

# **Making Yesterday Serve the Cause of Tomorrow: 50 Years of the Historical Society**

## **ABSTRACT**

Despite a general interest in Baptist history, New Zealand Baptists from their beginning in 1851 had no official Historical Society for almost one hundred years. After the Second World War, however, the possibility was raised of a society in New Zealand on the lines of the one in England. This came to fruition in November 1950 when the NZ Baptist Historical Society was founded. The Society focussed on four things: publicity, arranging annual meetings, establishing an archive, and publishing books and bulletins of historical interest. Since 1986 the Society has adjusted to a more modern approach. It has amended its name, produces a regular Research Journal, has transferred the archives to a more up-to-date facility and has begun the full computerisation of its records. It faces the 21st century with confidence despite limited finances and changing demands.

## **The Beginning**

For nearly a hundred years from the foundation of the first Baptist Church in New Zealand at Nelson in 1851, there was no systematic effort to preserve historic records concerning New Zealand Baptist churches. Some material was kept at denominational headquarters, some at the Baptist Theological College but generally the individual churches were left to preserve their own records. Some did this with care and efficiency. At the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church in Christchurch, for example, S.R. Ingold, the church secretary from 1892-1924, with a keen sense of history, preserved meticulously every minute book, financial statement, magazine, pamphlet, photograph or programme he could find from the foundation of the church in 1863. Not all churches were so

fortunate. Too many incidents occurred where over-tidy church secretaries burned old records, or threw them into the rubbish or, as N.R. Wood reported, some Association records were found 'in a box under a house'. At Otahuhu a secretary burned about 50 years of minute books, members' lists and memorabilia.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, many Baptists were keenly aware of the importance of history. Chief among them were the editors of the *NZ Baptist*, the monthly denominational magazine published continuously from 1880. It faithfully reported church meetings, obituaries of church leaders, accounts of anniversaries, the opening of church buildings, reminiscences of pioneer Baptists and many other such items. The Baptist Union also encouraged interest in church history by publishing in 1910 a *Primer of Baptist History*. In that same year, S.R. Ingold, after a series of meetings, presented a set of his lecture notes on Baptist history to the Union Secretary, together with 'a set of superior lantern slides' hoping they would be used around the churches.<sup>2</sup>

The president of the Baptist Union in 1928, Mr S. Barry, writing of his year in office said:

Instead of preparing a President's address, I prepared a History of our Churches - illustrated with lantern slides from photographs of all the Churches - good, bad and indifferent. To compile that History I secured from all Church Secretaries or the oldest members, facts concerning the Buildings and the Personnel. I prepared two large albums, one contained all the original material from the Churches. The other contained Photos of the Churches and most of the Ministers. Both of these volumes were presented to the Baptist Union for safekeeping.<sup>3</sup>

This interest in Baptist history was maintained in 1940 when, under wartime pressures, the Baptist Union published an 8- page pamphlet entitled *The Baptist Churches in New Zealand*

1 Letter, N.R. Wood to the Society, 3 Sept. 1971 and from Roy Bullen's address to the North Shore Genealogical Society, 4 Nov. 1996. Both Mss in the Society's files.

2 N.Z. Baptist Historical Society *Bulletin*, no.1, June 1952, 2.

3 Handwritten note from S. Barry, undated, in the Society's files.

1851-1940. Despite this interest in Baptist history, however, no-one for nearly one hundred years seems to have suggested that a Baptist Historical Society should be started in New Zealand.

### **The Society Proposed**

With the ending of the second world war (1939-45), men and women from the Armed Forces overseas began to return to New Zealand. Some returned with a fresh appreciation of their Baptist heritage. H.E. Whitten, for example, had been a prisoner-of-war in Germany and Roy Bullen had served with the navy in the Pacific. On their return, both took a lively interest in Baptist history and were eager to help when the opportunity came.

Meanwhile, at the Baptist Theological College in Auckland, the Principal, Rev. Luke Jenkins, warned that the College 'had nowhere to put our valuable books, nowhere to store historical records'.<sup>4</sup> Ayson Clifford, the College tutor in church history, recognized that something needed to be done. He regularly read the *Baptist Quarterly*, the journal of the Baptist Historical Society in Great Britain. The British Society had been founded in 1908 and Clifford began to think that something similar was needed in New Zealand. About this time also Rev. N.R. Wood, the newly appointed editor of the *NZ Baptist*, was thinking along the same lines. His interest in history had been stimulated by Dr J.J. North who eventually invited him to assist with tutoring in the subject at the College. He also was a reader of the *Baptist Quarterly* and he too began to promote the idea of starting a Baptist historical society in New Zealand. Meanwhile a college student, Roy Bullen, wrote on 18 July 1949 to the General Secretary of the Baptist Union. He suggested that the time had come for the Union to establish a 'Baptist Museum' where churches could deposit 'letters, Minute Books and Documents over a certain age, e.g. 50 years'.

4 *NZ Baptist*, March 1949, 67.

