

Reviews

The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Volume Five: 1941-1960. Auckland and Wellington: Auckland University Press and Department of Internal Affairs, 2000. 679p. ISBN 1 86940 224 3.

Reviewer: Glenda Northey.

As a reference book on New Zealand's social history, this book is superb. As an exciting and interesting read, it surpasses many works of fiction. Iain Sharp, in his review in the *New Zealand Herald* on 20 December 2000, asked "which New Zealand book, published this year contains the juiciest scandal, most startling crimes, most remarkable success stories, saddest tales of woe?" Squeezed between these covers are stories about some outstanding New Zealanders, often people who had the vision to fight against the status quo and in doing so affected many aspects of our lives. This volume of the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* follows the format of the previous four. It condenses a significant portion of New Zealand history into a very readable and well written volume. The depth of information in each entry enables the reader to acknowledge the fullness of the life it honours.

Volume five covers the years between 1941 and 1960: years which saw a great deal of social change in New Zealand, incorporating the end of the Second World War, a post-war baby boom, the downfall of the first Labour Government, an upsurge in unionism and the 1951 waterfront dispute. The lives of those included cover a 120-year span from the 1870s to the 1990s. This volume includes reformers, feminists, those who contributed to the arts, education, the armed forces, health, the law, sciences, politics, community work, sport, business, unions, farming, and Māori affairs; alongside infamous convicted murderers, confidence tricksters and brothel keepers. Comprehensive indices for the complete set of the *Dictionary*, divided into geographical, tribal and hapū, and occupational areas are also provided.

The essay contributors read like a who's who in themselves. Authors and historians, journalists and siblings have all contributed essays in their specialist areas. Michael King documents the life of Whina Cooper, Sandra Coney of Jean Begg, Michael Bassett of Norman Kirk, Maurice Shadbolt of Eric Lee-Johnson, and Barry Gustafson of Sid Holland and John Marshall.

So, what sort of person writes about librarians?

Librarians, often seen as meek and insignificant, number eleven amongst the 608 essays describing the lives of those considered to have made a valuable

contribution to New Zealand society. Several of the librarians incorporated had themselves contributed essays to earlier volumes of the *Dictionary*. Readers and librarians who delve into the essays on their lives will never believe the stereotypical myths about librarians again. The essays show a passion and a belief in librarianship which has ensured a smoother passage for their successors.

Amongst the librarians noted are several who made major contributions to the collection and preservation of materials on New Zealand history. Graham Austin Bagnall is named in the introduction by editor Claudia Orange to illustrate the wide diversity of the lives which are included in the volume. Bagnall began and concluded his working life as a librarian at the Alexander Turnbull Library. One of his major contributions was the compilation of the most comprehensive list of New Zealand works, the *New Zealand National Bibliography* to 1960, which he edited for over a period of 35 years. Herbert (Bert) Otto Roth was a first and foremost a socialist who became a librarian. He escaped from Austria during the Second World War and arrived in New Zealand in 1940. His involvement in trade union activities never ceased and during his time as Deputy Librarian at the University of Auckland he wrote and collected materials on labour history which are now stored in the Alexander Turnbull Library.

The remarkably diverse working life of Alister Donald Miles McIntosh is recounted by Ian McGibbon. McIntosh's inspiring career began in the General Assembly Library, was diverted through the Prime Minister's Office during the thirties as Secretary of the War Cabinet and External Affairs Department, and culminated in the establishment of a diplomatic service. McIntosh received a CMG in 1957 and an honorary doctorate from the University of Canterbury. He went on to join the Board of Trustees for the National Library, the Turnbull Trustees Committee, the Alexander Turnbull Library Endowment Trust, and the New Zealand Historic Places Trust, and ended his stunning career as chairman of the Broadcasting Council of New Zealand.

There are other librarians listed whose lives have also inspired those who have followed them. They are Geoffrey Thomas Alley, Mary Campbell, Archibald Dunningham, Helena Ruth France, Nola Leigh Millar, Charles Stuart Perry, Dorothy Mary Neal White and Alice Woodhouse. One of the more colourful essays is about Auckland's Freda Stark. Immortalised as the dancer who performed for the American troops in only a g-string and gold paint, she spent her later working

life in the University of Auckland General Library.

Equally important, of course, are the lives of the other 597 subjects in the volume. Among the better-known, such as artist Colin McCahon, war hero Charles Upham, academic John Beaglehole, murderer Stanley Graham, photographer and illustrator Eric Lee-Johnson, Māori songwriter Tuini Meotu Haangu Ngawai, politicians Mabel Howard, John Marshall and Sid Holland and many others, are those who made an important contribution in areas which were not always equally recognized by the press.

There are people like Aileen Mary Stace who spun her way through World War Two. When commercial wool ran out for the auxiliary who were knitting jerseys for the Navy, Stace and her sister bought a spinning wheel and gathered pieces of wool off farm fences and taught themselves to spin. Each Christmas her spinning group supplied jerseys, sporting Māori motifs, to the crew of the British Warship *Onslow* working in the North Sea and Arctic. They also supplied jerseys to a group of Scottish orphans. Stace went on to teach the art of weaving to many other New Zealanders.

Geologist and volcanologist James Healy can be thanked as one of those who rose to the occasion when the North Island was suffering a severe power shortage. Healy already had proven results from a bore at Wairakei so he drew up the initial plan for a line of bores which later became part of the first geothermal power station in New Zealand.

Jelal Kalyanji Natali migrated to New Zealand from India in 1920. He became a successful businessman, and was a leading campaigner against the White New Zealand League and worked against New Zealand's pro-white and anti-Asian immigration policies. He received a Queens Medal for his work, not only within the Indian Community, but also for assistance to Māori and Pakcha.

Amongst the dozen of names listed for their contribution in the area of community service and welfare is Puti Tipene Watene. Watene, of Ngati Maru and Te Arawa descent, was "involved in the integration of rural Māori to the urban environment" during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1948 he was instrumental in the establishment of the Māori Community Centre in Fanshaw Street, which was a forerunner of the modern urban marae. In 1963 he became the Labour member of Parliament for Eastern Māori and died in office while cross examining a witness about the impact of changes to the Māori Affairs Amendment Bill.

Editor Claudia Orange notes the large number of women who are included in this volume. Well known women such as Māori Leader Whina Cooper, artist Rita

Angus, New Zealand's first woman detective Nora Crawford, and mechanic and racing car driver Sybil Lupp are honoured alongside lesser known women like Annie Smyth, who was one of the first Salvation Army officers to undertake missionary work overseas. After spending thirty-four years in Japan, Annie returned to New Zealand only to be murdered along with her sister several years later by an unknown assailant.

Orange notes that the fifth volume and its companion Māori-language volume are the last of the planned series. The database from which the Dictionary is based currently consists of nearly 12,000 records and this will continue to be added to by a smaller team. Like many publications in this electronic age the earlier volumes will soon be accessible electronically. Orange states that "the end of the series, then, is merely the start of something new and exciting, which will expand the network of readers to embrace those who use the resources of the Internet, including the Heritage Group's history website, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz>."

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