

Review

PACIFIC MANUSCRIPTS

Catalogue of manuscripts of Australasia and the Pacific in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. Series A; manuscripts catalogued between 1945 and 1963. Sydney, The Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, 1967. 283p.

There is enough New Zealand manuscript material listed in this catalogue to warrant scrutiny of it by those in this country who are concerned with historical research. Entry 5-56A, for example, describes the papers, 1831-42, of Captain William Cornwallis Symonds. Consisting mainly of letters to his family, the collection appears to be concerned with his activities in Auckland, including his trip to Taupo with Dieffenbach. 5-42A is the journal, 7 August—24 October 1845, 21 November 1846—2 January 1847, of the Rev Thomas Biddulph Hutton kept at Purewa, Auckland—not Waimate as stated in the catalogue. As well as the papers of men who actually lived in New Zealand, there are the papers of those who visited. In his journal, 1838-42, William Cleveland (5-91A) records that in September 1840 he sailed for the Bay of Islands and was at Thames during October and November of the same year. New Zealand references are also found in papers like those of Phillip Parker King, who received letters from friends or past professional colleagues in New Zealand. In King's case they were Robert Fitzroy [sic] and Everard Home.

All the manuscript collections mentioned in the preceding paragraph come from Chapter 5: "Manuscripts pertaining to the period 1820-1849". The catalogue has been divided into nine chapters which have been determined by chronological periods. This is an example that could be followed by other printed catalogues of a library's manuscript holdings. So far as New Zealand is concerned, the generally accepted pre-1642, 1642-1840, 1840-1853 etc., periods could be used. Regarding collections that cover more than three periods, use could be made of a chapter designated a "through" period as there is in this catalogue.

It is doubtful whether the division into periods compensates for the lack of birth and death dates for personal main entries. In themselves an aid to research, they should have been included at least on the occasions when the determining of them would not have been too difficult—even though many would be readily available to the user in biographical dictionaries.

A paragraph whose implications the user should be fully aware of is the following in the Introduction:

Manuscripts being amorphous material, their description can never be as standardized as that of books. *Therefore the users of this volume cannot expect the consistency of cataloguing, either in style or in depth that one would expect to find in a catalogue of printed materials.* The fact that the volume contains manuscripts catalogued through eighteen years—a period which brought about changes in the method of cataloguing manuscripts in the Mitchell Library—might also have caused some unevenness of cataloguing. [My italics]

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In mentioning what appear to be some of these inconsistencies, I am aware that my ignorance of the manuscripts themselves and of Australian history limit the validity of my judgments. What then may be one such inconsistency is the choice of the main entries for 4-21A (New South Wales—Governor) and 5-5A (Arthur, Sir George). In this case the confusion is resolved by the use of references in the index. With the former there is a *see also* reference from "Macquarie, Lachlan" and with the latter a *see* reference from "Tasmania—Governor". Some inconsistencies cannot be resolved by the index. These are found in the descriptive notes or the skeleton inventories that follow the main entry. Where correspondence is concerned, some of the collections appear to have all their correspondents listed, others only those whose letters comprise a whole volume. Summaries are given of some journals and not of others. It seems that the smaller the individual collection the more detailed its treatment. Considering the size of some of the collections, it is difficult to see how this would be otherwise. A detailed listing of the contents of the magnificent Macarthur collection would fill a volume the size of the one under discussion. One criticism that might be made is that some of the inventories contain entries that do not appear to earn the amount of space they occupy, for example, in 5-5A eleven lines are taken up by listing inwards correspondence by volume number and years covered by each volume. Considering that the user would have to consult a manuscripts librarian anyway before reading any of the material, "v17-27 Letters to Sir G. Arthur, 1821-49", would have served the purpose adequately.

The index entries are based on Library of Congress subject headings for printed material but are not dominated by them too much. It would be interesting to know whether the compilers of this catalogue became aware of the need to modify LC headings before the re-indexing of the first volume of the NUCMC was done. One feels that they did.

In a manuscript repository such as the Mitchell's, access by indexed author to the information it contains is at least as important as that indexed by time, place or subject. Generally most people mentioned in the catalogue have entries in the index. Two who do not are Everard Home and Fitzroy. Regarding place, the tendency appears to be to index the particular place except where it is a suburb of a city. Under headings such as "New Zealand" and "New South Wales", very detailed *see* and *see also* references are given. Because there is an abundance of cross references and no meanness in repeating entries, the index provides very good coverage indeed. An example of this is found in the treatment of ships, which combines general, particular, and chronological approaches. As one would expect, all ships have a name entry in the index's alphabetical sequence. As well as this all are listed in chronological order under "Ships and Shipping".

If there is an attitude expressed in this catalogue, it is that the chronological approach is fundamental in gaining access to information contained in modern manuscript material. First there are the period divisions already mentioned, and then there are the chronological subdivisions in the collective index entries. The list of individual ships under "Ships and Shipping" is preceded by a chronological list of "Primary Sources". Likewise there is one under "New Zealand", for example,

1834	5-96A
1836-1841	1-24A
1837-1854	5- 3A
1840	5-91A

etc.

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Although I have pointed out some minor errors and made some minor criticisms I am aware that there is a limited amount of time and staff available for compiling this type of catalogue. After all it is a research aid, not a research project. Its function is not to reduce the user's need to consult indexes, inventories, and manuscripts librarians on the spot, but rather to give the user not in the Library some indication of whether what he is seeking is likely to be found there. Heed will be taken of some of the excellent features of this catalogue in the second stage of the Alexander Turnbull Library's own project.

RAY GROVER

Correspondence

WITHER THE RENTAL COLLECTION?

SIR,—I generally support the view expressed by Ada Fache in your August issue and wish some librarian who sees his pay collection as she see hers would grasp such nettle as there may be in its dismantling. Either the collection is playing a positive part in developing or maintaining popularity and high standards of service, in which case it merits the space it occupies and the time we give to it, or it is an embarrassment we should be better off without; Miss Fache makes clear which case is that of the collection of Dunedin's Public Library today.

The view that such pay collections should "wither away" has been orthodox since they were first espoused in 1940 in *The Case for Free Library Service*; I know it was Mr Alley's and, more recently, Mr O'Neill's. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the Association's present fiction policy is geared to this distant objective, thereby adding to the present financial difficulties of many of our libraries. The accepted New Zealand objection to them, brought out by Miss Fache, is that they involve our handling an inferior species of reading to the detriment of more worthwhile stock; she acknowledges, however, that the question if pay collections are removed is not whether to stock material that is below present standards for free service but how much to stock of it, bearing in mind that the demand under free terms will be greatly increased. She also knows that "luvs and lights" are staple fare in most British libraries. Perhaps she does not realize to what extent American critics of these genres are blind to the pretentious mush that fills so much of the capacious American public library fiction shelving, nor the time that is given in America to the selection of detective stories; even comics and *True Confessions* are not ruled out. (1) But whether these pay collections will in fact wither away, or, whether it is even right, when we make money out of the works we call unworthy and only these, to content ourselves with wishing they would wither away, are other questions and Miss Fache is right to go beyond them to the question of what we may do in the way of expediting their demise, with all the difficulties she so honestly faces.