He then went on to make another suggestion which he felt 'was perhaps rather premature' that the Union set up an Historical Society, modelled along the lines of the English Baptist Society. The Society/or Committee could perhaps be the Trustees of Documents and be responsible for cataloguing and doing research where necessary. It would seek to gather letters, photos and MSS that give light on the origins of our work in New Zealand.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of the efforts of Roy Bullen, Ayson Clifford and N.R. Wood an announcement was made at the Baptist Assembly in Auckland in 1949 inviting those interested in forming a Baptist Historical Society to meet together after an Assembly session. Seventeen turned up at the meeting on Monday 7th November at 1.30 p.m. They elected a provisional committee to draw up a constitution and to take the appropriate steps in setting up a Society.<sup>6</sup> The provisional committee met on Tuesday, 8 November 1949 with Ayson Clifford as chairman and H.E. Whitten, A.D. Mead and Ridland Jamieson as committee members.<sup>7</sup>

The constitution they drafted stated that membership in the Society was open to all interested who subscribed 'not less than five shillings per annum to the funds of the Society'. The Annual Meeting was to be held in conjunction with the Baptist Assembly and an elected executive committee was to carry on the Society's work during the year.

The objects of the Society were summarised in a promotional leaflet as follows:

1. To stimulate interest in and to promote the knowledge of the history of Baptist churches and Baptist activity in New Zealand and in the general history of the Baptist movement throughout the world.

5 Letter, Roy Bullen to P. Lanyon, 18 July 1949, NZBRHS, Clifford Manuscripts.

6 Baptist Union Report Book, 1950-51, 100.

7 NZBHS Provisional Executive Minutes, 8 Nov.1949; *NZ Baptist* Dec.1949, 353.

2. To establish and maintain a library or depository of books, pamphlets, periodicals, manuscripts, portraits and to encourage the preservation of such materials.

3. To undertake research into such material and to prepare and publish from time to time information which will elucidate New Zealand Baptist history.

4. To co-operate with the Baptist Union and all denominational organisations in the maintenance of historic Baptist principles.

The constitution was approved by the Baptist Assembly in November 1950 and printed copies were circulated in 1951. It remained unaltered for almost fifty years.

### **The First Meeting**

With approval having been given to the constitution, the Society arranged for its first meeting during the Christchurch Assembly in 1950. The meeting, held in the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church on Tuesday, 7 November, 1950, attracted only twelve people. They were: J.A. Clifford, E.M. Grigg, N.R. Wood, A.L. Silcock, R. Goldsmith, G. Beilby, H.E.M. Whitten, S.L. Edgar, E. Payton, I. Christensen, R.E. Bullen, and E.A. Dennis. All those attending were ministers except one layman, E.A. Dennis from Darfield.<sup>8</sup>

Like many to follow, the meeting did not spend much time on business matters. It elected an executive committee based in Auckland with Ayson Clifford as President, Rev. H.E. Whitten as secretary/treasurer and Rev. Roy Bullen as curator. A.D. Mead and Rev. Luke Jenkins were committee members. The only other item of business was a request from the Assembly's literature committee that the Society prepare 'a popular pocket history of the Baptists in New Zealand during the first hundred years'. The new Society accepted this request and resolved to approach Revs. Rex Goldsmith and George Beilby to undertake the work.

8 NZBHS Provisional Executive Minutes, 7.Nov.1950; B.U.Report Book 1950-51, 100.

From such small beginnings the Society began its service to the denomination.

### **The Work of the Society**

The new Society focussed on four things: publicity, arranging annual meetings, establishing an archive, and publishing books and bulletins of historical interest.

#### **1. Publicity**

To publicize the Society, 1000 copies of a 4-page promotional brochure: *Introducing the NZ Baptist Historical Society* were printed in 1951. Each Church received six copies. The brochure included a photograph of delegates to the 1896 Assembly at Ponsonby, information about the Society and a membership application form.<sup>9</sup>

It is difficult to assess the impact of such a promotion. Only a handful of new members resulted. But at least the Society's existence was now more widely known. From then on the Society's publicity tended to depend on the success of the Annual Meetings at Assembly, occasional articles and advertising in the NZ Baptist and newsletters to members. More, no doubt, could have been done. But the work of the Society from the beginning depended on only a handful of volunteers limited by a meagre budget.

#### **2. Annual Meetings**

Baptist Assemblies until 1986 lasted for nearly a week. They began on the Thursday night when the President gave the opening address and continued till the following Wednesday night. The scheduled meetings left little room for other functions. So the new Historical Society had to squeeze its

<sup>9</sup> A copy of this brochure is in the Society's files. In the Society's report to Assembly it was stated: 'Any resemblance in the photograph in the Brochure to any of the officers of the Society was purely accidental' - *NZ Baptist* Dec 1951, 300.

Annual Meeting into a tea interval. The first meetings, as has been noted, only drew twelve enthusiasts. But numbers grew steadily. Forty attended the 1953 meeting at the Linwood Baptist Church in Christchurch. The following year, at the Auckland Tabernacle, the numbers climbed to sixty. For the next thirty years or so attendances fluctuated between about 50 and 120.<sup>10</sup>

The Historical Society tea meeting held on the Tuesday night of Assembly became quite a tradition. The first tea was held at the second meeting of the Society at Brooklyn, Wellington in 1951. Unfortunately the Wellington weather brought the members cold and wet to the tea table. At Roslyn, Dunedin, the following year, a very late afternoon Assembly session and more bad weather made a proper meeting and discussion almost impossible. Despite such early problems the tea meetings gradually became a popular part of the Assembly programme. Ladies from one of the local churches would provide the food and tickets were sold to cover costs.

