<http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0160b.htm>>.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Australian Dictionary of Biography 2006, *Goldstein, Vida Jane (1869-1949)*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed 7 August 2017, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldstein-vida-jane6418/text10975>>.

²² Bomford, J 1993, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria, p. 229.

²³ *ibid.* p. 229

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Documents

Waterworth, E 1937, 'How Women Got the Vote'. *The Argus*, 28 October, p. 7, accessed 21 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

This article outlined how Vida Goldstein acknowledged the arguments against women's suffrage while systematically disproving them in her own campaign for federal election. It was useful in the sense that it gave an in-depth perspective on how Vida was seen at the time while also showing the methods she used to combat negative criticism.

'Vida Goldstein: Australia's Stateswoman Visits Western Australia' 1906. *The Daily News*, 26 February, p. 4, accessed 19 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

This article details Vida Goldstein's visit to Western Australia, in addition to the attitudes and opinions of those waiting to see her. It was useful in demonstrating the extent to which the media had gone to portray Vida in a negative light and the effect that this had on the Australian people.

'Her Schoolmates Became Famous' 1950. *The Argus*, 30 September, p. 9, accessed 10 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

This article, based on the memories of a school friend, recounts Vida's days at the Presbyterian Ladies' College. It provides a valuable insight into Vida's childhood, detailing the events that led up to her candidacy for parliament in addition to showing the origins of her passion for social activism and women's rights.

'First Victorian Woman Elector' 1909. *The Queenslander*, 17 April, p. 35, accessed 10 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

This article briefly summarises Vida's rise to power amongst Australian suffragettes and her role as the first woman to exercise her right to run for parliament. It is useful in explaining the historical context surrounding these events and was designed as an informative piece for the general public.

'Vida Goldstein' 1903, *Morwell Advertiser*, 27 November, p. 2, accessed 25 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

This letter, written to the *Morwell Advertiser* newspaper in 1903, is aimed at urging the public to vote for Vida Goldstein in the upcoming federal election. It was useful in demonstrating the true influence that Vida's actions had on her constituents and the determination of women to gain a powerful voice in the government of their country.

Interviews

Goldstein, V 1903. 'Arrival in Adelaide: An Interesting Interview'. Interviewer unknown. *The Advertiser*, 23 September, p. 7, accessed 15 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

This interview, conducted on behalf of the *Adelaide Advertiser*, outlines Vida's political intentions in addition to the campaign strategies for her first nomination to federal parliament. It provides a useful perspective on the true nature and personality of one of Australia's most prominent suffragettes, showing a side of her that was often ignored by the media at the time.

Goldstein, V 1902. 'Miss Vida Goldstein'. Interviewer unknown. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 August, p. 5, accessed 17 August 2017, National Library of Australia, Trove.

This interview, conducted after Vida's return from America, summaries her experience in that country in addition to the events of the International Women's Conference she attended. It is useful in explaining Vida's true opinion of America as well as her impression of the American suffrage movement. The interview also shows the extent to which this trip influenced Vida's own opinions and how this affected her stance in Australian politics.

Secondary Sources

Audio

Standing for her convictions: the campaigns of Vida Goldstein 2009, radio program, ABC Radio National, 22 February

The radio recording, guest starring a small group of Australian academics, provides a detailed account of the life of Vida Goldstein focusing on her contributions to Australian politics. As it includes a range of opinions on different aspects of her life, it is useful in understanding the true impact that she has had on the Australian nation as a whole.

Books

Bomford, J 1993, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Victoria.

This biographical publication, dedicated to the life and work of Vida Goldstein, explains in great detail the events that led to the creation of one of Australia's most influence political and social activists. Organised into specific chapters each focusing on a certain period of Vida's life, this book was a useful reference for describing Vida's individual personality traits and how these aided and hindered her position in the Australian political sphere.

Sawer, M & Simms, M 1993, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.

This book offered in-depth information on the role of women in Australian politics following the end of the 19th century. It was particularly useful in describing the changes in the Australian political environment brought about by the efforts of female activists such as Vida Goldstein.

Webb, K 2008, *Analysing Australian History*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, Victoria

This book provided a comprehensive overview of Australian history, with special focus on the work of outstanding Australian suffragettes and social activists. In addition to the traditional textbook style layout, this book also offers a range of useful eyewitness accounts and primary documents that allow for a greater understanding of the given time period.

Guile, M 2010, *Vida Goldstein's Fight for Women's Rights*, Macmillan Education, South Yarra, Victoria

This book documents the challenges faced by Vida Goldstein over the course of her candidature for Australian parliament. It was useful in explaining the utter inequalities between men and women during the late 1800s leading into the 20th century. The addition of the illustrated pages provides an alternative portrayal of the events in question and allows the historic account to become more relatable to a modern-day audience.

Online Resources

Australian Dictionary of Biography 2006, *Goldstein, Vida Jane (1869-1949)*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed 7 August 2017, <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldstein-vida-jane-6418/text10975>>.

This article, published as part of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, documents the life of Vida Goldstein from early childhood through to her death in 1949. It is written in exact chronological order and was useful in pinpointing specific dates that correlate to major events in both Vida's life and the Australian suffragette movement.

Land, C & Carey, J 2015, *Goldstein, Vida (1869-1949)*, The Australian Women's Register, accessed 12 August 2017, <<http://womenustralia.info/biogs/AWE0218b.htm>>.

The website provides a brief overview of Vida's contributions to Australian politics, with emphasis on her involvement with the women's suffrage movement. It is useful in documenting the wide array of political organisations and committees she was involved in and founded over the course of her career as a social activist.

Women and Equality as Citizens n.d., National Museum of Australia, pdf, accessed 19 August 2017, <http://www.nma.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/19378/Women_equality_full_colour.pdf>.

This textbook extract, produced by the National Museum of Australia, provides a detailed examination of the suffragette movement and how this led to changes in the social, political and economic climate of Australia. It is useful in providing the historical context of the period in which Vida Goldstein was alive and explains in detail the challenges she faced as a woman in a society dominated by men.

The Encyclopaedia of Women & Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia 2014, *Goldstein, Vida Jane*, Australian Women's Archives Project, accessed 19 August 2017, <<http://www.womenustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0160b.htm>>.

This encyclopaedia entry, commissioned as part of the Australian Women's Archives Project, outlines the various roles that Vida Goldstein played in society and their

overall impact on modern-day Australia. It provided an in-depth study of Vida's influence in different areas of social reform and the implications these would have in later years.