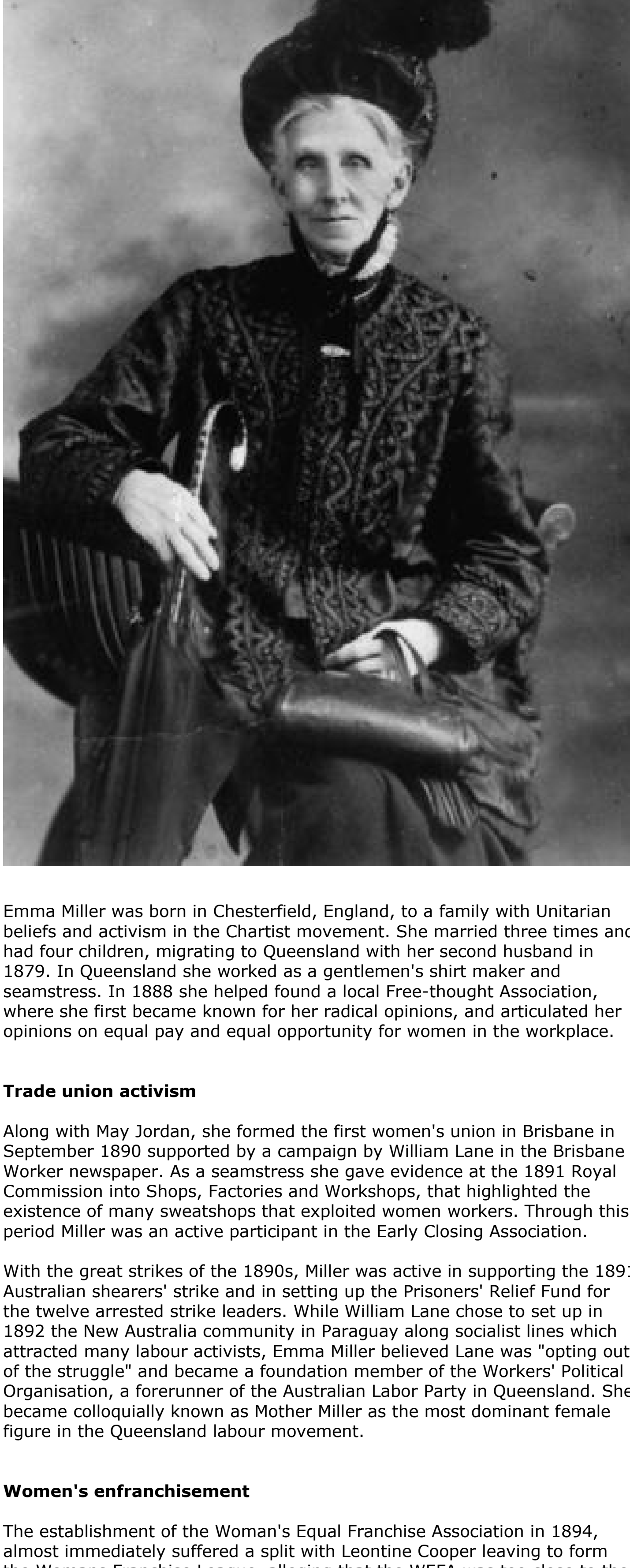


Emma Miller (1839 - 1917)

Emma Miller (26 June 1839 - 22 January 1917) was a pioneer trade union organiser, suffragist, and founder of the Australian Labor Party in Brisbane.

Emma Miller, pictured below, emigrated to Australia from England in 1879. She settled in Brisbane where she was employed as a seamstress making shirts. She was instrumental in the formation of a female workers' union, and a campaigner for "*one adult, one vote*", a movement that sought the vote for women and the cessation of multiple votes for squatters. Emma Miller led a group of female workers on a protest march to Parliament House on the Black Friday of the general strike in 1912. When she died in 1917, the flags at Trades Hall were flown at half-mast.



Emma Miller was born in Chesterfield, England, to a family with Unitarian beliefs and activism in the Chartist movement. She married three times and had four children, migrating to Queensland with her second husband in 1879. In Queensland she worked as a gentlemen's shirt maker and seamstress. In 1888 she helped found a local Free-thought Association, where she first became known for her radical opinions, and articulated her opinions on equal pay and equal opportunity for women in the workplace.

Trade union activism

Along with May Jordan, she formed the first women's union in Brisbane in September 1890 supported by a campaign by William Lane in the Brisbane Worker newspaper. As a seamstress she gave evidence at the 1891 Royal Commission into Shops, Factories and Workshops, that highlighted the existence of many sweatshops that exploited women workers. Through this period Miller was an active participant in the Early Closing Association.

