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‘Theatre of Wonders’:

The Emergence of the Southland Museum 1869-1945

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Philosophy
In
Museum Studies

at Massey University, Turitea, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

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2000

ABSTRACT

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, international scholarship in museology began to focus on the development of museums in the colonial context, with particular emphasis on the nineteenth century. While a tradition of institutional histories has developed in North America and Australia there have been few detailed histories written of New Zealand Museums. Institutional histories provide an insight into the motivations and practice of early museology and the role museums took in the colonisation process and the subsequent development of provincial centres.

This thesis provides the first detailed historical account of the early development of Southland Museum and Art Gallery. Four periods of development have been identified. Andrew McKenzie operated a museum in his commercial premises from 1872 until 1875 when the Invercargill Athenaeum purchased his collection. The Athenaeum maintained a museum collection until the early twentieth century when it was transferred to the Southland Technical College where it was opened to the public in 1912. Intensive political lobbying and fund-raising from 1936 led to the opening of a purpose built public museum in Invercargill in 1942. At a time of adversity, the museum emerged as a public symbol of progress and freedom.

Underpinning the primary chronological narrative of this thesis is the identification of the important individuals whose energy ensured that the museum collection continued to develop as an educational resource for the community. The thesis also documents and analyses the changing focus of the collections from a 'theatre of wonders' to a more systematic natural history collection. While located at the Southland Technical College the focus shifted progressively towards agricultural subjects, though the museum maintained a very broad range of exhibits including an increasing range of cultural material. The final chapters of the thesis broaden to a detailed account of the collecting activities of selected individuals in Southland during the period 1869 to 1945.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Karl Gillies, my external Thesis Supervisor and Collections Manager for the Southland Museum and Art Gallery. Also Russell Beck, former Director of the Southland Museum and Art Gallery, 1976-1999, David Woodings, current Director of the Southland Museum and Art Gallery and the staff of the Southland Museum and Art Gallery Niho o te Taniwha.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Alan Bryce and Marianne Foster, Information Services Department, Invercargill Public Library. Invaluable material was also provided by Sheila Natusch, author and grand-daughter of Roy Traill, the family of James Morton (naturalist) and George Murdoch, past Southland Technical College pupil. I also wish to acknowledge family and friends who have supported me throughout.

Of paramount importance was the guidance and support of David Butts, Thesis supervisor at Massey University, Palmerston North. Also of assistance were Aaron Braden, Research Librarian, and Janine Delaney, Curator of Archives and Manuscripts, Hocken Library, Dunedin. I also wish to acknowledge Brian Patrick, Research and Archives Manager, Otago Museum and Eamonn Bolger, Archivist, Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. I would like to thank William Cox, Associate Archivist, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., and Samantha Collenette, Natural History Museum Archivist, The Natural History Museum, London. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the many curators, information professionals and historians who have freely given their knowledge and assistance towards this project.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EPS	Emergency Precautions Service
ICC	Invercargill City Council
IPL	Invercargill Public Library
<i>JPS</i>	<i>Journal of the Polynesian Society</i>
SC	Southland College (later Southland Technical College)
SCC	Southland County Council
SEB	Southland Education Board
SI	Southland Institute
SMAG	Southland Museum and Art Gallery
SMB	Southland Museum Board
SMTB	Southland Museum Trust Board (Inc.)
STC	Southland Technical College
<i>TPNZI</i>	<i>Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute</i> (formerly <i>TPRS – Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society</i>)
<i>TSC</i>	<i>The Southern Cross</i>
<i>TSN</i>	<i>The Southland News</i>
<i>TST</i>	<i>The Southland Times</i>
<i>TWN</i>	<i>The Weekly News</i>
UAS	University Association of Southland

SMAG ARCHIVES ABBREVIATIONS KEY:

<i>SIMB</i>	<i>Southland Institute Minute Book</i>
SMA: Misc.	Miscellaneous Southland Museum Archives
SMA: B1-B7	Southland Museum Archives: Boxes 1-7
TD:	Teviotdale Diaries

GLOSSARY

* The Southern Maori dialect is used throughout. For example 'k' replaces 'ng'.

