

Library Services to the Maori community

Wharehuia Hemara discusses some aspects of the NZ experience

1993
INTERNATIONAL YEAR
FOR THE WORLD'S
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



'A NEW PARTNERSHIP'

The Treaty of Waitangi (Treaty between the Crown and Maori, 1840) and Treaty resolution have come into sharp focus over the last ten years, giving rise to a massive increase in the demand for historical, evidential Maori intellectual material.

The Library profession has responded in a variety of different ways.

Up until the mid 1980's public libraries had been slow to meet the challenge; research libraries and archives responded in a worthy but barely adequate manner. How did this happen?

There appears to have been a shift in attitude by many Pakeha (non-Maori) away from using Europe as the yardstick for all that is great and good, to self-appreciation and re-evaluation of this country's history and its place in the South Pacific.

A fortunate spinoff of this shift is an increased appreciation of the indigenous contribution to this part of the world and the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised.

Also, the Maori community has given notice that it is not prepared to take a passive role in any decisions that affect their present status and future well-being.

Although this rebirthing process has not been painless, as evidenced by regular and extremely vocal redneck reactions, the change has a life of its own.

All this has impacted on the profession which now realises that it has an articulate Maori clientele which it either never realised existed or purposely ignored.

Maori have been more fortunate than most indigenous minorities, in that their community took the opportunity last century to create a large written historical resource. This has allowed them to preserve much of their material and esoteric culture while using it as fuel for dynamic intellectual growth.

In 1984 the Auckland Public Library held an exhibition of 19th Century Maori manuscripts. The exhibition proved to be a resounding success, especially within the

Maori community, increasing their awareness that other research institutions also held these rich resources. Since then the demand for access to the Maori written record has increased exponentially.

Research libraries and archives now appreciate that it is their Maori material that contributes to the unique quality of their collections. This appreciation may have helped



Wharehuia Hemara

them realise the need to address the special needs of the contemporary indigenous community.

Among the organisations that have had a role in facilitating change, the Auckland Public Library has taken a proactive approach. Apart from their successful 1984 exhibition, they have also employed and trained a Maori as a Maori library specialist. Both these actions resulted in an enormous increase in Maori usage.

The Alexander Turnbull Library which is part of the National Library (*Te Puna Matauranga o Aotearoa*) established a Maori specialist position in 1979 and began to develop intellectual access tools and to arrange and describe Maori material in a way that best suited Maori clients.

In 1989 plans were laid for the development of a Maori Language Subject Thesaurus, with the intention that it would be used by all the nation's cataloguers, in li-

braries, museums and art galleries. It will be ready as a working document during 1993.

In 1990 the National Library mounted its major exhibition, *Nga Kupu Korero—The People of the Treaty Speak*, which has been exhibited around the country. This has raised the profile of all Maori collections throughout the country and particularly the services the National Library has to offer. The National Library has also created 5 more Maori specialist positions and established grants to encourage more Maori into the profession. A Maori Research and Services Unit planned for 1993 will be a catalyst for further development and will hopefully unify individual initiatives.

Since the mid-1980's government departments and local authorities have become aware of and responsive to their obligations to the Treaty of Waitangi. This has impacted positively on departmental and local libraries.

In 1990 a guide to Maori bibliographic resources, *Te Hikoi Marama* was published. It listed over 80 organisations which deliver a variety of information services.

The adoption of Biculturalism as a philosophy to work by is changing the way Pakeha see their relationship with the indigenous population. The library profession has taken the philosophy on board, but what it means, how it can be implemented and where it will lead to, is still being debated. It is generally agreed that Maori are special to Aotearoa/New Zealand, that they are a unique culture and race that have developed in this country and have a right to self-determination and a role in determining which direction the country and in this case the profession is to take. The problem for Maori, is convincing Pakeha to share power so that biculturalism can be translated into direct and positive action.