

*The Canoes of Kupe: A History of Martinborough District.* By Roberta McIntyre. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2002. 344 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 0-864734-46-8.

*Doing it Themselves: The Story of Kumeu, Huapai and Taupaki.* By Deborah Dunsford. Kumeu District History Project, Auckland, 2002. 303 pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 0-473089-69-6.

*The Far Downers: The People and History of Haast and Jackson Bay.* By Julia Bradshaw. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2001. 152 pp. NZ price: \$34.95. ISBN 1-877276-07-3.

*THE CANOES OF KUPE* is a very well-produced and illustrated history of the Martinborough region. It begins with a brisk and competent survey of Maori in the region. Pakeha Wairarapa began in the New Zealand Company context, particularly the demand for a Wellington hinterland. This coincided with peace talks between Ngati Kahungunu and the northern invaders, well discussed alongside the explorations by Fox and company, which were anything but romantic. Their lack of competence is summarily detailed.

The treatment of the squatting period is clear, with various hapu wishing to have settlers as tenants, officials seeking to ban such arrangements, and the reliance of gentlemen like Clifford, Weld and Vavasour on such as Caverhill the border shepherd bailing them out all being lucidly discussed. Likewise Colenso's ambiguous relationships, which when they resulted in his removal had the effect of weakening Ngati Kahungunu's bargaining position. However, a little more attention could have been paid to the wider context, particularly Grey's land policy in the context of the whole colony.

The eponymous John Martin was closely connected with the South Otago landowner James Chapman Smith (who married Martin's sister). Indeed all the Martins spent time at Tokomairiro, and John Martin was for a time in partnership with Smith. Such emphasis on colonial connections in a local history is refreshing. Martin was said to have left Otago with £13000, with which he set up in Wellington as a land and commission agent. His move into Wairarapa pastoralism from the late 1860s is treated as the story of a boy from the wrong side of the tracks battling with the self-appointed gentry. Attempts to establish a squire township were hindered by the long depression. Although the discussion is sound there is no reference to David Hamer's important work on frontier towns, and McIntyre should have been aware of other work that suggested that John Martin, in his progression from humble origins to colonial wealth was not particularly unusual.

The decades after Martin's death seem to involve discussion of many wider Wairarapa themes, which although very useful and illuminating — especially on matters such as Maori loss of natural resources and settler subdivision — sometimes proceeds with little reference to the district. Discussion of settler politics around 1900 is engaging but impressionistic. A relatively small proportion of the book deals with the period since 1914; the district's high hopes ended with the war preventing the completion of the railway line. There is a very interesting discussion of the changing self-perception of established pastoral families, and recent conversion of land-use to viticulture is soundly covered. However, Alister Taylor was and remains noteworthy for much more than attempting to grow grapes: he also introduced an unsuspecting public to the delights of *Bullshit and Jellybeans*, the *Little Red Schoolbook*, and Plum Trees (for getting Down Under). To what extent was Martinborough a place to drop out?

*Doing it Themselves* discusses another wine district, this one in West Auckland. Thankfully the commissioning bodies allowed the author to run over the initial time estimate and the result is a very engaging work. Dunsford's style is very accessible without compromising the quality. After a brief discussion of Maori and the area, there is a good account of settler establishment in the 1840s and 1850s. Thomas Deacon was

evidently the Kumeu booster and there are very good examples of how he and others used debt and the Native Land Court to get the land, and also of how Ngati Whatua gave land for the railway but John Sheehan, despite his pro-Maori reputation, refused to honour oral agreements for accommodation facilities and free travel for a time. This local history addresses some pointed issues. The predominance of subsistence farming is clear, but I found myself wanting a fuller picture of what was produced, how farmers related to storekeepers, and other such matters.

With the early twentieth-century apple boom, Auckland speculators invented the name Huapai, subdividing 5000 acres and promoting orcharding as a life of leisure. The arduous reality is comprehensively discussed. Dairying also became more important, but a better sense of the chronology of dairy development would help. Overall, one has little sense of the passage of time from 1900 to 1930. This may have been because little did change, but that in itself provides a theme to be explored.

There is an excellent account of the depression, which shows how relief schemes worked on the ground if the council was sensible and flexible — and the tensions between farmers and relief workers. Particularly appealing was an outstanding photo of Gordon Coates driving bullocks at the show in 1940, aged 62 ‘like the expert he undoubtedly had been nearly 30 years before’. Likewise the treatment of community mobilization from 1939 to 1945 is exemplary.

The 1950s and 1960s are aptly described as the comfortable years, and Dunsford shows that affluence and improved communications did not compromise the district’s essential character. The discussion of winegrowing is deft, with due attention paid to the major growers, many of course of Yugoslav origin. *Doing it Themselves* is a more notable work than its modest format suggests; Dunsford sticks closely to the topic and shows that Kumeu would provide a lot of raw material for work on the history of small rural communities in New Zealand.

Julia Bradshaw’s *The Far Downers* is different in style if not in intention. It comprised nine interviews with old residents of the Haast-Jackson’s Bay region. Isolation and self-sufficiency are the keynotes in these stories, all of which deal with the decades before the highway connected the region to other centres. Small amounts of cash were made through dairy farming but subsistence cultivation, and the bush, rivers and sea provided most of the food required. The book includes a short and lucid historical introduction, a transcript of some interviews made forty years ago, and the main body of interviews, all of them with people born before 1930. In reproducing the oral narratives this book is deliberately not a work of analysis. In its own terms it succeeds, being very well produced with an abundance of photographs and maps.

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