

Perhaps — myths aside — he should be best remembered as the first great Minister of Agriculture rather than the last great Minister of Lands. And, in parallel with the declining significance of the Lands Department, the populist land policy debate also declined, reflecting the reduced significance of land in the economy.

As I argued in my 1994 Hocken lecture, we should not ignore the dramatic shift in the political economy when we judge the Liberal period.⁴ Brooking is better than most in this respect, and historians have every right to complain that economic historians have not provided the framework in which the task can be done. Such a framework may lead to a major re-evaluation of the period. Just consider the ease of governing in the 1890s, when fiscal revenue was buoyant, compared to the misery of the 1880s, when the main fiscal activity was cutting government spending.

Even without a new political economy, one major biographical work remains to be done for the Liberal period: a successor to R.M. Burdon's *King Dick*, to go with the biographies of Ballance, Reeves, Tregear, Ward, and now Jock McKenzie. Certainly Brooking has done Jock proud with this respectful, affectionate, but insightful biography, an attitude nicely illustrated by the picture of the author on the back cover in a pose similar to the subject on the front.

BRIAN EASTON

*Stout Research Centre and
The University of Auckland*

1 T. Brooking, 'Use it or Lose it. Unravelling the Land Debate in Late Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, XXX, 2 (1996), pp.163-181.

2 W.J. Gardner, *A Pastoral Kingdom Divided: Cheviot, 1889-1994*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992.

3 B.H. Easton and S.F. Connor, 'The Terms of Trade: Past and Future', *Quarterly Predictions* (March 1980), pp.33-37. The data is reported in B.H. Easton and N.J. Wilson, *An Investigation of the Data Base of New Zealand's Terms of Trade*, NZIER Working Paper 84/10 (1984).

4 B.H. Easton, *Towards a Political Economy of New Zealand*, (1994 Hocken Lecture), Hocken Library, Dunedin, 1996; also *In Stormy Seas*, University of Otago Press (forthcoming).

The Story of Suzanne Aubert. By Jessie Munro. Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books, Auckland, 1996. 464 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 1-86940-155-7.

THE STORY OF SUZANNE AUBERT fully deserves all the accolades bestowed on it. In this long, detailed study an immense scholarly apparatus is leavened by the grace and imagination with which the book is written. Munro has had the gift of a long and extremely rich life about which to write, but she displays a combination of skills which few other New Zealand historians could match in telling this particular story. Munro's fluency in other languages has enabled her to access vital archival material in France and Rome, and to place Aubert far more completely within national and denominational frameworks than any previous study. The book also has an almost poetic quality in its descriptions of places and evocation of atmosphere, from the sound of the angelus bell over the hills of Hiruharama to the smells of burnt bush, bitter medicine extract (and toddler ammonia) on the habits of Aubert's Jerusalem sisters. It is a beautifully crafted work.

Because Aubert's life was so varied, the book will appeal to specialists in many areas of New Zealand history, as well as to a general readership. Munro cuts a generous swathe

through New Zealand's past, introducing the reader to a roll-call of names, great and small, with whom Aubert interacted during her 91 years. New Zealand politicians, churchmen and women of various denominations, Maori and Pakeha who came under Aubert's care, women activists, government servants, and business people pass through the pages of the book. And yet, Munro is also careful to acknowledge Aubert's upbringing in provincial France and the invisible people and influences 'packed in her trunks' when she departed for New Zealand. A fascinating chapter on 'France — women and faith 1789-1860' explores the whole context of French women's religious commitment, the multiplication of sisterhoods, and reasons for an emphasis on action and mission in post-revolutionary French religious experience. Like all the background discussion in *Suzanne Aubert*, this is no vague 'life and times' material: it is carefully charted and constantly referred to in subsequent chapters as a fundamental part of Aubert's persona and of her activities in New Zealand. It helps to explain the presence in New Zealand not only of Aubert herself, but of such French orders as the Sisters of the Good Shepherd and the Little Sisters of the Poor. Part of the broad focus which Munro consciously chose to take in writing the book, it illuminates rather than intrudes.

The politics of the Catholic mission to New Zealand, Maori Catholicism, interdenominational relations in early Auckland, rural Hawke's Bay, the isolated Whanganui River area and twentieth-century Wellington, the place of women within the Catholic church and the governance of religious orders are all explored in *Suzanne Aubert*. The story of the Sisters of Compassion is to the fore, of course, and is sympathetically told. Munro shows how Aubert designed a sisterhood to suit the New Zealand setting, one characterized by its adaptability and sensitivity to local needs and emphasis on hard manual work. The sheer breadth of the sisters' work in the early part of this century is remarkable. Unlike the more contemplative orders or those whose works were narrowly institutional in scope, the Sisters of Compassion were constituted as an active order. They were visible in the community, whether begging in the streets, visiting the sick poor in their district-nursing role or, like Aubert herself, serving on the committees of other organizations and attending public meetings. Aubert came into conflict with her own church for an insistence on caring for people of 'all creeds, and none'. Church welfare has not been greatly explored within the New Zealand context and, while Aubert's work was not typical of early twentieth-century Catholic activity, Munro sheds light on the sometimes uneasy relationship between church and state in the development of social services. Aubert had to contend with the narrower vision of her own church's hierarchy and the requirements of a newly emerging state welfare inspectorate: public esteem and her own sheer force of personality ensured that she often — but not always — prevailed over church and welfare bureaucracies.

In dealing with her independent, energetic, pious yet pragmatic subject, Munro has not let empathy degenerate into hagiography. The demands Aubert placed upon her sisters and her errors of judgement are acknowledged. Munro is sensitive to the part Aubert played, consciously and unconsciously, in creating her own legend, unravelling the provable from the improbable and speculating on the slippage between reminiscence, anecdote and parable. Aubert emerges from the study as an attractive character, broad in her sympathies, capable of anger but not of holding grudges, engaging the reader's sympathies as fully as she engaged the support of contemporaries.

MARGARET TENNANT

Massey University