

An Exploration of the Political Ideologies of Annie Jane Allen Schnackenberg (1835-1905) of New Zealand

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With scarce documentary evidence, one might be tempted to relegate to the sidelines any efforts to examine the political ideologies of Annie Jane Allen Schnackenberg (1835-1905) of Auckland, New Zealand. A national leader who oversaw the petition campaigns of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of New Zealand, culminating in the world's first self-governing nation's right for women to vote, Schnackenberg rarely arises beyond a note or two in secondary sources focusing on New Zealand women's history. Her eldest daughter, Katrina Schnackenberg Astley, destroyed her letters and diaries since, as her descendants remember her saying, the documents were "too personal." Consequently, a lack of traditional resources for political historians means that we today know little of this national leader. Schnackenberg was part of an international movement in which the "category" of woman -- scientific, socio-economic, and even philosophical -- was changing. Her efforts to secure greater freedoms for women in New Zealand deserve greater recognition.

The eldest child of two successful drapers in Leamington Royal Spa, Schnackenberg became a milliner in her 20s and likely sold her hats and other creations from her parents' shop. The whole family was active in the Wesleyan (Methodist) Church, and she grew up in within a strong tradition of temperance activism then blossoming in England. Upon her emigration to New Zealand with her parents and siblings in 1861, she soon won gainful employment as a teacher with a Wesleyan missionary, Rev. Cort Henry Schnackenberg (1812-1880), and his wife Amy in the Waikato, a rural area south of Auckland. There she stayed for the next two decades. When the missionary's first wife Amy died in 1864, Annie Jane married Rev. Schnackenberg and had five children by him.

Called Jenny by her adoring husband, she was a very successful teacher and manager of the mission schools assigned to them in Kawhia, Aotea and Raglan. They were situated in a very wealthy area of the country in which the Māori people had been flourishing as entrepreneurs with international trade and agricultural production. They were also right in the centre of the New Zealand wars that had broken out as the push for land and regulation of Māori trade escalated. Without her own personal papers, one can only conjecture how they continued to be successful during these violent times. However, one might easily imagine the trust and mutual respect that Schnackenberg engendered among the Māori. Her knowledge of the language of the Māori people, te reo Māori, must also have extended to a close observation of Māori social and political practices. She was likely also to observe how women of European backgrounds had fewer legal and political rights than did Māori women. During this early part of her womanhood and life as a wage-earning teacher, she would have been able to observe Māori women's leadership styles. As the chaos of war came to the Waikato, Māori women's power and influence (mana) came to the fore. Schnackenberg saw up close the way in which Māori women would take on myriad challenges as opportunities for to develop new leadership practices, personal courage, and

inner strength for thinking about new pathways for the future of one's family and the collective group as a whole.* This important aspect of Schnackenberg's background led directly into her choices in leadership strategies in the 1880s and 1890s.

After her husband died in 1880, Schnackenberg came to live in Auckland at Allendale with her parents until she found her own house. She had already taken on volunteer work for her church and local temperance society by 1885 when Mary Clement Leavitt, the world missionary for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, came to New Zealand to organise the WCTU New Zealand (WCTUNZ). From over two hundred women who attended the organisational meeting, she was appointed as the superintendent of the Education department in the inaugural Auckland WCTU branch. She was already well versed in fundraising and teaching, and with her work with the Mt. Albert Total Abstinence Society, she was also learning the tactics of political canvassing and petitioning. The meetings of this first official chapter of the WCTUNZ were carefully recorded in local papers, and in February 1885 the chapter declared three main goals:

- (1) To influence their husbands, brothers, and sons to vote straight on the temperance question;
- (2) to bring about temperance instruction in the public schools, so that the rising generation would be forearmed through being forewarned;
- (3) to obtain by legislation the abolition of barmaids.†

It is important to understand the lesson one can draw from this three-pronged platform: the socio-cultural and political dimensions of the public life are intimately linked and mutually consequential. So for example, the fledgling WCTUNZ branches organised the many petitions garnering over 18,000 signatures in 1885 to support a legislative effort forbidding women to serve in any capacity in public houses. The key purpose of this activism was to protect women and girls (working age was 14 and pubs would advertise for girls and young women to work as barmaids). It is not difficult to imagine the roughhousing and overt sexual predations that occurred in these settings. A personal deputation by the national WCTU leadership that year also pressed government leaders for women's suffrage.

