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**TOWARDS THE  
PROFESSIONALISATION OF  
NEW ZEALAND MIDWIFERY  
1840 - 1921**

**A thesis presented in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Philosophy  
in Midwifery at  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the reasons behind the move to formalise New Zealand European midwifery care in 1904 and the impact this had on midwifery practice. 'The Midwives Act, 1904' concentrated on providing a training system for midwives, hence traditional midwives found their duties circumscribed by their lack of knowledge and training. While women were seen as the appropriate case managers for women during parturition, the Midwifery Act set in place regulations that required advanced knowledge and set standards of practice. The setting up of a nation-wide structure at St Helens Hospitals<sup>1</sup> for the training of midwives reinforced the role of the trained midwife, who in some instances was also a trained nurse, and began the move towards the hospitalisation of maternity patients which came to fruition around 1938.

The contention of this thesis is that the Midwifery Act contributed to the development of professional standards of midwifery practice leading to a more professionalised midwifery service in place of that which had, until 1904, been unstructured and informal. Through the inclusion of scientific developments into the syllabus of instruction the Midwifery Act gave formal direction to the training, examination and practices of midwives. Finally, it brought to the fore the trained midwife and single woman who replaced the traditional married midwife.

The developments and changes in midwifery that occurred following the 1904 Midwifery Act had their beginnings well in advance of the Act. Maternal and infant mortality and morbidity rates had become a concern in England during the 1860s. As early as 1867 maternity lying-in hospitals were beginning to develop protective mechanisms to prevent infection. In New Zealand an unstructured midwifery service comprised mainly of traditional midwives developed from 1840. Stringent use of antisepsis and advanced, professional, midwifery knowledge did not influence these midwives' practices until 1904 when the Midwives Act was implemented leading to the demise of the traditional midwife.

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<sup>1</sup> St Helens hospitals does not have an apostrophe.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Abstract	i
	Acknowledgments	ii
	Table of contents	iii
	Abbreviations	iv
	List of Tables	v
	List of Figures	vi
	Introduction	1
Chapter One	Phases in the Development of a Profession	14
Chapter Two	The English Midwives Act	27
Chapter Three	New Zealand European Midwifery Practice Pre 1904	37
Chapter Four	New Zealand European Midwifery Practice: Introducing the 1904 Midwives Bill to Parliament	54
Chapter Five	Training and Education of Pupil Midwives 1904-1913	68
Chapter Six	New Zealand European Midwifery Post 1904: The Effects of Formalisation - A Professional Career for Women	89
Conclusion	The Impact of Formalisation on New Zealand European Midwifery	107
	Appendix 1	120
	Appendix 2	131
	Appendix 3	136
	Bibliography	142

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJHR	Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives.
BCL	Bradford City Library, West Yorkshire, England.
BPS	British Practical Statutes.
CMB	Central Midwives Board.
JN-M	Journal of Nurse-Midwifery.
JNNZ	The Journal of the Nurses of New Zealand.
LOS	London Obstetrical Society.
MCNN	Midwives Chronicle and Nursing Notes.
NM	Nursing Mirror.
NZG	New Zealand Gazette.
NZL	New Zealand Listener.
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates.
NZOYB	New Zealand Official Year Book.
NZS	New Zealand Statutes.
TBID	The Bertillon Index of Diseases.
SCNZ	Statistics for the Colony of New Zealand.
SDNZ	Statistics for the Dominion of New Zealand.
WARC	Wellington Archives.
WDNZFU	Womens' Division of the New Zealand Farmers' Union.
WARC	National Archives of New Zealand. Wellington.
WTU	Alexander Turnbull Library.

**LIST OF TABLES**

Introduction	Table 1	7
	Table 2	7
	Table 3	8
Chapter One	Table 4	17
	Table 5	17
Chapter Three	Table 6	43
	Table 7	44
	Table 8	50
Chapter Five	Table 9	62
	Table 10	62
	Table 11	72
Chapter Six	Table 12	92
	Table 13	95
	Table 14	98
	Table 15	103
	Table 16	104
	Table 17	121
Appendix 1	Table 18	122
	Table 19	123
	Table 20	124
	Table 21	125
	Table 22	126
	Table 23	127
	Table 24	128
	Table 25	129
	Table 26	130

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Chapter Four	Figure 1	57
Chapter Five	Figure 2	74
	Figure 3	74
Chapter Six	Figure 4	94