

Archives for New Zealand Social History

THE EASIEST and most frightening way to begin a review of archival sources for New Zealand social history is to enumerate those which are known to be no longer available. These are chiefly official. The greatest and most obvious loss is the individual census schedules which overseas are such a staple article of diet for historical research. In New Zealand only a few fragments relating to Auckland and Nelson in the 1840s remain; the individual schedules from the first general census of the population in 1851, then held triennially till 1881 and at quinquennial intervals from that date until 1961, have been systematically destroyed. The 1966 schedules exist on microfilm, and the Statistics Act 1975 now permits the Chief Archivist to select individual schedules for permanent retention. The loss of the census schedules has placed a premium on the survival and use of the registers of births, deaths and marriages in the office of the Registrar-General in Lower Hutt and in the offices of the District Registrars. Unfortunately the Registrar-General's office, with statutory scales of fees for its services, is simply not adjusted to the needs of the academic researcher, who may require to consult hundreds or thousands of entries, making research cumbersome and expensive. In his report, *Archives in New Zealand* (1978) Dr W.I. Smith, Dominion Archivist of Canada, recommended that the older registers be transferred to the National Archives to facilitate research. If this is not found possible, a firm arrangement specifically related to the needs of scholars will need to be negotiated with the Registrar-General.

Fire has taken the archives of the Wellington, Auckland and Marlborough Provincial Governments prior to 1856, 1872 and 1876 respectively. The Parliament Buildings fire of 1907 was disastrous for the destruction of all the registered files of the Maori Affairs Department from 1840-1891 containing its inward letters, though happily most of its other nineteenth-century records (including registers and outward letters) survive. Most unfortunate of all, the Hope Gibbons fire in 1952 removed, amongst other things, the surviving Agriculture Department registered files to 1920, the yearly numbered files to 1912 and closed

parts of registered files to 1952 of the Labour Department (established 1891), and all the lands yearly numbered files to 1891 of the Lands and Survey Department. Administrative action was responsible for the pulping about 1942 of most head office Education Department registered files prior to the 1930s, and for the destruction of most Health Department registered files prior to the 1920s and of practically all Police Department head office files after 1904. The records of the Pensions Department (1898-1938) have almost completely disappeared in unknown circumstances, and so have many records, including its minutes, of the State Advances Corporation (established 1896) from before 1930. After these dates, of course, the files are generally available.

In spite of these calamitous losses (some historians and even archivists reckon them a blessing) much exists in the National Archives of value to the social historian. The archives of the following head offices of Government departments are mostly intact: Army, particularly important for militia, volunteer, and expeditionary force rolls; Immigration, especially but not only the passenger lists and associated papers relating to assisted passages, 1871-1888; Justice, including coroners' reports, 1854-1962, and the archives of the Prisons Department, 1881-1920; Legislative, notably committee papers and petitions from 1854 onwards; and Police, until at least 1904. The records of the Social Security Department (established 1938) are remarkable for the lists of all passengers arriving and departing by ship from 1883 to 1973. The Department of Internal Affairs, originally the office of the Colonial Secretary, should not be overlooked. As the original general purpose department of Government it dealt with practically every side of Government business, particularly in the first fifty years of its existence to about 1890. Of the first importance are the records of naturalisation which continue from 1841 to the present day. Also to be found in the National Archives are the records of numerous commissions of enquiry, ranging in subject from prisons in 1867 to equal pay in 1971. The archives of the University of New Zealand, 1871-1961, are held at the National Archives.

The effect of the major losses of head office official records, while extremely serious for those wishing to study the evolution of social policy, is to some extent lessened for the social historian by the current and increasing interest in social conditions on the ground at the local level; by a new awareness of regional differences in social structures and dynamics; and by the requirement for information on particular cases, individually and in the aggregate, often in large quantities. In these circumstances the records of district offices are rather more likely to provide the necessary data. The archives of the district offices of the Lands and Survey Department, which contain registers of Crown grants, licences, and various forms of leasehold, are of the utmost importance; those of the Wellington district office in the National Archives are particularly complete, and substantial portions survive from the Invercargill, Hokitika, Nelson, Napier, Auckland (in the Auckland Records

Centre), Christchurch (in the Canterbury Museum), and Dunedin (in the Hocken Library) offices.

