OTAKI HISTORICAL SOCIETY (INC.)
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EDITORIAL

'IT'S PEOPLE who make history,' wrote Gordon Dempsey in his guest editorial in last year's issue. This is not just a truism. History is about emotions, relationships, beliefs, attempts to control others and challenges to controls. It's about friends, lovers, rivals and enemies.

Here we are, twentyone years old, coming of age and just getting into our stride. How can a small region produce so many stories? Perhaps it's our varied landscape. A cross-section from east to west provides so many settings for human drama: a mysterious off-shore island, a (fairly) sheltered channel, sandy beaches and dunes, wetlands and estuaries, fertile terraces, steep foothills, and the craggy summits of North Island's mountain backbone. People have broken and chequered it, leaving remnants of native bush, creating orchard, garden, shelterbelt, farmhouse, marae, factories and suburbs. And each of these is the scene for a different story. The remaining stands of totara remind us of peace (the pillars of Rangiatea) and of war (the fleet in which Te Rangihaeata invaded the South Island). Stories surround wrecked ships on the beaches, old sawmills rusting in the valleys, a flax mill dreaming by the highway. Being close to the capital city, our region has been made use of by the state in its roles as nurturer and controller, each purpose bringing its own peculiar community: farm trainees, United States marines, young offenders, conscientious objectors, undernourished children, tubercular women, the unemployed, the psychiatrically troubled, fighter pilots in training, plant scientists.

Yet this is a region that travellers pass through with little thought and less knowledge of what surrounds them. Travellers on the beach road knew nothing of what lay behind the dunes; today's travellers on State Highway One know nothing of our lakes or valleys. We are one-eyed creatures. Trampers hurry through to get to their beloved ranges, while lowlanders see the mountains as a mere picturesque backdrop.

For twenty-one years our journal has explored all these layers of meaning, connecting stories to their settings, preserving images, interpreting their meanings, and urging citizens and governments to value their heritage. This year again we bring you the prejudices, adventures, striving and quarrelling that have made the Horowhenua coast such a special place.

Anthony Dreaver, Editor