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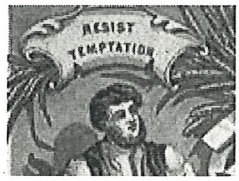
# Beginnings - NZ temperance m

## Dawn of the temperance movemer

Temperance was one of the threads of philosophy century settlers, along with many other aspects of British life and culture. The temperance movement had emerged in Britain and the United States early that century.




Band of Hope pledge card

Social reformers saw alcohol as the cause of many of the problems of industrial society, such as poverty, ill health, neglect of women and children, immorality and apathy. Temperance societies, mainly started by church groups, first appeared in the 1820s and 1830s. They required their members to sign pledges that they wouldn't consume alcohol. By the turn of the 20th century temperance campaigners were a major force in many western (especially Protestant) countries.

The use and abuse of alcohol was widespread in pioneering New Zealand, most visibly among e itinerant communities of men who worked the country's agricultural, maritime and industrial frontiers. It was often said that the main causes of death in colonial New Zealand were 'drink, drowning, and drowning while drunk'. In the late-19th century non-conformist churches encouraged abstinence among their congregations, and numerous temperance lodges were established throughout the country. Temperance was more popular in urban centres, where alcohol was seen as the enemy of the settled and respectable parts of society.

1886 Women's Temperance Union established

### A movement rises

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The temperance cause gained momentum during the 1880s. In 1886 advocates established the New Zealand Alliance, a national organisation that brought together the many local temperance groups to protest against licensing laws and distribute educational material. The Alliance urged Parliament to abolish the production and sale of alcohol once and for all. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), established in 1885, was also an important voice in the temperance campaign. Women were widely thought to be among the worst affected by alcohol, in an era when they were largely dependent on men for money to sustain e home and family. The WCTU would campaign strongly for women's political rights, helping New Zealand women win the vote in 1893.

Temperance supporters' first chance to challenge the place of liquor in New Zealand society came under the Licensing Act of 1881, which enabled each electoral district to elect its own licensing committee for the first time. The Act determined that licensing committees had 'discretion ... to grant or refuse certificates for licenses'. Temperance advocates realised that a sympathetic licensing committee could refuse to issue any liquor licenses, thereby making that electorate 'dry'. Success was far from certain, but it was worth a try.

Leonard Isitt

This question was put to the test in 1889, when Sydenham in Christchurch voted in a temperance-friendly licensing committee. L.M. Isitt and T.E. Taylor, who both went on to be national leaders in the temperance cause, were the organisers and leading figures. When the committee immediately rescinded all liquor licenses in the electorate, the publicans took them to court on the grounds that their action was never intended by the law. The court concluded that the committee had 'an incurable bias' against the liquor trade, and overturned their decision.

## A change of tactics

Temporarily defeated, Isitt and Taylor campaigned strenuously for the licensing laws to be amended so electorates could directly vote to become 'dry'. Attitudes towards temperance cut across party lines in Parliament, and it was an especially difficult issue for the Liberal government.

In 1893 Premier Richard Seddon introduced the Alcoholic Liquors Sale Control Bill, which was passed into law soon afterwards. This legislation was a clever compromise, offering a triennial licensing poll in which communities could vote to reduce the number of licenses in their electorate, or close the pubs completely (an option known as 'no-license'). But local prohibition would only be introduced if half the voters turned out and three-fifths of them voted to go 'dry'.

Many temperance supporters were sceptical, feeling that the high threshold would make prohibition extremely difficult to achieve. At the same time, though, New Zealand's landmark women's suffrage legislation potentially doubled the electorate; many people, on both sides of the temperance debate, felt that women would be more likely to support prohibition. The events of 1893 would launch a new era of temperance campaigning in New Zealand.

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