

McLintock, Alexander Hare

1903–1968

Teacher, university lecturer, historian, artist

By Edmund Bohan

Biography

Alexander Hare McIntock was born in Gore on 14 April 1903, the son of Robert Alexander Hare McIntock, a Glasgow-born engineer, and his wife, Christina Jane Cameron McDonald. Throughout his life he remained proud of his Scottish heritage. Educated at Caversham School and Otago Boys' High School, he attended the Dunedin Training College before working as a primary schoolteacher in Dunedin between 1921 and 1929. He also studied at the University of Otago, from where he graduated MA with first-class honours in history in 1928, and at the Dunedin School of Art.



Alexander Hare
McIntock

As a university student McIntock won a reputation as a trenchant debater; he once teamed up with Arnold Nordmeyer and represented the university at least three times in overseas debates. Widely read, especially in the English classics, he developed not only a remarkably high reading speed but a retentive memory. He had a wide interest in the arts: as well as painting and etching he played the piano competently. Throughout his life music was his major relaxation; his record collection was remarkably comprehensive.

On 11 January 1928 at Dunedin, McIntock married Eva Maude Adams. They had one daughter. He taught at Timaru Technical College between 1929 and 1936 and, in addition, lectured for the WEA from 1930 to 1934. In 1936 he went to the University of London, where he took his PhD. His thesis was expanded into his first major book, *The establishment of constitutional government in Newfoundland, 1783–1832* (1941).

By that time McIntock had also won a reputation through his paintings and etchings and his writing on New Zealand art. After returning from London in 1939 he was a director of the National Centennial Exhibition of New Zealand Art, editing its catalogue. He was later given the task of selecting both retrospective and contemporary works for exhibition in the United States – a project abandoned when that country entered the Second World War in December 1941.

From 1940 to 1952 McIntock lectured at the University of Otago: in history until 1946 and thereafter in English. It was during this period that he edited the Otago Centennial Historical Publications (completed in 1958). This massive undertaking involved editing 17 district histories and the writing of his own truly monumental *The history of Otago* (1949) and *The port of Otago* (1951). *The history of Otago* remains in a class of its own as a provincial history. A combination of meticulous research, comprehensiveness, and grandeur of style, it won the Ernest Scott Prize from the University of Melbourne and established McIntock as one of New Zealand's major historians.

It was the greater shock, therefore, when, amidst considerable controversy, McIntock failed to obtain the chair of history at Canterbury University College in 1949. McIntock was a proud man, conscious of his own abilities and worth, and such a bitter blow coinciding with a publishing triumph marked him for life and bred a disdain for the academic establishment.

In 1952 he was appointed parliamentary historian, with a brief to produce a comprehensive parliamentary history spread over several volumes. His first task, however, was to investigate the King Country liquor question, surrounded at the time by a profusion of conflicting myths. His report debunked the notion that there was ever a pact to keep the King Country dry.

This report was typical of McIntock's work, for he believed that history must be neither myth nor prejudice, nor the servant of transitory intellectual fashion; rather, it had to be the honest evaluation of facts discovered through painstaking research. Always a man of forthright opinion, he was contemptuously dismissive of what he regarded as 'shoddy' history and those he judged to have dodged the real work of the historian by escaping into slickly expressed generalisation. Inevitably he was at odds with some contemporary academic historians, to whom he could be both arrogant and aloof. To those he trusted, however, he was considerate and inspiring, a good-humoured friend and a conversationalist of rare accomplishment.

The first volume of the parliamentary history, *Crown colony government in New Zealand* (1958) was assailed by some critics for being too lofty in tone and too detailed, and for drawing faulty conclusions – especially on military matters. Perhaps McIntock also overemphasised personality at the expense of economic factors, and he certainly overlooked recent work in his field. Yet few other New Zealand historians have written prose of comparable quality or portrayed the personalities of the leading actors in the country's history so vividly.

The second volume was to be a study of the Legislative Council from 1854 to 1887. McIntock was deflected from this task by the demands of editing *A descriptive atlas of New Zealand* (1959), and more especially by the three-volume *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* (1966), a vast work of three million words for which he gathered more than 1,800 essays from 359 authors. During much of this time he also looked after his wife, who had been incapacitated by a severe stroke.

The *Encyclopaedia* is an enduring monument to McIntock's wide interests and formidable editorial skills, and he regarded it as the one project of his life which extended him to the limits of his physical and mental strengths. It remains an indispensable work of reference, and McIntock's own elegantly composed essays on all manner of subjects are models of erudition and lucidity.

McIntock had continued painting and etching, and his work was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1937 and 1947 and at the Royal Scottish Academy, the New English Art Club and in Paris. His work was included in the New Zealand art exhibition sent to Russia in 1958, and he is represented in several New Zealand galleries. He served on the arts advisory committee of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand and remained active in the Otago Art Society and the Otago Photographic Society until his death. He was one of the committee which decided on the designs for New Zealand's decimal banknotes. He was made a CBE in 1953.

McIntock, already terminally ill with cancer, retired from his official post in February 1968 and died in Dunedin on 29 May. He was survived by his wife and daughter.

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