

Louisa Lawson and the Woman Question

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Abstract: The start of the women's press in Britain in 1855 by Emily Faithfull was an important step on the path to emancipation – women had now a voice in the media. Thirty-three years later Louisa Lawson, who has been called the first voice of Australian feminism, published the first number of *The Dawn*. This was a watershed in that it gave women a voice, marked women's political engagement in the public sphere, and employed women compositors, making available to a broader public issues which were politically relevant.

In the first number Lawson asks, “where is the printing-ink champion of mankind's better half? There has hitherto been no trumpet through which the concentrated voices of womankind could publish their grievances and their opinions.” This article will look at some of the content in the journal during the seventeen years of its existence, 1888-1905.

Key words: Louisa Lawson, Women's press in Australia, *The Dawn*



Cato via Joseph Addison
(O. Lawson 4)

The nineteenth century was remarkable for the numbers of watersheds, social, political and historical that took place. One of the most striking historical issues was the fight for women's independence and the vote, and the appearance of women as the catalysts for social change. In enabling women's voices to be heard in the public arena the press played a seminal role, marking a watershed in the dissemination of information about the situation under which many women were living in different parts of the world.

In Australia Louisa Lawson was a pioneer in promoting the Women's Cause, and in making writing and publishing for women accepted. However, we should be aware that though Louisa Lawson was a pioneer in Australia, she was following in the footsteps of women in Britain and the US. In 1855 Emily Faithfull started the Victoria Press in Britain with all female compositors, an important step on the path to emancipation, since women now had their own media. From the 1860s onwards through to the early twentieth century, a plethora of women's newspapers and journals were published, especially in Britain and America, promoting employment for women, education, suffrage in its widest terms, equality for men and women in marriage, the vote, etc.

The Dawn: A Journal for Australian Women appeared on the Australian newspaper scene in 1888. Dale Spender writes:

The Dawn helped to pave the way for women's magazines in Australia, in part by demonstrating that women had need of a printed space of their own; in that printed space Louisa Lawson created a context for the exchange of ideas – and for the encouragement of women's writing (1985: 140).

And as Brian Matthews writes, "*The Dawn* was no city cabaret, it was a road show!" (1987: 202), in other words it had far reaching tentacles into the Australian landscape. A monthly publication from May 1888 to July 1905 *The Dawn* campaigned for women's rights at all levels of society, as well as proving that women were no longer dependent on men to run their own business. Like the Victoria Press, it employed women compositors, gave women a voice, and marked women's political engagement in the public sphere, making available to a broader public issues relating to women. Like Emily Faithfull Louisa was not only "business manager, [but also] editor, printer and publisher" (Lawson 1990: 3). As Louisa writes in the editorial of May 1, 1889,

As THE DAWN is the pioneer paper of its kind in Australia, being edited, printed and published by women, in the interest of women. [sic] It has been looked upon by many, as an uncertain venture, and we have frequently been asked, by subscribers and advertisers, the question 'Will it live?', to all such we have but one reply. THE DAWN has been a success from its first issue, while a glance at our subscriber's list convinces the most sceptical.

In the first number Lawson starts by citing Tennyson:

'Woman is not uncompleted man, but diverse,' says Tennyson, and being diverse why should she not have her journal in which her divergent hopes, aims, and opinions may have representation. Every eccentricity of belief, and

every variety of bias in mankind allies itself with a printing-machine, and gets its singularities bruited about in type, but where is the printing-ink champion of mankind's better half? There has hitherto been no trumpet through which the concentrated voices of womankind could publish their grievances and their opinions. (Sydney, May 15, 1888 – published under the pseudonym Dora Falconer)