With the great strikes of the 1890s, Miller was active in supporting the 1891 Australian shearers' strike and in setting up the Prisoners' Relief Fund for the twelve arrested strike leaders. While William Lane chose to set up in 1892 the New Australia community in Paraguay along socialist lines which attracted many labour activists, Emma Miller believed Lane was "opting out of the struggle" and became a foundation member of the Workers' Political Organisation, a forerunner of the Australian Labor Party in Queensland. She became colloquially known as Mother Miller as the most dominant female figure in the Queensland labour movement.

Women's enfranchisement

The establishment of the Woman's Equal Franchise Association in 1894, almost immediately suffered a split with Leontine Cooper leaving to form the Womens Franchise League, alleging that the WEFA was too close to the labour movement which could hinder women's enfranchisement. Miller remained and was elected President of the Woman's Equal Franchise Association (1894 - 1905), the remaining period of its existence. Despite the differences, Emma Miller, Leontine Cooper and the conservative Women's Christian Temperance Union often worked together on suffrage issues.

Women were enfranchised under the Federal Electoral Act on 9 April 1902, becoming the first women of the world to win the right to vote for a national parliament. (Women in New Zealand won the right to vote in colonial elections in 1893). Members of the Woman's Equal Franchise Association actively canvassed for the women's vote for the December 1903 Federal election, by forming the Women Workers' Political Organisation with Emma Miller as president. After the Federal election Miller stood down as president, but became President of the Political Labour Council in Brisbane. Women were granted the vote for the Queensland parliament on 25 January 1905, although not the right to stand for parliament. The following year Emma Miller embarked on a tour of western Queensland under the auspices of the Australian Workers' Union, speaking at large public rallies and helping to form local branches of the Workers' Political Organisation and the Women Workers' Political Organisation.

Brisbane General Strike

During the 1912 Brisbane General Strike for the right to organise trade unions, Miller thrust her hatpin into the Police Commissioner's horse causing the Police Commissioner permanent injury, a feat for which she is remembered.

