**Jennifer Caligari**, Deakin University

‘Bessie Harrison Lee’s *Marriage, Heredity and the Social Evil* (1893)’

**Abstract:**

Bessie Harrison Lee’s publication *Marriage, Heredity and the Social Evil* in 1893 provided a utopian framework for ‘a revolution of all our social and domestic relationships…’[[1]](#footnote-1) Harrison Lee’s most notable contribution to public debate in Victoria was her fierce and unconventional advocacy of the right of women to control their own bodies and their own fertility, free from the sexual exploitation of men, within marriage as without it. Her discussion of the double moral standard, of prostitution, and particularly of the right of wives to refuse the repeated childbearing that debilitated them and debarred them from exploring other avenues in life were all based on one essential premise. Men must attain the standards of purity and restraint demanded of women. Harrison Lee aimed to expand women’s horizons by offering viable alternatives through her work as a spokesperson for the Victorian Women’s Christian Temperance Union and later World Representative of the WCTU. This movement supported a range of reforms that typified liberal feminism, varying from the moderate demand for improved education, to the more threatening demands for legal and political parity with men, including the right to vote, through to what was considered the most radical demand of all, reform in sexual norms. Harrison Lee’s observation that women who suffered repeated childbearing brought her to publish *Marriage and Heredity* in 1893. This set out a guide on how women could regain control of their bodies if they were to live a dignified and independent existence. Her publication contributed to public debate in city, rural newspapers and public forums. In this paper, I explore the vision of social relationships described in *Marriage, Heredity and the Social Evil*, and consider how it differed from more conventional first-wave feminist utopian imaginings

**Biographical Note:**

Jenny Caligari is a PhD student at Deakin University Victoria. Her qualifications include a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) at Deakin University and a Master of Arts, La Trobe University, Victoria. Jenny Caligari currently teaches senior history at a secondary school. Recently she delivered a paper at the Deakin University Summer School titled, *Victorian Rural Suffrage, 1891.*

**Sharon Crozier-De Rosa**, Deakin

**‘**Citizen of Australia...Citizen of the world: An Australian New Woman’s Nationalist Vision’

**Abstract**

Questions about the relationships between Australianness and Britishness, colonialism and nationalism are at the heart of current discussions about the construction of an Australian identity around the time of Federation. As too are issues surrounding gender, about the degree to which the new nation was constructed by women and men, shaped by masculinity and femininity. So, whereas some historians argue that Australianness was always at odds with Britishness, others contend that one was reliant on the other. And, whereas various histories of nineteenth-century Australia portray the landscape as a place of manliness, others argue that those at all ends of the imperial spectrum were being offered literary and visual images of the Australian frontier that were more than simply masculinised. Catherine Martin’s popular writing, her fiction as well as her non-fiction, provide a valuable insight into these contentious issues by offering an important commentary on popular understandings of Australianness and the future of the Australian nation at the time of Federation. Her texts present modern historians with one contemporary’s vision for a newly emerging Australian nation, a vision that reveals itself as a utopian blend of feminist and nationalist aspirations. What emerges from Martin’s writing is a sense of an Australian landscape that was as feminised as masculinised; a belief in a national identity that may have been pan-nationalist in that it was shaped by understandings of what it meant to be British or European but that also revealed itself as partially antagonistic to an old world identity in that it pitted a new world Australianness against an old world Britishness; and, a belief in a newly emerging Australian nation that far from being insular or isolated was, rather, integrally connected to the world community. Australia, Martin’s writing affirmed, had the potential to be an ideal state, one that represented an escape for women as well as men from an overly-decadent, overly-civilised, decaying Old World.

**Biographical Note**

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa ([sharon.crozierderosa@deakin.edu.au](mailto:sharon.crozierderosa@deakin.edu.au)) is an Alfred Deakin Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Alfred Deakin Research Institute, Deakin University. She is an historian working at the intersection between emotions history, a history of femininities and feminism and a study of nationalism and imperialism at the end of the nineteenth- and beginning of the twentieth century. In particular, her current postdoctoral research focuses on Irish, British and Australian print culture and the degree to which these forms of print affected and were affected by newly emerging forms of feminism and nationalism. She has published on gender and empire (for which she was awarded the Mary Bennett Prize for the best article in women’s history by an ECR in Australia), the emotional lives of ‘ordinary’ middle-class British women, the controversial *fin-de-siècle* feminist icon, the New Woman, and emotions history and historiography.

**Maryanne Dever**, Newcastle,and **Margaret Henderson**, UQ

‘If I can just get this one thing...’: Feminist futures and the archiving of Merle Thornton.