According to Olive Lawson the journal had its greatest impact in the years 1888–1895, and Louisa “wrote over 200 of the journal's leading articles” (1990: 15). With a cover price of 3d per issue, or 3 shillings for an annual subscription it was otherwise financially supported by advertisements and sponsors, which were often, as in the British press, collected in the last pages of each issue. The advertisements, which often covered up to twenty of forty-four pages, provide a fascinating snapshot of the commercial activities of the time. Louisa had various inventive ways of raising subscriptions such as selling off annually her family land in Eurunderee “to paid-up subscribers,” two acres at a time, after her husband Peter Lawson (a Norwegian seaman turned gold prospector) died in 1888 (Lawson 1990, 19). The journal also offered free courses in various subjects, provided you got twenty new subscribers. In these original ways of gaining paid-up subscriptions to the journal Louisa Lawson was in contrast to other women's newspapers of the time, which, though asking for subscriptions, were dominated by middle and upper-class women, and often had access to financial means, and politicians. Louisa's background was very different from that of the more ladylike women supporting the cause, brought up as she was in the bush and with few economic means.

The journal had a widespread readership, also in rural areas and abroad (Lawson 1990:13). The typical reader according to Sheridan was “a woman for whom the improvement of domestic life and the affirmation of her rights as a wife and mother was at least as important as gaining equal rights with men in the public sphere” (1995: 77). She saw the vote as the answer to many of these issues, but considered it important that her journal addressed a wide variety of questions which involved the everyday life of women in Australia at the time. She describes “The Colonial Girl” thus:

The typical bush girl early acquires a practical knowledge of house keeping, and generally excels in cookery, dairy and laundry work. She not only rides well, but she knows how to look after her horse, how to put the saddle on and mount him without help.

[...] No doubt the isolation of many families in our sparsely-populated districts helps to develop the resources of the individuals composing them, and the difficulty of obtaining help of any kind makes our girls useful and self-reliant. (June 1, 1894 editorial)

The social impact of *The Dawn* seems to have been considerable. Sheridan posits that *The Dawn* was the first newspaper for women with ‘feminist principles’. However, from my own study of other British newspapers of the period I would say that Louisa Lawson was feminist in principle but much more diverse in her approach to women's issues. Of course, since she was more or less alone as a woman in Australia promoting a journal for suffrage, she could take a freedom where women of other nations felt more constrained. But she did meet with opposition from male compositors who led an

unsuccessful campaign to close her journal in 1889-90. As she writes in "Boycotting The Dawn":

The Dawn office gives whole or partial employment to about ten women, working either on this journal or in the printing business, and the fact that women are earning an honest living in a business hitherto monopolised by men, is the reason why the Typographical Association, and all the affiliated societies it can influence, have resolved to boycott *The Dawn*. They have not said to the women "we object to your working because women usually accept low wages and so injure the cause of labour elsewhere," they simply object on selfish grounds to the competition of women at all. (October 5, 1889)

Her answer was to ask for support from women that they would only deal with tradesmen who would advertise with *The Dawn* — a shrewd business woman and a salient comment on the power of advertisements in keeping a journal afloat.

It is interesting to consider the content of *The Dawn* in the light of Matthew's biography of Louisa. Like many at the time it was written, he seems surprised that Louisa covered such a vast range of topics. But this was the case with all the women's newspapers and journals. Women had understood that purely feminist ideas and ideology would not reach out to the greater mass of women. They needed to be encouraged to see that the Cause embraced all aspects of women's lives, and of course they were dependent on the advertising subscriptions to keep going. Women editors and those fighting for the vote in the late nineteenth century saw the need to make clear that women's rights included far more than the vote. This diversity of approach is something we appreciate today when we talk of human rights.

Critical reception of *The Dawn* is varied. Whereas Brian Matthews considered *The Dawn* radical, Penny Johnson calls it typical of the "reformist bourgeois feminism of its period," and Judith Allen terms it "expediency feminism" which she considers was "dominant in the Australian women's movement" (cited in Sheridan 1995: 79). But given her background Lawson can hardly be called 'bourgeois'. Sheridan and Oldfield draw distinctions between feminism as woman-centred, and that which targeted and aimed at reforming men and patriarchal attitudes, and campaigning for equal rights. Oldfield considers that "Louisa Lawson's analysis of cultural attitudes was radical in the context of her time" (1992: 4), and suggests that many were shocked by Louisa's iconoclastic views on women. Louisa was active in making speeches and promoting the cause, but very outspoken. For example in one speech she comments on how women's lives are ruled by men in every circumstance ending "and she goes to a heaven ruled by a male God or a hell managed by a male devil. Isn't it a wonder men didn't make the devil a woman?" (Matthews 1987: 259). The linking of twentieth century theoretical ideas of feminism and Louisa Lawson's attitudes is, in my opinion, problematic as to Lawson the plight of women and fundamental human rights were all important.