Barnum	Referring to Barnum and Bailey, American showman. 'Barnum-like' was used in a derogatory sense in the mid-1800's. Similar to the use of 'Disneyfication' today
Flax	Plant fibre. Maori name Harakeke (<i>Phormium tenax</i>)
Fossick/Fossicker	To gather. Someone who collects artefacts without regard to stratigraphy or systematic documentation of discoveries
Hei tiki	amulet, neck pendant
Iwi	Maori tribe, people
Koiwi	Human remains
Koiwi *takata	Maori human remains
Maori	Original colonist of New Zealand – of East Polynesian origin
Maripi	Paua levers
Mere	Short flat Maori club
Moa	Large extinct flightless bird of New Zealand
Murihiku	Often used to refer to the southern end of the South Island of New Zealand
Pakeha	Non-Maori New Zealander
Patu	Maori club
Paua	Abalone (<i>Haliotis iris</i>)
Poi	Ball used in action performance
Pounamu	A collective Maori term that includes two minerals, nephrite jade and bowenite
Taiaha	Long Maori club
Takahe	Flightless bird (<i>Notornis mantelli</i>)
Takata whenua	People of the land/people of this place
Taoka	Treasured item
Teko teko	Carved ancestral figure on house
Tuatara	Ancient 'living' reptile (<i>Sphenodon punctatus</i>)
Waka huia	Feather/treasure box
Whakapapa	Maori genealogy
Whare	Maori dwelling

INTRODUCTION

As we enter the twenty-first century the nature of the museum is evolving rapidly. In our search for a way forward it is critical that museum practitioners understand the origins of their collections and the historical development of their institutions.

Southland Museum and Art Gallery is one of a series of regional museums in New Zealand supported by regional government. The transition from private collections to public museum is an important part of the history of each of these museums. The part these collections have played in the lives of individuals, families and communities is an important dimension of the cultural and social history of each region throughout New Zealand.

Research objectives:

The primary objective of this thesis is to provide a detailed historical account of the development of private ‘museums’¹ and the emergence of a public museum in Invercargill, Southland, from 1869 to 1945. In order to account for the development of these ‘museum’ collections it has been necessary to explore the nature of private collecting in Southland and the networks interconnecting private collectors, scientists and museum personnel in New Zealand and beyond.

It is argued that the development of public museums in New Zealand draws on a complex set of interrelated forces. The essential notion of the museum was transplanted from Europe and Great Britain in particular. As was the case in Great Britain, there were a number of public organisations, such as athenaeum, mechanics institutes and the philosophical societies, established in early New Zealand settlements, each with the potential to foster the development of a museum collection for educational purposes. However, the significance of local individuals with their own motivation and vision,

¹ The term private ‘museum’ is used to refer to private collections that are opened to the public in commercial or other premises.

should not be underestimated. Their contributions as collectors and voluntary curators are documented and analysed.

Within the historical account this thesis attempts to provide answers to an inter-related set of questions. For example, what phases of development did the museum go through before it emerged as a publicly funded institution in a purpose built facility and is it possible to document the network of collectors from which museum collections derive? Of equal significance is an exploration of the objectives of the key personnel involved in each phase of museum development. Insights into the museum development process may be gained from a detailed investigation of the political struggle to establish the museum as a community facility and the key factors in being able to complete this transaction will be explored.

The broader and more theoretical objective of this thesis is to explore the complex web of interrelationships that motivate and sustain private collecting and museum development in the colonial context. Contemporary museology is much concerned with understanding the political and social context within which private and public collections were accumulated and interpreted. Knowledge of this historical context is essential to contemporary understanding and management of these collections.

Structure of thesis:

This study presents an essentially chronological account of the transition from private and commercial collections to the establishment of a fully public museum in Invercargill.

Chapter One begins with reference to the development of museums in Europe. In the colonial context, the museum became an agent of imperial appropriation. First, the private collectors and public institutions focused on identifying and naming the newly discovered flora and fauna. By the 1880's, with the indigenous peoples declining in the face of colonial settlement, there was a rush to collect the remaining material evidence of their cultures.

Brief historical outlines are provided for the four major museums in New Zealand. Two smaller regional museums are then examined. Common themes in the development of these institutions are identified. The final section in this chapter provides a brief historical overview of the Southland region as a context for the historical narrative to follow.

Chapters Two, Three and Four provide a case history of the early development of the Southland Museum from 1869 until 1945. Chapter Two documents the development of Andrew McKenzie's commercial 'museum' from 1869 until it was purchased by the Invercargill Athenaeum in 1876. This chapter also documents the development of the Athenaeum museum. Attention focuses on the development of the collection and the way in which the public profile of the 'museum' changes during this period.

Chapter Three traces the relocation of the Athenaeum Museum to the Southland Technical College. Although not opening until 1912, the Southland Technical College museum collection was under the watchful eye of its first museum 'curators' from 1906. The history of this emerging public collection documents a transition from the emphasis on science, particularly natural history, as the prime function of a museum, towards more specific educational objectives, particularly agricultural education. In addition to documenting the growth of the collection, this chapter provides an overview of the management and curatorship of the museum.

