

# LawTalk

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NEW ZEALAND LAW SOCIETY

1869-2019



5<sup>th</sup>

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# A Changing Profession

NEW ZEALAND  
LAW SOCIETY  
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BY **GEOFF ADLAM**

On 26 March Āpirana Turupa Ngata (later Sir Apirana) is the first Māori to be admitted as a barrister and solicitor.

On 3 May Walter Scott Reid is unanimously elected the first President of the New Zealand Law Society. Solicitor-General for a record 25 years from 1875 to 1900, Mr Reid is the only in-house lawyer to have held the role.

On 10 May Ethel Benjamin becomes the first European woman to be admitted as a barrister and solicitor. She is followed nine years later by Matilda Monteith and Eliza Melville (both admitted 1906), Geraldine Hemus (1907), Annie Rees (1910), Hariette Vine (1915) and Lyra Taylor (1918).

In February the Gisborne District Law Society is founded.

On 7 June 10 King's Counsel are appointed: the first in New Zealand. 112 years later, 317 members of the profession have been honoured with the rank.

Sir Francis Henry Dillon Bell KC becomes President in January and remains so until 1918 – the longest tenure of any President. His equally long CV includes terms as Mayor of Wellington, a founder of Bell Gully, one of the first King's Counsel, Cabinet Minister, acting Prime Minister four times, and Prime Minister for 16 days in 1925.

11 September The Female Law Practitioners Act 1896 allows women aged 21 and over to be enrolled as a barrister or solicitor.

1896

1897

1901

1907



► **Dunedin Court opening 1902**  
Otago Witness, 2 July 1902. Photo courtesy of the Otago Daily Times