

Talking History: A Short Guide to Oral History. By Megan Hutching. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993. 79 pp. NZ price: \$17.95.

Women's History: A Short Guide to Researching and Writing Women's History in New Zealand. By Bronwyn Labrum. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993. 114 pp. NZ price: \$17.95.

COMMISSIONED by the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, these two short books aim to introduce the novice researcher to the respective intricacies and pitfalls of oral history and women's history. Bronwyn Labrum begins her *Guide* by reviewing the traditional invisibility of women in history, and she illustrates how this has been addressed by some of the more recent work on women's history. Turning to the issue of interpretation, Labrum goes on to identify some of the problems in this particular field. Imposing an uncritical 'victim', 'valiant' or 'modern' perspective, she rightly suggests, is unacceptable. However, the overwhelming direction of women's history of at least the past ten years has been towards understanding the ways in which the category of 'gender' has been constructed within specific societies at given times. A distinction between sex and gender would have strengthened this part of the book. Given that the *Guide* is aimed at the novice historian, these more theoretical discussions might also have been less intimidating placed after the more practical advice upon choosing topics and framing questions.

The *Guide* continues with very useful advice on areas for investigation, locating sources and research strategies. Some of the suggestions, however, could have been framed in more cautious language. Experience both as an oral historian, and teacher of women's history, indicates that it would be extremely difficult for the novice to leap in and answer the kinds of questions posed by Labrum for the histories of lesbianism or sexuality.

The strength of Megan Hutching's introduction to oral history also lies in the practical information concerning the preparation for, and recording of, interviews. The advice is very sound, and the only additions I would make would be to suggest a firmer time limit for interviews (having made some bad judgements myself in the past when the elderly interviewee appeared to be enjoying herself only to virtually collapse at the end), and to organize interviews, where possible, relatively early in the morning when both interviewer and interviewee are usually more alert! Hutching's insistence upon a professional approach should be tempered by the awareness that one is engaged in an intensely personal process, asking an often unknown person about many private aspects of their lives. It is, therefore, equally important for the interviewer to build a rapport with the person whom they are recording, and this relationship is not always so easily disengaged.

In this *Guide* questions concerning the nature of the evidence have been left until last, and here it is to be regretted that there is no reference to the extensive international literature which has so transformed our understanding of oral testimony. The ways in which memory is constructed by the individual have been explored in a myriad settings, from the Yukon to Turin. These have shown how people use many different strategies to make sense of their past: for example, some utilize pre-established frameworks, collective identities or traditional narrative forms; while other testimonies may give clear indication of silences, or the suppression of painful or difficult memories. It is important that the interviewer is aware that we all construct our memories, and is familiar with the ways in which historians have used this knowledge to develop new insights into what it is that oral history can tell us about the past.

In conclusion, both *Guides* are valuable tools in terms of the practical advice they offer

to the researcher beginning a project in either women's or oral history. They are particularly well produced, with a clear typeface and with a good use of photographs to enhance the text. However, neither is an effective introduction to the wider literature and theoretical debates within each of these areas of historical enquiry.

ANNA GREEN

University of Waikato

Studying New Zealand History. By G.A. Wood. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2nd edn., 1992, revised by Simon Cauchi and G.A. Wood. 154 pp. NZ price: \$24.95.

THIS NEW EDITION of *Studying New Zealand History* offers something to all involved in the subject. The book has the laudable aim of making New Zealand historical sources more accessible by showing how to find and use primary and secondary sources; and it achieves this aim. It is our most widely accessible and comprehensive guide to the study of New Zealand history. With assistance from Dr Simon Cauchi and the Department of Library and Information Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, Wood has produced a compact book that is clearly organized and explained. It quickly provides information to the user, whether an experienced or novice researcher. It shows how to investigate particular aspects of New Zealand's past by outlining the sources available and explaining how to access these. With continual advances in information technology, some of the book's instruction on this subject will date rapidly. Particularly for non-professional researchers, however, it does provide sufficient information to convince that the expertise of research centre staff is a valuable thing, and it also does more than merely detail sources and their use. Wood presents a bigger picture of what constitutes history; of what historical sources are and the process of historical investigation, interpretation and writing. He includes a section on New Zealand copyright law and a section on the presentation of formal historical works. Here he challenges any romantic notion that the production of such work is a simple matter of writing it down. For all but the rare, Wood insists, it is hard, constant, disciplined work requiring 'a sense of urgency, a respect for deadlines and a sacrifice of other activities' (p.109).

On this apposite note I raise the subject of secondary school teachers of history. As one, I suggest that Wood deserves a particular place for his book in our school, both departmental and personal collections. I think he does this for two reasons. First, for those teachers of New Zealand topics, the book provides enormous, one-stop assistance to what is available. Chapter 12 (which Cauchi is credited for expanding), for example, will delight those wanting to include non-written evidence in their teaching programmes. This chapter locates and advises on such sources as oral history, photography, music, the theatre and science.

Secondly, for all history teachers, irrespective of the topics they teach, this book also provides a clear focus on the substance of our subject. It reveals the construction materials and processes that became this thing, history: the knowledge of what constitutes evidence, how to get to it, what to do with it once you have, and how to be systematic in the process. This is as relevant in our classrooms as it is to those more directly involved in the process of historical research and writing.

DIANNE NORTHCOTT

Mt Albert Grammar School, Auckland