

A Brief History of Spiritualism in New Zealand

Spiritualism has been active since the mid to late 1800s in New Zealand. It is recorded that Spiritualist gatherings were being held in many parts of the country by 1875.

In addition, Spiritualists from both England and America travelled to New Zealand in these early years of the movement's development in our country. Some of these people are listed below.

- One of the first people to bring Spiritualism to New Zealand was Mrs Harris-Roberts. She arrived in New Zealand from England in 1866, and led meetings explaining the philosophy of Spiritualism.
- Emma Hardinge Britten was a well-known English spiritual medium, and an advocate for the early modern Spiritualist movement. She travelled to both Australia and New Zealand, arriving in New Zealand in 1879. Emma Hardinge Britten conducted meetings in both the North and South Islands, and her visit was followed by a significant increase in the number of Spiritualist meetings and circles held in this country. Emma Hardinge Britten is also credited with defining The Seven Principles of Spiritualism.
- In 1897 Dr. J.M. Peebles came to New Zealand. He was an American physician and author, with many of his books being about Spiritualist subjects. He gave lectures on Spiritualist philosophy, phenomena, and comparative religion.

Although Spiritualist gatherings were held since approximately 1875, it wasn't until around 1900 that these became organised church services in Christchurch and other parts of the country.

In 1907 the majority of established New Zealand Spiritualist Churches became part of the National Association of Spiritualist Churches. This Association preceded the formation of the Spiritualist Church of New Zealand (1924).

During the early 1900s New Zealand received regular visits from Spiritualist overseas speakers and mediums.

It should be noted that it was common at this time for some established Christian church leaders and congregations, to denounce the Spiritualist movement in this country. Early pioneers of the movement faced many obstacles, and undertook much hard work to become a recognised Spiritualist Church of New Zealand. There were also some prosecutions at the time for 'fortune-telling', under the New Zealand equivalent of the Witchcraft Act that was still operating in Britain.



A Brief History of Spiritualism in New Zealand

In 1920, the well-known author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, arrived in this country from England. He was a dedicated supporter of Spiritualism, and gave lectures in a number of places around the country. It is reported that his lectures provided the New Zealand Spiritualist movement with further stimulus and direction.

During this early period there were also a number of local mediums becoming well-known in the country. A psychic art exhibition was held in 1924. In addition, there was the development of a journal, and a magazine, both devoted to Spiritualist thought.

The first conference of the National Association of Spiritualist Churches was held in Wellington in April 1923. This led to the drafting of a Bill for presentation to Parliament, and on 22nd September 1924, an Act of Parliament was passed in New Zealand forming the Spiritualist Church of New Zealand (SCNZ), and giving Spiritualism in New Zealand legal status. Members of the Spiritualist Church of New Zealand organisation were mainly Spiritualist Churches, with only a few individuals becoming members under specific circumstances. This organisation focused on supporting Spiritual Churches throughout New Zealand and was highly successful for many years.

References:

Brief Sketch of Early Spiritualism in New Zealand, by Harold S. Sell.

Wikipedia references