

FOREWORD

Harriette Vine was the first woman law graduate of Victoria University of Wellington (VUW). Her Bachelor of Laws degree was conferred in 1913 and her Master of Laws in 1915 when she was 37 years old. She went on to practice in Whanganui at the firm of Treadwell & Gordon, where she worked for her entire career, practising in the areas of trusts, wills, banking and company law. Harriette was clearly devoted to her legal work, possessing her own very substantial law library, and she continued to educate herself more widely after her law degree, including by obtaining accountancy qualifications.

Evidently a community-minded and inspirational woman, Harriette was awarded the Order of St John for her work with St John's Ambulance, and later made a Dame of the British Empire in recognition of this work. Her non-conformity with prevailing social norms is put beyond doubt, if not by her legal career, by the fact that she obtained her pilot's licence at a time when very few women would have considered taking up such an interest.

Harriette died at age 84 in 1962, at which stage she was still working as a lawyer. She was in fact hit by a train while walking home from work, which was no doubt a great loss to her family, firm and the Whanganui community.¹

In spite of her evident dedication to her work, Harriette never became a partner in her firm. The first woman to be made a partner in a New Zealand law firm was Margaret Mackay who was made a partner at Lee, Grave & Zimmerman in 1946, but opposition from one of the other partners was so strong that her name was not added to the partnership list until he retired in 1961.²

Women continue, of course, to lag behind men in terms of advancement in the profession, notwithstanding that for over 20 years we have comprised the majority of law graduates. Many talented women choose to leave the law before reaching a senior level and women are substantially under-represented as partners or principals in firms, judges and Queen's Counsel. It is interesting to me, as a barrister sole, that comparatively few women choose to go to the Independent Bar in spite of the flexibility that career path offers, with approximately only 36 per cent of barristers being women.³ Clearly we, as legal women, still have much to achieve.

1 Research on Harriette Vine provided by Nancy Watters, Wellington Women Lawyers Association (WWLA) Convenor 2012–2013. Nancy acknowledges Victoria University of Wellington staff and Gordon Swan of Treadwell & Gordon for assisting with this information. See also Kay Morris Matthews *In Their Own Right: Women and Higher Education in New Zealand before 1945* (NZCER Press, Wellington, 2008).

2 "Life Members" Otago Women Lawyers' Society <www.otagowomenlawyersociety.com>.

3 "Gender" (2014) 836 Law Talk 9 at 9.

The Wellington Women Lawyers Association (WWLA) became an incorporated society in 1987, with its first stated objective being to "work for equal opportunity and the advancement of women in the study and practice of law".

Consistent with this objective, in 2013, 100 years after Harriette Vine's graduation, WWLA ran an essay competition with the topic *Harriette's challenges 100 years on: Same or different?*, which asked entrants to outline the challenges that confront women law graduates today and discuss possible ways to overcome these. Two winners were chosen, Monique van Alphen Fyfe and Amelia Guy-Meakin, both students at VUW Law School at the time of submitting. It is a great pleasure to see these published in this Special Edition of the *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review*, which has been made possible by the VUW Law School and particularly Associate Professor Elisabeth McDonald (who also framed the essay topic). Both of the winning essays are commendably reflective and mature, and well deserving of publication.

Shirley Smith's wonderful piece, "My Life in the Law" has been reprinted in this volume: that memoir, written for the first Special Edition in 1993, to some extent provides a stepping stone between the earlier experiences of Harriette Vine and the observations made by our essay competition winners.

WWLA is happy to see that the call for papers for the Special Edition yielded topics that are far wider than women in the legal profession, with authors exploring a range of legal issues from a feminist perspective, including the law of evidence, youth justice and the law relating to "wrongful birth". As an association of professional women, it is important to remember that gender inequality strikes more brutally when its victims are not university graduates in first world countries.

I should add that I have been privileged to become involved in this Special Edition at the very latest stage, as the recently appointed Convenor of WWLA for 2014–2015. Thanks are due to Nancy Watters, the WWLA Convenor for three years between 2010 and 2013, who became interested in Harriette Vine and had the original idea for the essay competition, as well as Katy Martley (the WWLA Convenor for 2012–2013), and committee members throughout that period who assisted with the essay competition and related (and very successful) panel discussion that took place at the Law School on Suffrage Day (19 September) in 2013.

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