**Abstract:**

This paper explores the theme of feminist futures through our project, ‘Archiving Australian Feminism’. The latter has involved archiving the personal papers of activist Merle Thornton for acquisition by the National Library of Australia, an initiative designed to augment the documentary record of Australian grass-roots feminist activism. Thornton’s best-known and most celebrated action was the 1965 Regatta Hotel demonstration in Brisbane when she and Rosalie Bogner chained themselves to the front bar to protest women’s routine exclusion from such public spaces. This event ‘presaged a new phase in the history of feminism’ (Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, 214). Thornton went on to form the Equal Opportunities Association for Women that successfully campaigned to end the marriage bar for women in the public service, for better crèches and kindergartens, and for paid maternity leave. Drawing on Thornton’s papers and a lengthy oral history interview we recorded on behalf of the National Library, we reflect on the vision of an alternative feminist-inspired future that prompted the bar-room demonstration and shaped Thornton’s activism even as it proved difficult at times for her to achieve personally. At the same time, we examine what happens for us as researchers when our own potentially utopian visions of feminism’s recent past are challenged in the process of documenting and recording it.

\*This project has been supported by the Sidney Myer Foundation and the Queensland Premier’s Department.

**Biographical Notes**

Maryanne Dever ([maryanne.dever@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:maryanne.dever@newcastle.edu.au)) is an Associate Professor in Film, Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Newcastle. She was formerly Director of the Centre for Women’s Studies & Gender Research at Monash University. Her recent publications include *The Intimate Archive: Journeys Through Personal Papers* (co-authored with Sally Newman and Ann Vickery). Her current research focuses on issues of intimacy and materiality in relation to the research practice for and the socio-cultural status of archived objects.

Margaret Henderson ([m.henderson@uq.edu.au](mailto:m.henderson@uq.edu.au)) is a Senior Lecturer in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland. She is the author of *Marking Feminist Times: Remembering the Longest Revolution in Australia*, a study of Australian feminist cultural memory. She is the co-editor of *Terra-Recognita: New Essays in Australian Studies* and *Manifesting Australian Literary Feminisms: Nexus and Faultlines*, as well as articles on feminist fiction and autobiography, surfing and motorcycle cultures. She has been a consultant to the National Museum of Australia, advising on a modern Australian women’s movement collection.

**Heather Felton**, University of Tasmania

‘Utopia in the Tasmanian highlands? Women and Hydro village life, 1935 to 1955’

**Abstract:**

Between 1912 and the 1970s Tasmania’s Hydro Electricity Department (later Commission) built ten ‘company towns’. While some were transitory, disappearing once power scheme construction was completed, others were more permanent, established near power stations for those employees involved in generating and transmitting electricity. Until the late 1930s, the only women assured of a welcome and a home near construction sites were those married to salaried employees, such as engineers, mechanics and clerks. Married wage labourers were expected to live alone in camps for ‘single men’. Between 1940 and 1955 three villages, Butlers Gorge, Bronte Park and Wayatinah, were built specifically to accommodate as many married employees as possible. Two others, Waddamana and Tarraleah, were expanded. Like the existing villages the new ones were on the Central Plateau, an isolated highland area with a harsh winter climate, few roads and even fewer services. In many ways these Hydro ‘towns’ emulated the ‘model planned towns’ associated with benevolent companies such as Cadbury and Lever Brothers in Britain. Two such ‘towns’ came into existence in Hobart soon after the First World War –the Electrolytic Zinc Company’s development of Lutana (1918) and the Cadbury Estate at Claremont (1922). This paper will focus on the experience of women who lived in isolated Hydro villages immediately prior to and just after the Second World War. Their views of village life provide a stark contrast with the often-depressing image promulgated by many academics and writers, most notably Richard Flanagan in his award-winning novel, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, set in Butlers Gorge.

**Biographical Note:**

Heather began her career with the Tasmanian Education Department; her publications include books written for that Department on behalf of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Heather is editor of the *Tasmanian Historical Research Association* *Papers and Proceedings*. Her qualifications include a Bachelor of Education (Hons) and Master of Public Administration from the University of Tasmania where she is currently completing a PhD thesis, ‘James Backhouse Walker (1841–1899), moral enlightenment and the interplay of ideas and social reality in nineteenth-century Tasmania'.

**Jennifer Hibben**, University of Melbourne

‘An Australian Utopia: Shirley Andrews - Scientific, Just and Dancing’

**Abstract**:

Shirley Andrews (1915-2001) was a remarkable, hard-working woman who spent her life trying to make her world a more just and pleasant place. Her family imbued a sense that what was Australian was good and when she became involved in the Communist Party, this was reinforced through their radical nationalist agenda. She loved to dance and discovered that Australia had a strong dance and folk tradition. Her work was in science, which combined with the communist predilection for organisation, drove her research in early dance in Australia and imbued it with structure and commitment. As well, she believed that Indigenous Australians deserved the same rights as white Australians and she laboured to make that a reality. In her vision of Australia, people had a sense of national pride, enjoyed being physically fit, appreciated and exercised rational judgement and embraced everyone in a just society. Shirley worked hard to make that vision a reality.