Chapter Four explores the establishment of the Southland Centennial Memorial Museum from 1936 until 1941, the opening in 1942 and subsequent developments in the period from 1942 to 1945. This chapter is a purposefully detailed exploration of the complex and difficult process of securing funding and gaining public support for the museum. During this period, the museum shifted the emphasis from agricultural to ethnographic and historical display, though the natural history collections were retained and exhibited.

Chapters Five and Six place the development of the Southland Museum in a broader context. Chapter Five explores the social and intellectual milieu within which McKenzie and the Invercargill Athenaeum operated in the second half of the nineteenth century. It

explores the 'culture of collecting' that was extant in Southland in this period and documents the extent to which collectors participated in the collection and exchange of natural history specimens. Case studies have been provided to illustrate the range of collections and exhibitions which was characteristic of the period. The first section of Chapter 6 provides biographical detail about those involved in the emergence of the museum. The intention of this section is to explore the origins of the Southland Technical College museum and the impact of the emerging ideas of 'professionalism' in the museum sector. The importance of the role of agricultural research in the development of science in New Zealand and the unique placement of the Southland Museum within the Southland Technical College is also documented. The second section of this chapter relates to Southland Museum during its planning period and beyond. For Southland Museum it was also a period of increasing inter-institutional co-operation and museum development.

Sources and Limitations:

Although there has been some primary research on aspects of the history of some New Zealand museums during the last decade the published literature on this subject is still very limited. Hence, the accounts provided in Chapter One are dependent on a very limited range of sources. However, these sources were useful in identifying themes and patterns to explore in the context of this case study. It was this awareness of the lack of detailed historical accounts of museum development in New Zealand that determined the form of this thesis. Such a detailed account provides the opportunity to balance the general assumptions made about colonial museums in New Zealand against a detailed account of the local context.

There have been significant recent publications in the field of the history of collecting, particularly in the colonial context. In particular, the works of Clifford, Ames, Griffiths and Sheets-Pyenson² provide important insights in understanding and analysing the early history of Southland Museum.

² Michael Ames, *Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: the Anthropology of Museums* (Vancouver: UBC Press, c1992), Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: the Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*. (Melbourne: University Press, 1996), J. Clifford. *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Cathedrals of Science: the Development of*

The documentation of collectors, collections and early museum activity in Southland depends almost entirely on original archival resources. There are few published references to Andrew McKenzie's 'museum' and those that do exist repeat erroneous facts. Hence, the account of this 'museum' depends almost entirely upon contemporary newspaper reports.

Because the Southland Museum collections moved from the Athenaeum to the Southland Technical College to the Centennial Memorial museum it was necessary to source archives from all three locations. The absence of a central archive in Southland made this difficult but archives do remain for each period and these have been consulted. For the Athenaeum 'museum' period, records relating to the founding of the Athenaeum and the purchase of McKenzie's and other collections were found amongst an incomplete archival record at the Invercargill Public Library. The period between 1880 and 1915 is characterised by scant newspaper reference to the museum collection and an almost non-existent archival record. However, while housed in the Southland Technical College the museum was under the control of the Southland Education Board and their records for this period have been most useful. Many of these records, including minute and newspaper clipping books provided valuable information about the development of the 'museum'. Most were held at the Invercargill Public Library as the nominated repository for Southland Education Board records. Other archives were located at Invercargill's Cargill High School, the successor to the Southland Technical College. In the course of this research these records were united with those at the Invercargill Public Library. The Southland Institute of Technology, which remains on the site of the Southland Technical College, provided records of the building site and plans showing where the museum was located.

For the period 1915 to 1945 there was a contrasting wealth of relevant un-indexed archival material in the Southland Museum and Art Gallery. A comprehensive review of this material provided a clear picture of the development of the collection, funding and staffing levels, exhibition focus and overall functioning of the museum as the collection

Colonial Natural History Museums During the Late Nineteenth Century (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

moved from the Southland Technical College to the Southland Centennial Memorial Museum.

This thesis traces the history of museum development in Southland from 1869 – 1945; from a collection in a private commercial establishment to a publicly funded institution in a purpose built facility. This pattern of private collecting and museum development in Southland has aspects in common with other regions in New Zealand. This thesis however, presents for the first time a detailed account of the complex network of individuals and institutions that was necessary to sustain such development over a period of 75 years.