On January 1887, Schnackenberg was elected to the presidency of the Auckland WCTU branch, serving in this role until 1897. She was appointed at the WCTUNZ convention in March 1887 to the national superintendency of the Education department now focusing on "scientific temperance instruction." In March 1892 she was elected national president and served through 1901. It was during Annie Jane's presidency that the work to ally with and include Māori leaders – not just proselytise or minister as missionaries – officially began. Under her leadership, the collective efforts of the WCTUNZ chapters had successfully recruited Māori women such that by 1899 more Māori than "European" women had paid memberships. This growing trend was well noted by Schnackenberg when in 1896 she printed her greetings in te reo in the WCTUNZ's *White Ribbon* newspaper and a year later an

* Stacey Ruru, Maree Roche, and Waikaremoana Waitoke. "Māori women's perspectives of leadership and wellbeing," *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing*, vol. 2, issue 1 (June 2017): 5-14.

† "Women's Christian Temperance Union," *New Zealand Herald*, 7249 (11 February 1885): 6. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18850211.2.35>.

open letter to her “Māori Sisters at Rotorua.”* She took on the additional role of serving as the WCTUNZ national superintendent of Māori work in 1898. As such she would have had greater opportunity to work closely with Māori women leaders and further develop her own unique way to view the world and women’s place in it. She would have relied on her personal connections with Māori families in the Waikato area to open doors that might not be available to others of European backgrounds, and her ease of connecting culturally – through physical activities such as weaving or preparations for feasts – with wāhine Māori aided her in gathering supporters across contemporary barriers.† Since all her personal papers were destroyed after her death, it is only in a narrow scope of a decade of her life's work that we find direct evidence of her political ideology gathered from documents published in the WCTUNZ’s newsletter *The White Ribbon* and from reports about her in public newspapers from all around the country in the 1890s.

While her published works included many different topics for consideration, this essay focuses on four main points that consistently showed up in her public discourse. Like many of her British predecessors who published on women's rights, including such essayists as Harriet Taylor Mill and Caroline Norton in England in the 1850s, Schnackenberg spoke regularly about individual liberty and bodily autonomy. As an extension of this idea, secondly, she also emphasised the need for women's access to a rigorous education in science, civics, and political philosophy. Thirdly, women's right to vote connected naturally to this vision of an educated and committed citizen working through a collective spirit of activists in an organised, non-partisan bloc. And a fourth point to scrutinise was regularly emphasised in both her speeches and her activities: a dedicated effort at inclusiveness - that women across racially segregated barriers and nations were her sisters, all deserving a voice in decision-making for a better world.

Just as Harriet Taylor Mill who wrote several generations earlier in England as co-author of John Stuart Mill’s book On Liberty, Schnackenberg consistently advocated for full legal, social, and economic equality of the sexes. While a young working woman, Schnackenberg might have read Taylor Mill's essay “The Enfranchisement of Women” which, in a statement emphasising women's right to the vote, stated that men and women should not have to live in separate spheres.‡ Suffragists in the nineteenth century emphasised that at the core of the right to vote was self-government. They focused on ways to express how a woman's actions and opinions derived from self-determination and a moral code by which she sought to do good for her family and community. As the U.S. suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued before Congress in 1884:

Now, the right of Suffrage in a republic means self-government, and self-government means education, development, self-reliance, independence, courage in the hour of

* “Official Correspondence,” *The White Ribbon*, Vol. 2, Issue 22 (April 1897): 9, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/white-ribbon/1897/04/01/9>.

† Deborah Heke, “Te Kupenga: A woven methodology for collecting, interpreting and stor(y)ing Māori women’s knowledges,” *MAI Journal*, vol. 12, issue 2 (2023): 146-157.

‡ Harriet Taylor Mill, “Enfranchisement of Women,” *The New-York Tribune, for Europe* (October 29, 1850). Reprinted in *Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review*, July 1851. Available online at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Enfranchisement_of_women.

danger....The ballot is the scepter of power in the hand of every citizen. ... The disfranchisement of one-half the people places a dangerous power in the hands of the other half.* (pp. 41-42).

U.S. WCTU president Frances Willard used the same imagery of power in her statement before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage in 1888: "The ballot is the compendium of all there is in civilization, and of all that civilization has done for us... give women power to go forth so that when her son undertakes life's treacherous battle still let his mother walk beside him weak but serious, and clad in the garments of power."[†]

In Schnackenberg's presidential address in 1896 she emphasised that the WCTU NZ woman's use of the vote was crucial:

"remember that this is a sacred duty - a great responsibility. While we are not partisans, we should vote only for those men who are known to be of good moral character, and who will be on the side of righteousness, giving their interests and vote in favour of moral reform, including the people's right to abolish the liquor traffic, and ourselves vote straight for prohibition."[‡]

Their work in temperance connected directly with their moral force derived from a Protestant Christian ethic, as well as an abiding belief that both the drinking and selling of alcohol destroyed this moral core required of a healthy democracy. She also reminded her fellow WCTU NZ members to continue working for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act and any "Acts which are a moral wrong – unconstitutional because they endanger the liberty of the subject."