Target group

It has been said that *The Dawn* was specifically targeted to the working class and “designed to be a paper in which women may express their opinions on political and social questions which involve their interest (...) [and] was to be enthusiastically tutorial” (Lawson 1990: 4-5). Louisa attributes the journal’s success to the fact that, “The mass of women want to have themselves fairly represented, and the mass are made up of those who are not much in evidence, and who do not therefore figure as typical women” (“Ourselves” May 5, 1890). Sheridan states that like most of these newspapers pre-1905 it drew a fine line between politics and domesticity, with its “dual focus on public and domestic concerns” (1995: 78-9). A point supported by the following extract from the first editorial:

We wear no ready-made suit of opinions, nor stand on any platform of woman’s rights which we have as yet seen erected. (...) for nothing concerning woman’s life and interest lies outside our scope. It is not a new thing to say that there is no power in the world like that of women, for in their hand lie the plastic unformed characters of the coming generation to be moulded beyond alteration into what form they will. This most potent constituency we seek to represent, and for their suffrage we sue. (Vol.1 no.1 Sydney, May 15, 1888)

In one of the many editorials entitled “Ourselves” she philosophizes as to why *The Dawn* has prospered and survived in contrast to other similar projects. Louisa maintains it is the result of the view that the paper has taken of women’s interests — one fundamentally different from the stereotypical notions of womanhood at the time. This is further illustrated by the change in subtitle in 1891 to “A Journal for the Household.” Lawson was in many ways attempting to achieve two things in her journal—to encourage women to demand their rights, not only political but also in the home, and at the same time, following the “advice column” manner, throw light on issues specifically relevant for women in all walks of life, regardless of class, and how to deal with the ensuing problems. This is evident in editorials such as this:

“The Dawn” has from the first identified itself with the cause of woman,—has striven to be her mouth-piece as well as her counsellor and supporter, and thus, in looking back upon the past six years we take fresh courage in view of the amazing progress in women’s advancement made during that short period. Six years ago questions relating to any improvement in the position of women were relegated to the most flippant of the Australian comic papers, and the idea of a “woman’s paper” was viewed by some readers with contempt, by others with alarm. (...) but the line we had chosen was one in which no “looking backward” was possible, and we struggled forward with what courage we might, hoping that the time would soon come when the truest and most earnest of our sex would be ready to take their stand beside us. (May 1, 1894, editorial “Our Anniversary”)

Content

In the course of this article it is only possible to give some glimpses of the topics dealt with in *The Dawn*. Like other women's newspapers and journals in Britain and America *The Dawn* covered a wide variety of topics from 'Women in China', to 'Woman's Suffrage in Norway' (when women got the municipal vote in 1901); advice on many topics, such as support for widows, inequality of education; health; child abuse (Oldfield 77); fancy work, 1896; and one on 'A White Australia,' Feb.1 1904. Other articles include dressmaking, "A Boy's Velveteen Suit"; "The Correct way to Play the Piano"; recipes; Poonah Painting and even a Children's Corner. As was customary the various women's journals and newspapers reprinted articles from each other. Louisa borrowed quite considerably from British newspapers, for example, articles by Keir Hardie, June 1, 1902; and Mona Caird's discussion of marriage series "Does Marriage Hinder a Woman's Self-development?" were included in *The Dawn* in July 1890.

