Editors: Giselle Byrnes & Mark Smith

Editorial Advisory Group:

Catharine Coleborne University of Waikato
Stephen Hamilton Darwin, Australia
Bronwyn Labrum Massey University, Wellington
Rowland Weston University of Waikato

The New Zealand Journal of Public History is an occasional journal published by the Public History Research Unit (PHRU), University of Waikato. The New Zealand Journal of Public History is currently available free of charge.

Correspondence should be addressed to the

Administrator

New Zealand Journal of Public History
Public History Research Unit (PHRU)
History Programme,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Te Tari Tumu Korero,
The University of Waikato, Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato.
Private Bag 3105
New Zealand
Or by electronic mail to: phruadmin@waikato.ac.nz

PUBLISHED BY THE PHRU, HISTORY PROGRAMME,
THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
ISSN 2253-153X
© 2011 The New Zealand Journal of Public History
Introduction

Welcome to the first issue of The New Zealand Journal of Public History, a publication devoted to the discussion, debate and dissemination of ideas about the practice of public history in Aotearoa New Zealand. We hope the Journal will be a site for new ideas about what characterizes public history: its particular contours and challenges and how this might contribute in our collective quest to better understand the past. We hope in the future to feature further articles and essays on any aspect of public history associated with Aotearoa New Zealand. We also hope to include exhibition, website and conference reviews in order to profile the pace and energy of the public history community.

Yet first the term ‘public history’ begs a clear definition. We consider any work produced for those outside the strictest definition of the academy, yet adhering to standards of the historical discipline, as ‘public history’. Generally speaking, public history refers to the employment of historians and the historical method outside academia; in government, private companies, the media, historical societies and museums, as well as those working in private practice—for example, consultants and freelance historians writing commissioned histories. Public historians are employed by government agencies, in archives and records management, film, photography and video archives management, heritage preservation, historical consulting, historical research, editing and publishing, museum curatorial work, management and exhibitions, tourism, and in Treaty of Waitangi research.

The work of public historians can be divided into two broad areas. The first field is historical resource management which involves the collection, preservation and use of historical materials in public agencies such as historical societies,
museums, archives, and the media. The second sphere, which might be called ‘applied research’, involves the use of history for client-oriented research where the historian’s perspective, methodology and skill set is valuable in problem solving, policy analysis, and project histories for businesses, institutions, and government agencies.

Perhaps most importantly, as several of the contributors to this issue remind us, public history is not distinguished by where it is practiced, but by its audience and the method of communication. In the most general sense, the purpose of public history is to make the past useful, relevant, and accessible to a wide audience. Public historians therefore seek to make history serviceable to the present and relevant for the future.

The rise of public history as an academic sub-discipline is relatively recent. It was only in the late 1970s that Public History formally became a discrete field of study. Robert Kelley and his colleagues set out to establish a programme devoted to the application of the historical method beyond the academy and to what might be termed the practical and pragmatic realities of ‘doing history’.

Thanks to efforts like Kelley’s, journals such as The Public Historian and other landmark publications, the genre has since been internationalized, with public history programmes now offered across the United States as well as in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

Here in Aoteaora New Zealand, public historians have been at work for most of the twentieth century. The establishment of the Professional Historians’ Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (PHANZA) in 1994, and the Centre for Public History at the University of Otago in 1995, along with several course offerings at New Zealand universities were concrete indicators of the growth of public history in this country. The publication of key texts such as Common Ground? Heritage and Public Places in New Zealand, 2000, and Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History, 2001, signified the establishment of a critical literature devoted to public
history. Moreover, the publication of many scholarly historical works over the past two decades—most of which have been supported by the state—has signaled the vibrant intellectual dimension of public history. Alongside and underpinning this developing literature, there has been an increased demand for historians and historical analysis beyond the education sector. For some time, the Waitangi Tribunal and the History Group of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage have been major employers of historians and the historical method. There is also a great deal of historical research conducted at the local level, in museums, archives and historical societies. As evidence of this, the Professional Historians’ Association of New Zealand/Aotearoa (PHANZA) now has a large national membership and holds regular conferences and symposia. In addition, there are many freelance and contract historians currently employed across New Zealand on historical projects that speak to audiences beyond the academy. We invite all of you to be involved with future issues of this journal.

This first issue of the Journal draws its material from the inaugural Public History symposium, hosted by the Public History Research Unit (PHRU) at the University of Waikato in Hamilton in late November 2010. The papers featured here address a broad variety of issues and topics that touch on issues of public history interest and currency. Kirstine Moffatt’s article on interacting with historic pianos is an evocative examination of an experience of material culture, and the dialogue between the scholar and the enthusiast within herself. Nancy Swarbrick offers an insightful reflection on the experience of creating the Waikato entry for Te Ara: the Online Encyclopedia of New Zealand. As well as describing the process of contributing to a state-funded online publication, Swarbrick considers the specific advantages a very different kind of history and the possibilities for engaging users in thinking about the past. Mark Smith’s article also looks at engaging participants - through a novel methodology. Smith’s piece explains the learning history method along with revealing how a group beyond the university views and uses their history. William
Jennings’ article highlights the exciting opportunities offered by the publication of the *Lettres reçues d'Océanie*, and the significant possibilities for refreshing public discourse on New Zealand’s early settlement history. This piece is followed by freelance scholar Stephen Hamilton’s description of the experience of preparing a scoping study on the history of Woodlands Estate in the Waikato and the possibility of evoking in rich detail the life of the people who lived, worked and died there. This inaugural issue of the *Journal* begins and ends discussing experience: our final article is Rowland Weston’s exploration of his ambivalence as a historical tourist and makes striking comments about the nature of experience, history and our identification with the presence of the past.

The variety of these contributions indicates some of the possibilities of public history. We hope that these articles showcase something of current public history practice and will generate new conversations on the richness of historical research in this country. We believe that valuing and understanding our past experiences is essential in informing discussion, debate and decision-making on contemporary issues. This journal is one small contribution to that effort—long may such efforts continue.

GISELLE BYRNES AND MARK SMITH

*Editors*

---

1 The first offering of Public History as a subject (at the University of California in 1976), the initial publication of *The Public Historian* (1978) and the creation of the National Council for the Promotion of History (1979) all happened within a relatively short period.