

A NOTE ON PACIFIC HISTORY IN NEW ZEALAND

Mary Boyd

Your enquiry about the beginnings of the teaching of Pacific history in New Zealand takes me back to 1949 when a new prescription for an MA degree in History was adopted by the four constituent colleges of the University of New Zealand. This included an optional paper on Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific. At Victoria University College, almost no New Zealand, Australian or Pacific history was then being taught; only colonial history, which was mainly the evolution of responsible government in Canada and the evolution of the British Commonwealth, and colonial America. The lectures we had on colonial history when I was a student included one on the history of New Zealand by J. C. Beaglehole and another on imperial rivalry by Sylvia Smith (nee Masterman, and author of *The Origins of International Rivalry in Samoa*), yet most MA students wrote theses on New Zealand topics.

By 1949, Beaglehole was editing Cook's Journals full-time and I was employed as a Junior Lecturer, among other things to teach his colonial and American history classes. F. L. W. Wood, the Head of Department, who had always taught European and British constitutional history, was writing *The New Zealand People at War* and suggested that I might like to teach the new MA option, mainly I guess because I had written a thesis on early race relations in New Zealand, and worked on the missionary map for the New Zealand Historical Atlas, a Department of Internal Affairs centenary project that eventually floundered.

All four History Departments (Otago, Canterbury, Auckland and Victoria) seemed to have found the prescription too wide in scope for one of the four papers required for an MA, plus a thesis. Having read J. W.

Davidson's PhD thesis on 'European Penetration in the South Pacific' for my Atlas research, and being interested in anthropology (not then taught at Victoria), we asked him if we could use it as a basic text and he asked his mother to send us her copy. About this time, too, John M. Ward's *British Policy in the South Pacific* was published.

More importantly, there were forces at work in the University and the community which fostered an increased interest in the study of the Pacific as well as New Zealand history—the Pacific War and the development of New Zealand nationality, the Australia–New Zealand Agreement of 1944, the establishment of the international trusteeship system in San Francisco in 1945, and the South Pacific Commission in 1947; also the Samoan petition for self-government and Albert Henry and the Cook Islands Progressive Association, which were putting pressure on the Fraser government for 'new look' policies to promote political as well as economic and social advancement. Beaglehole and Wood and other members of the University were active members of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, which had always been concerned to increase understanding and discussion of Pacific affairs and New Zealand's involvement in them, and they encouraged their ex-students and junior staff to become members.

In February 1949, I went to the Pacific Science Congress in Auckland and Christchurch with the anthropologists Pam and Ernest Beaglehole, who had recently published *Some Modern Maori* and *Islands of Danger* and done fieldwork and research on the ethnology of Pukapuka atoll, on the Tongan village of Pangai, and on modern Hawai'ians. This was a tremendously stimulating experience for someone brought up on European, colonial and American history—my first exposure to Pacific history as an interdisciplinary study! All the New Zealand anthropologists were there, and Americans who had been members of the postwar research expedition to United States-occupied Micronesian islands, including Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa), Director of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, who had been to Kapingamarangi and illustrated his lecture with a film. Newly appointed, full-time members of the South Pacific Commission, including H. E. Maude, were also there.

Two other influences on my teaching of Pacific history were Raymond Firth, whose lectures and seminar I attended at the London School of Economics, and W. K. Hancock, Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London, who let me participate in his 1950–51 interdisciplinary

seminar on colonial policy and practice in the age of Kipling and Lugard. This was much more interesting than Graham's seminar on imperial history and Martin's on the Colonial Office, at the Institute of Historical Studies, and it impressed on me the importance of studying what was happening in indigenous societies, not just European activities. Most of the contributors were Africanists, but Davidson turned up one evening and talked about his work in Western Samoa.

In subsequent years the Pacific history I taught was largely based on the research and publications of the Canberra school of Pacific historians cross-fertilised by ideas and methods of African historians. Several Victoria students went on to do PhDs in Davidson's Department, including Alan Ward, Hugh Laracy and Barrie Macdonald.

A first year course in New Zealand history was established at Victoria in 1957 but we didn't start teaching an undergraduate course in Pacific history until after Macdonald had pioneered one for both internal and extramural students at Massey University in the early 1970s. The reorganisation of History teaching at Victoria in 1976–77 resulted in two new, second-year courses, David Mackay's on Australian history and mine on Pacific history, which was similar to but wider in span than Massey's. For basic reading we dredged the *Journal of Pacific History* and other journals, monographs based on PhD research, Davidson and Scarr's *Pacific Islands Portraits*, and Gash and Whitaker's *Documents and Readings in New Guinea History*. The second Waigani Seminar on *The History of Melanesia* fertilised this course and the eventual publication of Kerry Howe's *Where the Waves Fall* provided a welcome textbook. Students, however, tended to shy off from studying island kingdoms in depth; more essays were written on the labour trade and indentured labour.

For BA Honours students, the old paper on Pacific history was replaced by a new one on the decolonisation of Oceania, beginning with resistance movements. Discussion with members of the Law faculty actively involved as constitutional advisers was helpful, as were seminars at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies during study leave in 1974–75, and seminars arranged by our Pacific Studies Committee at Victoria, which consisted of staff members teaching courses and researching in the area.

By 1985 when I retired, new approaches to teaching Pacific history were needed. New Zealand-born Pacific Islanders were coming to the university; women's studies were advancing; the importance of oral

tradition was more widely appreciated; colleagues were facilitating the writing of island histories from indigenous perspectives rather than doing it themselves. New skills were required, including a working knowledge of the language of the people. One pointer to the way ahead in New Zealand is Maori thinking about their past and the development of Maori history, partly to provide evidence on claims being heard by the Waitangi Tribunal.

So to answer your question, Dorothy Shineberg was almost certainly the first person to mount an undergraduate course in Pacific history.

Note

Mary Boyd retired as Reader in History at Victoria University of Wellington in 1985. More recently she worked for the Waitangi Tribunal. This short piece was written in response to my enquiry—at the behest of Barrie Macdonald— about the origins of Pacific history as an undergraduate offering in New Zealand universities [Ed.].
