

**Responses to censorship issues at Auckland Public Library
1920-1940**

by

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Abstract

This report examines how historical responses to censorship issues have influenced the development of contemporary intellectual freedom ideology through an analysis of censorship challenges and responses at Auckland Public Library during the years 1920-1940. Sociological theories related to the development of public libraries and to the development of librarianship as a profession are considered. The Remarque case of 1929 is identified as a pivotal moment in the development of contemporary intellectual freedom ideology among New Zealand librarians. Three key conclusions are made. Some librarians in New Zealand during the 1920s and 1930s saw censorship as part of their role. There was tension between a public expectation that entertaining fiction should be provided by the public library and the librarian's belief that the public library's primary purpose was education and cultural advancement. Although there was some opposition to librarians as censors, New Zealand librarianship had not yet advanced towards a definite understanding that the public library should be for all. This is evidence that New Zealand librarianship was developing in much the same way as its British and American counterparts, who at this time were also negotiating the librarian's role in selection and censorship issues.

Keywords: Censorship, intellectual freedom, professionalism, ideology

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1.0 Statement of the problem

With the introduction of the Internet into New Zealand public libraries during the last few years librarians have been placed in a difficult position. Often they have to justify providing unmediated access to a resource which contains much potentially offensive material. Increasingly Internet access policies are being drawn up explaining that the library's stand on the principle of intellectual freedom is in accord with the statements of a national professional organisation, such as LIANZA. This indicates that librarians need to feel that there is a professional ideology supporting their decisions. Yet there has been little research on the development of this ideology among New Zealand librarians. How have historical responses to censorship issues influenced contemporary intellectual freedom ideology? An historical analysis of responses to censorship challenges in the Auckland public library system between 1920-1990 will shed some light on the development of the intellectual freedom ideology there. Importantly this project will also be making a contribution to the understanding of these issues in terms of the New Zealand experience as distinct from that of other countries.

2.0 Theoretical framework for the study

As Anthony Powell notes, because libraries function within a larger context, historical research should 'consider libraries and other information systems in broad contexts.'¹ This is especially relevant for this project, as censorship is part of the knowledge and power relations which permeate society as a whole. For this reason, some consideration of sociological theories related to the development of public libraries and to the development of librarianship as a profession was necessary.

2.1 The problem of purpose

The evolution of the public library is inextricably linked with censorship issues. Allan Pratt, in the preface to Charles Busha in 1972, states that libraries' problems with censorship are the result of the profession being founded on a paradox.² According to Pratt one of the fundamental assumptions of the library profession is that reading can change a person. Why then, he asks, are librarians opposed to censorship? 'Since it is absurd to assert that only good changes are possible ... there is at least a *prima facie* case for restricting the nature of what is made available for reading'.³ This is a very simplistic argument which has been refuted in later literature by the introduction of the concept of reader response theory, which emphasises the differences in each reader's background – differences which colour the reader's interpretation of a document.⁴ Communication models such as Shannon and Weaver's have also been used to further the theory that messages in literature are not necessarily received as they were intended to be.⁵ However, in assuming that all people will react in the same way to a text and dividing the possible changes in them into 'good' and 'bad', Pratt highlights the authoritarian response to censorship issues.

In fact, the real contradiction on which libraries were founded may lie in what has been termed 'the problem of purpose'.⁶ There are two theories which attempt to explain the social role of public libraries, and these are particularly important to this project. Each provides a different view on the historical purpose of libraries and how this relates to librarians' professional credo of intellectual freedom. The traditional view is that public libraries grew out of the need for democratic societies to have an educated

citizenry. This view emphasises such ideals as freedom and equality which are the foundations of a good democratic society and the basis of the concept of intellectual freedom. A more radical standpoint is that libraries were established in order to ensure that this citizenry was educated to suit the authoritarian-elitist class. Michael H. Harris, who espoused this theory in the 1970s, believed that public libraries were established in America at a time when there were large numbers of immigrants because it was expected that such institutions would help to inform them in the 'right' way.⁷