Louisa attacked the picture of women portrayed in the press and elsewhere. She maintained that whatever a woman does she is framed in a negative context and treated with contempt, a comment still not uncommon in the twenty-first century. In *The Dawn* February 1891 she complains of the constant belittlement of women in the press all over the world, and its concurrent effect of subjecting womankind to intolerable jests, and hindering belief in themselves (May 5, 1890). Louisa considered male journalists should refocus their opinions away from "disquisitions on woman, her weakness, inconstancy, vanity and little failings innumerable." Instead authors should turn "the search light of genius" upon men and boys, because "a serious examination of modern social affairs, renders apparent the significant fact that women and girls in the mass, have a higher standard of action, and a finer moral tone, than men and boys in the mass possess." ("The Man Question, or, The Woman Question Re-stated." September 2, 1889)

Louisa is clear and unequivocal on what she considers typical attitudes to women in contemporary society. As Oldfield points out succinctly, "the best of Lawson's writing is elegant, logical and fervent dialectic. The worst is trite and sentimental, or full of bitter invective" (1992: 77). Some of Lawson's articles are to put it mildly sentimental—praising women and their qualities. She exhibits her tendency to criticize men, and also to take a religious attitude to the moral superiority of women, the effect of which is lessened by linguistic excesses, such as:

The time is coming when women will say to men, 'Come to me, undefiled, as I came to you,' and this is the basis of the so-called Woman's Rights. (...) It is to women the world must look for salvation, and before the 'coming woman' the army of priests and clergy, the cranks – one and all – will give way, and men will see themselves as they are and be ashamed. (April 1, 1897)

This is typical of many of the editorial comments where Lawson combines a religious based morality with critique of men and their dissoluteness. It is, of course, related to the fact that the campaign for votes in Australia was closely connected to that of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union against drunkenness. One wonders what impact this had on the readers as it is in marked contrast to British suffrage papers where there was less emphasis on the moral aspects, apart from prostitution, and more on the

potentialities which women had and could benefit society with, such as education and employment.

She sometimes attacked vitriolically the newspapers' and journalists' way of reporting women. In "Unfair Criticism" November 1893 she points out that more space is given in newspapers and journals to actresses who flaunt their abilities and sex, and ridicule those working for the vote. In 1890 she wrote,

Not one woman out of every hundred cares what is going on at the centres of fashionable society, and those who do, are proverbially known to be just those least likely to subscribe to a paper, hence the ignominious fate of every attempt to cater exclusively for them ("Ourselves", editorial, May 5, 1890).

In an article "Give Women Their Due" on the conversation of men she writes: "[v]ery few men think their mothers fools, or their sisters contemptible, yet it does not occur to them when they hear the whole sex belittled by a sneer, that their own women folk are involved." She considers it remarkable that the typical picture of a woman has not reduced them to living "down to the level of the witty obscenities and disdainful epigrams of these many centuries" (September 1, 1891, emphasis in the original). But Lawson can also be amusing as in the editorial on the "Woman versus Man Question":

From the time when Adam made the first paltry charge against Eve, men have been ever found ready to indulge in a querulous gerimede against the sex. Eve got the apple, and woman-like, gave Adam a bite, after which Adam went and told, putting all the blame upon her. Eve left Eden and the apples (and went to look for oranges, perhaps) and, like a sensible woman, forgave her mate and let the matter drop. (October 1, 1904)

This article continues in the same vein, showing how Eve tells Adam she can manage without him as he is "an old hen-wife, and we don't want him as he is." Given her own background Louisa was probably aware of more forms of discrimination against women than many of the other suffragists (Oldfield 1992: 228). Her own unhappy marriage to Peter Lawson no doubt contributed to her attitudes to romanticism and marriage, but it is noteworthy that she seldom shows bitterness or hatred in her writings. Her views on marriage as a necessity to survive are similar to those found among other suffragists in the US and Britain, though in the latter case the story was different as there the number of single women, estimated by some researchers as a surplus of up to one million, was a situation which was not paralleled in Australia. Louisa saw education as a catalyst for change. To her inequality of education was a key issue, having herself experienced what the lack of this meant. Several important editorials are on "The Education of Women" March 1, 1892 which according to Lawson after a certain age seems to concentrate on marriage, and does not give food to the soul.

