



Suffrage stories

From an early age Emily dreamed of training as a doctor. She became a medical student at the Otago Medical School in 1891. Emily was careful to set a good precedent as New Zealand's first woman medical student. While she was studying, Emily signed sheet 97 of the 1893 Women's Suffrage Petition from her home in central Dunedin.

In 1896, Emily became New Zealand's first female doctor. After postgraduate study in obstetrics, gynaecology and children's medicine in Ireland, she set up a private practice in Dunedin. Her career was devoted to caring for women and children. She worked closely with midwives, Plunket and women's organisations.

Emily had visited a Women's Building in Vancouver and wanted a similar facility for Dunedin. An opportunity arose to build one as part of New Zealand's Centennial celebrations in 1940. Hopes were dashed when Dunedin Councillors withdrew their support and cut off access to funding. Emily's indignation turned to determination and she helped form the Otago Pioneer Women's Memorial Association in March 1939. The group successfully fundraised and purchased a building in 1942, which remains as a space for women to this day.

Emily was a courageous, determined woman who fought 'the wrongs of womankind' and wanted equal opportunities for women in higher education and the professions.

Emily Hancock Siedeberg

1873-1968



■ Emily Siedeberg McKinnon, first woman to graduate in medicine, 1896.
Credit: F.L. Jones photograph, Box 148-002, Te Uare Taoka o Hakēna – The Hocken Collections, University of Otago.



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