

FAMILY LAW REVIEW

Volume 2, Number 1

December 2011

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History of the Family Law Act and the Family Court of Australia – Hon R S Watson AM	
In this article, Justice Watson, one of the drafters of the original <i>Family Law Act</i> and a judge of the first Family Court of Australia, has described the background and events which culminated in the eventual introduction of no-fault divorce and other reforms under the <i>Family Law Act 1975</i> (Cth), and the creation of the “helping court” for families, with a focus on counselling and friendliness. Justice Watson has recorded the movement for divorce law reform which emerged in the 1960s and continued through the 1970s; the lengthy progress of the Family Law Bills through Parliament; the movement for the creation of a dedicated Family Law Court; and the challenges involved in setting up and operating that court in its earliest days.	6
The “helping court”: Exploring the therapeutic justice origins of the Family Court of Australia – Helen Rhoades	
Opened in 1976, the Family Court of Australia was created as a specialist jurisdiction for resolving family disputes. Incorporated into its design were an in-house counselling service and a mandate to conduct proceedings without undue formality. Underpinning these innovations was a desire to offer separating couples a less adversarial and more supportive environment in which to negotiate the end of their relationship. Yet, despite the hopes of the policymakers of the day, the new Family Court quickly garnered significant public criticism, and its judges soon became the targets of death threats and attacks. This article draws on interviews conducted with some of the court’s original personnel to investigate this history and its implications for the modern family law system’s integrated services models and therapeutic justice goals.	17
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