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RECENT ARCHIVAL ACTIVITIES IN NEW ZEALAND

On the rare occasions when I am invited to speak to an audience I find it difficult to decide whether an invitation has been extended on the grounds of an anxiety on the part of the organisers to provide that which they consider to be the best that is offering at the moment, or whether in desperation I have been invited on the grounds that 'no-one else wants to speak and he's usually good for 30 minutes anyway'.

Perhaps on this occasion my recent arrival from across the Tasman may have prompted a curiosity on your part to know what is going on, archivally speaking, in New Zealand. Not that I have found such a curiosity about each other on any other grounds to be part of the normal make-up of New Zealanders and Australians.

I understand that Australians have a high opinion of the New Zealand bred race horse and a contempt for its cricket. In turn I must remind you that the citizens of New Zealand are inclined to regard Australians as just a little bit boisterous, and yet somehow incapable of producing skills with a rugby ball to match the immortal All Blacks.

Most of you will have read Anthony Trollope's two volumes devoted to a visit to Australia and New Zealand, and if so you may remember that he wrote

'It may be well to any who have omitted New Zealand from their acquired geography, that the colony bearing that name consists of the North Island, the Middle Island and Stewart Island'.

The New Zealand Official Yearbook gives a little more detail and claims that the Dominion is approximately 103,000 square miles, which is roughly one-third of the area of the State of N.S.W. The only other point I would emphasise is that before New Zealand was administered centrally a provincial system of government operated, which bears some similarities with the Australian state government pattern.

Speaking archivally, before 1950 New Zealand had an archivist in charge of the Dominion archives which eked out a sad and potentially inflammable existence in a series of musty attics above the General Assembly Library in Wellington. Beside this collection there were considerable quantities of Departmental Records all over the country in varying states of preservation, but most, I suspect, untouched for many years, unwanted and mostly unloved.

In 1950 the New Zealand Library Association included an archives seminar in its annual Conference. In the following Conference a main session was devoted to archives and as a result, the New Zealand Library Association Archives Committee was born. Its terms of reference were broad - a request that it look into the question of the care and preservation of records in New Zealand. In succeeding Conferences, the faithful few gathered together, discussed and read papers to each other, remaining firmly a part of the N.Z.L.A., and remaining firmly of the opinion that for the time being, at least, archives and books should remain as close as love and marriage.

This did not imply that librarians are the proper people to look after archives. Rather, it was felt that since archivists would be rare in New Zealand for some time to come, librarians might find it necessary to assume this added responsibility, and thus might be obliged to acquire new techniques

for that purpose. Incidentally, you may regard these last few words as a mere reporting of the New Zealand situation, or, if you take them in conjunction with Chapter 3 of Dr. Schellenberg's Modern Archives,¹ you may be provoked to some wrath, or comment, or both.

In the beginning, the work and progress of this New Zealand Committee was not very spectacular, but later, its efforts received greater publicity following a large fire in Wellington which destroyed or damaged a considerable corpus of government records. Not long afterwards, the archives staff and some of the now called National Archives not Dominion Archives were moved into more reasonable quarters. New Zealand was beginning to be archive conscious. The National Archives staff had already produced in 1953, an admirable "Guide to the Dominion Archives" and have since produced several preliminary inventories to the collections. Moreover I understand that there is a good chance of an archives act being passed this session. The act will define public archives as public records that have been preserved for reference purposes by the Government Office which originally accumulated them, its successor or the National Archives. Public records are to be defined as all documentary materials made or received in the normal course of its transactions by any Government office. Public archives of the age of twenty-five years or more must be transferred to the custody of the National Archives except when they are required for current business and in a few other cases. The act appoints a Chief Archivist who is to be in charge of this under the Minister of Internal Affairs, and he may give such advice as he deems necessary for the efficient and economical management of the public records.

From the beginning the New Zealand Library Association Archives Committee concentrated on local authorities. In this respect New Zealand is very well served since, at present, there are more than 900 of such authorities, many having a history exceeding 100 years. In addition there were a large number of authorities, now defunct, whose records are still in existence.

There are two kinds of local authorities - the territorial and the ad hoc authority - I imagine that you are familiar with most of them. The territorial are self explanatory - Counties, Corporations, Road Boards, Town Boards and the like. Ad hoc authorities are those which cannot be confined to the boundaries of a territorial authority, e.g. Power, Harbour, Drainage, Catchment, Hospital, etc.

The Committee's main object was to conduct a survey of local records throughout New Zealand. Before describing the actual survey operation it would be appropriate to describe the make-up of the Committee and the kind of co-operation we sought to enlist. With one exception, the original committee consisted of Librarians and the officer in charge of the Dominion (now National) Archives. Later it was felt that the Committee would benefit if some local authority official not necessarily a member of the New Zealand Library Association,

1. T.R. Schellenberg. Modern Archives: principles and techniques (c. 1956).

could be persuaded to take membership. In this way the Town Clerk of one of the largest cities was added to our Committee. His role was to pass on to the Municipal Association and the Town Clerk's Institute information relating to our activities in the field of local archives. This proved to be most helpful and so the next step was to enlist the support of the New Zealand Counties Association. This was arranged and each County Clerk was asked by the Association to help us in every way. Following this, Government approval was sought for our survey. The reply from the Department of Internal Affairs is important since it indicates a pattern of approved repositories distributed throughout the country.

