
NOHANZ Newsletter

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www.oralhistory.org.nz

Calling all members...

*We would like to hear what you are working on.
Please share your stories, successes, proposed
projects, challenges, etc., with us.*
Send to:

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P.O. Box 3819
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Or e-mail to:

megan.hutching@mch.govt.nz

Oral history in New Zealand

Raoul Island Oral History Project - challenges and progress

While working on remote Raoul Island as a volunteer for the Department of Conservation as a volunteer, I spent many evenings poring over the old station diaries. The diaries dated back to the 1950s and 1960s and were full of intimate details of the life of a small team of men stationed on the island for a year at a time (until 1989 only men were stationed there). Intrigued by their stories, I set about tracking down some of the men and women who had worked on Raoul Island.

Chance meetings and internet searches have contributed to both my research and tracking down people to interview. Contact with one person was made possible by a chance meeting a friend of mine made in the hot pools at Nuhaka (Hamish's comment "ahhhh, this reminds me of the hot pools we dug in the sand on Raoul island" led the other occupant in the pool to say that he too had been on Raoul, as a mechanic in the 1950s.) Another friend's work mate's father was head of the Aerodrome Service and was closely involved with work on Raoul Island in the 1940s; Wing Commander Gibson was responsible for sending a married couple and their young daughter to the island in the early 1940s. I have now interviewed the 'young daughter', after she approached Karen Olsen (Met observer 1989) following a talk: I had tried to track her down but got nowhere.

The internet white pages enabled me to search all the phone directories in the country at once – heaven - and I've found other Raoul contacts by simple name searches on the internet. I had some staff lists found in an old notebook on the island, advertised in the RSA news (hoping to locate a coastwatcher), and put the word out through the Met Service and the Department of Conservation. One of the challenges I've faced has been limiting the number of people interviewed!

The network of people associated with Raoul Island remains strong, even though some people were there over 50 years ago. In the 'old days' the Raoul and Campbell Island Association helped keep the memories alive for Raoul Island 'veterans' by production of a newsletter 'The Islander', and with regular dine and dance

evenings and film screenings of films about the islands.

I set out to record changes over time from 1937 - 2000, and to interview people who had worked in different roles on the island:

- An axeman/handyman sent up in 1937 as an 18 year old to clear the bush by hand to make the roads, preceding the establishment of the met station.
- A woman who had lived on Raoul Island with her family, as a six year old child in the early 1940s.
- A farm manager who spent 18 months producing meat, milk, butter and vegetables from the Raoul Island farm, with the help of Niuean labourers. (1948)
- A former lighthouse keeper who was stationed on Raoul as the officer in charge for two expeditions in the early 1970s (followed by a stint on Campbell Island), and his wife, who remained in New Zealand looking after their three children.
- A man who joined five expeditions to Raoul Island in the 1960s first as cook and then officer in charge.
- A goat hunter sent up by the NZ Forest Service to take part in the eradication of goats.
- The first woman to be stationed on Raoul as a meteorological observer (1989).

All the interviews follow the same themes: family background/early years, how they came to go to Raoul, first impressions, work, leisure, expedition team, conflict, events, food and food sources, accommodation, how the island was administered, the landscape and environment, the effect of isolation, leaving, life back in New Zealand. I adapted the life history interview format so that the bulk of the interview is about their time on the island, which enabled lots of detail in their recollections about the island.

A story from one interview stands out, demonstrating the resourcefulness of island dwellers: in 1964 the team was preparing to receive the Governor General and his wife, Sir Bernard and Lady Laura Fergusson. The OIC thought it would be a good idea to spruce up the old Ford truck (the only

transport on the island then -and still in use!). He decided to cover the seats with fabric, and to suit the vice-regal occasion dyed it red with the only dye he could get his hands on – beetroot juice. In the temperate climate, Sir Bernard stepped out of the truck to find that his white trousers had turned pink!!

One ethical issue I've faced was how to handle sensitive information I had read in station diaries or government archives which was personal and I was pretty sure the person I was interviewing wouldn't have seen it (and most likely would not have been aware of it). I put this information aside when interviewing, leaving open the possibility that the interviewee could raise it. I've also found that some aspects of living on the island which had a big impact at the time can in retrospect be of less importance. Conflict between expedition members features strongly in station diaries, (and in my own experience) but most people I've interviewed have preferred to focus on the positive aspects of life there.

Huge thanks for the grant I received from the Sesquicentennial Fund. I have faced some challenges in doing the project, including starting the project when my son was one, my partner (and project assistant!) being unwell with Guillain Barre syndrome, and a move to Lyttelton. Some of the challenges have been unexpected, and others relate to an overambitious project plan. Despite this I'm passionate about my project, and it has given me new skills and enormous satisfaction - particularly when I hear that it has meant a lot to the people I've interviewed to have someone take an interest in this time of their life.

I've really appreciated the encouragement and advice I've had from people in the oral history community, for Judith's inspirational training and all the help I've had from Megan, Linda and Jocelyn.

2002 will be a landmark year in the history of Raoul Island as DoC are doing a helicopter poison drop to eradicate rats and cats in the hope that the island will be able to be returned as far as possible to its original state. Seems like a good year to launch the tapes and celebrate their journey to the Oral History Centre.

Contact kimm@ihug.co.nz
Phone 03 328 8133

'THE TUIS' – stories of World War II women added to Turnbull collections

Oral history interviews with a group of New Zealand women who tap danced and plucked chooks from Cairo to Rome to support New Zealand troops during the Second World War were handed over to the Alexander Turnbull Library in January this year.

Liz Catherall interviewed 12 women for the *Tui contribution to World War II oral history project* which was funded by an Award in Oral History.