The practice of having a speaker at the Annual Meeting began in 1952 when Professor A.H. McLintock was invited to speak. Unfortunately he could not come on that occasion but made up for it in 1961 when, as Parliamentary Historian, he spoke about 'The Collection and Maintenance of Historic records'. Most of the speakers over the years have been members of the Society sharing some particular research project. For example, E.W. Batts, after many years at Hanover Street Baptist Church, Dunedin, spoke on 'Early Days of Otago Baptist life'. H.E. Whitten in 1966, while minister at Thames, spoke on the history of Thames Baptist Church, while Roy Upton in 1974 gave a talk on Waihi Baptists. Other speakers highlighted the lives of Baptist pioneers such as Decimus Dolamore, R. S. Gray, John Takle and Guy Thornton. Sir Norman Perry, a Presbyterian leader, addressed the Society in

<sup>10</sup> Attendance figures compiled from Annual Reports and Executive Minutes.

1990 on Maori-Pakeha relations and Gordon Parry, an Anglican, and well known Dunedin journalist, spoke the following year on 'Life in the Manse'. His father was the highly respected Baptist minister, Rev. F.A. Parry.

On several occasions slides and films from the archives were shown and, in 1962, the Society went on a pilgrimage to the Linwood cemetery in Christchurch to dedicate the newly refurbished grave of the pioneer Baptist minister, Decimus Dolamore.<sup>11</sup>

The traditional Tuesday tea meetings at Assembly continued for 36 years. Then, in 1986, the Baptist Union decided to reduce the length of the Assembly from a week to a weekend. This forced the Society to meet at often awkward times and places. Occasionally this worked in its favour. At other times, attendances dropped drastically. In 1993, noting the poor attendance at the Annual Meeting, the Executive expressed concern about the 'new style Assembly and packed schedule of meetings'.<sup>12</sup> The following year it doubted the viability of 'having this function (the AGM) whilst the current Assembly programmes operate'.<sup>13</sup> Despite this, the Society realized that the Assembly was the only time when delegates gathered from all over the country. It therefore continued the Annual Meetings at Assembly despite the difficulties.

Although these Annual Meetings were the public face of the Society, the real work was done by the executive committee in Auckland. Under the leadership of Ayson Clifford, Dr. Stan Edgar and Rev. Harold Pidwell and others who served as chairmen for lengthy terms, the work of the Society was maintained. But it was always something of a struggle with a

11 The grave in Linwood cemetery was traced by Rev.E.T.Jones. A plaque was affixed and a dedication service was held. A copy of the Order of Service is in the Society's files. See also Executive Minutes, 7 Nov. 1960.

12 NZBHS Executive Minutes, 8 Dec. 1993.

13 NZBHS Executive Minutes, 16 Nov. 1994.



membership averaging only about 50 and with limited financial resources.

### 3. The Archives

When the Society began, it had not even a cupboard where archives could be stored. Roy Bullen, the first curator, recalling these days wrote: 'the first archives were in several folders and a few cardboard boxes, mainly stacked under my desk. After all, great ventures begin in humble fashion.'<sup>14</sup> In March 1953 the Auckland Baptist Tabernacle provided a small room. The Society, thanks to a grant from the Baptist Union, promptly bought a metal cupboard for 28 pounds and a filing cabinet for 30 pounds. The cupboard and cabinet are still in use 50 years later.

In his first report to the Society, Roy Bullen noted that in 1951 he witnessed the beginning of the collecting of material for the Society. 'Requests for documents and records were made in the *NZ Baptist*; and also in our first printed circular'.<sup>15</sup> He bought a register and in it carefully listed the documents received:

- 1 set year books 1917-1947
- 1 set report books 1931-1947
- College Jubilee pamphlets
- College magazines 1946-1951
- 1 History of Indian Mission: H.H. Driver
- Jubilee History of Auck. Auxiliary 1892-1942

Letters and souvenirs from churches began to flow in. The first of such records came from 'Belmont, Kumeu, Minnisdale, Berhampore, Nelson, Chinese Church, Spreydon'.

While the Tabernacle room was a good beginning, by 1955 the Executive knew that it could not be a long term solution. The ideal place for the archives was clearly the Baptist Theological College where students for the ministry could at least have ready

14 From Roy Bullen's address to the North Shore Genealogical Society 4 Nov. 1996.

15 First Annual Report 1950-51 in the Society's files.

access to denominational records. The College had moved in 1953 to a new property at 85 Victoria Avenue, Remuera. The settling in period took some time and it was not until 1961 that steps were taken to provide space for the Society's growing archives.

The Executive on 14 April 1961 agreed to accept an offer of the College Principal 'to make available temporary storage in a lecture room and that we refer the matter to the College Board requesting that favourable consideration be given to the reservation of suitable space under the administrative building of the College for the purposes of the Historical Society.'<sup>16</sup>

Ayson Clifford had taken over as College Principal in 1960. That was fortunate in more ways than one. He was also chairman of the Historical Society. So he did all he could to assist the Society in the search for better accommodation. The only space available was underneath the main College building. With student help a space was excavated and a small room built. The shelf space was soon crammed with files, books and papers. But this cubby-hole of a room served as the Society's base for the next thirty years.