"Another thought that occurs to me is the desirability of having one records centre in the principal towns, wherever it is decided that records shall be deposited. Again, although this department is not concerned with the central depositing of local body records, it is recognised that for practical purposes the concentration of both governmental and local body material should best be at one point.

Now that Cabinet approval has been given to further steps being taken with regard to Government Archives, it is probable that definite action will be paid to local depositories in the near future, and a certain amount of consultation between the Library Association Committee and this Department will be desirable".

Three important points emerge from this letter. Firstly, it is recognised that government archives should be, in some measure, decentralised and be located in the principal towns. Secondly, the Department would like to see a concentration of both government and local records in such records centres, and thirdly, the New Zealand Library Association will be consulted when the question of local depositories is under consideration.

In addition to this letter, the Secretary for the Department of Internal Affairs was good enough to arrange for a further letter to be sent out to all local authorities. It is worth quoting in full, for it commends to all local authorities the work of the Archives Committee and expresses an official interest in the preservation of records.

20th October, 1954.

The Clerk or Secretary,
All Local Authorities.

Dear Sir,

Local Body Archives

The New Zealand Library Association is keenly interested in the preservation of archives, and to this end has set up an

Archives Committee to inquire into the need to preserve documents and the methods of collection and preservation. The Committee's main project at present is a survey of local records of the country. In furtherance of this project the various branches of the Association together with the Archives Committee are attempting to survey the records of local authorities. So far as possible this is being done by personal visits to each individual local authority.

This department commends to all local authorities the work being done by the Association in surveying their records.

The object of this survey is to discover which of the records that local authorities have accumulated (such as minutes, correspondence, etc.) are valuable for research. Many of the records that local authorities accumulate in the normal course of their activities for their own administration, legal or fiscal purposes come to possess, in the course of time, values for research purposes. They may document the beginnings and development of communities and the growth of local government, they may reflect significant trends in the economic and social progress of communities, or they may contain information on many fields of local activity, such as communications, transport, public utilities, agriculture, or industries. Such records are valuable not only because they are often unique and contain information that is not available elsewhere. These records may have lost or may be about to lose their original usefulness to the local authorities that accumulated them, but it is in the public interest to preserve those that possess or that have come through the course of time to possess values for research.

The aim of the New Zealand Library Association is to try to ensure the preservation of such records and to make them available to research workers in cases where it is proper to do so. In some cases this will involve the deposit of these records under mutually agreeable conditions in approved institutions, such as libraries and museums.

This Department fully approves of these aims and strongly recommends local authorities to co-operate to the fullest extent with the New Zealand Library Association in this work, and to refrain from destroying records that may possess values for research purposes. Any enquiries on this subject may be addressed to this Department or to the Convenor of the Archives Committee of the New Zealand Library Association, Mr. F.H. Rogers, Librarian, University of Otago, Dunedin.

Yours,
(signed) A.G. HARPER
Secretary for Internal Affairs

Prior to launching the survey, the Committee prepared a standard proforma.

New Zealand Library Association Local Records Survey

1. Name of authority
2. Date of inception
3. Records held e.g. Minute Books
Letter Books
Correspondence
Rate Books
Valuation Rolls
Special Reports

N.B. These types of records are merely examples of those usually held.
Any other kind of record should be listed.
In all cases covering dates and details of records should be listed.

4. Details of any authority which the present authority has taken over.
(This section should include details of any records in existence).
5. Has any research worker used the records? If so has any work been published as a result?
6. Does a policy of destruction of records exist? If so give brief details.
7. Would the authority be willing to deposit its early records in a recognised archives institution should such a facility exist in the area?

Quantities of these questionnaires were sent to Branches of the New Zealand Library Association whose members had agreed to regard the survey as a branch project. Each Branch received a detailed briefing and was asked to indicate the area for which it would assume responsibility. Those areas beyond Branch responsibility were then deemed to be the responsibility of the Central Committee. My own experience as a member of a Branch and its approach to the survey might be of some interest. In the first case a sub-committee was formed and a list of authorities was compiled. This was set down in card form, each entry under the name of the town containing the headquarters of the authority in question. This meant that people could offer

to take care of a particular town. Such volunteers could be local librarians, adult education lecturers, branch members on holiday, and so on. This method was adopted because it was felt that the personal approach was the best approach. This method meant that the survey officers were always preceded by letters from the Department of Internal Affairs, from the County Clerks' Association or some form of endorsement of the scheme by the Municipal Association or Town Clerks' Institute. Where personal contact was impossible, postal channels were employed. The results were, not surprisingly, somewhat uneven, but a considerable corpus of information was acquired which is proving of inestimable value to research workers.