Health was also an important issue, not least as contemporary views on women, learning and physical exercise were a source of contention. The article "Muscular Development of Girls," November 5, 1889 stressed the need for girls to have physical training, not just mental. "Muscular development not only conduces to healthfulness, but also to beauty of form." She even goes as far as to say "If a girl cannot have both muscular and mental development, then give her the most important, the muscular

development. Good common sense will help the lack of mental training.” European suffragists laid emphasis on intellectual abilities as being those which would enable women to compete with men on an equal basis. This perhaps shows us one fundamental difference between Europe and its old civilization, and a country like Australia, where an immigrant population was struggling to establish themselves in a foreign country and where agriculture was an important, if not dominant, source of livelihood at that time. Another example of health advice is the following:

COMPLETE REST.

“If you cannot sleep during the day,” said a physician to a nervous tired-looking little woman, “try and get at least half an hour’s absolute rest of mind and body in a darkened room. Throw off all tight garments, and in a loose wrapper stretch yourself out on a couch, close your eyes and think of nothing.”

Even if one does not feel the need of this afternoon rest, it is an excellent plan to take it benefiting as it does the eyes, the mind and the whole body. Thirty minutes complete rest every day will have a magical effect in relaxing the facial muscles and postponing wrinkles. (May 1, 1895)

Given that Louisa aimed at working women and those with little money the inclusion of the above seems somewhat incongruous.

Lawson also wrote on one of the contemporary issues which was in all women’s newspapers and journals: “The Coming Woman” (April 1, 1893, June 1, 1894, April 1 1897, May 1, 1899, Sept 1, 1900). To Lawson the ‘coming woman’ represented any aspect of women’s lives, whereas in the English press the ‘coming woman’ was mostly used for the feminist woman of the future—what she would become when given her rights and freedom—her behaviour was under scrutiny, and her way of dressing.

Votes for Women/Womanhood

The first suffrage meeting in New South Wales was held in 1889 May 23, “when, at the invitation of Louisa Lawson, a number of women assembled for the purpose of establishing an association of women whose object would be to consider various questions of importance to the sex.” From its second year 1889-90 *The Dawn* became the mouthpiece of the Women’s Cause until the Womanhood Suffrage Bill was passed in New South Wales in 1902. But Louisa Lawson is pursuing another path than that in England, where it was not just the vote, but also the right to stand for office that was prominent. In *The Dawn* of July 1, 1889, Lawson published a paper she had read at the Dawn club, beginning on a satirical note:

The popular idea of an advocate of women’s rights is this:—she is an angular hard-featured withered creature with a shrill, harsh voice, no pretence to comeliness, spectacles on nose, and the repulsive title, ‘blue-stocking’ visible all over her. Metaphorically she is supposed to hang half way over the bar which separates the sexes, shaking her skinny fist at men and all their works. (May 23, 1889)

She continues by taking up the traditional objections to women gaining the vote and describes how in other countries women have already proved their worth, using many of the same arguments that we find in the American and British press, echoing Mary Wollstonecraft's ideas, such as:

The whole principle of the justice of the woman's vote agitation may be compressed into a question:—

“Who ordained that men only should make the laws to which both men and women have to conform?” (July 1 1889)

Louisa takes up and answers many of the traditional objections to women getting the vote – such as lack of knowledge of politics and economics, a point equally relevant for many men.

Does housekeeping or any other woman's employment make any one more unfit to conscientiously and usefully record a vote than bricklaying or writing a ledger? It is not the right to rule that women want; they have no desire to change places with men; they only claim the right to record an opinion, a right difficult one would think to justly deny an intelligent creature. (July 1, 1899)

She refers to England where women are already on school boards (examples are from 1885-8), managing trade unions, have access to higher education, and she notes their successes, especially in medicine and the sciences—the same in the US. However, though she supported the Womanhood Suffrage League in NSW, Lawson did not make the vote the prime aim of her journal, as some critics have maintained.

