



Women Protest

Queensland History
Week

23 – 27 May 2022



QUEENSLAND HISTORY WEEK

23-27 MAY 2022

PROUDLY PRESENTED BY
QUEENSLAND HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION



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#QLDHISTORYWEEK

References:

Rosalie Bognor and Merle Thornton chained themselves to the bar at the Regatta Hotel in 1965. (Photograph - The Courier Mail.)
Article 'Chained up!' April 1965. Sunday Truth -State Library of Queensland.

Rendall, J., (2020) Merle Thornton recognised with honorary doctorate and 'Merle's Pledge' to fight corporate gender inequality.
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-15/merle-thornton-honorary-doctorate-university-of-queensland/12884090>

Women and Inequality, The Australian Women's Weekly (1933-1982) 23 November 1966
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/478137>



Stories of Queensland - Women Protest, Regatta Hotel

On the 31 March 1965 in Toowong Brisbane, Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bognor made headlines when they chained their ankles with a padlock to the foot rail of the bar in the Regatta Hotel.

The women were protesting the law, Section 59A of the Queensland Liquor Act, which excluded women from entering and drinking in public bars. Hotels and bars faced huge fines if they served women a drink. There were different responses and actions on the day and the weeks following the event. Some sympathetic male patrons brought the female activists a beer, but the media and police were soon alerted. After significant media coverage, Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bognor received hate male and criticism for staging the protest.

Despite the backlash, the brave action of Merle Thornton and Rosalie Bognor became the starting point for women's liberation in Brisbane. The Liquor Act was repealed later in the year and Merle Thornton established the Equal Opportunities for Women Association (EOWA) in 1965. As its president, Thornton led a successful campaign to repeal the 'marriage bar', which prevented married women from working in the Australian public service. The organisation also addressed pay inequality and the treatment of women in the workplace.

Thornton continued her service to women and while working as an academic at the University of Queensland, she introduced the first Women's Studies course in Queensland in 1973.

In 2020 Thornton was awarded the honorary doctorate of letters from the University of Queensland for her remarkable impact on women's rights movement in Australia. The UQ Vice-Chancellor, Debbie Terry explained that "Acknowledging and recognising that contribution through an honorary doctorate of letters is of course the highest honour that we bestow as a university."

The Regatta Hotel also acknowledged Thornton and the bar is now named Merle's Bar in her honour. This protest is considered a pivotal moment in Australian women's liberation movement.

Thinking Activity: THINK-PUZZLE-EXPLORE

- Think – what do you think you know about this topic?
- Puzzle – What questions or puzzles do you have about this topic?
- Explore – How might you explore the puzzles we have around this topic?

Extra for experts:

Watch the video ABC News Story from 1965 (4 mins)

<https://www.abc.net.au/education/four-corners-women-rattle-the-chains-in-public-bars/13722280>

Henderson, M (July 2013) 'Archiving the feminist self: reflections on the personal papers of Merle Thornton', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 41 (2): 91-104.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01576895.2013.806013>