During this period the Central Committee continued to receive returns from the Branches and, at the same time, considered its own postal survey in areas not covered by Branches. As the various returns were received they were examined carefully, sometimes referred back for clarification and then the final results were transferred to 8 x 5 cards. From this master set several copies were produced to be deposited in various parts of the country. The arrangement of these results is arbitrary. A geographical arrangement will reveal the strength and weaknesses of all kinds of records in a given area, whereas an arrangement under kinds of authorities will reveal a totally different kind of information.

At the same time the Archives Committee was well aware of the lack of informed advice on the preservation of records. Therefore, in 1955 the Committee produced An Elementary guide to archive practice. A brief introduction attempted to define the meaning of archives and the responsibility for preservation, while subsequent chapters were devoted to a description of the kinds of organisations which produce archives, the retirement of records, cataloguing, calendaring and classification of records, care and repair of records, a list of archival terms and a select bibliography. Finally the guide contains, as an appendix, a draft agreement for the taking over of records. As soon as the guide was completed the names of four archives consultants approved by the N.Z.L.A. Council and situated in four main centres were announced. Since then, small pamphlets have been sent to all local authorities offering advice on records preservation. That, in effect, is the brief story of records preservation in New Zealand from 1950 to 1955.

I think that we may conclude, therefore, that the New Zealand Government is interested in the decentralisation of its own records and, moreover, is prepared to bless a venture associating local and national records in one archival institution. It recognises that such institutions must, for some time to come, for reasons of finance, public interest, and political expediency or necessity, be associated with libraries and librarians. But it does not follow that such a state of affairs is either

desirable or that it need exist permanently. I feel that such a pattern of decentralisation within New South Wales is possible, although it would be wrong to deviate from the view that we must have trained archivists in charge of archives, who must be able to command a financial vote, however modest, whether such demands are made through a library or not. Speaking as a newcomer, I wonder just how far we are prepared to recognise this necessity for a decentralisation of State Records and the possible setting-up of provincial archival institutions, housing state and local archives besides business and private records relating to any particular area. If there was any kind of guarantee forthcoming that such material could be adequately housed and cared for in a proper manner, then we should look at it very carefully. It has been said recently that the only possible remedy is that state capitals should become the centre of what is equivalent to provincial archives, if only for the reason that in those places alone will there exist sufficient resources capable of giving the records adequate treatment.¹ If, for example, it could be demonstrated that within the framework of its library system, the University of New England was willing to develop an archival institution and maintain it by employing accepted standards of staffing, buildings, etc., would much of the argument against decentralisation be removed? I am sure that a discussion on this matter alone would prove most fruitful.

We might also have time to discuss one further point made by the same writer², for he believes that Universities could provide archivists with instruction in the techniques of researching for and writing local history, and make themselves responsible for the training of archivists involving the treatment of private records. Here is a viewpoint with which, in this context, I must disagree. The training of archivists must be done by archivists in the same way that librarians must be trained by librarians. Moreover, researching for and writing local history should not be a prime factor in the make-up of an archivist.

In conclusion I would like to quote from the introduction of the New Zealand Library Association guide to archive practice, in which a definition of an archivist is attempted.³

"The archivist is an official appointed as custodian and administrator of archives. His first duty is, besides that to the authority which he serves, to the records entrusted to his care.

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1. Penny, "The problem of local records" Historical studies Australia and New Zealand. May 1956.
 2. See Supra.
 3. This, as I remember it, is largely the view of the Society of Local Archivists (Great Britain).

On him is the onus of seeing that they are properly housed, preserved, and calendared or catalogued. If he be in charge of an institution to which the public has a right of access, he has a further duty to make the records accessible to students and to the public generally, under suitable arrangements for safeguarding them. The archivist is not appointed to extract his records for the sole purpose of writing historical monographs based upon their study. It is, therefore, not essential that he should be an historian. A good knowledge of history, national and local, and particularly administrative, is a valuable qualification, but a history degree, coupled with a 'love for ancient papers', does not make an archivist. In addition to his particular routine duties, it is his further interest to promote, in every way he can, the preservation of archives generally".

That, I submit, is enough for any one person.

F.H. Rogers,

University of New England.

THE ARRANGEMENT AND DESCRIPTION OF PRIVATE PAPERS

Suggestions for field workers listing private papers in Australia with a view to the compilation of a central register.

At the Library Association's Conference held in Brisbane in August 1955, the Committee of the Archives Section appointed a sub-committee to outline principles of arrangement and description for private papers in this country.

The committee was anxious to provide guidance for the research workers, historians and librarians who might have the opportunity of surveying such papers.

Detailed examination and description such as is suggested here may not always be possible, but it is hoped that the procedure outlined will lead to standardisation of description and arrangement.