An excellent article on suffrage in *The Dawn* is the one by Mrs. Orpha E. Tousey “A Few of the Reasons Why Woman Should Have the Ballot” which takes up women's position in the past and counteracts these attitudes. It is a three page excellently written and very clear analysis of the situation, though at times rather overtly flowery as in the concluding sentence:

The ballot is the fulcrum upon which laws, institutions and public policies rest —politics the lever which elevates or lowers the condition of races; and woman standing side by side with man—her intuitive perception combined with his executive force—is the only power that can conduct the Ship of State safely over the shoals and sandbars of these perilous times (April 5, 1890).

Anti-suffrage arguments are the same as elsewhere, mainly that women do not know enough about politics to vote—to which the answer is of course that neither do most men. “We are inclined to believe that a woman can form as good an idea as to the best man among Parliamentary candidates as the average man voter,” a good example of the clarity of her writing at its best (June 5, 1890). The cartoons published in *The Dawn* illustrating the fight for the vote are markedly similar to those in Britain, but adjusted to local situations. What I find interesting is the use in Australia of the term, Votes for Womanhood, rather than Votes for Women. This epitomizes Louisa Lawson's approach, and implies a much more embracing approach to women's rights issues, as the term ‘womanhood’ is often used of women collectively.

After the vote was finally won in New South Wales in 1902 Louisa concentrated on women's position in society. She talks of womanhood suffrage, and demands of women that they understand the duties that go with the vote, publishing articles instructing how to vote. "If she fails in this, her sacred duty, she is unworthy the name of woman, and should never have been raised to a position for which she is not strong enough" (editorial June 1, 1903). This sudden change is remarkable, as it is not found elsewhere in the fight for the vote. Maybe it indicates what Sheridan and Mathews posit, that basically Louisa Lawson was more interested in women's situation and her rights as an individual than the political battle. A point obvious even in her first editorial where she wrote "nothing concerning woman's life and interest lies outside our scope" ("About Ourselves", editorial, May 15, 1888).

This attitude is further underlined in the editorial of November 1, 1903 where she writes, "The redemption of the world is in the hands of women, and there is no power so potent for purification as the influence of woman! So let us be up and doing." This was in relation to news from America where there was a debate going on as to the expediency of women in Parliament, an issue taken up in "Sex in Politics" and "Women as Politicians" (November 1, 1903). Having got the vote she considers women should "turn her energies in the direction of compelling professional men, as well as civil servants and business men generally, to treat her with the respect that she is, as a citizen, entitled to" (March 1905).

Differences in approach between other journals and *The Dawn*

Because *The Dawn* was the primary mouthpiece of the suffrage campaign in Australia its influence was considerable. However, other Australian journals of the time such the *Worker* and the Brisbane based *Boomerang* sometimes took up women's issues. They were not entirely anti-feminist, but confined their comments on women to the Women's Column which in fact "referred to female suffrage as inevitable, and women's uses of it as an unknown potential" (Sheridan 1995: 75). For example, the *Australian Town and Country Journal* hailed *The Dawn* as a useful journal saying that "purporting to be written by women for women (...) [it] is well and clearly printed, and contains a good deal of miscellaneous information and original articles which ought to recommend it to the favourable notice of its fair readers." (<http://kattekrab.net/digital-dawn>) The use of the word "purporting" raises some queries as though the *Town and Country Journal* is doubtful as to whether the articles were actually written by women. The *Anti-suffrage Bulletin*, although an "avowedly democratic and radical paper" according to Sheridan, was hardly pro-feminist. In an editorial in late October 1887 on "The Great Woman Question" it stated that "women's enfranchisement just now means man's enslavement" because "the tendency of the feminine mind is almost invariably towards Conservatism" (1995: 75).