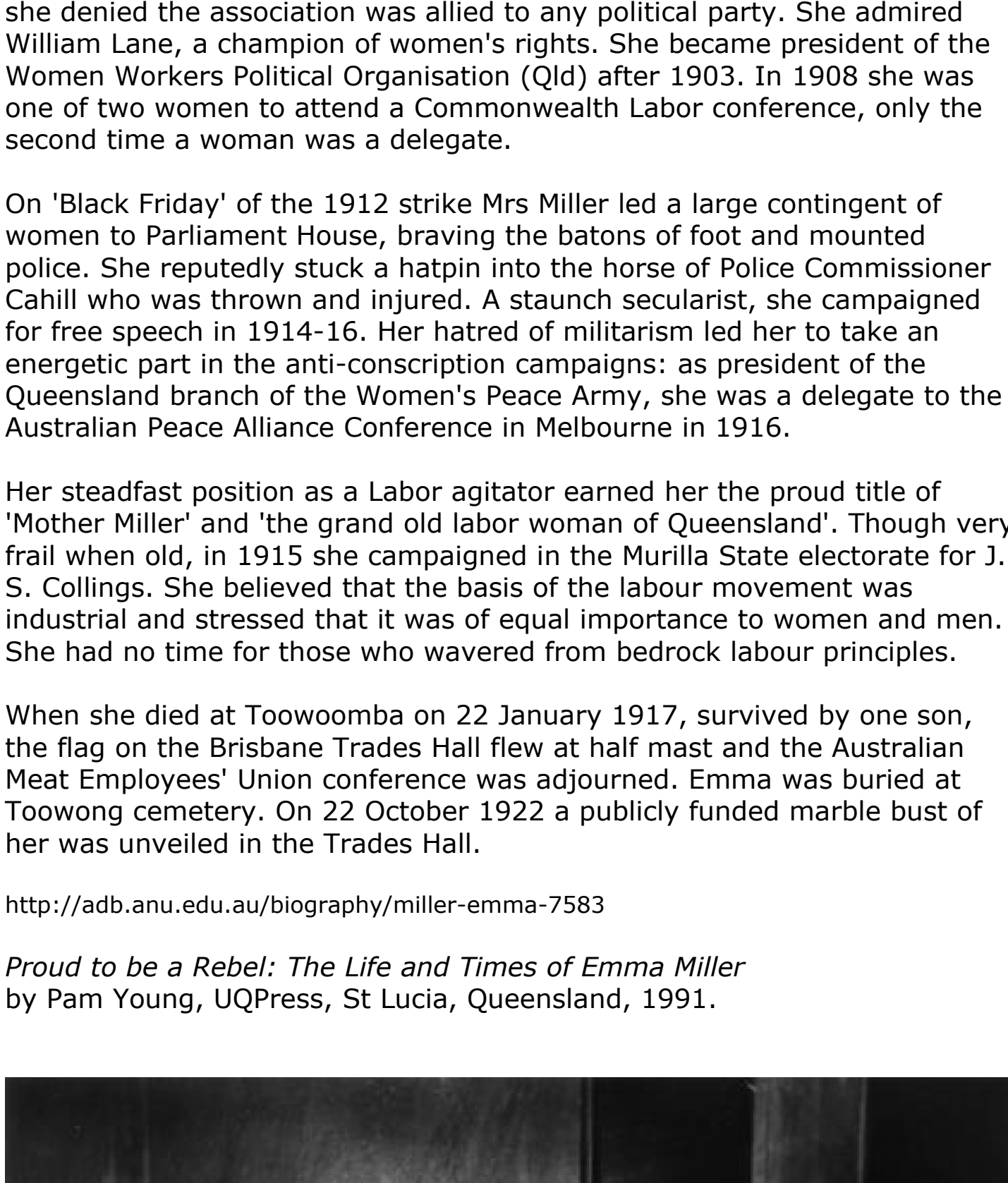
Women's Peace Army

She was also involved in anti-conscription activism over the course of World War I by joining the Women's Peace Army when Cecilia John and Adela Pankhurst visited Brisbane in 1915. The following year she attending the Australian Peace Alliance conference in Melbourne, and is reputed to have attended the Yarra Bank where she denounced militarism from her soapbox. The campaign against the first conscription referendum on 28 October 1916 was a success, attributed by many historians to the strong women's anti-conscription campaign.

Death

In January 1917 Emma Miller travelled to Toowoomba for several weeks rest. At her last public meeting in the Toowoomba Botanical Gardens she impressed on the women present the "need to play a part in the Labor movement as it meant as much to them as the men". Two days later Emma Miller died of cancer. The flag at Brisbane Trades Hall was flown at half-mast for the "mother of the Australian Labor Party". A state funeral was offered but was refused by her surviving son. However, a procession of several hundred mourners walked with her coffin from her home to the Toowong Cemetery.

A marble bust of her exists at the Queensland Council of Unions, and a statue is located in King George Square in Brisbane. There is also an Emma Miller Place located off Roma Street in Brisbane. The Emma Miller Award is presented each year by the Queensland Council of Unions to women who have made an outstanding contribution to their Union.



Miller, Emma (1839–1917)

by Pam Young

Emma Miller (1839-1917), seamstress and women's rights and labour activist, was born on 26 June 1839 at Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England, daughter of Daniel Holmes, a Unitarian cordwainer, and his wife Martha, née Hollingworth. Eldest of four children, she walked with her Chartist father to political meetings up to ten miles (16 km) away; he influenced her to rebel against the existing social order. On 15 September 1857 at Chesterfield Register Office she married Jabez Mycroft Silcock, a bookkeeper with whom she had eloped. They had four children whom she eventually supported in Manchester by sewing twelve hours a day for six days a week. Emma, now widowed, married on 30 August 1874 at Salford, Lancashire, William Calderwood (d.1880), a stonemason. With her children, the couple migrated to Brisbane, arriving in March 1879. Her third husband was Andrew Miller (d.1897), a widower whom she married at Brisbane Registry Office on 21 October 1886.

As a shirtmaker, in 1890 Emma helped to form a female workers' union, mainly of tailoresses. In 1891 she gave evidence to the royal commission into shops, factories and workshops and marched with shearers' strike prisoners when released. She was the first woman to travel west organizing for the Australian Workers' Union and was the first woman member and a life member of the Brisbane Workers Political Organization.

Emma Miller championed equal pay and equal opportunity for women and was foundation president of the Woman's Equal Franchise Association (1894-1905), urging legislation to grant women the franchise on the principle of one adult one vote; although its policy was similar to Labor's she denied the association was allied to any political party. She admired William Lane, a champion of women's rights. She became president of the Women Workers Political Organisation (Qld) after 1903. In 1908 she was one of two women to attend a Commonwealth Labor conference, only the second time a woman was a delegate.