These conflicting theories are important to this research for two reasons. Firstly, they may help to explain differences in librarians' responses to intellectual freedom challenges. These differences are apparent both within the profession and over time, as the discussions in sections 3.2 and 3.3 indicate. Secondly, the application of such theories to New Zealand history may be profitable. Preliminary investigation of this area by Jim Traue seems to indicate that the establishment of libraries in New Zealand was intended to civilise colonists rather than as a means of equalising opportunity.⁸

2.2 Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony

Other writers on the history of censorship in libraries have built on the authoritarian-elitist model of library evolution by introducing Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. While incorporating the idea of an authoritarian-elitist class which transmits its culture through societal mechanisms, cultural hegemony allows for certain institutions through which cross-class negotiation occurs. The public library, according to Louise L. Robbins and W. A. Wiegand, is one such institution. Activities such as providing 'Americanising' influences for immigrants were ways in which public libraries 'participated in the hegemonic project'.⁹

This kind of theory is extremely important in an historical study as it places events in the context of their time. Librarians are members of a society as well as members of their profession. Some librarians may be affected by political or personal pressure to censor material at certain times even if they see their role as a liberal one. A report written by a 1950s librarian at a time of increasing concern over juvenile delinquency seems to bear this out. Although writing enthusiastically of the advances made toward intellectual freedom in America and their implications for New Zealand,

the author believes the effect of offensive literature on young people is still of paramount concern in New Zealand.¹⁰

2.3 *The profession debate*

A debate which has developed as a natural progression from the 'problem of purpose' is the question of the professional status of librarianship. This debate is of some relevance to this project. The professional 'codes of ethics' drawn up by many library associations world-wide were partly in response to the argument that librarianship was an occupation rather than a profession. Professional education for librarianship and the development of the library associations themselves have added weight to the viewpoint that librarians are professionals. However, there is still some concern over the 'accountability' of librarians as professional practitioners. Although codes of ethics may include statements on censorship and equality of access, what happens if a librarian breaches this code? A doctor or lawyer in breach of their professional code could be disciplined and possibly removed from practice for a period. No such procedure exists for librarianship. This is an additional area of tension around the censorship issue for librarians. While this study will not address this issue specifically, it is important in terms of the development of librarianship as a profession that its history is explored fully. Michael F. Winter believes that it is particularly important that historical research is done in this area:

There is a great deal of history written by librarians, but there is still no systematic or comprehensive history of librarianship. Of course, there have been many histories of libraries and many biographical studies of eminent librarians ... but the profession itself, though several centuries old, has yet to find its historian.¹¹

In investigating the development of a professional ideology on censorship among a group of New Zealand librarians, this study will contribute to a fuller understanding of the history of librarianship as a profession in this country.

3.0 Review of the related literature

A preliminary search of the related literature indicated that the effects of censorship on libraries in New Zealand have been largely ignored. Some survey research has been conducted recently into the current attitudes of librarians in New Zealand to censorship issues, but historical study has been limited to one or two theses several years apart. In addition, these are in a somewhat dated narrative form.¹² This study would therefore be breaking new ground in providing an analysis of some of the events described in these works. Because of the lack of any specific New Zealand studies, the review of the related literature focuses on studies of censorship in other countries before considering the New Zealand situation. Important results which have emerged from survey research are also considered. The focus of the review is then narrowed to historical studies of New Zealand libraries' responses to censorship issues.

