

# Writing a Biography Guide

## 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition - Te Petihana Whakamana Pōti Wahine

*In 1893 Aotearoa New Zealand became the first country in the world in which all women gained the right to vote in general elections — thanks to the women who created, organised and signed the Women's Suffrage Petition. Now we need your help to tell their stories.*

Thirteen petitions were submitted to the House of Representatives in 1893 demanding the right for women to vote. They contained the signatures of 31,872 women from across the country and across the social spectrum. Twelve of the petitions have not survived, but the 'monster' that did contains 25,519 signatures, including some men.

Our goal is to collect as many biographies of these signatories as possible, and we want you to help us.

Your research will add to the growing number of biographies created for *He Tohu*, an exhibition of three constitutional documents that shape Aotearoa New Zealand (and home of the 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition). It will feature on the Suffrage interactive on the floor of the exhibition, and also on the *Suffrage Petition database* at NZHistory.

Your work will help recognise and celebrate the important achievement of these individual women who, by acting together, made history.

### Getting started

The best place to start is the Women's Suffrage Petition database on NZHistory:

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/womens-suffrage/petition>

This database allows you to search by surname, by suburb or town, by city or region, or by Sheet number. A digital version of each Sheet of the Petition is available.

### Tips for selecting someone to write about

- If you have a name in mind (such as someone from your family), check the database to see whether they have signed, and if any information on them is already available.
- If you don't have a name in mind, use the database to pick a woman that interests you most. Why not try someone from your street, town, or region? Or someone with an unusual name? Can you find any men on the Petition? Or Māori women?
- Women who have written the full names of their husbands are handy to research. 'Mrs. Charles Hanson' of Ponsonby may have a well-known husband, and then she will be easier to research.
- Look for blocks of family names. It can be easier to locate information on families, which means you may find out snippets on several women in the process.

## Where to find information: search tips

- Libraries have great information on families and may have subscriptions to things like Ancestry, Find My Past, NZSG collections, as well as Electoral rolls and published family histories. Church and parish records, community collections, and local museums can also be useful places to find information.
- Explore the general Research Guides available online at *Archives New Zealand* and the *Alexander Turnbull Library* – especially the Family History Guide – as well as their Suffrage Petition Research Guides for more ideas and sources.
- Search for birth, death and marriage information at:  
<https://bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/search>. Her absence or presence in the BDM indexes can tell you if she was born in New Zealand and whether she died here; the name of her parents; who she married; and her children. Some libraries also hold their own Indexes.
- For BDM information in the UK, use *GRO* for England and Wales, *Scotlandspeople* for Scotland, and *PRONI* for Northern Ireland.
- Family notices, court cases, and other newspaper items up to 31 December 1949 can be found on Papers Past: <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>. The Australian equivalent is *TROVE*.
- Records at Archives New Zealand may give clues to some life events. Go to <http://archway.archives.govt.nz> and do a simple search for her name. The date, series and agency information will usually give you the information you need without needing to call up a file.
- You may be able to find a Probate for her. These often include a Will. Digitised Probates are available for free at Family Search: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1865481>. If you can't find a probate for her, search for the probates of her father, husband or son(s)/children, as they are often the beneficiaries of wills.
- Many of these women will have been migrants to New Zealand. You can search the passenger lists held at Archives New Zealand for free at Family Search: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1609792>. These will tell you when she came here and on what ship, her age when migrating, her occupation, where she came from, and where she ended up in New Zealand.
- Run her name or her family names through the Alexander Turnbull Library unpublished collections catalogue: <https://tiaki.natlib.govt.nz> or the National Library catalogue: <https://natlib.govt.nz/search>
- Google your woman or family. If there is already a family tree online it can make it easier for you. Google her full name in quotation marks with things like 'New Zealand' or 'Dunedin' or her husband's name to get more targeted results. But beware of authenticity or reliability of information.
- Try searching for the woman's husband, son, or father if you can't find any records for her personally. Historically records were produced more for men than they were for women.
- Many women had sons who served during the First World War and may have been listed as those men's next of kin. The *Alexander Turnbull Library's guide on this topic* is very useful.

## Things to watch out for:

- Our database only corresponds to the 1893 Suffrage Petition, **not** the 1893 Electoral Roll or earlier petitions (less than a third of those who registered on the 1893 Electoral Roll had signed the 1893 Petition). You can check whether or not we are able to publish a biography by searching the 1893 petition database on NZHistory for a particular name: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/womens-suffrage/petition>
- There can be mistakes in how a name has been transcribed from the Petition, and many women signed with the initials of their husband. So you may need to try different spellings of a surname.
- Mothers and daughters often shared the same name. Although women had to be 21 to sign the Petition, there are some as young as 15. You may have to unpick which information belongs to which generation.

## Writing your biography

- You can read some of the submitted biographies at NZHistory for ideas.
- Title your biography with the Sheet number and name of the woman as she signed:  
*496 Euphemia W. Doull*
- Aim for around 200-300 words per biography. Longer ones are suitable for NZHistory but will need to be shortened for He Tohu.
- Record full names; maiden and/or married, year and place of birth, family, death, job, and so on, if you can, but...
- We also want to know about her character, any organisations she was part of, or events she experienced, if possible.
- Even if you don't find much information about someone, write it down anyway. Women are difficult to trace in published records, so any information, as small as it is, will be useful.
- Please note your sources at the end of the biography, if possible.
- If you wish to be credited, please include your name.
- We can upload photographs if you have them. Please include the source if you submit a photograph.

## Submitting your biography

Please submit your biography and/or images to NZHistory at: [webqueries@mch.govt.nz](mailto:webqueries@mch.govt.nz)

By submitting your biography to NZHistory it will also appear in the He Tohu exhibition.

You will be credited for writing the biography and notified of any use of the biography beyond He Tohu or NZHistory.

## Thank you!

*From the team at He Tohu and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage*