

**ADDRESS TO THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS AT
QUEENSLAND TREASURY, 8 MARCH 2001, ALL ORDS FUNCTION ROOM,
EXECUTIVE ANNEX, 80 GEORGE STREET, BRISBANE
"CELEBRATING A CENTENARY OF WOMEN'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN
QUEENSLAND"^ψ**

It is fitting that today, the first International Women's Day of the new millennium, we reflect on the achievements of women in the past century and also on the theme of professional women as volunteers, for 2001 is the United Nations Year of the Volunteer.

Before I do, let us examine what those in the past predicted that 2001 would hold. Unfortunately, few predictions considered gender issues. Feminist writers imagined a reversal of traditional roles; a time when women earned the money and men took care of household chores. The 1964 educational film, *1999*, produced by the Ford Motor Company, depicted the woman of the future minding a fully-automated kitchen, shopping on a computer terminal and sending the bill to her husband's terminal so that he could take care of the finances. The book *1999 – Our Hopeful Future* by Victor Cohn depicted the wife changing with a flick of the switch the colours on the walls of the automated home. Neither vision was completely correct. Although 57.2 per cent of Queensland women are now in the paid workforce, there are almost two men for every woman working full-time; women earn 80.8 per cent of men's wages and have wealth holdings of 85 per cent that of men.¹ As for housework, a recent study shows that homes are simply getting messier: expectations as to what constitutes a clean house have been lowered as men and women struggle to make productive use of their precious leisure time² and balance the demands of home and family.

Women have made great gains in the last 100 years. It is important to remember that, well into the 19th century, English law and society put women in the same category as children and lunatics, creatures requiring protection because they were unable to look after their own affairs. Until the *Married Women's Property Act* 1848, women in England were unable to own property; upon marriage, their property passed to their husband, sometimes with disastrous and unjust consequences.

Undoubtedly the greatest break through for western women was achieved with the right to vote. In 1902, the brand new Commonwealth of Australia, I am proud to say, was the first country in the world to allow women to both vote and stand for election to the national parliament. Queensland women won the right to vote in 1905 and first exercised it in 1907. This was not achieved without cost.

Emma Miller was not a professional woman. She came to Brisbane at the age of 39, made gentlemen's shirts, became involved in trade union work, campaigned for equal pay and equal opportunity for women and was the foundation President of the Women's Equal Franchise Association. She and her fellow suffragettes helped Australian women get the vote, a great example of active volunteerism. On 2 February 1912, during a general strike for the right to trade unionism, she led a march of women on Brisbane's Parliament House. Their path was blocked by mounted and foot police brandishing bayonets and rifles. The police charged the women, who retaliated with umbrellas and hatpins. Emma *volunteered* her hatpin into the horse of Police Commissioner Cahill, who

^ψ I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Mr Aladin Rahemtula, Supreme Court Librarian, and his staff in the preparation of this address.

¹ Sunday Mail, 4 March 2001.

² Forecasts that Missed by a Mile, Laura Lee, *The Futurist*, September-October 2000.

was thrown from his mount and injured. Emma would have been thrilled to know that her unpaid activism helped establish a society for her descendants, governed by a parliament of 40 per cent women, with women holding 5 of the 19 Cabinet positions. Something to celebrate!

Emma Miller would also have been proud of Jenny George's success in becoming the first woman member of the ACTU Executive in 1983 and the first woman president in 1996. Something else to celebrate!

Of course, Aboriginal women (and men) did not get the vote until 1967. It is shameful that Aboriginal women living in rural and remote areas of Queensland are 45 times more likely to be the victims of domestic violence than the non-Aboriginal population³ and continue to live in third World conditions in this First World country. One of our challenges for the new century!

At the beginning of the last century, appropriately qualified women were banned from admission as lawyers because the judges (male, of course) interpreted statutes permitting "any person" in possession of the necessary qualifications to be admitted as lawyers as excluding women. Enabling legislation was necessary and in Queensland the *Legal Practitioners Act* 1905 permitted suitably qualified women to be admitted as lawyers. The comments at the Act's Second Reading Speech give an interesting vignette of Queensland society in 1905. The Act was introduced by Mr Kenna, the Member for Bowen, for, of course, there were no women in State Parliament. He noted that it appeared:

"... to be the logical result of the recently passed Act granting the franchise to women. It gives them their full privilege of citizenship, and places them in that respect, on an equality with men. This is a small contribution towards removing those artificially imposed conditions which prevent women – or some women – from attaining the object of their aspirations. We have already admitted women as doctors, and it cannot be said that as members of the medical profession they have shown any inferiority to men. We allow them to be dentists, chemists and druggists. In journalism, in mercantile offices, in almost every sphere of life woman is now a competitor with man, with a result eminently satisfactory as far as women are concerned."

The Attorney-General of the day noted that he had no very great objection to the Bill. The Honourable R Philp supported the Bill noting it "a very desirable measure. Women have the franchise, and I am very glad to say that in almost every office in Brisbane you will find a female worker. In time they will oust all the men, who will have to go out into the country and earn their living. Women should be allowed to take up any occupation they please. ... Yes, even to coming in here." at which point Mr J Lahey interjected, "There are a lot of them here already." Mr Maughan, the Member for Ipswich, also supported the Bill as did Mr Rankin, who nevertheless warned, "I do not know that the admission of women will conduce to the dispatch of business in court, especially if we get good-looking barristers. It may possibly lead to the prolongation of actions in certain cases with possible additions to the costs." It is pleasing to note that at least no-one spoke against the passage of the Bill. I can't help thinking this was because the members were conscious that they would be facing women voters at their next election.

No woman took up the opportunities provided by the Act until Agnes McWhinney was admitted as a solicitor in Townsville in 1915. Agnes' elder brother Joseph was a lawyer

³ Sunday Mail, 4 March 2001.

at Wilson Ryan and Grose. Agnes was originally interested in studying medicine but the nearest medical school was in Sydney and the course was very expensive. As she watched her brother Joseph at work, she developed an interest in the law and in 1910 she commenced articles at her brother's firm. She was described as "a remarkable and strong minded young woman with confidence in her own ability, determined to succeed." Although the Northern Supreme Court judge, Mr Justice Pope-Cooper, was not impressed with the idea of a woman entering his legal profession and was said to become distinctly choleric at the very mention of her name, in the end he was unable to fault her qualifications and conduct and had to admit her to practice as a solicitor. The firm's record indicate that no payments were made to Agnes whilst she worked as a solicitor; her salary was paid to her brother Joseph, who was in active overseas service during World War I. Agnes worked as a solicitor until 1919 when she married. As was the wont in those days, she did not again undertake paid employment but used her skills as a volunteer in the community service, later becoming a judge – of cookery! It is also interesting to note that the firm did not employ another female articulated clerk until 1971!⁴

In law, as in all the professions and academia, women did not make a significant impact in numbers until the 1970s when a much greater proportion of women completed university degrees.

In 1976, when I was admitted as a barrister, the Bar Association of Queensland had 350 members, 4 or 1.1 per cent of whom were women. The Queensland Law Society had 1,250 members, 45 or 3.6 per cent of whom were women. In 1976, the University of Queensland Law School, then the only Law School in Queensland, produced 76 graduates, 13 or 17 per cent of whom were women. The number of women law graduates steadily increased and for many years now the various Queensland Law Schools have produced at least 50 per cent female graduates, who often beat the men in achieving the glittering prizes. But despite this, women have not been well-represented at the top of the legal profession, whether as judges, silks and high income earning partners in the big firms. Until the beginning of 1991, there were no women judges in Queensland. Now, the Chief Magistrate, The Vice-President of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, the Chief Judge of the District Court and the President of the Court of Appeal are women and 7 or 28 percent of the Supreme Court bench are women. Something else to celebrate!

The similar patterns of law representation at top levels emerge in other professions. Over the 12 years from 1984 to 1996, the number of female members of the Australian Society of Certified Practising Accountants increased four-fold to 25 per cent. At the same time, women relinquished their membership at a higher rate than men and, as in law, there remains a marked lag at all experience levels in the progression of females to the higher levels of the accounting profession, a difference that is attributable to gender, not just professional experience. A 1998 research article resulting from the collaboration of CPA Australia and RMIT,⁵ notes that "of members in public practice, 82 per cent of females are employees, while 65 per cent of males are principals and a greater proportion of females are employees at all levels of professional experience. ... This is so despite the fact that in the early years of their professional experience females and males are likely to hold similar job functions."

⁴ "Wilson Ryan & Grose: A Vintage Century in Townsville 1895-1995", Dorothy M Gibson-Wilde, Golden Land, Townsville, 1995.

⁵ Volume 11, No 2 1998 Accounting Research Journal, Women in Accounting Australia: Professional Participation and Career Progression" Marsha R O'Neill, Sheila Bellamy, Margaret Jackson, Clive Morley

CPA Australia's recently released statistics show that in 1990 15.47 per cent of its members were women; by 2000 this rose to 32 per cent. Interestingly, the Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore divisions of CPA Australia have over 50 per cent female members.⁶ In 2001, 51 per cent of candidates enrolled in the CPA Program were female but this rose to 56 per cent of those aged under 30 years; the number of high distinctions gained by men and women was, like any good accounting sheet, equally balanced. Something to celebrate!

Hoddinott and Jarratt⁷ recommend that the major professional accounting bodies consider a strategy for retaining women in the profession by developing a career structure that acknowledges the special needs of women, particularly the changing lifestyle imperatives associated with motherhood. Female accountants should have flexibility in work practice at times when family demands are high and accelerated retraining programs for those re-entering the profession after raising children. Female accountants should be promoted as role models in and beyond the profession, reflecting female values and practices which are applied to positive work-based outcomes. Presently, the profession is wasting a highly valued resource in which considerable time and money has been invested. Now that's an argument that should appeal to accountants! Lawyers, too, could learn much from these suggested strategies.

Interestingly, a study of gender differences in risk reduction in public accounting firms⁸ concludes that male auditors are less sensitive to risk cues than women auditors. Although I am against stereotypes, I guess this means women generally make better auditors!

Women now commonly head high profile corporate associations. Lynn Ralph has headed the Investment & Financial Services Association; Nicole Feely the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Philippa Smith the influential Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia formerly headed by Susan Ryan; Katie Lahey the New South Wales State Chamber of Commerce; Fiona McLeod the Victorian Energy Industry Ombudsman; Wendy Craik the National Farmers' Federation; Catherine McPherson the Tax Ombudsman and Roslyn Allan the Securities Institute of Australia. More reasons to celebrate!

Margaret Mittelheuser claimed a place in Stock Exchange history as the first woman in Australia to be a partner in a stock broking firm when on 27 July 1964 the Sydney Stock Exchange approved her as a non-member partner in Ralph W King & Yuill. She started her career in stock broking in 1951 in Brisbane and worked in both Brisbane and Sydney. In 1981, she became a member of the Stock Exchange. Despite her trail-blazing, she found time to volunteer as a trustee of the Brisbane Girls Grammar School and in other voluntary associations, including the Australian Federation of University Women and the Queensland Art Gallery Society. I am sure Margaret Mittelheuser was delighted to hear of Clara Furse's appointment as the first women chief executive of the London Stock Exchange in January this year. Another reason for celebration!

⁶ CPA Australia. "Gender Issues in Australia".

⁷ "Gender Imbalance in the Workforce: An Examination of the Public Accounting Profession" Australian Accounting Review Vol 8 No 2, 1998.

⁸ Risk Reduction in Public Accounting Firms: Are Women more Effective? Janne Chung, Kenis Tang International Review of Women and Leadership 4(1) 1998 39-48.

Although there were early successful and outstanding Queensland women medical practitioners like Dr Lillian Cooper and Lady Cilento, women in medicine have followed a comparable path to their sisters in law and accountancy. The Medical Board of Queensland's Annual Report for 1997-1998 shows that 2,584 women were registered as general practitioners compared to 4,801 men, but in the 26 to 30 year age group, the figures were much closer (623 females and 750 men) and for general practitioners under 25 years, 163 were female and 151 male. The statistics for medical specialists are, predictably, much less favourable to women: 2,816 males to 467 females. The Royal Australian College of Surgeons provided the following statistics: 233 College Fellows are female surgeons, making up 4.48 per cent of total surgeons. The College emphasises that whilst these figures are low, they are improving and more women are entering the basic and advanced training programs where they comprise 13.28 per cent of advanced trainees and 20.74 per cent of basic surgical trainees. The College boasts of the outstanding Australian female surgeons, Grace Warren, a world renowned researcher, author and surgeon on neuropathic limbs and leprosy; Kate Drummond, the youngest and only the third College female Fellow to be admitted to practise neurosurgery and an esteemed researcher and Fiona Wood, a researcher in burns, a surgeon and mother of six children. The College emphasises that their Vice-President is paediatric surgeon, Ann Kolby; there are three women on the Council, including the Censor in Chief and the College has a Women in Surgery Committee which reports to Council.

Significantly, the President of the Australian Medical Association is, for the first time, a woman, Dr Kerry Phelp, who was formerly the second female New South Wales AMA branch President. The AMA federal council comprises 6 women out of its 29 members. The AMA Western Australia branch President is Dr Rosanna Kapolingua-Host. The Vice-President of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners is Dr Kathy Innes. All this provides cause for celebration!

Similar patterns are reflected with women in architecture. Members of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects comprise 85.3 per cent males and 14.7 per cent females, but when those figures are broken into corporate members, the disparity rises further with women comprising only 12 per cent. The highest level of membership, Fellows, comprises only 3.5 per cent women.

Elizabeth Proust has recently reflected on the specific challenges for women in leadership roles and notes that successful young executives, both men and women, are making clear choices around family and work/life balance.⁹ I have noticed this also in the career choices made by young lawyers, both men and women, and see it as a positive step. The new economy is more flexible and prepared to accommodate individual needs. Proust stresses that community participation offers many opportunities for the development of skills and is an opportunity to both contribute to those issues that are important to the individual and to give something back to the community. If you volunteer in a field about which you are passionate, you will make the time and energy for it in your already busy life, be it the school council, the local sporting club, the community arts group, Zonta, the Soroptimists, or the National Trust. The rewards to the volunteer include increased knowledge, skill development opportunities, friendships and the old-fashioned satisfaction of assisting others. Proust also stresses the value of networking which includes involvement in professional associations and bodies, as well as community participation, all forms of volunteering. I would also emphasise the importance of

⁹ *Success in Business and Community – What are the Specific Challenges for Women?*, Elizabeth Proust, Mt Eliza Business Review, Summer/Autumn 2000/2001, 17-20.

mentoring, especially mentoring other women, another important form of volunteerism and giving back.

Many feminist commentators on leadership stress that women leaders are often different to men in that they are interested in an element of social and economic justice and that women leaders operate in a less hierarchical framework and instead cooperatively share skills and even rotate executive positions. Certainly, thousands of professional and business women in positions of responsibility work in voluntary organisations purely to improve society.

Of course, it is wrong to apply stereotypes to women in leadership and there are successful women leaders who have adopted a very traditional leadership approach like Boadecia, Catherine de Medici, Elizabeth I, Margaret Thatcher and Indira Ghandi. In the end, women must develop their own leadership styles and wield power as they think the circumstances require.

In conclusion, on International Women's Day 2001 we have much to celebrate but yet much to attain. In the century ahead, even more suitably qualified women will achieve positions of power and influence in the community. Women leaders will encourage both women and men to utilise the benefits of technology so as to best balance the demands of career and family in a flexible family-friendly workplace. Women leaders will work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination in the workplace. I encourage you all to continue your commitment to reconciliation by encouraging indigenous Australians into positions of power and responsibility and to improve the lot of indigenous Australians in isolated communities. Whilst Queensland women can rightly feel proud of what we have achieved so far, we must not forget the needs of women in Third World countries. I commend to you the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and stress the importance of countries like Australia signing the Optional Protocol to CEDAW in order to improve the lot of women and children throughout the world.

These admirable goals are all achievable if, as we obtain positions of power and responsibility in the community, we give back through volunteerism: through our professional associations, service clubs, school or community groups, political parties, international associations and importantly through mentoring and assisting others and each other.

I challenge you all to celebrate this magnificent century of women's achievements in Queensland by becoming powerful volunteers for positive change so that our grand-daughters can celebrate another magnificent century of women's achievements in Queensland on 8 March 2101.