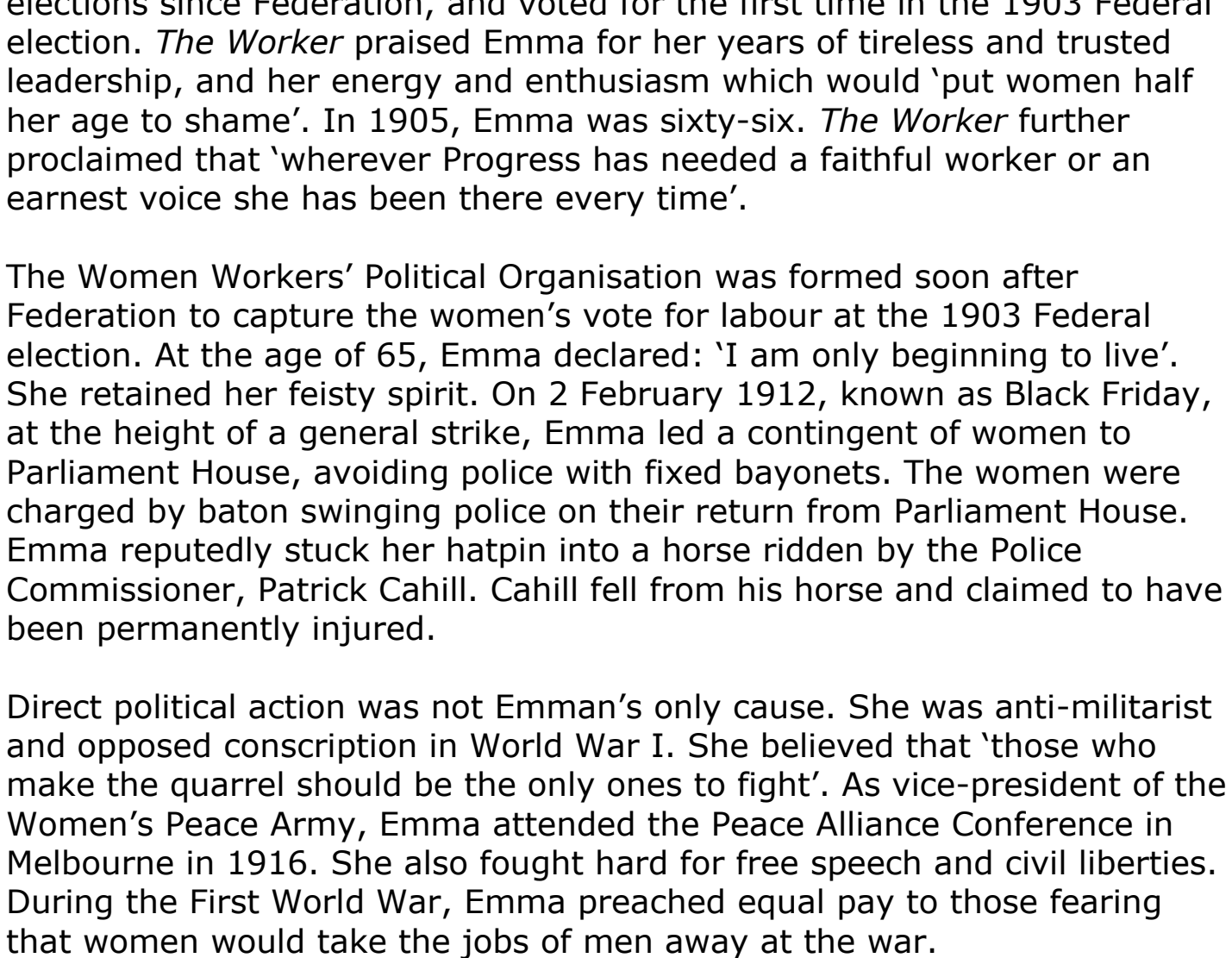
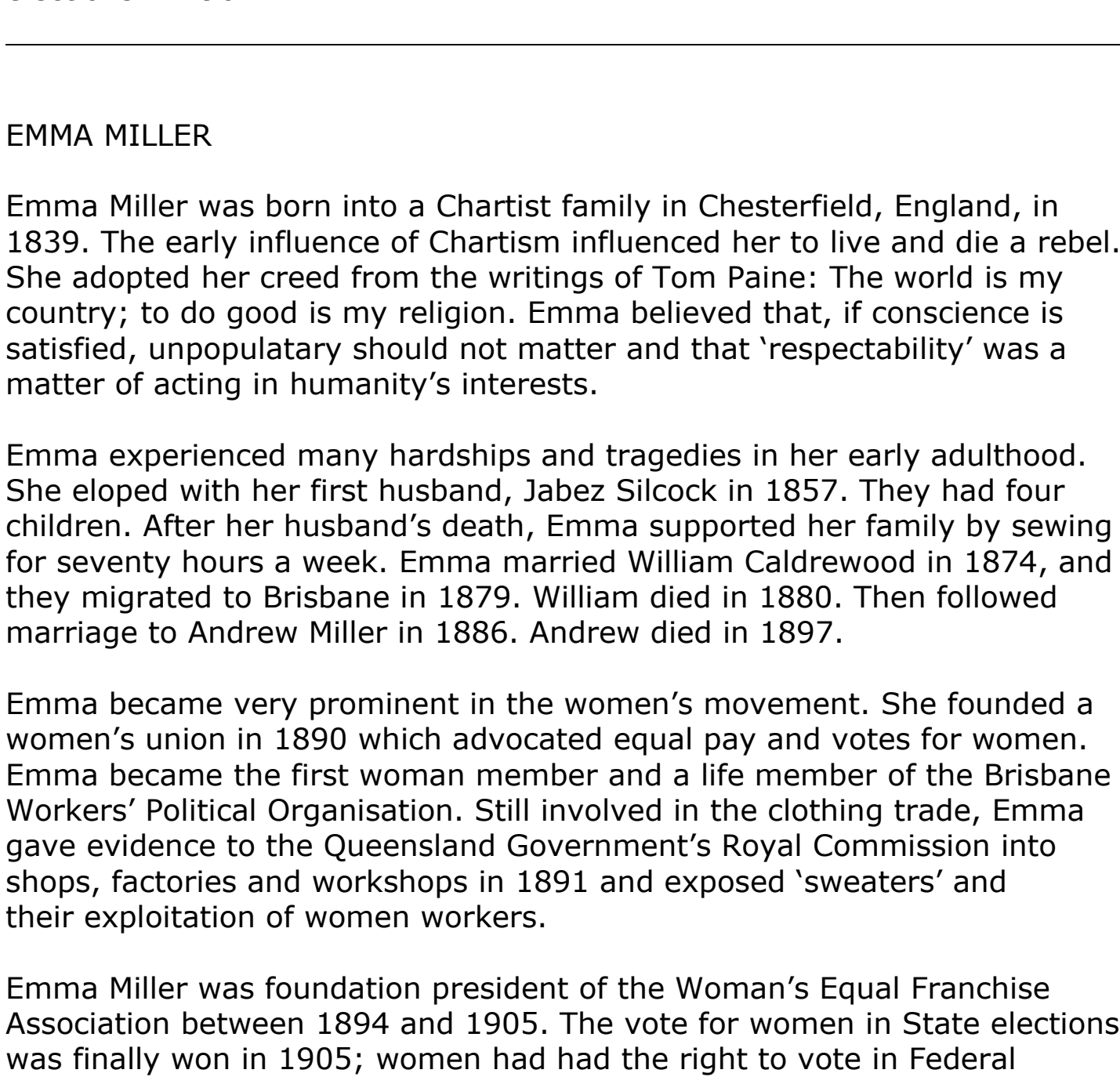
On 'Black Friday' of the 1912 strike Mrs Miller led a large contingent of women to Parliament House, braving the batons of foot and mounted police. She reputedly stuck a hatpin into the horse of Police Commissioner Cahill who was thrown and injured. A staunch secularist, she campaigned for free speech in 1914-16. Her hatred of militarism led her to take an energetic part in the anti-conscription campaigns: as president of the Queensland branch of the Women's Peace Army, she was a delegate to the Australian Peace Alliance Conference in Melbourne in 1916.

