

Kate Sheppard National Memorial



Category : Monument / Sculpture
Title : Kate Sheppard National Memorial
Primary artist(s) : Margriet Windhausen
Execution date : 1993
Media : Bronze, aggregate wall
Approximate dimensions : h 2.1m w 5m

Location : Oxford Terrace
Setting : Bank of the Avon, Oxford Terrace, beside the Information building
Owner / administrator : Parks Unit, Christchurch City Council

In 1989 moves were first made towards observing the 100 years since New Zealand women won the right to vote. A memorial to Kate Sheppard was initiated by Women Towards 2000.

Kate Sheppard (1848-1934), was a strong advocate for equal rights for women. Sheppard became a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and took up national office as the superintendent of its franchise department in 1887. Sheppard realised that with the vote women could achieve social reforms. Subsequently this concept developed into her struggle for the rights of New Zealand women to vote. The fifth petition to parliament in 1893 contained 31, 872 signatures, a number that was a third of the female population of that time. It was due to the efforts of Kate Sheppard and the campaign she led that on 19 September, 1893 the Electoral Bill giving women the right to vote received the Governor's assent.

The choice of Margriet Windhausen to produce a national memorial to Kate Sheppard provoked debate. The issue was raised that gender had been put before merit in the choice of the artist. Windhausen's proposal was considered dull and old fashioned, however the Kate Sheppard National Memorial Committee favoured an unchallenging work that they felt would be understood by the public.

Windhausen created a stone memorial with a life sized bronze relief sculpture. In this sculpture Kate Sheppard is flanked by other suffragists. The group of women are depicted taking the petition to parliament in a cart. Smaller panels on the side illustrate traditional roles for women one hundred years ago, while the history of the women's suffrage movement and Kate Sheppard's contribution are also recorded in the outer panels.

When the memorial was unveiled on the centennial of women winning the right to vote, a time capsule was placed within the monument. The time capsule records the names of the memorial fund supporters, news clippings and other material depicting lives of New Zealand women in 1993.