3.1 Intramural censorship

One of the key papers in this area was not a piece of research, but a theory put forward by Lester Asheim at the 1953 Second Conference on Intellectual Freedom. Asheim stated that it was the motivation for judging which differentiated the censor from the selector. The selector tries to find reasons to select a book, while the censor tries to find reasons to reject it.¹³ Survey research of public and school libraries in California conducted by Marjorie Fiske in 1956-1958 built on this censorship/selection dichotomy. Fiske found that librarians themselves were sometimes the harshest censors, conscientiously not selecting books which might be considered unsuitable by parents, patrons or teachers. This 'intramural' censorship also took the form of removing books from circulation into 'mending' or contriving to keep them off the shelves in other ways.¹⁴

There is some consensus in the literature on the issue of intramural censorship. Kenneth L. Donelson conducted surveys of Arizona teachers and librarians' attitudes to censorship in the 1970s and found that several respondents declared there was 'nothing worth censoring' in their libraries since, in the words of one librarian, they 'would not want to recommend or handle any book anyone might object to for any reason'.¹⁵ Clearly

attitudes in a different geographical area many years after the Fiske report were remarkably similar to those found by Marjorie Fiske.

W. A. Wiegand, in a piece of historical research on the availability of controversial materials in America's rural Midwestern communities from 1890-1956, also found that libraries conformed to community pressures. This occurred to such an extent that during World War One books were checked in the 'Army Index' (a list of books not allowed in military training camps) in order to determine their patriotic suitability.¹⁶ Intramural censorship has been a common practice in American librarianship, despite the current professional belief in intellectual freedom. While it is difficult to study intramural censorship historically, since it something of a hidden activity, such self-censorship could be considered as one reason for a lack of censorship challenges during a selected period in an historical study.

3.2 The role of personal and professional attitudes in censorship practice

Charles H. Busha's survey of attitudes to censorship among Midwestern public librarians more than ten years after the Fiske report, in 1972, also found a marked disparity between attitudes to intellectual freedom as a concept and censorship as a practice. Respondents who saw intellectual freedom as a very important concept to their profession would still censor materials they thought inappropriate. Busha believed that this disparity between professional credo and censorship practice was the result of differences in education. The results of his survey indicated that there were higher levels of censorship among librarians with more formal education, while those with less formal education were more liberal.¹⁷ As Alvin Schrader noted in 1995 studies of censorship after Busha's tended to focus on the individual librarian and not the profession.¹⁸ The debate centred on personality traits and attitudes and how these affected selection practices.

However recently some of the historical literature, in particular, has begun to examine the development of the concept of intellectual freedom as a key part of the librarian's professional ethos. Louise Robbins' 1996 study of the American Library Association's response to threats to intellectual freedom from 1939-1969 was hailed in one review as valuable because 'it is important for our profession to have the history of our current stand on intellectual freedom chronicled'.¹⁹ Robbins does just this, tracing the

development of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights from 1939-1969. In the introduction, she discusses Evelyn Geller's contribution to this area of inquiry. Geller uses concepts borrowed from the sociological study of professions in order to explain 'the changing attitudes of librarians toward their social role and toward censorship'.²⁰ Clearly it is accepted that librarians, in America at least, were not always champions of intellectual freedom. Geller's use of sociological theory illuminates this constant evolution in the profession's ideology.

Cindy Mediavilla demonstrated the value of survey research to historical study in her analysis of anti-Communist censorship and the California Library Association during the 1940s and 1950s. Because the area and time period covered are very similar to Fiske's, Mediavilla used the Fiske report as 'an explanation of how intellectual freedom challenges impacted on Californian librarians of the period'.²¹ At the same time, such an analysis provides an indication of the value of knowing the historical background to survey research. As Mediavilla showed, Californian librarians of the early 1950s had been through a difficult time in the preceding ten years, with many attacks on 'Communist' materials and even some of the librarians themselves. One head librarian was told that all the books on his shelves would be examined because a public committee was not satisfied that he was 'free of those liberal thoughts we don't like to see in the mind of the head of our library'.²² Working in such a climate, it is hardly surprising that many respondents in the Fiske study were unwilling to select materials that might offend someone.

