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CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF WOMEN AT THE PARLIAMENT OF NSW

Honouring Millicent Preston-Stanley and a century of progress through a public talk and unique re-enactment

The Parliament of NSW is proud to honour the legacy of Millicent Preston-Stanley – the first woman elected to the NSW Legislative Assembly – with a special commemorative event on Wednesday, 13 August 2025.

The event will feature a keynote address by the Honourable Justice Virginia Bell AC, SC, followed by a short historical re-enactment, *Skirts on Sacred Benches*, celebrating Preston-Stanley’s contribution to the rights of women in NSW.

Preston-Stanley made history in 1925 when she was elected as a Nationalist Party representative for the Eastern Suburbs - nearly 25 years after women in NSW gained the right to vote, and seven years after the Women’s Legal Status Act 1918, which allowed women to practise law and stand for Parliament. Though she served only one term, her impact was profound. A tireless campaigner for women’s and children’s rights, Preston-Stanley’s ongoing efforts laid the foundations for future reform of maternal health, child welfare, and housing for women. She also introduced a private member’s bill advocating for equal custody rights for mothers—a cause she continued to champion long after her parliamentary service.

As we honour Preston-Stanley through our re-enactment next month, we recognise the suffragists who fought for the vote for women. Also, those that followed who won the right to stand for election for women in NSW, and those she inspired, including leaders like the Honourable Justice Virginia Bell AC, SC, whose service continues to shape public life today.

“The Honourable Justice Virginia Bell AC, SC—a trailblazer in her own right—will deliver the keynote address,” said the Hon. Greg Piper Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. “Justice Bell’s career in Australia’s highest court and her longstanding work in legal reform reflect Millicent Preston-Stanley’s own fearless pursuit of justice and equality.”



Skirts on Sacred Benches

The Parliament presents *Skirts on Sacred Benches*, a historical re-enactment of Preston-Stanley's time in the Legislative Assembly. Performed by actress Lucy Miller and joined by parliamentary staff who will portray her male colleagues, the public performance will bring to life the spirited debates of 1925.

Using creative interpretation of historical records, the performance captures Preston-Stanley's sharp wit and political courage.

'(Preston-Stanley) ... entered a space designed for and ruled by men; a lone figure in a House not favourably disposed towards "petticoats in parliament."

Millicent was labelled by some on the bench as a 'she-devil' and a 'battle axe', but she rounded on her critics with the assertion that 'women have a contribution to make to the life of the nation, which only they can make.'

The Herald ... meanwhile praised her well-reasoned, temperate and concise performance. Her tongue was a "stiletto ripping into Labor's policy" and the benches "writhed and squirmed under the lash of it."

(Quoted from: A fit place for women: NSW Parliament)

Today, women make up around 42% of the NSW Legislative Assembly, a remarkable progression from Preston-Stanley's time as the sole female voice in the chamber.

While we celebrate Millicent Preston-Stanley's groundbreaking legacy, this moment also invites reflection on how far we've come—and how far we still have to go.

Tickets are selling fast and seating in the Legislative Assembly is limited. Early registration is encouraged to avoid disappointment.

Key event information:

- Date: Wednesday 13 August
- Time: 17:30 – 18:30
- Where: Legislative Assembly at the Parliament of NSW
- [Tickets are available through Eventbrite](#)
- [The event will also be live streamed](#)