The Australian Women's Sphere published in Melbourne was another women's paper, "a monthly feminist journal" (trove.nla.gov.au). *The Sphere* was clearly and purposefully political and even goes so far as to apologize in one editorial for the emphasis on politics (October 1900). This is hardly surprising as it was run by Vida Goldstien, a pioneer of Australian suffrage. In 1903 she was the first woman in the

British Empire to stand as an electoral candidate, for the Australian Senate, a position she stood for five times but was never elected. In 1905 she writes that she moves to a shorter edition of the journal, because “the work of the Women’s Political Association for 1905 will absorb all my time.” Thus *The Sphere* was short-lived. The aim was to “make the periodical a means of keeping the supporters of the woman suffrage movement in touch with its progress and informed of the ways in which they can advance it” (February, 1901). It had many articles similar to those in British suffrage papers eg. October 1900 “How Women can Succeed in Business” “How to Choose a Career” (Oct. 10, 1903), and illustrated interviews with women who have made it, the first being “The Proprietor of the Book Lover’s Library” (October 1900). The extracts I have seen from this paper show that it is very like the British suffrage papers of the 1880s -1890s.

Another journal was *The Woman’s Voice* (1895) Started in 1894, six years after Louisa Lawson started *The Dawn*. The editorial February 23, 1895 states the intentions of the paper: “The paper is published especially in the interests of Women, but it will exclude the opinion of no individual and no class, so long as the subject is treated with moderation and in a spirit of calm enquiry” (Editor’s note May 18, 1895). It also ran “The History of the Women’s Franchise Movement” by Stephen Baker, J.P. Vice-President of the Australian Women’s Franchise Society, Victoria. *The Woman’s Voice* seems, from the few pages I have been able to access, to be much more concerned with the political aspects of the franchise and less concerned with women’s position in life generally. Given the above it is clear that *The Dawn* with its wide readership and breadth of approach to women’s issues was far more influential than the other journals for women, not least due to its tenacity in the market.

The recent digitalization of *The Dawn: Journal for the Australian Household*, initiated by Donna Benjamin, who raised funding for the project, (first published on Women’s Day March 8, 2012) marks yet again its importance. An article in *Connections*: an online newsletter for school library staff, stresses the relevance of this digitalization as the new history curriculum in Australia “identifies federation and suffrage as key themes.”

The last publication of *The Dawn* was in 1905 after Louisa had been through a terrible time when the Post and Telegraph department had taken her patent for closing mailbags and she had to fight through the courts to get it back. Ill health, after a fall from a tram, and the physic stress of the long legal battle made her decide to stop the journal:

as she knows none whom she could with confidence trust to continue this Journal on the unbiased and independent lines which has characterised it in the past—the independent woman journalist being as scarce as the good man politician—she contemplates ending her paper as she started it, quite upon her own responsibility. And while earnestly thanking her many faithful supporters, she sincerely trusts they will not, either by letter or verbally, try to persuade her to alter this decision. In bidding one and all “Good-bye”, her prayer to each is:
“WISH ME WELL.” (July 1905)

This is interesting in that around the same time the *Women’s Suffrage Journal* in Britain closed down because of the death of Lydia Becker who had been its editor for 30 years.

The reason for closure was totally different, as in Britain it was felt that Lydia Becker had been so responsible for the content that any change would mean a different kind of journal, whereas Louisa Lawson personally decided to close her journal.

Conclusion

I have in this short article tried to give some impressions of Lawson's *The Dawn*. It was undoubtedly a watershed in the fight for the vote and women's rights. Researching this paper has opened up many avenues to follow. Perhaps it is time for a good long look at the women's press of the nineteenth century and compare it to today's practice – what can we as women learn.

That Louisa Lawson was a pioneer in women's writing and media participation in Australia is beyond doubt. This was acknowledged by her contemporaries, for example in a note in *the Dawn* stating that Louisa Lawson "After fourteen years labor in the cause of suffrage by the voice of the people and press of New South Wales, Louisa Lawson has been declared pioneer of this glorious cause recently brought to such a successful issue. She has been introduced to the heads of the Government by leaders of the people as the Mother of Womanhood Suffrage" (October 1, 1902).

I end with the following tribute to her:

"To the Women of Australia December 1, 1902 article in *The Dawn*

I heartily join in conferring the honour of pioneer on Louisa Lawson, for she has nobly worked and won it, and her name will be handed down to the coming generations with pride and honour,

Too much honour cannot be bestowed on Louisa Lawson and her associates who have so nobly and strenuously worked to bring our right to its present standpoint. (signed 7. 7 7).

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