As archival material kept coming in, shortage of space became acute. Fortunately the building of a new College library provided the opportunity the Society needed. The Society pleaded for some space for the archives in the new building. By 1975 the Society reported that 'permanent accommodation within the new College library is keenly anticipated'.<sup>17</sup> An area was eventually provided in the basement of the new library. With student community service help the archives in the 'cubby hole' were transferred to the new site during the long vacation in 1980-81.<sup>18</sup>

The new arrangement was not ideal. Roy Bullen noted 'the ceiling was about the height found in early sailing vessels to

16 NZBHS Executive Minutes, 14 April 1961.

17 B.U. Report Book 1975-6, 20.

18 B.U. Report Book 1980-81,

New Zealand. You had the feeling that the ceiling was falling in on top of you.'<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless it was a vast improvement on previous storage and for a dozen years it served students and researchers well. The College Board, however, had begun to think of the long-term future of the College. In 1993 it sold the Remuera property, including the new library, for 4.8 million dollars and began the development of a new complex at Penrose. In planning for the new College, Brian Smith, then the College Principal, recognized the growing research value of the archives. He believed they should be incorporated into the new library. So the special 'lundia' shelving was moved to the new site, desks were provided for researchers and an office was opened for the curator. The archives were now, for the first time, established on the main floor of the library.'<sup>20</sup>

A key figure in the building up and indexing of the archives was Maxwell Barker. For 31 years he worked as a volunteer curator. His death was a huge loss. It was fitting, therefore, that on 16 October 1994, at a ceremony in the new College library, his widow should unveil a plaque in his memory. The new archives were formally dedicated and named 'The Maxwell. Barker Archives.'

Apart from the usual minutes and written records, the Archives also include a wide range of other objects. At the 1953 meeting an elderly member of the Society offered to present some Hindu basins and idols for the archives. The President, Ayson Clifford, graciously declined the offer, but remarked, amid much laughter, 'You might consider giving them to Brother J. He might find them useful in his church!' There was also much merriment in June 1996 when the Executive debated 'the proper resting place for the stuffed parrot from the Manurewa Home'.<sup>21</sup>

19 From Roy Bullen's address to the North Shore Genealogical Society.

20 NZBHS Executive Minutes, 18 Aug. 1993; 20 Nov. 1993; 8 Dec. 1993.

21 *NZ Baptist* Dec. 1953, 271; NZBHS Executive Minutes, June 1996.

Nevertheless, the Society has been grateful for the many historical artefacts that have been donated over the years. For the first time in its history it now has adequate space to store them.

### **Publications**

One of the constitutional objects of the Society was 'to publish from time to time information which will elucidate New Zealand Baptist History'. To fulfill this mandate the Society published a wide range of bulletins, newsletters, books and pamphlets.

#### **Bulletins**

The original intention was to publish two bulletins a year. Funding proved a major hurdle and only nine bulletins appeared sporadically between 1950 and 1984. The first three were only brief pamphlets of 4-6 pages. The later ones were more substantial with 15-22 pages covering mainly biographies of Baptist notables like Decimus Dolamore, Rosalie McGeorge, J.K. Archer and R. S. Gray. The last of the bulletins was issued in November 1984 on the North German Mission, by N.R. Wood. These bulletins were provided free to members of the Society.

A booklet of 16 pages by S.L. Edgar on Alfred North (1846-1924) was published in 1955. It was not labelled a 'bulletin' but set the standard for the later bulletins to follow. Dr Edgar was to play a notable part in the Society from its inception. He served as chairman (1962-73); secretary/treasurer (1988-90) and as a writer of several of the Society's publications.

#### **Newsletters**

In addition to the bulletins of the Society, newsletters were also sent out to members. Some of the newsletters were merely a single duplicated sheet. Others such as those from 1981-84 were four pages long and included articles of special interest as well as news items. Unfortunately these newsletters lacked regularity

and there were considerable gaps in publication. This lack of continuity was largely due to the perennial shortages of finance and the Society's dependence on a few volunteers to do the work.

### Books

In response to a request to publish 'a pocket history' of NZ Baptists, two ministers were asked to do the work. Rev. Rex Goldsmith pulled out at an early stage and Rev. George Beilby took sole responsibility for the Society's first book. It was *Road to Tomorrow. A popular account of one hundred years of Baptist work in New Zealand*. This 55-page, well illustrated book was ready in time for the 75th anniversary of the Baptist Union in 1957 and remained the standard history of the Baptists in New Zealand until 1982.

The death of Dr J.J. North in 1950 - the same year as the founding of the Society - made many feel that a biography of this revered leader must be written. Several of those who worked with him were invited to take up the challenge.<sup>22</sup> All declined on the grounds that they had not time to do a proper job or that they were too close to North to be objective. Finally E.W. Batts agreed to tackle it. In September 1959 he reported that the 'work was proceeding satisfactorily'. He completed his draft biography in June 1961 and Ayson Clifford and Dr S.L. Edgar were asked to consider it for publication. Although Rev. Batts had done extensive research, particularly into J.J. North's family and personal life, there were many gaps. The reviewers felt it needed serious redrafting.

Again the Executive found it difficult to find someone willing to undertake the task. Finally, Rev. Angus MacLeod was approached. He had no personal knowledge of Dr North and was a comparative newcomer to the N.Z. Baptist scene. Nor was he told of the difficulties the Executive had had in finding writers.

22 Those approached included Revs. L.A.North, R.C.Goldsmith and N.R.Wood.

However he took on the task. It proved much more time consuming than he had anticipated. The book was completed in October 1964 and 2000 copies were published by the Society in 1965 under the title *J.J. North: The story of a great New Zealander*.

