

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN FACT FILE

EMMA CONSTANCE STONE (1856-1902)

First Woman Medical Practitioner and Feminist

1856	Born 4 December in Hobart to William Stone, builder, and his wife Betsy (Haydon). Educated at home by her mother, a former governess
1872	Family moved to Melbourne
1884	Studied medicine at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania, USA
1888	Graduated from Trinity College, University of Toronto, Canada
1889	Returned to Melbourne
1890	Registered as a medical practitioner in Victoria
1893	Married Rev David Egryn Jones
1895	Founded the Victorian Medical Women's Society
1899	Queen Victoria Hospital for Women and Children, Melbourne was opened
1902	Died 29 December in Melbourne
1975	Honored on Commemorative postage stamp

Emma Constance Stone, who was always known as Constance, was oldest of three children of broadminded English parents who let their two daughters choose what they wanted to do. After the family moved to Melbourne, Constance ran a small family school until 1884 when she left to study in the United States.

Constance, a quiet, fine featured woman with a high forehead and a strong, regular profile had, at an early age, developed an interest in anatomy and a desire to study medicine. However, at that time, women were excluded from the Medical School at the University of Melbourne as the subject matter was considered inappropriate for mixed classes, so Constance determined to study overseas. She completed a three year MD course at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where the teaching was excellent, and contrary to most medical schools, the practical work was especially good. To obtain British qualifications (and ensure registration in Australia) she went on to Trinity College, University of Toronto (Canada) from where she graduated MD, ChM with first class honours in 1888.

From Canada Dr Stone moved to London to the New Hospital for Women and Children, working with Dr Mary Scharlieb (considered the foremost woman surgeon of the time) and qualifying as a Licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries, then still the only medical qualification open to women. Here began her dream of setting up a hospital for women of all classes, staffed by women.

On her return to Melbourne in 1889, Constance applied to the Medical Board of Victoria for registration as a medical practitioner, and in the following year she became the first woman to be so registered in Australia. She opened a practice in Collins Street, but concerned for the many women too poor to visit her there, she volunteered her services to Dr Singleton's busy free Medical Mission in Collingwood, a 'slum' area.

In 1887 the University of Melbourne allowed women to enter the Medical School. Constance's sister Grace Clara (1860-1957: always known as Clara) was one of seven women whose insistent and influential public lobbying had led to this change. In 1891 Clara became one of the first two women to graduate in medicine from the University of Melbourne. She joined Constance in private practice and at the Collingwood dispensary, where they often handled sessions of up to 100 women and children.

A cousin of the girls, Emily Mary Page Stone (1865-1910) commenced medical studies in 1889 and graduated in 1893.

Constance, Clara and Mary were all involved in the early activities and networks of Melbourne's female doctors. The inaugural meeting of the Victorian Medical Women's Society was held in Constance's home in March 1895. The chief object of the society was *...effecting a closer relationship between medical women graduates and undergraduates and to advance the knowledge to further their interests generally*. Clara was the first president and all three women supported the Society throughout their lives.

On 4 July 1893, in the Congregational Church St Kilda, Constance married Rev David Egryn Jones, of the Welsh Church of St David in Latrobe Street. They had one daughter Bronwyn, who also became a doctor and joined the Queen Victoria Hospital medical staff in 1930.

By 1896 there were enough women doctors in Melbourne for Constance to realise her dream. At a meeting held on 5 September, Constance and ten others decided to set up a public hospital for women of all classes, staffed only by women. *Their vision and subsequent achievement was attributed to Constance's inspired leadership*. Beginning as an outpatients dispensary in St David's Church Hall, the hospital was soon inundated with patients from all over Victoria. Money was needed urgently for larger premises. Annette Bear Crawford, a suffrage leader, capitalizing on the euphoria engendered by Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, headed the committee that eventually led to the official opening of the Queen Victoria Hospital for Women and Children in 1899 with money provided by the Shilling Fund Appeal supported by women from all over Victoria. The £3162/11/9 raised was sufficient to buy a building to house the hospital, which eventually became one of the largest in the British Commonwealth.

Sadly, Constance did not live to see its full development as she died of tuberculosis at age 46 on 29 December 1902. She was described by one of her medical colleagues as *the real pioneer* who alone deserved all recognition for starting the Queen Victoria Hospital. Despite her short career, Constance's determination, impressive qualifications and overseas experience paved the way for medical women in Melbourne. She certainly succeeded in her aim of doing *useful work for the world*.

In 1975 Constance was one of six famous Australian women for whom a Commemorative postage stamp was issued to mark International Women's Year.

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* Held in JSNWL

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