

Geoffrey Alley, Librarian: His Life & Work. By W.J. McEldowney. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2006. 504 pp. NZ price: \$59.95. ISBN 0-86473-534-0.

ANY BIOGRAPHY OF G.T ALLEY, the creator of the Country Library Service and New Zealand's first National Librarian, of necessity (as McEldowney acknowledges in his Introduction) has to encompass the transformation of library service in New Zealand from the 1930s to the 1960s, the growth of the Country Library Service into the National Library Service and then the creation of the National Library in 1965. It also has to assess the contributions of the major players in those events, both the institutions and the personalities, and that requires an even wider perspective of the social, economic and political currents of the period. McEldowney, as one of the players who knew nearly all of the personalities, and the author of the history of the New Zealand Library Association, one of the main institutional players, is eminently suited for the task.

There are few biographical studies of New Zealand librarians, only a smattering of library histories, and nothing to compare with *Alley*. This belongs to a small but growing group of life and times studies of the administrators, public servants, publishers and others who built the infrastructure in the middle years of the twentieth century that supported the intellectual and cultural achievements of the following generations. Some recent examples are works on C.E. Beeby, James Shelley, Gordon Tovey, J.C. Beaglehole, and Denis Glover's contribution as printer and publisher at the Caxton Press.

McEldowney knits together skilfully the varied strands, from Alley's early life and work with James Shelley in rural education, the shrewd interventions of the Carnegie Corporation to assist the growth of professional leadership in the 1930s, the rejuvenation of the library association to generate ideas and to provide a framework for librarians to work together, the various attempts to provide a modern public library service in the countryside, leading to the Labour government's decision to create the Country Library Service in 1938, and Alley's second appearance on the national scene, this time as a librarian, not a rugby footballer. From then on the pace accelerates and McEldowney captures well the sense of purpose and the excitement of the times. Alley moves to centre stage as secretary of the New Zealand Library Association and member of several powerful committees, trusted adviser to the government, director of the Country Library Service, soon transformed into the National Library Service, and a key figure in the creation of local education for librarians culminating in the National Library's Library School. Two narrative threads, the search for the best structure for rural library services, and the creation of a National Library as the cornerstone of a national system, dominate the story from then on. McEldowney's account of the complex negotiations and the battles leading up to the National Library Act of 1965 is masterly.

Alley's personal development, from the Alley-Buckingham inheritance, especially its values, through his early education and experience, and his developing roles as husband, father, gardener and teacher, is charted in detail, and his relations with his family, colleagues, friends and politicians shrewdly evaluated. McEldowney's judgements on library personalities and politics are penetrating and fair.

To his few detractors Alley was seen as the puppet master or the spider casting a wider and wider web of central government control. McEldowney's more apt image is of Alley, at the height of his power, marshalling the efforts of all the players as he did earlier as the single lock in the 2-3-2 All Black scrum. This was a position he found difficult to maintain at the end of his career as circumstances changed and new ideas and personalities emerged. Alley's strengths and weaknesses are explored with sensitivity. His colleagues were well aware of his weaknesses but most were prepared to forgive him because of his outstanding leadership. He was not an ideas man but a skilful creator of administrative structures with a sure sense of what was politically and administratively achievable, able to select trusty lieutenants and to inspire them.

McEldowney writes easy narrative prose marred by the occasional lapse into too colloquial forms of expression. He slips in the occasional barb aimed at the new managerialism and other intellectual aberrations that manifested themselves in the 1980s and laments the loss of the 'ideal of working together cooperatively for the good of society as a whole which was basic to the Alley era' and its replacement by a 'competitive model, imposed for ideological reasons'.

Alley provides a reminder that although there were giants on the earth in those days even dwarfs can see further if they are prepared to stand on the shoulders of others. It is required reading for all librarians and valuable for students of public administration and for those who wish to understand the major shift in New Zealand society that had its beginnings in the 1930s when a group of gifted men and women were able to tune into the Spirit of the Times.

JIM TRAUER

Wellington

Colonial Discourses: Niupepa Māori 1855–1863. By Lachy Paterson. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2006. 250 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877372-26-1.

IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1842 AND 1932 some 34 newspapers aimed specifically at a Māori readership were published by a variety of individuals and organizations, including the government. *Colonial Discourses: Niupepa Māori 1855–1863* examines nine of these publications, produced over a short but critical period in New Zealand history. The emergence of the Kingitanga, war in Taranaki, the looming conflict in Waikato, and Crown efforts to shore up support for its position at the Kohimarama conference and through the 'New Institutions' of Governor George Grey all featured prominently in a number of these papers. But as relations between Māori and the Crown deteriorated in the 1850s some readers of the niupepa remained more concerned about the price of wheat and felt cheated when traders refused to give them the prices listed in their commercial columns.

We know about Māori dissatisfaction with declining wheat prices after 1856 in part because, as Lachy Paterson amply demonstrates, readers actively engaged with the niupepa, sending in correspondence and reports on a wide range of matters. Some runanga transmitted their determinations over land disputes for publication, in other cases Māori sought to have their views on a wide range of political, religious and socio-economic issues known publicly; and all too often, editors complained, individuals simply wished to see their names in print. For some Māori at least the newspapers of this period were an important bridge to a wider world and, Paterson suggests, constituted a kind of taonga.

Te Karere Māori was published by the government throughout the nine-year span covered in this book (though briefly under a different title). Despite a print-run of just 500 copies in 1856, it seems likely that its influence was much greater than this might at first suggest. Indeed, as the author argues, in many kainga the contents of the Māori newspapers were the subject of lively recital, discussion and debate. A simplistic dichotomy between an oral or literate society, it is rightly asserted, is not appropriate for this period. In this sense, the newspapers provide an invaluable insight into the kinds of debate occurring within Māori communities.

Nowhere can their significance be seen more clearly than in the Waikato district. *Te Hokioi*, the King movement newspaper, was established in 1861 following the gifting of a printing press to two Waikato chiefs who had visited the Austrian Emperor two years earlier, and rapidly posed a strong challenge to the more usual religious or political sermonizing of the government and missionary or philanthropic organs. The cold war