In analysing sources, this research project considered how an individual's socialisation both as a person and as a professional might have affected responses to censorship issues. As the Mediavilla study and the New Zealand studies in section 3.3 show, some librarians may have been pressured by the cycles of 'moral panic' in society, even if personally and/or professionally they saw their role as a liberal one.

3.3 New Zealand research on censorship

A. C. Burns' 1968 thesis entitled *Aspects of censorship: A Survey of censorship Law and Practice in New Zealand From 1841 to 1963, Mainly Concerning the Control of Indecent Publications* is a slightly 'dated' history in that it is almost solely narrative.²³ However, it does provide good background knowledge of censorship laws in New Zealand and is valuable as a record of the period in which it was written. A 1956 report

by Dorothy Walker is similarly valuable for the insight it provides into censorship issues of the time. Walker's report traces the development of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights as she sees it and applies it to New Zealand public libraries:

'It has helped librarians throughout the free world to realise afresh their responsibilities to the communities which they serve. Such a document as the Association Bill of Rights can be applied not only to the American situation; and any consideration of censorship must take it into account as it sets out the principles by which any librarian in a free country must be prepared to stand'.²⁴

Walker's idealistic position is a very different one from that of her contemporary, Stuart Perry, and highlights the difficulties involved in making generalisations about librarians' viewpoints, especially from such a distance. Perry used the New Zealand Library Association's 1946 *Report of censorship committee* in a justification of censorship as 'necessary in order to meet the demands of public opinion'.²⁵ For Walker, the most important issue concerning censorship and the public librarian is deemed to be 'indecent or obscene literature' and she is most concerned about the effect of this literature on young people. Walker worked at Wellington Public Library at the time, where 'young people graduate from the children's section at the age of fifteen, or if they are mature, as young as twelve'.²⁶ This report was written just one year after the 1955 report of the Mazengarb committee, and although the author might appear to be in line with modern conceptions of intellectual freedom, not allowing children to borrow from the adult section of a public library would be considered censorship today.

3.3.1 Moral panic and the Mazengarb report

Chris Watson and Roy Shuker's 1998 history of censorship in New Zealand is somewhat biased towards material other than literature.²⁷ However they build on a theory first applied to censorship in New Zealand by Paul Christoffel in 1989. Christoffel stated that society goes through periods of 'moral panic' during times of great change. Film or literature is sometimes blamed for the changes and so censorship increases, the aim being to fix 'boundary crises' by re-establishing moral boundaries. Christoffel applied this to the Mazengarb report of 1955.²⁸

Gordon Tait, writing in the 1970s, also pointed out the proximity of two key events.²⁹ The first was the publication of the Mazengarb report, a report prepared by a

special committee on moral delinquency in children and adolescents which concluded with two pages on 'objectionable literature' under the heading 'searching for a cause'. The second was the passing of the Indecent Publications Act in 1954 which restricted the import of comics and pulp fiction to New Zealand. The Act was passed just ten days after the Mazengarb report was received by the Prime Minister.

Christoffel further elaborated on the theme of cycles of moral panic by describing a similar increase in censorship during the late colonial era. New Zealand was changing rapidly under various social and environmental pressures, including a downturn in immigration, the growth of biblical criticism under the influence of Darwin and the movement of women into factories and offices as the country became more industrialised. At this time a number a number of indecent publications cases came to court.

3.3.2 Recent survey research

Peter Ball's 1998 survey of the incidences of censorship in New Zealand public libraries revealed much about the current attitudes of New Zealand librarians to the concept of intellectual freedom. Ball found that over a five year period in New Zealand there had been an average of just one attempt at censorship per fortnight. This was a much smaller figure than Alvin Schrader found in a similar study conducted in Canada in the mid-eighties.³⁰ In conclusion, Ball reasoned that this may be because New Zealand librarians are 'less censorious' than their Canadian counterparts, or because Schrader's larger survey sample produced more valid results.³¹ However, although Ball has documented several cases of intramural censorship in the surveyed libraries earlier in his work, he does not consider the role this may have had in reducing the number of controversial materials in libraries. Nevertheless, Ball's work provides an excellent documentation of some New Zealand librarians' current attitudes to censorship. This project addresses the question of how these attitudes have developed.