Her utopian vision showed in the choices she made; the organisations she joined – the Movement against War and Fascism at University; the CPA; CAR and starting TSDAV; and her actions were always to push people to seek a better future for society in general. Nevertheless it was not just for a generalist society, it was a society that valued women and Aboriginal Australians, one that was progressive and politically active.

**Biographical Note:**

Jenny Hibben ([jahibben@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jahibben@yahoo.co.uk)) is just completing her PhD in History at the University of Melbourne. She has written an historical biography of Shirley Andrews, supervised by Stuart Macintyre and Shurlee Swain. She is a teacher of French, currently at Trinity Grammar School in Melbourne, and an examiner and moderator with the VCAA.

Jenny first met Shirley at the regular meetings of the Victorian Dance Assembly, an initiative of the TSDAV.  They enjoyed the dance research as well as sharing many values and conversations.**Stefan Petrow**, University of Tasmania

‘Imagine a World Without Cruelty: Women and the Protection of Animals in Nineteenth Century Tasmania’

**Abstract:**

According to environmental historian Alfred Crosby, European immigrants arrived in the New World accompanied by ‘a grunting, lowing, neighing, crowing, chirping, snarling, buzzing, self-replicating and world-altering avalanche’. Animals helped Europeans conquer foreign lands, but soon they were treated as violently and brutally as native peoples. Throughout the British Empire animal lovers reacted against this ill-treatment and sought to protect animals in different ways. Following the humanitarian example set by Britain in 1824, they eventually established Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and agitated for legislation to stop cruelty.

In Britain and her colonies women did much for the protection and welfare of animals. This paper examines the work in Tasmania of middle-class women like Louisa Anne Meredith and Mary Selina Gellibrand to teach humanity towards animals, Meredith through her ‘eloquent pen’ and Gellibrand through her involvement with the Tasmanian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals from its formation in 1878. The Tasmanian Society was formed to teach southern Tasmanians, and in particular children, ‘to treat kindly the dumb creatures which ministered so much to man’s uses and enjoyments’ and was one of the first public bodies in which women were prominent. Gellibrand was the ‘leader, guide and life’ of the society and waged ‘a constant war against cruelty’. She did much to raise consciousness that cruelty to animals was wrong and envisaged a world where tenderness and kindness towards ‘God’s speechless creatures’ would replace violence and brutality.

**Biographical Note:**

Dr. Stefan Petrow is an Associate Professor in the School of History and Classics at the University of Tasmania, where he teaches Australian, British and European History units.

**Laura Rademaker**, ANU

‘Maternal Visions; Single Women Missionaries of the Church Missionary Society in Arnhem Land, 1908-1942’

**Abstract:**

This paper examinesthe identities of single white women missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Arnhem Land. The majority of missionaries to Australian Aboriginal people from 1900-1945 were single women but mission historians have largely overlooked this gendering of missions. Single women missionaries participated in a movement which upheld women’s submission and promoted middle-class gender norms for indigenous people. Yet their position as childless, remunerated religious leaders appears to challenge the very gender norms propagated by evangelical mission societies. Living among the ‘heathen’ added another layer of apparent non-conformity to their missionary work.

Despite the apparent contradictions, this paper argues that missionary work presented single women with an opportunity to represent an idealised, even utopian model of evangelical femininity. Single women used missionary work as an avenue to exhibit domestic femininity, feminine compassion, civility and even white Christian motherhood without the traditional Christian family and the home sphere. Understanding ‘missionary maternalism’ thus, sheds new light on the tragedy of the Stolen Generation.

**Biographical Note:**

Laura is currently completing a PhD thesis through the Australian Centre for Indigenous History at ANU, supervised by Prof Ann McGrath, focusing on the history of the early language policies and linguistic work at the Methodist and Church Missionary Society Missions in Arnhem Land in the period up until 1970. Laura completed a Bachelor of Philosophy with Honours at ANU in 2009 and received the University Medal in History.

**Pam Sharpe**, University of Tasmania

'Utopia and Gender on the Waterfront: Mapping Colonial Hobart'

**Abstract:**  
A collaborative team at UTAS, led by Pam Sharpe, has recently produced a prototype for a digital historical atlas of Tasmania that is potentially usable on hand-held devices such as iphones and ipads. This paper takes a close look at early nineteenth century plans for the improvement of Sullivans Cove, and examines the implications for the development of the port and waterfront and for civilised living in the city, involving shopping malls and boulevards. These plans are particularly interesting in view of the vision developed by Danish architect Jan Gehl during 2010 (and currently under community consultation) for the future of both Hobart and Launceston.