Any man whose moral sense is wanting could report a woman to the police who would then force her to be examined under the Contagious Diseases Acts 1869. A woman or girl walking along the street or entering any public space on her own drew the male gaze, and a policeman could make a judgment call whether or not her presence was legal. Her activities undertaken without a male escort could be interpreted as evidence of being a sex worker. The policeman's duty then, under the New Zealand Contagious Diseases Acts (1869), would be to detain her and have her forcibly examined for venereal disease. Women detained under the Act faced regular medical examinations for a period of one year. If she was diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease, she would be confined to a lock hospital or jail until deemed clean.

Schnackenberg led the campaign for a petition to Parliament to raise the age of consent for women from twelve to eighteen to allow them greater autonomy and rights over their own

* "Chapter III. Congressional Hearings and Reports of 1884," *History of Woman Suffrage... Vol. IV. 1883-1900*, eds. Susan B. Anthony & Ida Husted Harper. Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1902). Available online at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/History_of_Woman_Suffrage/Volume_4/Chapter_3.

[†] Frances Willard, "Statement before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage – April 2, 1888," Iowa State University Archives of Women's Political Communication, <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2019/08/15/statement-before-the-u-s-senate-committee-on-woman-suffrage-april-2-1888/>.

[‡] "W.C.T.U. Convention, Dunedin 1896. President's Address," *White Ribbon*, 10 (April 1896): 5, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/white-ribbon/1896/04/01/5>.

property and bodies.* She also urged encouraged WCTU NZ members to use different language for the legal status of a child's "age of consent." Instead, she urged members to use the phrase "age of protection" because, she stated, she could not imagine it ever possible "for a girl or woman to consent to her own ruin."[†] At the organisational meeting of what became the National Council of Women of New Zealand, she focused on putting forward resolutions calling for support for the right of co-guardianship of one's own children, divorce reform, and a carefully worded resolution supporting the rights of voters in a democracy.[‡] Similarly, as Caroline Norton had written in her English pamphlet in 1854 advocating for married women's rights: "Power, in its purer form, is protection. Power, in its corrupt form, is oppression."[§]

In a related way, Schnackenberg emphasised that a woman's role as a wife or mother should not limit her pursuit of self-development and any careers for which she might be prepared. This included the right for women to vote. As early as March 1890 at an annual meeting of the male-led New Zealand Alliance for the Abolition of the Liquor Traffic, Annie Jane reminded the male leaders that they still had not openly shown their support of the franchise as recognition of women's equal rights. She stood to speak, representing the WCTUNZ, and asked whether the Alliance included the franchise for women in its mission. Upon hearing that this topic was not a formal part of the Alliance's work, she "thanked the Chairman," and then presented the argument used by suffragists around the world when she said that "women claimed to have more intelligence than a child and were better fitted to exercise their rights than criminals and lunatics." She asserted that "women claimed their rights of equality... [and] they wanted the direct vote as to who should go into Parliament."^{**} Her presidential address in 1898 at the WCTUNZ convention in Napier - the largest convention they had yet held - emphasised the role of education. "... we ourselves, and women generally, need instructing in our duties and responsibilities as citizens, that we may have laws which harmonise with the law of God, in harmony with the golden rule, equal purity, equal personal liberty, equal opportunity for men and women."^{††} Similarly, Harriet Taylor Mill had written a generation earlier in England:

The proper sphere for all human beings is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to... Let every occupation be open to all, without favor or discouragement to

* "W.C.T.U. Convention," *Southland Times*, Issue 12847, 3 March 1894, Page 2.
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ST18940303.2.15>.

[†] "Official Correspondence," *White Ribbon*, Vol 2, Issue 20 (February 1897): 4.
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/white-ribbon/1897/02/01/4>.

[‡] "The Women's Parliament," *Evening Star*, 9983 (18 April 1896): 2.
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ESD18960418.2.24>.

[§] C. Norton, "English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century," London: Printed for Private Circulation, 1854. Available online at <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/norton/elfw/elfw.html>.

^{**} "New Zealand Alliance," *Auckland Star*, 58 (11 March 1890): 2.
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18900311.2.4>.