Her steadfast position as a labor agitator earned her the proud title of 'Mother Miller' and 'the grand old labor woman of Queensland'. Though very frail when old, in 1915 she campaigned in the Murilla State electorate for J. S. Collings. She believed that the basis of the labour movement was industrial and stressed that it was of equal importance to women and men. She had no time for those who wavered from bedrock labour principles.

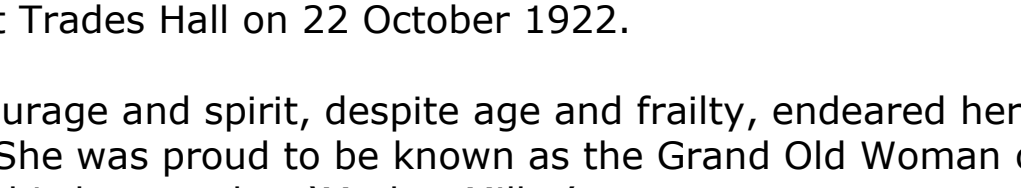
When she died at Toowoomba on 22 January 1917, survived by one son, the flag on the Brisbane Trades Hall flew at half mast and the Australian Meat Employees' Union conference was adjourned. Emma was buried at Toowong cemetery. On 22 October 1922 a publicly funded marble bust of her was unveiled in the Trades Hall.

<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/miller-emma-7583>

Proud to be a Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller
by Pam Young, UQPress, St Lucia, Queensland, 1991.



On 2 February 1912, 73-year-old Emma Miller led a contingent of women on a march to Brisbane's Parliament House. A wall of police, blocking their path, charged at the women leaving them to defend themselves with what they could, such as their umbrellas. Mounted Police Commissioner Cahill came upon Emma who, to defend herself, dug her hatpin into his horse, causing him to be thrown off. He later walked with a limp.



Emma Miller
SUFFRAGETTE

The Women's Equal Franchise Association fought for the right of women to vote, under the banner "one woman, one vote". The Association triumphed in 1902, with women allowed to vote in federal elections. The States were slower to follow and Queensland women won the right to vote in their State elections in 1907.

EMMA MILLER

Emma Miller was born into a Chartist family in Chesterfield, England, in 1839. The early influence of Chartism influenced her to live and die a rebel. She adopted her creed from the writings of Tom Paine: The world is my country; to do good is my religion. Emma believed that, if conscience is satisfied, unpopular should not matter and that 'respectability' was a matter of acting in humanity's interests.

Emma experienced many hardships and tragedies in her early adulthood. She eloped with her first husband, Jabez Silcock in 1857. They had four children. After her husband's death, Emma supported her family by sewing for seventy hours a week. Emma married William Calderwood in 1874, and they migrated to Brisbane in 1879. William died in 1880. Then followed marriage to Andrew Miller in 1886. Andrew died in 1897.

Emma became very prominent in the women's movement. She founded a women's union in 1890 which advocated equal pay and votes for women. Emma became the first woman member and a life member of the Brisbane Workers' Political Organisation. Still involved in the clothing trade, Emma gave evidence to the Queensland Government's Royal Commission into shops, factories and workshops in 1891 and exposed 'sweaters' and their exploitation of women workers.

Emma Miller was foundation president of the Woman's Equal Franchise Association between 1894 and 1905. The vote for women in State elections was finally won in 1905; women had had the right to vote in Federal elections since Federation, and voted for the first time in the 1903 Federal election. *The Worker* praised Emma for her years of tireless and trusted leadership, and her energy and enthusiasm which would 'put women half her age to shame'. In 1905, Emma was sixty-six. *The Worker* further proclaimed that 'wherever Progress has needed a faithful worker or an earnest voice she has been there every time'.

The Women Workers' Political Organisation was formed soon after Federation to capture the women's vote for labour at the 1903 Federal election. At the age of 65, Emma declared: 'I am only beginning to live'. She retained her feisty spirit. On 2 February 1912, known as Black Friday, at the height of a general strike, Emma led a contingent of women to Parliament House, avoiding police with fixed bayonets. The women were charged by baton swinging police on their return from Parliament House. Emma reputedly stuck her hatpin into a horse ridden by the Police Commissioner, Patrick Cahill. Cahill fell from his horse and claimed to have been permanently injured.

Direct political action was not Emma's only cause. She was anti-militarist and opposed conscription in World War I. She believed that 'those who make the quarrel should be the only ones to fight'. As vice-president of the Women's Peace Army, Emma attended the Peace Alliance Conference in Melbourne in 1916. She also fought hard for free speech and civil liberties. During the First World War, Emma preached equal pay to those fearing that women would take the jobs of men away at the war.

Emma died in Toowoomba on 22 January 1917. The flag at Trades Hall in Brisbane flew at half mast, and there were glowing tributes in progressive newspapers. A bust of Emma Miller, funded by public subscription, was unveiled at Trades Hall on 22 October 1922.

Emma's courage and spirit, despite age and frailty, endeared her to her followers. She was proud to be known as the Grand Old Woman of Queensland Labour and as 'Mother Miller'.

http://www.australianworkersheritagecentre.com.au/10_pdf/miller.pdf