**Biographical Note:**

Pam Sharpe is Professor of History at University of Tasmania. She has recently co-edited (with Joanne McEwan) Accommodating Poverty: The Housing and Living Arrangements of the English Poor c.1600-1850 (Palgrave 2011). Her interests are mainly in the demographic, social and economic history of Britain c.1650-1850.

**Ellen Warne**, Australian Catholic University

'Learning from the League: Supra-National Women's Groups and the League of Nations'

**Abstract:**

Out of the grim days of the WWI, Christian women's organizations drew inspiration from the newly formed League of Nations. Not only did it signal an era of internationalism rather than nationalism, its members believed it also established a mechanism that would allow serious consideration of the sorts of overarching problems that they had been highlighting for several decades. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the YWCA and WCTU, in particular, dedicated themselves to studying and discussing ‘serious’ issues both in grass-roots ‘study groups’ and in international forums. Even as WWII loomed they recognized that a state of crisis provided particular risks and opportunities for “supra-national” organisations that had inter-class and inter-‘racial’ connections. “We are living in a strangely disunited and at the same time united world”, Ruth Woodsmall explained in 1939: the YWCA, ‘is building and steadily working like a clock in a thunderstorm and its worth can be realized when one considers its tremendous contact with youth and women in every part of the world.” Crisis, Woodsmall argued brought both ‘opportunity’ and ‘danger’ but the greatest danger was that “a sense of frustration and retreat from ideals” might lead to the collapse of the utopian ideal of internationalism. This paper uses research on the YWCA as a case study to explore the significance of such utopian internationalism to the growing self-identification of their organisation as a significant supra-national women’s agency in the 1920s and 1930s.

**Biographical Note:**

Ellen Warne is a Senior Lecturer at Australian Catholic University where she teaches history. She has particular interests in the public influence of Christian women’s organisations in national and international forums. She is currently preparing the final manuscript of a book, along with Professors Shurlee Swain and Patricia Grimshaw, on working mothers in Australian history.

**Claire Wright**, La Trobe, ‘Utopia Girls’

**Utopia Girls: The Dawn of Women’s Rights in Australia**

Produced by Lucy Maclaran and Alex West for Renegade Films

Directed by Jasmin Tarasin

Written by Clare Wright and Alex West

Researched and Presented by Clare Wright

For ABC1

In association with Screen Australia and Film Victoria

Historian Clare Wright investigates how and why Australia became the first country to give women full political rights.

Australia’s unique history bred an amazing group of rebellious women who each played crucial roles in shaping the destiny of the country. But this being Australia, this tale of nation building is driven as much by raw luck and rank opportunism as by high-minded idealism.

Women in the nineteenth century had virtually no rights. Once they married they signed over everything to their husbands (including their children!). If the marriage turned abusive it was almost impossible to escape. And even worse was the fate of ‘fallen women’ as unmarried mothers were called. Our determined protagonists’ aim was to improve the lot of all women. Only by having political representation would this be achieved.

And getting this representation came about by the vision and hard work of five women, Caroline Dexter, Henrietta Dugdale, Louisa Lawson, Mary Lee and Vida Goldstein, who, with their comrades, would carry the flag over half a century until a newly federated Australia could claim its title as a uniquely democratic nation.

Their tireless, and sometimes thankless, work would take them from the poorest slums to the seats of power in the fledgling nation.

Clare guides us through this fascinating story, with some of Australia’s most prominent actors illuminating the film by reciting from contemporary texts. Beautiful graphic and archive sequences illustrate our story. The result is an evocative and moving film about a vitally important but little known passage of Australian history.

**Biographical Details**

Dr Clare Wright is an award-winning historian, author and public commentator who has worked in politics, academia and the media.

Clare holds a PhD in Australian Studies from the University of Melbourne and an MA in Public History from Monash University. From 2004-2009, she was an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Research Fellow at La Trobe University. She is an internationally recognised scholar in the fields of the social history of alcohol and women’s political activism. Her expertise in Australian History covers the gold rush period, 19th and 20th century women’s history, democracy movements, mining history, bushrangers and the liquor industry.

Clare is currently working as a freelance historian.

http://www.latrobe.edu.au/history/staff/wright.htm

1. Harrsion Lee, B., *Marriage and Heredity and the Social Evil*, National Temperance Publication Depot, London, 1903, Preface to First Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)