

The history of the Waikato Scientific Association (WSA) prior to being admitted as a member body of the Royal Society of New Zealand (1945-1954)

An Inaugural meeting was held on 23rd October, 1945 convened by Mr R.E.R. Grimmett who occupied the chair and a general discussion took place on the question of forming a local Scientific Association. It was moved by Mr W.H. Udy, seconded by Mr F.E. Mason that this meeting constitute itself the *Waikato Scientific Association (WSA)*. This was carried unanimously. A general discussion followed on the question of frequency of meetings, and the drafting of a constitution and these matters were left to a committee to finalise. The committee was made up of the Chairman: Mr R.E.R. Grimmett; Secretary/treasurer: Mr W.G. Whittlestone; and the Committee: Mr F.E. Mason, Mr W. H. Udy, and Mr K. J. McNaught. The attendance at this first inaugural meeting was 23.

The first committee meeting of the WSA was held on the evening the 1st of November, 1945. The business of the evening revolved around the drafting of a constitution, the organization of the first public lecture and booking of rooms. A tentative programme of regular monthly speakers was prepared at the 2nd meeting on February 25th, which included a talk on Atomic Energy by Dr Marsden in May of 1945. Meetings in the 1940s covered a range of topics and even included field visits and trips to labs (e.g. the Galloway Laboratory). Talks included for example, “the Use of Identical Twin Cattle in Animal Research”, “Great Botanists of New Zealand”, “the Uses of the Electron Microscope”, “Recent Research in Pear development”, and “Plant Hormones”. Meetings were regular and averaged 30 in number in 1947. Larger meetings were held at the Little Theatre in Palmerston Street in Hamilton and it was recommended in November 1948 to have as many meetings as possible in the newly opened Little Theatre.

Notable talks between 1945-1949 include:

- i) “The Role of the Expert Witness”, by Dr P.P. Lynch of the Wellington Hospital in May 1948, with 100 present
- ii) “The Nature of atomic energy and its social implications” in May 1948 by Dr W.G. Whittleston of the Ruakura Animal Research Station, with 60 present
- iii) “Department Inquires into the causes of facial eczema” in June 1948 by Dr Filmer director of the Animal Resarch Division, Department of Agriculture. Facial eczema was a new disease to New Zealand at the time and was believed to be caused by toxic grass. There were 130 present at this talk and it was followed by a lively discussion lasting an hour
- iv) “A Geographical History of the Waikato basin” by Professor J.A. Bartrum, of Auckland University College in July 1948. There were 70 present at his talk
- v) “Antibiotics and the Discovery of Penicillin” by Dr J. Melville, Director of the Plant Chemistry Laboratory, Palmerston North in July 1949.

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All notable talks were advertised widely in the Waikato Times and given excellent reviews.

At the AGM of the WSA on 21st November, 1952 in the Hamilton Art Gallery, Mr Grimmett described advantages of affiliation with the Royal Society, and described a possible organization where any existing members would have full status, and other members associate status of a local branch of the Royal Society.

The WSA was admitted as a member body of the Royal Society of New Zealand under the Royal Society of New Zealand, Act, 1933 on the 15th May, 1954. However, it remained the Waikato Scientific Association in name and it was only at the 1960 Annual General Meeting of the WSA, when it was unanimously resolved that the organization would henceforth be named the Waikato Branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand. This name would of course would need approval of the Royal Society in New Zealand. It was felt by the Association that this brings the Association in line with the other branches throughout the country. The branch was 7th in order of affiliation date after Auckland Institute, and the Wellington, Canterbury, Otago, Hawke's Bay and Nelson branches.

The members of the Royal Society of New Zealand Waikato branch were instrumental in setting up like-minded organizations or organizations in sympathy with the objectives of the Royal Society in the Waikato region. Special mention must be made for branch members campaigning for and setting up of a Centennial Museum in Hamilton with the groundwork done by the Hamilton Historical Society. Local members had a special interest in this connection since the Royal Society encourages its branches to aid in the establishment of museums in their localities. Museums would hold private collections of cultural and scientific activity in the community. A comparison was made in the way that the Auckland branch of the Royal Society gave active support to the Auckland Institute and Museums, for the benefit of the people of Auckland. Letters were subsequently sent out to various organisations to invite them to a discussion evening to consider the formation of a Waikato Museum Society to work for the establishment of a museum in Hamilton. This meeting was held at "Wintergarden", Hamilton's leading Social Centre. In support for museum facilities in Hamilton, it was pointed out that the modern tendency is to have smaller, more selective displays which are of general interest and to devote more space to educational and research facilities for the serious student, both young and old. Museums thus conducted become an important part of educational facilities and are vital in any progressive centre of population. It was during this time (1960), the Museums and Art Galleries Association suggested that a Museum of Technology should be established in New Zealand and the matter was taken up by the Royal Society of New Zealand with Hamilton suggested as a likely site for a Museum of Technology. It was also during this year, when the Museum of Transport was being established at the old pumping station in Western Springs in Auckland by the Auckland Public Relations Office. In 1970 the Waikato Museum was formally handed over to the Mayor of Hamilton for the future use of the people of the Waikato.

