

more to 1951 than post-war dynamics) would have been undermined. We are far better off having the particular story that Green has provided than a half-baked attempt to retell the story of 1951. Let's hope that Green produces a companion volume exploring the social history of 1951. It is very much needed, and she is the person to write it.

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No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago, 1840–1914. By Jim McAloon. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2002. 230 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877276-23-5. Published with assistance from The History Group, Ministry of Culture and Heritage.

THIS IS A FINE EXAMPLE of scholarly social history, one of the best monographs in New Zealand history to appear in recent years. Based on the author's doctoral thesis, it retains the rigorous analysis of a thesis yet has been extensively rewritten for publication, and in some places revised (see p.199, n.60, for example). Exhaustive research in probate records, death-duty registers, company records and family correspondence produced a database of 1042 Canterbury and Otago settlers who at death left sums in excess of £10,000 (or £15,000 after 1918, to allow for wartime inflation). Landed wealth accounted for just over half of all estates; merchants and financiers comprised 13.5%; professionals and managers 9.7%; and manufacturers just 6.4%. Apart from 13% 'undefined' (including 56 'gentlemen') the remainder ranged from shipowners to newspaper proprietors. Canterbury's wealth was predominantly agricultural and pastoral, while Otago's richest estates were left by merchants and manufacturers. In Otago farmers made up 41% of the wealthy, whereas 56% of Canterbury's richest estates were based on farming.

Some readers may remark at these figures, 'Well, so what? We could have guessed that.' But the great merit of McAloon's book is that he has dug deep in the archives and found hard evidence instead of relying on guesswork, as so many writers of general histories of New Zealand have in the past (and still do). McAloon's argument is strengthened by careful definition of categories and explicit engagement with class theory in Chapter One. He emphasizes that this is 'not a study of a class as such, but rather of a stratum within a class' (p.24). He avoids the term *élite* because he is not convinced that the wealthy in Canterbury and Otago ever constituted a powerful, cohesive oligarchy, and he avoids the term middle class because that implies an upper class, and he doubts that colonial New Zealand ever had one.

The book's title squarely rebuts Stevan Eldred-Grigg's influential depiction of rich, colonial Canterbury landowners as an idle *élite* in *A Southern Gentry* (1980) and more recently in *The Rich* (1996). Such externals as large houses, servants and carriages led Eldred-Grigg to repeat an older Canterbury myth, of the Oxford-educated gentleman-pastoralist pioneers who did well in a new land. This myth has been repeated by Reeves and Sinclair, and more recently by Belich, but was long ago exposed by Scotter and Gardner. Only a scattering of Canterbury pioneers like Acland and Tripp ever fitted this stereotype. McAloon's detailed research shows that very few of the South Island's most successful landowners came from the upper class in Britain; in fact, a mere 3%. Two-thirds of the wealthy farmers had social origins in the lower middle class of tenant farmers, traders and master artisans. McAloon argues that they brought with them thoroughly bourgeois and Calvinist attitudes of hard work, thrift and moderation. Those who did best were the first on the scene, like the Rhodes brothers: 'Early arrival was the key to wealth' (p.33). This is a well-organized book, with sub-headings and summary conclusions at the ends of chapters. There are statistical tables and pie-charts as well as a small selection of photographs of some of the book's leading players. Chapter Two examines

the rich landowners, showing how they acquired and operated their properties, how they financed further development, and how some embraced innovation in order to increase returns. McAloon concludes that the most successful saw farming as a business, and made rational business decisions. He also emphasises their strong work ethic. The third chapter focuses on the urban wealthy, most of whom also came from the British lower middle class. Perseverance and probity were the watchwords of this group, assisted by access to capital and interlocking directorates. The National Mortgage Agency and J.M. Ritchie form an important case study here. Chapter Four gives the reader a fascinating insight into the families of rich colonists, and shows that the family was at once the reason for wealth-accumulation and an important instrument for that accumulation. Men dominated these families, but McAloon points to the role of wealthy women in building up the family fortune, and their critical role in passing it on to the next generation. C.G. Tripp's cautious response to a request for a guarantee from a merchant brother-in-law indicates that Ellen Tripp had as much a power of veto at Orari Gorge as the bank manager (p.78).

The fifth and sixth chapters are concerned with the politics of the wealthy, and find that this was no monolithic conservative oligarchy, as Eldred-Grigg implied, but rather a diverse spectrum of opinion that was moving in a conservative direction. The wealthy were to be found on both sides of most major issues in the late nineteenth century, and not just women's suffrage. On land policy Eldred-Grigg followed the Reeves-Sinclair view of the 'bursting of the big estates', but McAloon acknowledges that this was a complex process and not always what it seemed to outsiders. Tom Brooking has established that most vendors were willing sellers, and Jim Gardner has shown how an astute lawyer could extract significant advantage for a family. McAloon sees the Liberals' land reform less as an assault on the rich than as an example of state-led economic restructuring, with many big landowners as willing participants.

Chapter Seven discusses the role of the wealthy in local government and local influence. McAloon misses one prime example in the section on churches: Robert Heaton Rhodes senior donated the tower and bells of Christchurch Cathedral, while the family of his late brother George donated the steeple. (The Rhodes family also donated the land for St Mary's Anglican Church in Timaru.) McAloon is remarkably accurate and sure-footed as he traverses the complexities of Canterbury family histories, but he makes one slip on p.34: Robert Rhodes did not 'remain at Purau'. The death of his brother George in 1864 ended the brothers' partnership, and W.B. Rhodes insisted on the sale of all the runs. Robert moved to Christchurch where he built Elmwood, and used his proceeds from the sales to become a spectacularly successful property speculator, buying cheap land on the plains for subdivision into small farms. That is why he was worth £574,098 when he died in 1884. Rhodes fits the model of the entrepreneurial businessman and financier even better than that of rich pastoralist.

As winner of the History section of the 2003 Montana Book awards, and runner-up for Melbourne University's Ernest Scott Prize, *No Idle Rich* has already gained wide recognition as a work of excellence. It is a significant contribution to New Zealand historiography and has already prompted debate with Cain and Hopkins, proponents of the 'gentlemanly capitalism' thesis in *British Imperialism* (1993). McAloon has responded vigorously, and raised the level of debate in this field. *No Idle Rich* deserves a wide readership, and is likely to remain a mine of information for other historians for many years to come. It is probably only coincidence, but the cover photograph of J.M. Ritchie bears an uncanny resemblance to the book's author.

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