3.4 Summary and conclusions

Some tentative conclusions which could be drawn from this review of the literature are that librarians at the turn of the century may have seen censorship as part of their role, and perhaps this was rooted in their conception of the library's role in society. Intramural censorship was commonplace in American libraries even in the 'liberal' 1970s.

This could be one explanation for a lack of 'challenges' to controversial materials over a given period. And finally, librarians are a product of their time and of society they work in, which may have some bearing on their decisions about censorship issues.

While it is probably not advisable or accurate to form hypotheses from overseas research, such hypotheses and such research provided one way in which to approach my research problem in the absence of any detailed New Zealand study in this area. Powell has said that 'the historian can not always anticipate the facts that he or she will uncover as the examination of the sources proceeds'.³² Indeed, the outcome of my research may suggest that New Zealand librarians had a very different orientation to their professional credo of intellectual freedom than librarians in other countries.

4.0 Methodology

The following section discusses the methodology used in conducting the research as well as the methodology that was proposed at the outset, explaining the difference between the two.

4.1 Research questions

Ronald R. Powell has said that 'the historian can not always anticipate the facts he or she will uncover as the examination of the sources proceeds'.³³ Robert Jones Shafer also notes that the hypotheses of historical research must be tentative and be abandoned at need.³⁴ In the absence of any detailed study of the effects of censorship pressures on New Zealand libraries, research questions have been used in place of hypotheses for this project. These have been formed from studies of censorship history in libraries in other countries. In all cases, they are framed as broad questions concerning New Zealand librarianship. Although the project considered only Auckland public libraries, it was expected that extrapolation of the data collected would provide a probable indication of attitudes to censorship issues nation-wide.

How did the professional ideology of intellectual freedom develop among New Zealand librarians?

Were librarians in New Zealand affected by the same censorship pressures as librarians in other countries?

What were those pressures?

Did librarians in New Zealand sometimes see censorship as part of their role?

These questions reflected the four main areas of interest in the study, although it was anticipated that an examination of the sources might change the questions or create new ones.

4.2 Definition of terms

The term 'censorship' as used in this research refers to attempts at censorship, as well as actual censorship. As Alvin M. Schrader noted in his study of censorship in Canadian public libraries, 'findings based on crucial incidents are not comparable to findings based on all incidents experienced by public libraries'.³⁵ However, this is a

constant problem for the historian, who can only use cases which were documented at the time – inevitably these will be those Schrader terms ‘crucial’. Anthony Thompson’s study of censorship in public libraries in the United Kingdom during the twentieth century ameliorated this to a certain extent by broadening the description of censorship used to include what he termed ‘official supervision’.³⁶ This means that while crucial cases which resulted in actual censorship are considered, so are book ‘challenges’.

It is perhaps also necessary to define the term ‘challenge’ as applied to materials in libraries. An item is ‘challenged’ when a library user complains, either verbally or by filling out a complaint form, about the item’s presence in the library collection. They in effect challenge the library’s right to have that item in the collection. Throughout this study, ‘censorship’ will be used to describe cases which resulted in books being ruled indecent or banned as well as cases in which books were simply ‘challenged’ by library patrons.

4.3 Delimitations and limitations

The principal delimitation in this research, as in any historical research, was the time period covered – in this case 1920-1940. Initially a seventy-year period from 1920-1990 was chosen. This period was selected because it follows on from the time examined by Glenda Northey in *Accessible to all? Libraries in the Auckland Provincial Area, 1842-1919*.³⁷ Although Northey’s thesis covers the broader issue of the purpose and role of Auckland public libraries during those years, it necessarily touches on censorship and professional development issues as well. A seventy-year time period was chosen because it was not clear how much information might be found, especially for the earlier years of the study. Once the research began however, it became apparent that there was much material worthy of discussion in newspaper reports from 1920 onwards. A 1940 finish date was therefore decided on.

