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State-funded history



1922.

State funded *The New Zealand Wars* published

MCH, 2012f

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Timeline 1

A selection of books published by the History Group of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage in 2005-6.

The state of history

The New Zealand government has a long history of funding and publishing historical works of all kinds, ranging from the 50-plus volumes of Second World War history to the cutting-edge digital projects of the early 21st century.

The government's role in recording and promoting New Zealand's historical heritage can be traced back to at least 1865, when the Colonial Museum was founded in Wellington. State support for history publications dates from at least the 1920s, when James Cowan completed his landmark history of *The New Zealand wars* (1922-3).

In the mid-20th century the government broadened its historical role. The Centennial Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs published an 11-volume series marking New Zealand's centennial in 1940, drawing on the talents of various historians and writers, notably E.H. McCormick and J.C. Beaglehole. Other publications at this time included the first *Dictionary of New Zealand biography*, edited by Parliamentary Librarian G.H. Scholefield.

In April 1945 a War History Branch was established, under the direction of McCormick, now Chief War Archivist, and Major-General H.K. Kippenberger, Editor-in-Chief. Beginning with the publication of 24 short booklets, the Branch produced nine campaign volumes, 11 volumes on various services and 21 histories of particular units, plus volumes of documents and the four-volume *New Zealand people at war* series. The official Second World War history series eventually totalled more than 50 volumes spanning nearly four decades. It remains the largest historical enterprise ever attempted in New Zealand.

Meanwhile, other official histories appeared, including A.H. McIntock's *Crown colony government in New Zealand* (1958) and the three-volume *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* (1966). Although work on the originally planned series of war histories continued into the 1980s, the War History Branch became the Historical Publications Branch in 1963. In 1989 it was renamed the Historical Branch and began a period of expansion under the leadership of Jock Phillips, producing dozens of histories of New Zealanders at war, government departments and state activity.

In the early 1980s the Branch helped launch a new *Dictionary of New Zealand biography* project, with first W.H. Oliver and later Claudia Orange as General Editor. Five volumes, containing biographies of 3049 people, were published between 1990 and 2000, together with a parallel Maori-language series, *Ngā tāngata taumata rau*. Another major reference project of the 1990s was the *Bateman New Zealand historical atlas: ko papatuanuku e takoto nei* (1997), edited by Malcolm McKinnon.

At the end of that decade the then Heritage Group of the Department of Internal Affairs embraced the brave new world of the Internet, launching the NZHistory.net.nz website on 16 March 1999. An online version of the [Dictionary of New Zealand Biography](#) (in English and Maori) was formally launched on 19 February 2002.

In 2000 the renamed History Group became part of the new Ministry for Culture and Heritage. It has continued to publish histories of New Zealand's involvement in war, state activity in the broadest sense, and works of national significance like the television tie-in history *Frontier of dreams: the story of New Zealand* (2005). In 2002 the Ministry's new Reference Group began work on [Te Ara](#), the online encyclopedia of New Zealand. The first of nine planned themes of this world-leading digital resource was launched in 2005.

Further information

- [History Group publications](#) (MCH website)
- [Dictionary of New Zealand Biography](#)
- [Te Ara](#)
- [Read the Second World War histories at the NZ Electronic Text Centre](#)

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Community contributions

Marion Thomson

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HI I am making a preliminary foray into the type of organisation that will financially and otherwise help the Soil and Health Association of NZ celebrate and compile its history. In 2011 the organisation is celebrating its 70th Anniversary of existence in NZ and it is possibly the second oldest organisation of its type in the world. The oldest being the Soil Association in UK.