The Courts have also left us massive, highly complex bodies of records generated at the local level, and which so far remain virtually unexploited, except by genealogists. They generally include long runs of criminal and civil record books, and sometimes judges' notebooks, as well as the supporting papers. Perhaps most important of all, in the administrative jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, are the wills and various other papers relating to probate; and also the instruments of security and other registered agreements, such as indentures of apprenticeship, which have hardly been used. Usually classed as court records are those which related to the administration of goldfields, particularly through the agency of the wardens' courts which granted licences for various kinds of activities and decided disputes. The Hauraki Goldfields records are deposited in the Auckland Records Centre, the Nelson and West Coast records in the National Archives and the Otago records in the Hocken Library. A special place is held by the minutes of the Maori Land Court, so ably exploited by Ann Parsonson, which are now held on microfilm in the Alexander Turnbull Library and the University of Auckland (to 1900) and more fully in the National Archives. These, in the instances where the land was not confiscated early as in Taranaki, are perhaps the most valuable single source for the internal history of the Maori people, although one should not underestimate for this purpose the importance of missionary records in the Turnbull and Hocken Libraries, the papers of the Maori Purposes Fund Board in the National Archives and Turnbull Library, genealogies held in various places, and collections of personal papers held privately by Maori families but about which little is known.

The Land and Deeds Division of the Department of Justice maintains in offices in the larger centres the registers of titles to land, through which in many cases the title to any piece of land can be traced back to the original Crown Grant, even though registration did not finally become compulsory until 1922. Some offices, notably in Dunedin and Auckland, have even retained the original instruments of title supporting registration. The registers are the definitive source on land ownership, but as yet have scarcely been touched by historians.

The original local authorities until 1876 were the provincial governments, and the archives of all of these, excepting the records of the Canterbury Provincial Government which are in the Canterbury Museum, are housed in the National Archives in Wellington; inventories for each have been published. They contain a wealth of information on matters relating to land, immigration, education, health and cultural activities during the provincial era. They were succeeded in part by the more numerous territorial local authorities whose records continue to reflect the developments of whole communities; but it is only recently that a legal obligation to preserve and make available to the public their

permanently valuable records has been imposed through Part XVII of the Local Government Amendment (No. 3) Act passed late in 1977. The significant core of records of any territorial authority are those generated in the Town or County Clerk's department, though valuable documents, particularly relating to subdivisions and planning, will be found in the Engineer's Department, and also in the Building Inspector's and Health Departments. There is no doubt that local authority archives have suffered massive devastation in the past, with usually only the minutes surviving with any certainty. Inward letters have generally disappeared completely, and complete sets of early valuation rolls and ratebooks are the exception rather than the rule. A survey of local authority archives conducted by the Archives Committee of the New Zealand Library Association in 1955 revealed that most were in the possession of local authorities, and this is still very much the case, though little is known about their condition. The city councils of the traditional four main centres, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, all retain substantial bodies of archives, and Wellington and Christchurch have the creditable distinction of having kept their inward letters almost complete. Only in Otago has there been a systematic attempt to locate and place the older records of territorial authorities under professional control in a regional repository, the Hocken Library.

The archives of two kinds of local authorities, education boards and schools, and hospital boards and hospitals, have an added significance because of the loss of most of the early head office papers of the Education and Health Departments. The most complete group of Education Board archives known to exist are those of the Wanganui Education Board whose inward correspondence (always the touchstone of comprehensiveness) is complete from 1907, closely followed by the Otago Education Board (in the Hocken Library) which has inward letters from about 1912. Other education boards known to have kept substantial bodies of archives include Auckland (Auckland Records Centre), Canterbury (Canterbury Museum), and Marlborough and Wellington (National Archives). The records of schools are extremely vulnerable as they seldom have adequate storage; and generally it is the archives of the older, most favoured, and particularly private, schools which have lasted best. Their most important single record is the Register of Admissions, Withdrawal and Progress which every school was required to maintain, and at its best gives considerable personal information on pupils including reasons for leaving school and their immediate destination. Less is known about Hospital Board archives, though the Wellington Hospital Board employs an archivist and those of the Otago Board are in the Hocken Library sans inward letters. The patient registers have generally not found their way into archival institutions. It is vital that records of hospitals and their boards should be located as speedily as possible, because hospitals not only sheltered the very sick but also administered charitable aid, and as recently as 1933 were a major public agency for relief.

Of the older universities Otago and Canterbury have their archives complete and in good order; those of Auckland may be complete but are in disorder, while Victoria's archives have suffered substantial losses including the papers of Sir Thomas Hunter.

Except for parish registers, the potential of church archives for the writing of social history is unknown, but it must be considerable. Of the major churches only the Catholic Diocese of Auckland has an officially designated archivist with its archives ordered for research. The other Catholic dioceses possess archives and even archivists, but their extent is uncertain and access to them is difficult. The best known and most used Anglican diocesan records are those of Christchurch, but those of Auckland have also been recently organized, and the archives of the Wellington diocese have been deposited in the Turnbull Library. A Commission was appointed by the Anglican Provincial Synod earlier this year to investigate and report on the whole question of diocesan archives. The Methodist Church has tended to centralize its archives at the Connexional Headquarters in Christchurch, and the Presbyterian Church has an archives, very limited in scope, at Knox College in Dunedin. Generally the churches are aware of the need to preserve their archives, but resources are extremely limited.