A second delimitation was the choice of public libraries as a subject of study. They were chosen because of their current stand on intellectual freedom. Previous historical study in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom has shown that public libraries’ perception of their role in society changed during the twentieth century. At the turn of the century, it was accepted that censoring materials was something public librarians often had to do. Many in the profession saw themselves as guardians of public morality – there to make sure the public was informed in the ‘right’ way. The present day

professional ethos of intellectual freedom is a relatively new development, which appears to have originated in the 1960s and 1970s in America. Studying these libraries in particular will help to shed light on the evolution of this professional ideology in New Zealand.

Geographical area was a third delimitation in this research, because of possible difficulties involved in obtaining good sources from many parts of the country. It was anticipated that media reports would make a good starting point in collecting information about censorship cases, but these would ideally be supplemented by additional material from minutes, schedules or agendas of library meetings, professional journals of the time and other documentation. However, to view many of these sources it is necessary to visit the libraries involved. For this reason, the study narrowed its focus to the Auckland public library system. In researching primary source material, scrapbooks containing many relevant clippings were found. Auckland Public Library staff collated these during the years 1919-1957. Debates about censorship challenges and reports of related council and committee meetings were found in these. However, there proved to be few relevant primary sources and the study had to be limited to secondary newspaper reports. Nevertheless these were analysed carefully according to the guidelines laid down in section 4.4.

The most important and potentially problematic limitation of the project was expected to be the quantity and quality of sources available for examination. It was possible that there might be little relevant documentation, or limited time in which to collect and analyse the information available. In fact, the opposite proved to be the case and more relevant information than it was possible to incorporate in this study was found. However, a discussion of a procedure to be followed in order to minimise this limitation was written and can be found in section 5.0 on data collection.

4.4 Research procedures

The historical method requires the use of external and internal criticism of source material. External criticism had lesser importance to this study, as primary sources were fewer. However, the project followed the rules of internal criticism as closely as possible – for example checking for bias and trying to locate supporting information in other documents.

Equally important though is the need to analyse the material found and to interpret it. As stated in section 1.0, the historical studies done in this area so far have been solely in narrative form. This approach would not be particularly useful in answering the research questions posed in section 4.2. As Herbert Goldhor notes, history should be concerned with what caused events to happen.³⁸ Because the historian must deal with past events, it is difficult to confirm an hypothesis. Essentially historical hypotheses must remain just that – possible explanations. Nevertheless, the interpretation of sources which appear to support a theory or hypothesis gives one possible explanation of past events.

While understanding the role of theory in historical studies, the researcher must always be ready to abandon or even overturn old theories if the sources indicate that they are no longer applicable. This is important in order to avoid bias, something which may be particularly easy to fall into in interpreting the historical evidence in light of a 'pet' theory. Even data collection becomes problematic since a researcher tied to a particular theory may be inclined to collect data which supports that theory. In order to reduce this possibility there should be a good grasp of several theories or ways of explaining events, as well as a flexible attitude to the development of new theories.

4.4.1 Specific procedures

A brief outline of the proposed specific procedures to be undertaken in finding the source material for this project is given below. Some potentially useful primary sources are listed. These were to be analysed first, and then the secondary sources listed were to be examined (or re-examined in some cases).