For their next major publishing effort the Society targeted three centennial celebrations. The first was the centennial of the Baptist Union in 1982. The century of the Union's existence was divided into four periods. Paul Tonson, Ayson Clifford, Dr Barry Gustafson and Dr S.L. Edgar were engaged to prepare a volume each. Dr Gustafson withdrew at the last minute and Rev. George Beilby came to the rescue and took his place. Rev. Angus MacLeod edited the series.

Three of the volumes were published in time for the 1982 centennial Assembly under the title *A Handful of Grain: the Centennial History of the Baptist Union of New Zealand*. The fourth volume was published in the following year. This four volume history has proved a standard work of reference and is probably the most important publication the Society has produced.

Three years later the Baptist Missionary Society celebrated its centenary. For this event the Society published *Towards the Sunrise: the Centenary History of the N.Z.B.M.S.* This 278 page book was in three parts. Part 1, written by Dr S.L. Edgar, covered mission work in Bangladesh. Part 2 dealt with work in Tripura State in India and was written by former missionaries M.J. and B.N. Eade and B.K. Smith. The final section on 'Other Avenues of Service' came from the pen of Rev. Hugh Nees, a former general secretary of the Baptist Union and Missionary Society. Angus MacLeod again served as editor. This history of the N.Z. Baptist Missionary Society is the most comprehensive yet published. Like other publications of the Society it was written and produced entirely on a voluntary basis.

A third centennial was that of the Auckland Baptist Association. W.H. Edgar, a past president and former secretary of the Association, wrote the 88 page history. It was published in 1993 and circulated mainly in the Auckland area.

One other major publication by the Society was *L.A. North: the Man and his Memoirs*. L.A. North, the former general Secretary and first Superintendent of the Baptist Union, died in 1980. Not long before his death he wrote some memoirs for his family including reminiscences of his years of service in the church. The Society received permission for the memoirs to be edited for wider circulation. Rev. George Beilby took on the task. The 131 page book, printed in time for the 1983 Assembly, was snapped up by delegates eager to remember a key figure in Baptist life.

Nine books in fifty years is hardly a major contribution, but it reflects the struggle of the Society to gain widespread support. The harsh reality is that for the denomination issues of history (like that of ecumenism) were never a high priority.

### **Pamphlets**

In 1988 the Executive began to think of fresh ways of promoting awareness of the Baptist heritage. The Southern Baptists of the U.S.A had produced a series of leaflets called *Shapers of Southern Baptist Heritage*, highlighting individuals of significance in their history. From this idea, the Society produced in 1989 a set of six leaflets under the title *Shapers of Baptist Life*. They featured J.J. North, George Johnston, N.R. Wood, L.A. North, B.N. Eade and Thomas Spurgeon.

The original idea was to publish two sets of six leaflets. The marketing of the first set proved inadequate and the Society's lack of funds meant that only one leaflet of the second set was published. It featured the pioneer missionary Rosalie McGeorge.

These well written, attractive leaflets were aimed at the ordinary church member. But sales were poor. Partly it was due to the Executive Committee's lack of time, finance, and marketing zeal. But there was a deeper reason. The majority of ministers and members, other than those of the older generation, seemed to have little concern for the past or little appreciation of their heritage. How to overcome this was to prove a major challenge as the new century dawned.

The Society also published two small pamphlets aimed specifically to assist local churches. The first *Guidelines for church archivists* (1995) was followed by *Guidelines for writing a local church history* (1996). The latter was based on a similar pamphlet issued by the Victorian Baptist Historical Society in Australia. These two pamphlets have proved particularly helpful to churches planning to celebrate special anniversaries.

### **New Projects**

In the late 1980's interest in the Society began slowly to fade. Attendance at meetings declined. Ministers in particular and young people were conspicuous by their absence. Some blamed it on the 'baby boomers' - the immediate post war generation - who tended to undervalue tradition and to focus on the present and future rather than the past. Others pointed the finger at the charismatic movement which had drawn many into Baptist churches without any understanding of Baptist history. Some felt the lack of interest was due to changing patterns of the Assembly and the apparent lack of support from the new team of church leaders. Whatever the cause, the Executive realized it would have to try some new initiatives.

#### **1. Mid Year meetings**

In 1987 mid-year meetings were introduced in Auckland to supplement the Annual Meetings at Assembly. The initial meeting was held in the Ayson Clifford Library at the Baptist College in Remuera. With excellent desserts and coffee to tickle the palate before the guest lecture, the experiment proved a success. Over 100 gathered on a wintry night to hear Ayson Clifford speak on the topic 'My past is catching up with me'. The Society that night gained new members, sold some publications and felt it had tapped into a new market.

After a break in 1988, the mid-year meetings resumed and became a regular part of the Society's programme. Numbers have varied from year to year depending on the weather, the speaker and the level of promotion. But the meeting has become



an opportunity to share recent research and to keep the work of the Society before the public.

Several attempts were made to hold similar functions in the other main centres outside of Auckland. But without the support of a regular committee, such as at Auckland, little has yet been accomplished in other centres.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Computerisation

The archives of the Society over most of its history have been listed on cards of various kinds. With the advent of the computer, new possibilities opened up for a much more efficient system. Discussions regarding a computer system began in February 1992. The Society applied to the Arjay Trust for a grant of \$4400 to purchase a computer. The Tabernacle Trust made a grant for suitable software. So the huge task of transferring card indexes to the computer began. Despite the steady work of Douglas Dean, the curator, the rate of data input is too slow. How to speed up the process is one of the major tasks facing the Society. The updating of the archives on to computer is an essential task if the resource is to be of maximum use.

