OTAKI HISTORICAL SOCIETY (INC.)

HISTORICAL JOURNAL VOLUME TWENTY

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EDITORIAL

by Gordon Dempsey

I WOULD like to record what a great pleasure it is for me to be invited to write this editorial. Little did we think, way back in 1977, that the Otaki Historical Society would continue as one of the strongest Historical Societies in New Zealand. And one of its great strengths has always been its well-known *Journal.*

At the end of the first editorial I wrote: 'We trust that the seed sown will fall on fertile ground.' And indeed it did. Amazingly fertile. How long can a district keep on recording its history? We thought that if we aimed for five years we'd be doing well. Never in our wildest dreams did we think we'd reach the twenty year mark. But here it is. Absolutely remarkable. Everyone connected with the Society can be justifiably proud. I can recall in the earliest days when we had so few writers that we even despaired of ever getting out a new issue. But as the deadline for printing each *Journal* approached, the manuscripts appeared and its popularity seemed to go from strength to strength.

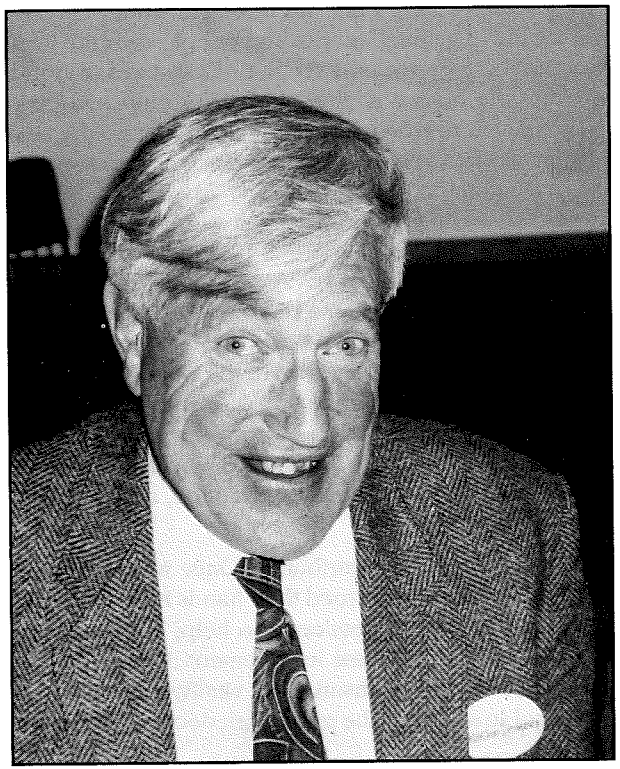
This progress I put down to two things in particular. First, our OHS *Journal* has always been full of *interest and variety.* We deliberately set out to cater for everyone – Maori and European; academics and whatnots; and, while we did have some scholarly contributions, the articles have been mostly of general interest and people-centred. I can remember people commenting how thrilled they were to see their Grandad's or Aunty Pat's photo 'in print', and to know that the history of their society or club had been recorded. There was even some excitement as to who or what would appear on the next cover! What we didn't realise until later was that we were riding the wave of the emerging school of social history that hit New Zealand in the late 60s and early 70s. Stemming from one or two people in our universities this exciting new approach to history gradually began to influence we ordinary folk, and we began to see that history wasn't just dry academics about the Romans, or Magna Carta, or Kupe's voyage of discovery (not that they are 'dry'!) but had to do with why Great-grandad came out to New Zealand in the 1870s, and what the Plunket Society has meant to Otaki, and how our Main Street shaped up over the years. This is what gave rise to the intense interest in the people-history of communities all over New Zealand, and resulted in the formation of many historical and genealogical societies. It's been a healthy approach. It's made us much more aware of who we are and what we're on about. It's helped us to be sensitive to where others come from, and to respect each other's point of view. So, long may it continue, and long may the OHS continue to produce a *Journal* for ALL people.

The second strength of the *Journal* has been the contributors. Once we were under way an amazing variety of people offered support and turned their hands to writing local and regional history. We were lucky to have a few professionals to help, but most of us were quite untrained, and for some it was a scary first-time involvement. But out of it all has come enthusiasm and new-found skills that have ensured the vitality and quality of the *Journal.* As I pay tribute to all those noble souls and the great work done by successive

editors and committees, I am deeply conscious that some are no longer with us. They were my friends, and great friends of the OHS. I miss them. It was around these dear people, and a wonderful band of stalwart contributors with us today, that the OHS was largely based. The people of the Horowhenua, and of Otaki in particular, owe them a huge debt of gratitude. I hope you appreciate their efforts, and continue to support the *Journal* and its present contributors as you have in the past.

Will people still be writing our history in 2017? Will the *Journal* reach its fortieth or fiftieth anniversary? I really hope so. There will always be people, and there will always be people who want to know about people. And it's people who make history. They're the most fascinating creatures on God's earth. And as long as we retain our curiosity, our search for identity, our need to know why things are as they are so that we can plan wisely for the future, there will be people recording our social history. That's why we need our OHS and its amazing *Journal.*

Congratulations to you all. May the young tree continue to blossom and fruit into the next exciting century.



Gordon Dempsey, first chair of OHS, at the twentieth anniversary dinner, 7 October 1997.
Photo: Geoffrey Wood

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

The twentieth volume!
In this issue, two themes dominate: the beach and public health. It is also a delight to be able to publish Charles Royal's scholarly essay on waiata. We continue the exploits of Hubert Ostler in the Ohau Valley and conclude Phil Barton's meticulous account of the mapping of the Tararua Range. Two accounts of the area by early travellers, Father Poupinel (1858) and Constance Astley (1898), came to my notice by good fortune. Thank you to all contributors, both Otaki residents and those from Auckland, Palmerston North, Wellington and Dunedin.

Twentieth anniversary dinner
What a night! What good fellowship! What oratory – stirring, funny and moving! What food! Jennifer and I were honoured to be your guests.

'Kuia': a mystery solved
In Volume 19 we appealed to readers on behalf of the New Zealand Portrait Gallery for clues to the identity of a portrait painted by Maud Sherwood at Waikane about 1910. Daphne Meyer also arranged for an article in the press. On May 14 1997, Judy Williams of the gallery wrote to our secretary:

> As a result of the article Sean Molloy wrote for the Levin *Chronicle* at the end of last year (which you inspired) Mr Frank Padden rang me up. He said he thought that 'Kuia' was his grandmother's sister, Rongo Eruini.
>
> Now at last we have met Mr Padden who lives in Otaki and have heard the whole story. His parents died when he was young and he was looked after by his grandmother, a much younger sister of Rongo Eruini. Rongo's father, Te Marau Eruini, was a chief whose territory included Petone Beach and Waikanae. Rongo died in 1943 when she was about 96 and Frank Padden was six. He actually helped his grandmother to lay out her sister, his great aunt, and is quite certain of her identity .... So thank you again for your help. The owner of the portrait is delighted and so are we.

Replica of Will Scotland's propeller
The flight by Will Scotland from a paddock south of the Otaki River in 1914 was described in last year's *Journal.* On 29 August the *Otaki Mail* reported that Jeff Fox, a restoration craftsman based at Manakau, had created an exact replica of the propeller of Scotland's Caudron aeroplane. He employed a copy router, which is designed to carve out an exact copy of any wooden object mounted on it. Six laminated layers of kauri took the place of the original's French walnut. The original propeller, gouged by branches of the tree with which the plane collided at Newtown, was put on display by Paraparaumu Trustbank on behalf of the Museum of Aviation, while the replica went to Wellington Aero Club.