Personal papers, as a grouping, are the largest, most varied, and, many will consider, the most penetrating source for New Zealand social history. At their best they embody in diaries and letters the thoughts and actions of individuals as they lived in society. Without doubt the most important and richest accumulation of such papers is in the Turnbull Library, but important collections are also in the Hocken Library, Canterbury Museum, and Auckland Institute and Museum. As a sampling one can mention the papers of the Richmond-Atkinson family, of Agnes Bennett and her family 1852-1960, and of James Gibb, the Presbyterian clergyman tried for heresy, in the Alexander Turnbull Library; the diary, 1851-1861, of Henry Monson, the Dunedin gaoler, in the Hocken Library; the Tutira station diaries, 1878-1895, in the Hawke's Bay Art Gallery and Museum; the diary, 1850-1851, of Edward Ward, settler, in the Canterbury Museum; the papers, 1841-1911, of Sir John Logan Campbell in the Auckland Institute and Museum; and the excellent collection of shipboard journals in the museum of the Otago Early Settlers Association. A related but completely ignored source are the records of legal firms, which can contain a mass of information on family and social history with records of family trusts, settlements, estates, court cases, purchase and sale of property, and investments. The extent of this source is quite unknown, though a few bodies of legal archives have found their way into repositories, notably the Hocken and Turnbull Libraries; and they tend to be complex physically and, because of their confidential character, difficult of access.

The social historian should find much of relevance in the records of our innumerable private organizations, particularly if it is wished to

study membership of groups as a measure of social relationships. In this category come lodges and friendly societies (a completely neglected subject), gentlemen's clubs, sporting bodies, and philanthropic and improvement associations. The last are important for telling both who was doing the good work and what was being done. Good examples of this kind of source are the records of the Canterbury Club, 1872-1890, in the Canterbury Public Library; of the Plunket Society, 1903-1970, in the Hocken Library; and of the National Council of Women, 1893-1974, in the Turnbull Library, which has built up a substantial collection of records of women's organizations and prohibition groups. Practically every museum, historical society, and public library has some archives of this kind. A particular effort has been made to locate and collect the records of trade unions, notably by the Auckland University Library, the Victoria University Library with its Labour Archives Trust, the Turnbull Library, and the Hocken Library. But the greatest success has been had by the University of Canterbury Library which took over practically intact the contents of the original Canterbury Trades Hall building.

This cursory and superficial survey of archival sources for the social historian shows them to be massive and diffuse, and the problems of preserving and making them available are the problems of archives in New Zealand generally. Dr Smith has dealt with these ably in his report. The records of central government, particularly of the head offices, are least at risk because of the Archives Act 1957 and the work of the National Archives, understaffed though it is. To a lesser extent the same is true of the records of district offices of Government departments. The Alexander Turnbull Library in the last ten years has done sterling service collecting the archives of national organizations, particularly those with their headquarters in Wellington, and also the papers of those who have interested themselves in social issues. But outside Wellington there is a simple paucity of archivists and archival institutions. The situation is least black in Otago, where the Hocken Library, which employs two archivists, is particularly active, but as one moves north leaving over Wellington, matters get progressively worse till one reaches Auckland, which is archivally speaking a black hole. There is not one full-time professional archivist in our largest city with our largest university history department. The lack of a real archives infrastructure outside the seat of government to complement the two national institutions in Wellington means that all regional archives, including those of significance for social historians, are at risk and that the heavy destruction will continue. Even in cases where archives have found their way into a library or museum the lack of full-time trained staff often means that they are badly organized and difficult to use. The present jumble of arrangements for the preservation of archives which obtains outside Wellington is quite incapable of responding with any degree of sophistication to the needs of social historians, or indeed of any other kind of historian. And, until we get regional offices with professional

staff, something after the English pattern, established at the very least in the university centres, this situation will persist.

There are some rays of light. The brightest at the moment is the forthcoming appearance of the continuing *National Register of Archives and Manuscripts*, jointly sponsored by the National Archives and the Turnbull Library, which should reveal for the first time the existence of many regional and local collections of interest to the social historian. The recent legislation providing for the protection of local authority archives should go some way towards lessening the pace of their losses. Finally and best of all, there is the undertaking in the National Party manifesto issued prior to the 1978 general election to encourage the establishment of regional archives. This in the long term is likely to provide the only real satisfactory solution to the main deficiency of New Zealand archives. Until there is a good spread of highly trained, long serving archivists who are conversant with the latest trends of New Zealand and overseas scholarship, and who are thoroughly acquainted with the latest methods and criteria for selection, description, and publication of finding aids, New Zealand will not be well-served by its archives, those that we have. It is a serious matter for the history departments of the universities, because, unless there are organized bodies of archives close to hand, it will become increasingly difficult for honours and graduate students, and in some cases the staff, to use archives regularly for any kind of historical research, particularly in social history; and the skills needed will never be developed. So that not only will archives not be preserved as they ought to be, but the historians to use them and the history they write will be slow in coming.

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