

# *The Anglican Historical Society of New Zealand* *Te Rōpu Hītori o te Hāhi Mihinare ki Aotearoa*

## *'I Must Write a Pamphlet or I'll Burst'*

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Sarah Selwyn uttered these words in the 1860s, when pamphlet writing was a useful way of releasing passion and energy. The New Zealand Wars were the catalyst for many such pamphlets. Of course, they varied in content and quality.

Recently I was asked to give an address to the Papatoetoe Historical Society on my work as an historian, with particular reference to my research of Friendship House, the ecumenical agency in Manukau City, established by six Churches in 1976. As I prepared for this, I was reminded that an historian's research and writing is often driven by a passionate desire to uncover a story and to share it with others.

My passion for New Zealand history, and especially the place of Christian mission within it, developed during extramural studies in the 1970s. History had been my favourite subject at school, yet I had a very limited understanding of New Zealand history, for it was not taught in any depth in schools of the 1950s. Nor had New Zealand church history received much attention in my theological studies. Yet in my first parish (Okato, in Taranaki) I was surrounded by history, both in the city of New Plymouth and also in famous nineteenth century sites of conflict and cultural clash - notable amongst these was Parihaka. My subsequent move to Matamata strengthened my interest, for there I learnt of Wiremu Tamihana. His impact on both Māori and Pakeha aroused in me the desire for research. Local historians, reading widely in published works, discussion with Māori - all these factors came together when some parishioners gave a stained-glass window for All Saints Church. By

mutual agreement between the donors, the Vestry, and Ngati Haua, the window featured Wiremu Tamihana. At this stage, in the mid-1980s, the Anglican Church was developing a strong interest in, and commitment to, the Treaty of Waitangi. So much so, that in 1989 the Church established a Bicultural Education Unit. I became one of the team of five educators.

An early task for me as an educator was to respond to the General Synod request for research of the circumstances relating to the death of CMS missionary Carl Völkner at Opotiki in 1865. This was a big challenge as there had been considerable controversy, particularly with regard to his inclusion in the Church's New Zealand Calendar. I recall sitting in the National Archives and holding the actual letters that Völkner wrote to Governor Grey. It was the content of those letters that led to his death. As I held the letters, I thought of his motivation as a missionary and as a European. Alongside this moving moment of research was my learning of the story of Mokomoko, unjustly executed for the death of Völkner. His final waiata, 'Bring me justice...' was another very human thread that needed to be woven into our understanding of a painful part of New Zealand's history. So, my recommendation, which General Synod subsequently agreed to, was that both men should be remembered as symbols of the reconciliation that is possible in the turmoil of our human affairs. Such discoveries of the human threads in our history are for me a strong energizer as I undertake research.

So also, is the discovery of material that no-one

else seems to have noticed or placed much value on. This gives a sense of going 'where no-one has gone before.' A few years ago, when visiting the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, I worked through a collection of material relating to James Stack. This had been organized in such a way as to assist in a series of publications relating to him. Yet little attention seemed to have been given to his wife Eliza's journal which is also part of the collection. I was delighted to find in her journal a very full description of a visit she made (with Carl Völkner) to Matamata in 1858, where they were given hospitality overnight in the home of Wiremu Tamihana. This is, to date, the only reference I have found to his domestic life.

All researchers have their own particular bias. We look at material from within the perspective of our own time and culture. So, I am not daunted by the fact that other researchers and scholars may have written and published work in an area which I want to revisit. A fresh investigation may yield new treasures and insights, and current needs and aspirations may provoke different ways of handling material. The researcher will dig around to find what material is available in public archives (and sometimes in personal or family archives). Discussion with other historians is usually very fruitful. Oral history has, in recent years, come to be valued very highly as a means of unlocking memories as well as awareness of other sources of information. It is important to follow all leads carefully, and not to discard any material too readily. Apparent trivia may later become very significant. So, it is important to keep full notes, and full details of the sources of the material. In any subsequent writing it is important that all sources are accurately recorded. While carrying out research it is also useful to be aware of one's own bias. What might I be overlooking? What might I be giving too much importance to?

All of this research will eventually lead to an account or story, published or unpublished. My

own experience suggests that the research phase comprises about 40% of the project, the writing phase another 40%, while the final details of publication occupy about 20% of the project.

My interest in the history of Friendship House has come out of my role as Chairperson of the Trust Board. Helping in the formulation of proposals for a major funding initiative made me aware of some unique aspects in the beginning of this ecumenical venture. As most of the significant figures in the developments of the 1970s are still alive it seems useful to do some thorough archival and oral research. I have had to overcome my own preference for nineteenth century history. As well, I discovered in my research on Carl Völkner that where matters being researched are still impacting on the present, there can be some presumptions about the research conclusions, and some hostility when those conclusions do not match the presumptions.

The unique aspects that are driving my research of Friendship House include: the opening of the original Friendship House buildings took place in 1976 at about the same time that the Manukau shopping mall was opened, so the Churches were in 'on the ground floor' of the development of the Manukau City Centre; several Churches worked together very intentionally and deliberately to launch Friendship House; the representatives of the Churches worked closely with the staff of the Manukau City Council. The factor that triggered my research was the statement by the Mayor of Manukau City, Sir Barry Curtis, that 'Friendship House is the spiritual focus of Manukau City.'

I am discovering the uniqueness of doing oral history: the researcher's own passion and motivation is assisted by the enthusiasm and energy of others. In some cases, my questions have uncovered memories, both joyful and painful, that have lain dormant for almost three decades. One interview also led to the discovery

of a major archival holding that I was not aware of. This is the minutes of the Wiri Interchurch Planning Committee, which help underline the uniqueness of Friendship House: Churches working together in regional Mission. This is unusual in today's context where the Churches pursue their own denominational objectives, but in the ecumenical warmth of the 1970s it was not surprising, and there are some other examples in

the same period, for instance, the Interchurch Trade and Industry Mission. Such shared Mission was usually 'community facing' with a focus on 'community development.'

It will be some time yet before this research is concluded. I am, after all, Vicar of a large parish! Yet, one day, 'I must write a pamphlet!'