One of the objectives of the Royal Society is the provision of a common meeting ground (or platform) for scientists, interested members of the public and young people. Also, perhaps one of the main functions of the Society was that it should be to act as a kind of a coordinating body for the diverse activities of the various scientific societies in the region. The activities of the society in the 1960s and

1970s were varied with regular monthly meetings, field visits (e.g. to Ruakura, Rukuhia, Whatawhata research stations and Te Kauwhata Viticultural Research Stations), scientific film evenings, wine and cheese evenings, visits to laboratories, visits to research institutes and visits to industry (e.g. electricity companies, mining companies and the like). Members offered each other peer support and membership created a sense of 'belonging' and 'connectedness'. Meetings concluded with a well attended annual dinner at the end of the year when awards and honorary memberships (a class of membership) were presented. The 25th anniversary dinner was held in 1971 and addressed by his worship, the mayor of Hamilton.

Speakers at meetings were drawn from both professional and lay persons interested in science. Talks were not generally of a very technical nature and nor were they encouraged to be too technical. Speakers from DSIR and various Scientific organisations were approached to address members and blanket letters were sent out to industry to solicit speakers (e.g. a speaker in 1961 on Agrichemicals from Shell Oil NZ Ltd.). Newly appointed professors at New Zealand universities were often approached for talks, such as Prof John Morton, Professor of Zoology at The University of Auckland, in 1962 who incidentally was also a 'Waikatoan' and ex-Morrinsville college student). Talks were not only scientific in nature but also of general interest, such as a talk in 1975 on *A comparison on some aspects of the criminal and justice systems in Sweden and New Zealand*. From the nature of branch activities, members could best be classified as 'enthusiasts' and not just people learning to do their job better.

There were few women amongst the wider membership. The committees and branch presidents did include some very dedicated women (eg. Dr Charlotte Wallace in 1962). The following is a list of presidents compiled for use in a proposed centennial publication of 1967.

1953	E.B. Davies
1954	M.C. Gudex
1955	K.J. McNaught
1956	R.R. White
1957	A.G. Yarrall
1958	W.F. Roulton
1959	J. Adams
1960	(name requested from RSNZ)
1961	F. Dorofaeff
1962	Dr Charlotte Wallace
1963	G.E. Allan
1964	(name requested from RSNZ)
1965	J. Martin
1966	J. McCraw

There was a strong emphasis in the branch on science and technology teaching within local schools. The Royal Society (Waikato branch) sponsored a Science and Technology exhibition for primary and post-primary schools during the 1960s. In 1969 the institution of an annual award, the Royal Society

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(Waikato) Award was made to the Hamilton Junior Naturalists (very active today and known as the “Junats”, which began in Waikato in 1962) for the best original investigation by one of its members.

The University of Waikato was four years old in 1968 when the founding vice-chancellor Don Llewellyn received funding from the University Grants Committee (UGC) to build a School of Science. The four foundation professors, chemist Alex Wilson who became the first dean, soil scientist John McCraw, biologist Jim Prendergrast and physicist Bruce Liley, were all active members (at some stage of their careers) of the local branch. There was a lot of enthusiasm within the branch for gaining more links with the newly created Science School at University of Waikato. In 1968, the Society was offered the use of a suitable room at the University for its meetings with no charge for use of lecture rooms. In 1970 the new School of Science opened its doors. Regular meetings were held in the University Science block in the early 1970s.

Membership in 1970 was very high at 105 after an active membership campaign with an average of 23 (about 28% of total membership) attending meetings.

Don Llewellyn, the founding vice chancellor of the University of Waikato was named the first patron of the branch in 1970, and gave his continued support and interest in the branch’s activities.

There was always a strong association with issues facing the Waikato River by the general membership. A two-day symposium, organised by the Royal Society Waikato branch in conjunction with Waikato Extension was held in September, 1971 on *Waters of the Waikato* with contributors from all around New Zealand. In the words of Dr D.R. Llewellyn ‘This symposium is an overall look at the problems of water and land use in the catchment, enrichment of lakes and pollution of the river’.

The branch was affiliated to numerous groups such as the Reserves Advisory Council (Waikato branch) which catered for the outdoor needs of all types of people and made recommendations to land acquired by the crown to aid protection. The branch through the links with the Royal Society in New Zealand was active in making submissions of national significance, such as i) the Antiquities Bill (1974) which aimed at protecting and preserving Maori artifacts and pa sites, and ii) the zoning of national parks and scientific areas (such as marine reserves, archaeological sites, areas possessing geological features, and areas designated as research centres with experimental sites).