The advent of the computer also made possible desk-top publishing. Now bulletins and journals of good quality can be produced without the high printing costs which have been such a limiting factor in the past.

## 3. Oral History

Among the archives are a number of cassette and older type tape recordings from the 1960's with the voices of prominent Baptists of that period. By the 1990's, however, it was clear that not enough was being done in the field of oral history. The matter was discussed at the Executive in June 1995. The

23 NZBHS Executive Minutes, 26 April 1995; 23 Aug. 1995; 25 Oct. 1995; 11 Nov. 1995; B.U.Report Book 1964-5, 23. *NZ Baptist* Dec. 1954, 282.

following year an appropriate up-to-date tape machine and two microphones were purchased. But there still remains the need to train more people in the art of interviewing and to contact the older generation before it is too late.

#### 4. Prizes

The lack of younger people at Society meetings has been a major concern in recent years. The Society therefore decided initially to focus attention on the ministerial students at the Baptist College. Their interest needed to be captured. Hoping to achieve this, the Society established a prize in 1998 for the best research essay by students in the College Baptist studies class. It was subsequently named in memory of Rev. Roy Bullen the first curator of the Society and its secretary/treasurer from 1991-1996.<sup>24</sup> It is too early to tell to what extent this award has stimulated interest in the Society but it is a useful beginning.

#### 5. Snapshot 2000

As the year 2000 approached, the Executive felt that some special project was needed to mark the occasion. Brett Lowe, a member of the committee suggested a 'time capsule' which would give a bird's eye view of New Zealand Baptists at the start of the new century. The capsule would include photographs of the churches, details of pastors and leaders and of church programmes and statistics.<sup>25</sup>

The idea was accepted in principle and eventually became 'Snapshot 2000', a major attempt to document the denomination. Every congregation was asked for photographs of their church buildings, details of membership and ministers and a historical summary. In 1999, agents for the Society were appointed in every Association area to gather the material. It was hoped to produce a CD-ROM with all this accumulated

24 NZBHS Executive Minutes, 7 Oct. 1998.

25 NZBHS Executive Minutes, 19 June 1996.

information in time for presentation to the Baptist Assembly in November 2000.

Most churches responded well, but the quantity of material received proved too much for the few volunteers available. 'Snapshot' material is still being processed and it awaits someone to analyse the data and follow up the few non-cooperating churches. But it is a project that in time will be of considerable value to historians.

## **The Challenge of Change**

### **1. A New Name**

In 1995 it was suggested that the name of the Society might be too old fashioned for the modern age. Various suggestions were made but no action was taken. Then Dr Martin Sutherland presented a paper to the Executive in April 1998 entitled 'The Future of the Past'. In it he raised his concerns about the Society and suggested that the focus should be on research which challenges and assesses the present, as well as recording the past.<sup>26</sup>

The discussion that followed eventually led to the decision to change the name of the Society to *The New Zealand Baptist Research and Historical Society*. The inclusion of 'research' in the title highlights that the Society is not merely a depository of records but a resource where the past is recognized as a stepping stone to the future. In line with this, the third object of the Society in the constitution was clarified to read: 'To undertake research into New Zealand Baptist life both past and present and to publish from time to time information which will elucidate Baptist experience.' Other amendments to the constitution brought it up-to-date and the revised constitution was formally approved at the Annual Meeting in November 2000. The amendments for the most part were minor. But they heralded a change in focus.

26 'The Future of the Past' paper by Martin Sutherland, April 1998.

## 2. The New Journal

The change in the Society's focus, the possibility of desk top publishing, and the enthusiasm of Martin Sutherland, led to the launching, in October 1996, of a new publication *The N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research*. In introducing the journal the editor (Martin Sutherland) wrote:

The Journal is intended as a forum for careful thought and examination of all aspects of New Zealand Baptist life and mission both in this country and overseas. Thus while good historical work is welcome, future issues will include scholarly considerations of theology, practice and current debate....It remains to be seen whether Baptist research can achieve and maintain the standard of reflection that is necessary. Nevertheless a start has been made.<sup>27</sup>

With five editions of *Baptist Research* already published, this review of the Society's first fifty years leads the sixth. The journal is becoming known as a reliable record of serious research. The issues have included book reviews as well as articles on topics as varied as film censorship, the salvation of children and the social composition of Baptist congregations.

In addition to the *Journal*, the Society introduced, in April 1997, *Baptist Research News*. It was described as 'a companion to the larger journal' and would include 'shorter articles, opinion, advertisements, notes and reviews.' *BR News* has been issued in April each year since 1997.

The *Journal* and *BR News* are both edited by Dr Martin Sutherland. He follows in the tradition of Baptist College staff who, from the first meetings, have given their time and energy to the Society.

## 3. A New Financial Basis

The Society for nearly 45 years depended for its financial support on membership subscriptions. Unfortunately, membership proved hard to maintain. It varied from year to year

27 N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research no.1, Oct. 1997, 1.

from a low of 15 in 1951 to a high of 95 in 1987. In 2000 the membership was 76. The number of members has varied depending on the attendance at the Annual Meeting, the effectiveness of advertising and promotion, and the efforts of the treasurer or membership secretary in following up contacts. The end result has been that the Society has always struggled to make ends meet, and, for special projects, has had to depend on grants from the Baptist Union or Trusts. In 1996, however, the Baptist Union agreed to put the Society on its budget. It now makes an annual grant. This has given the Society a more stable financial base and has enabled it, for example, to pay an honorarium to the curator whose work is becoming increasingly important.