Many of the women interviewed attended the presentation and Liz Catherall spoke about the project, playing extracts from the interviews and showing photographs. Colonel Jessie Gunn, Director of the Office of Veterans Affairs, also spoke. There was a large display of photographs in the auditorium foyer accompanied by relevant quotes from the oral histories and a Tui uniform on loan from the Waiouru Army Museum.

The photographs were later moved to the Turnbull Library foyer and are still on display there.

The women travelled to Cairo in 1941 in response to a request from the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force Commander, Bernard Freyberg, to the New Zealand Government to send thirty 'girls' to bring a touch of home and to help staff the new Forces Club there.

When they arrived in Cairo, they were placed in the care of Freyberg's elegant upper class English wife, Barbara. Since 'My General' - as she called him - had his kiwis, she named the group 'The Tuis'.

The Tuis, who came from a wide variety of backgrounds, had been selected from hundreds of applicants by the Women's War Service Auxiliary and went overseas as members of the 2NZEF. They had no real idea of what was expected of them.

Their reasons for volunteering covered the field: some wanted adventure, some were escaping small towns where all the young men had left for war, others considered it their patriotic duty.

As the NZ Division moved from North Africa into Italy, the Tuis followed them, working in Forces Clubs in Bari and Rome and later at the Fernleaf Club in London. On the way they served hundreds of thousands of sandwiches and cups of tea, shopped with 'their boys' for presents to send home, visited wounded soldiers in hospital and, when required, sang and danced, though few of them had much experience of performing.

'We are delighted to receive this significant collection that documents the activities of the Tuis in the words of the participants,' said Linda Evans, Curator of Turnbull's Oral History Centre. 'At the moment in this country, there is a focus on recording the experiences of New Zealanders during the Second World War, and the stories of the Tuis contribute significantly to the rich oral history collections we hold relating to women's experiences during the war. We appreciate Liz's work as well as the generosity of the interviewees in recording these interviews that will be so valuable to historians and researchers in the future.'

Wanted to buy: Sony BM-77 Transcriber. Please contact: Suzanne MacAula at (04) 565-0349 [h]; (04) 463-6435 [w]. Or, email: smacaula@ihug.co.nz; Address: 113 Hill Road, Belmont, Lower Hutt.

Recent accessions at the Oral History Centre, 2001

Projects funded by an Award in Oral History

Anglo-Indian lives oral history project. Fourteen interviews by Dorothy McMenamin with people who spent their early life in colonial India and now live in New Zealand.

Auckland Civic Theatre 2000 oral archive project. Twelve interviews by Anna Soutar with people involved with the movie theatre since it began in 1929 and with those involved in its recent conservation and restoration.

Childhood in the Kumeu-Huapai district oral history project. Eight interviews by Debbie Dunsford with people who grew up in this rural

district north-west of Auckland early last century.

I am a dark river : Bob Lowry oral history project. Twenty four interviews by Tessa Mitchell and Ben Holmes about the life and work of this publisher, printer and typographer.

Interviews with Wiremu Kerekere and Henare Te Ua. Libby Hakaraia interviews these two Maori broadcasters.

Otaki Citizens Advice Bureau oral history project. Eight interviews by Jill Abigail with volunteers from the Bureau talking about its management and role in the community.

Piha oral history project. Six interviews by Yvonne Dufaur with residents of this West Auckland beach community, some of whom have lived or had holidays there since the 1930s.

'To rest in peace' oral history project. Five interviews by Sandra Kay Robertson examining the mental and emotional effects on parents and families who have an intellectually handicapped child.

Vintage years : the wine industry in New Zealand. Seven interviews by Janice Aplin tracing the history of the New Zealand wine industry since its early days in the 1950s.

Women's Studies Association feminist oral history project. Ten interviews by Jill Abigail with feminists about their involvement with feminism and women's studies since the 1970s.

World War I oral history project for Nga Taonga a nga Tama Toa Trust. Eleven videotape interviews by Monty Soutar about Maori experiences of World War I.

Other selected acquisitions

Interview with Frank O'Flynn. Dinah Priestley interviews this lawyer and politician.

Interview with Sir Robert Rex. Tony Johns interviews the Premier of Niue in 1977 about his early life and the beginnings of his political involvement on Niue.

Maysie Bestall-Cohen Promotions. The Benson and Hedges and Smokefree Fashion Awards.

Forty videotapes of the annual fashion awards and associated promotions from 1982 until 1998. Donated by Maysie Bestall-Cohen.

Michael King recordings about Whina Cooper. Sixteen tapes of interviews and recordings with Whina Cooper and Sir James Henare, for the biography *Whina*, recorded from 1982 to 1986.

Ophthalmological Society of New Zealand oral history project. Seven interviews by Anna Cottrell with prominent members of the Society. Commissioned by the Ophthalmological Society.

Resource Management Act oral history project. Eight interviews by David Young examining the effect of the Act ten years after it became legislation in 1991. Commissioned by the Institute of Policy Studies.

Second World War oral history project : Crete Seventeen interviews by Megan Hutching and Jock Phillips with veterans of the battle for Crete. Commissioned by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

Sound and video recordings of Noel Virtue 1990-2000. A collection of interviews with this gay author and other sound recordings relating to his work.

Translation service oral history project. Five interviews by Megan Hutching describing the service's history. Commissioned by the Department of Internal Affairs.

Upper Hutt Uniting Parish millennium oral history project. Fifty three interviews by Elaine Bolitho with church members talking about their faith and parish. Commissioned by the parish.

Restrictions may apply in some cases. For further information contact the Oral History Centre Atl@natlib.govt.nz or phone 04-474-3162.