^{††} "President's Address," *White Ribbon*, Volume 3, Issue 33 (March 1898): 4.
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/WHIRIB18980301.2.9>.

any, and employments will fall into the hands of those men or women who are found by experience to be most capable of worthily exercising them.*

Probably the most compelling arguments in Schnackenberg's temperance work came from the new research on how imbibing alcohol was not simply an immoral act (as was regularly depicted by male gospel temperance orators) but was harmful to one's physical and mental health. The horrifying details of alcohol poisoning was graphically laid out in scientific terms alongside the latest physiological depictions of the human body. The most poignant component of WCTU's scientific temperance instruction was the effects of alcohol consumption by expectant mothers and the results in their progeny's resulting deformities (recognised today by doctors as fetal alcohol syndrome). The STI literature was included in nearly every WCTUNZ branch, and members would hold public meetings to educate mothers about the impact of alcohol on their bodies. This science-based instruction intertwined with statistical information about deaths and violent acts due to drunkenness at the local and national levels. The WCTUNZ's motto "God, Home and Humanity" called for their political activities that protected not just women who were vulnerable to the violence caused by drunken men but also homes where a mother's addiction could lead to deformities.

As Harriet Taylor Mill put it, the rigorous and fulsome education of women would benefit not only themselves and their families but society as a whole. Men who restrict the education of girls and women are depriving themselves when they keep women oppressed and submissive.

The most eminent men cease to improve, if they associate only with disciples. The mental companionship which improving, is communion between active minds, not mere contact between an active mind and a passive. This inestimable advantage is even now enjoyed, when a strong-minded man and a strong-minded woman are, by a rare chance, united; and would be had far oftener, if education took the same pains to form strong-minded women which it takes to prevent them from being formed.†

The lives of Victorian women and girls, cloaked in feminine virtues and carefully constrained forms of education, seemed too restrictive to women's rights advocates ready for change. For Annie Jane Schnackenberg, having seen the empowerment of Māori women among their communities while she was a missionary teacher, the lives of British women were a stark contrast of dependency. Perhaps this expansive background experience was why Schnackenberg was so different as a political leader than those who came after her.

This provides us with our fourth main finding in Schnackenberg's political ideology. One of the most important contributions to New Zealand women's history that Schnackenberg evidenced was inclusiveness. As a WCTU member, she would have been introduced to the important primer of field notes written by President Frances Willard, Woman and Temperance: or, The Work and Workers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. One of the key points Willard lays out for her organisational members to remember as they build their movement was: "Put yourself in the attitude of a learner along with rest. Thus your

* Mill, "Enfranchisement of Women."

† Mill, "Enfranchisement of Women."

style will be suggestive and winsome rather than authoritative and disagreeable”* Schnackenberg's 1896 presidential address emphasised the “Do Everything!” challenge handed to them by Frances Willard. She urged that they not shy away from any task where “woman's hand is needed” and “endeavour to influence legislation in favour of the protection of our homes.”†

This in her mind clearly included the rights and responsibilities of Māori women, since it was under her leadership that the WCTU NZ published reports in te reo Māori in their newspaper. While she was president she also served as superintendent of the national department of Māori work, traveling with the Māori women organisers such as Jane Foley so that they could use the railway and coaches that might otherwise block their use by Māori women traveling alone. The paid membership numbers of Māori women rose such that by 1898 there were more Māori than “European” members on the books.‡ Schnackenberg enacted what today we would consider best practices for a progressive ally of oppressed groups: working to remove the barriers that halt the actions or impede the aspirations of those who are systematically restrained due to their class, gender, or ethnic heritage.

As her body began to evidence the wear-and-tear of the past decade's public service and travel, she spent time on writing words of encouragement to her WCTUNZ sisters in short correspondences published in *The White Ribbon*. On 2 May 1905, at the age of 70, Annie Jane Allen Schnackenberg died. She had been ill for at least two years and probably house-bound for some time before then. She died at her eldest daughter Rina and John Astley's house in Morningside on Western Springs Road in Mount Albert. All her work had centred on the dignity of an educated community member in which one's human rights were recognised and celebrated. The perspective she brought to her political actions had been fuelled by her lived experiences in and among Māori who loved and respected her. Her strong piety and her devotion to children coloured her sense of what the WCTU meant by “mother love.” First was her devotion to God and family; the rest was her service to humanity.

* Frances Elizabeth Willard, Woman and Temperance: or, The Work and Workers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (Hartford, Conn.: Park Pub. Co., 1883): 616. Available online at <https://archive.org/details/womantemperanceo00willa>.

† “W.C.T.U. Convention, Dunedin 1896. President's Address,” *White Ribbon*, Volume 1, Issue 10 (April 1896): 5. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/white-ribbon/1896/04/01/5>.

‡ Mary S. Powell, “Report of the Corresponding Secretary,” *White Ribbon*, Volume 4, Issue 47 (1 April 1899): 4, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/WHIRIB18990401.2.4>.