### **In Conclusion**

The contribution of the Society to the Baptist denomination is difficult to evaluate. The creation of the archives is an obvious benefit. The denomination now has an archive of which it can be proud. Once the data input on the computer is complete the value of the archives will be hugely enhanced. They will be on a par with the archives of much larger and wealthier denominations and will be available to a much wider public.

The publications of the Society have been limited but they have faithfully recorded the lives and service of many whose contribution to the church and to New Zealand could easily have been forgotten. There is no shortage of topics awaiting research not least the contribution of women to Baptist life. But the Society will need to take more initiatives in encouraging researchers.

The development of the *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research* is an exciting new venture. It is reaching out to a wider academic audience both in New Zealand and overseas. Its circulation is still small but, if it can continue its quality and regularity of publication, it has the potential to promote fresh thinking about vital issues of today as well as record the best thought of the past.

The record of the Society is not spectacular but it has played a necessary part in the life of the denomination. Its accomplishments have been due almost entirely to two factors. First, the close links with the Baptist Theological College (now Carey Baptist College). College staff members, both full-time and part-time, have been chairpersons of the Executive Committee for 45 years out of fifty. This close relationship to the College has given the Society a measure of status and influence it might not otherwise have had. A second factor has been the dedicated work of the Executive Committees over the past fifty years. They have been the engine room of the Society. The chairpersons, secretary/treasurers and curators, with one or two committee members, have organized the work, prepared the publicity and maintained the archives. Without them little would have been achieved.

The Society still has a long way to go to create interest in its work among the younger generations.. This is no easy task. Yet, although the Baby Boomers may seem indifferent to the past, too much must not be made of this. The genealogical societies are booming as people trace their family trees. History classes at universities still attract hundreds of students. Thousand have been researching the Treaty of Waitangi. The sale of videos involving the history of sport, pop culture and TV programmes is a prosperous trade. So there is a pool of interest in history if only it can be tapped.

The increasing call for 'vision' and 'visionary leadership' has also tended to keep the focus on the future. But so called 'visionary leadership' has often led the church down disastrous paths. Vision needs to be checked by the lessons of history. This is surely a task for the Society.

In the first *Bulletin* of the Society, in June 1952, Ayson Clifford wrote of 'making yesterday serve the cause of tomorrow to the glory of God'. Such a goal is still relevant as the Society enters its next half century.

**Angus MacLeod**

## Appendix I: Officers of the Society

Chairperson/President:		Secretary/Treasurer:	
J.A.Clifford	1949-61	H.E.Whitten	1949-54
S.L.Edgar	1962-68	R. Jamieson	1955-64
E.F.Sherburd	1969	F.G.McKean	1965-70
S.L.Edgar	1970-73	S.B.McMillan	1971-73
I.S.Kemp	1974-75	J.J.Burt	1974-75
H.J.Pidwell	1976-86	L.C.Kitchen	1976-81
J.North	1987	H.Trotman	1985
M.McClure	1989-90	S.L.Edgar	1986-88
A.H.MacLeod	1991-99	S. Dewdney	1989-90
D.Dickson	2000-	R.Bullen	1991-93
Curators:		Treasurer:	
R.Bullen	1950-53	R. French	1994-
G.T.Macann	1954-55		
M.Barker	1955-86	Secretary:	
V.E.Barker	1987-88	R.Bullen	1994-96
D.Dean	1989-	A..H.MacLeod	1997
		B.Lowe	1998-

## Appendix II: Annual Meeting Speakers and Topics

1956	A.L.Silcock	<i>J.J.Doke</i>
1957	Foster Sherburd	<i>The inception of the Baptist Union</i>
1958	Ian Kemp	<i>The life of Decimus Dolamore</i>
1959	Eric Batts	<i>Researching J.J.North</i>
1960	G.Beilby	<i>The NZ Baptist Missionary Work</i>
1961	Dr A.H. McLintock	<i>The collection and maintenance of historic records</i>
1962	(Pilgrimage to the grave of Decimus Dolamore)	
1963	A.H. MacLeod	<i>The Story of Oxford Terrace Baptist Church</i>
1964	R.L.Fursden	<i>Timaru Baptists</i>
1965	Slides of personalities of the past	
1966	R.E.Whitten	<i>Baptists in Thames</i>

1968	E.P.Y.Simpson	<i>Foundations of Baptist Life in America</i>
1969		
1970	E.W.Batts	<i>Early days of Otago Baptist life</i>
1971	N.R.Wood	<i>Changing patterns of Baptist Life</i>
1972	Photos from the archives	
1973	Warnock Watson	<i>The Penman family</i>
1974	Roy Upton	<i>Baptists in Waihi</i>
1975	Bruce Albiston	<i>Caversham Baptists</i>
1976	Paul Tonson	<i>Towards Union</i>
1977	Barry Gustafson	<i>Elliott, Archer and Others : Baptists in Politics WWI</i>
1978	G. Beilby	<i>Wellington Central Centenary</i>
1979	A.H.MacLeod	<i>R.S.Gray</i>
1980		
1981	J.A.Clifford	<i>The Founding Fathers</i>
1982	Centenary of the Baptist Union.....	readings from the past
1983	Richard Coombs	<i>John Takle</i>
1984	Ray French	<i>Guy Thornton</i>
1985		
1986	J.Crozier	<i>The High Calling of a Minister</i>
1987		
1988	Eric Batts	<i>A Baptist born and bred</i>
1989	Ewen Simpson	<i>Baptist church life 1928-89</i>
1990	Sir Norman Perry	<i>Journey towards harmony</i>
1991	Gordon Parry	<i>Life in the manse</i>
1992	A.H.MacLeod	<i>Thomas Kirk : Baptist Botanist</i>
1993	Rosemary Reddell	<i>100 years of the Manurewa Home</i>
1994	M.P. Sutherland	<i>From pulpit to podium...J.K.Archer</i>
1995	A.H. MacLeod	<i>Dr William Purdie...Otago Pioneer</i>
1996	M.P. Sutherland	<i>The Uncertain Parentage of N.Z. Baptists</i>
	A.H. MacLeod	<i>How negro spirituals came to NZ</i>
1997	'Silent Witness': Ernest Nees'	1944 film
1998	---	
1999	No Speaker	
2000	Bob Alcorn	<i>60 years among N.Z. Baptists</i>



### Appendix III: Auckland Mid-Year Speakers and Topics

1987	Ayson Clifford	<i>My past is catching up with me</i>
1988	no meeting	
1989	Dr Stan Edgar	<i>Have Baptists forgotten bigotry?</i>
1990	Sir Keith Sinclair	<i>Evangelicals and the Treaty</i>
1991	Brian Smith	<i>Baptists and the working classes</i>
1992	Margaret Davidson	<i>The puritan work ethic in 19th century N.Z.</i>
1993	Brian Meadows	<i>Baptists and educating the family</i>
1994	A.H. MacLeod	<i>Guy Thornton</i>
1995	Des Jones	<i>The beginnings of Baptist Maori ministry</i>
1996	Ayson Clifford	<i>The origin and development of Baptist Social Services</i>
1997	Bob Alcorn	<i>The crucial post-Second World War years and the NZBMS</i>
1998	R. French, A.H. MacLeod and B. Meadows	<i>The Bible Class Movement</i>
1999	M. McLure and O. Dickson	<i>The Changing Place of Baptist Women</i>
2000	L. Guy	<i>The Grand Chasm: Churches and the Gay Debate (1960-86)</i>
2001	M.P. Sutherland	<i>A Free People? Becoming Baptist in NZ</i>

### Appendix IV: Publications of the Historical Society

1951	Introductory Brochure	
1952	June:	Bulletin no.1
	Oct.:	Bulletin no.2
1953	Sept:	Bulletin no.3
1955	<i>Alfred North</i> by S.L. Edgar	
1956	Bulletin no.4	<i>Baptist Mission to Maoris</i> by A.D. Mead
1957	<i>Road to Tomorrow</i> by George Beilby	
1960	Bulletin no.5	<i>Rosalie McGeorge</i> by R.J. Mardle
1962	Newsletter	
1965	Aug. Bulletin no.6	<i>Decimus Dolamore</i> by Ian Kemp
	Nov.	<i>J.J. North</i> by E.W. Batts and A.H. MacLeod
1970	Bulletin no.7	<i>J.K. Archer</i> by N.R. Wood

- 1977 Newsletter
- 1980 Bulletin no 8 *Baptists and Politics 1916-19* by B.Gustafson and  
R.S.Gray by A.H.MacLeod
- 1981 Newsletter
- 1982 Newsletter  
*A Handful of Grain: Centennial History of the Baptist Union of  
NZ (4 Vols)*
- 1983 *L.A.North: the Man and his Memoirs* ed. G.Beilby  
Newsletter: *Notes on early Baptist interest in NZ* by  
A.H.MacLeod
- 1984 Bulletin no.9 *The North German Mission* by N.R.Wood
- 1985 *Towards the Sunrise: Centennial History of the NZ BMS*
- 1986 Newsletter: *Guy Thornton* by R.French
- 1987 Newsletter: *Random Reminiscences* by J.T.Crozier
- 1989 July: Newsletter: *A Baptist Born and Bred* by E.W.Batts  
*Shapers of Baptist Life* (set of six leaflets)
- 1990 Newsletter; *Baptist Church Life 1928-89* by J.E.Simpson
- 1991 Newsletter: *Journey towards Harmony* by Sir Norman Perry
- 1992 Newsletter: *The working class view of Baptists* by B.E.Smith  
*Shapers of Baptist Life.....Rosalie McGeorge*
- 1993 *Auckland Baptist Association: centennial history* by W.H.Edgar
- 1995 *Constitution and Rules of the NZ B.H.S.*  
*Guidelines for Church Archivists*  
Newsletter:
- 1996 *Guidelines for writing a local Church History*  
Newsletter: *Thomas Spurgeon*  
*N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research* no.1
- 1997 April: *Baptist Research News*  
Oct. *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research* no.2
- 1998 April: *Baptist Research News*  
Oct. *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research* no.3
- 1999 April: *Baptist Research News*  
Oct: *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research* no.4
- 2000 April: *Baptist Research News: Baptist Women*  
Oct. *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research* no.5
- 2001 April: *Baptist Research News: Evangelism*