It was expected that the procedure for this research would be to:

- Examine and analyse the following primary sources
 - APL minute books for the appropriate time period(s)
 - Minute book(s) of the New Zealand Library Association (Auckland branch).
 - The papers of John Barr, Librarian at Auckland Public Libraries 1913-1952
 - The *Munn/Barr report* (survey of New Zealand libraries 1934)
 - Any other relevant primary sources which are uncovered during this archival research

- Analyse these sources in terms of historical methodology (internal/external criticism) and relevant theory
- Examine and analyse the following secondary sources
 - McEldowney, W. J. *New Zealand Library Association 1910-1960*. Wellington: Wright and Carman, 1962.
 - Colgan, Wynne. *The Governor's gift: Auckland Public Library 1880-1980*. Auckland: Auckland City Council, 1980.
 - Bush, G. W. A. *Decently and in order: the centennial history of the Auckland City Council*. Auckland: Collins, 1971.
 - Any other relevant sources which are uncovered during the research
 - Stuart Perry's indexes to the decisions of the Indecent Publications Tribunal (1963-1980)
 - Trace these decisions through the media reports of the time
 - If Auckland libraries were involved in a particular case, look for additional material at these libraries or in other relevant sources (eg professional journals)
 - Analyse these sources in terms of historical methodology (internal/external criticism) and relevant theory
- Synthesise and interpret results to see what the sources reveal about public libraries and censorship in New Zealand during the years 1920-1990

5.0 Data collection

The preliminary step was to go through the procedures as listed above in section 4.5. It was expected that this would be fruitful. However, useable primary source material proved scarce, so an alternative search method was used which relied more heavily on media reports. A useful resource for this was the scrapbooks of newspaper and magazine clippings relating to Auckland Public Library compiled by Auckland Public Library staff 1920-1940. Obviously, the value of this was limited by the fact that the media reports are secondary sources, which are not ideal as a sole basis for analysis. Nevertheless, this step provided some insight into the effect of censorship on New Zealand librarians, and their attitudes towards the issue.

Ideally, other sources would have been available to provide not only more information on librarians' attitudes, but also more reliable information than that given by media reports. Such sources might have included minutes, agendas or schedules of library meetings, professional journals and other historical studies. However, librarianship in New Zealand in the early years of the twentieth century was at an earlier stage of development than the profession in other countries. This meant that there were no professional journals, and library meeting minutes do not appear to have been deemed important enough to warrant their retention. Most of the historical studies analysed in the literature review used a variety of sources. Cindy Mediavilla, for example, used minutes of library meetings and professional journals of the time as well as media reports. Louise Robbins and W. A. Wiegand cite similar sources. Anthony Thompson, on the other hand, relied heavily on media reports. While he acknowledged the unsatisfactory nature of this, he went to great lengths to explain the rigorous internal criticism he used in evaluating the usefulness of each report.³⁹

Indeed, media reports are often revealing in their attitudes towards the role of librarians at a certain time. For example, Thompson traced a debate in one regional newspaper in 1926 about the actions of a Croydon librarian who was allegedly practising intramural censorship by locking books in his office. In fact, no such thing had happened. The mistake was the result of the newspaper copying several statements from attributed to the library from an article in another newspaper. However, the tone of the article makes for fascinating reading – the librarian is depicted as a classic authoritarian

sensor with a 'long sensitive nose' with which to sniff out immorality, eyes 'glistening with joy' when immoral works are found and safely locked away.⁴⁰

Thompson's study served to illustrate a possible course of action if there were few primary sources available for the proposed study. While relying solely on media reports is not ideal, it is certainly possible to produce a useful piece of historical research from them providing rigorous analytical and critical skills are used.

6.0 Summary

An historical study of responses to censorship issues in Auckland public libraries would help to shed light on the development of intellectual freedom as a professional ideology among New Zealand librarians. An understanding of this aspect of the past is particularly important at a time when librarians are increasingly dealing with censorship issues brought up by the Internet. There may be difficulties associated with locating and accessing relevant documents, but previous studies in other countries have shown that good historical research can be produced from relatively limited source material. The most important criteria are that the researcher must have critical and analytical skills and the ability to apply relevant theory in conducting such analysis.

7.0 Introduction: 'The Barr regime'

It is vital to understand the importance of personality as a factor when studying the Auckland Public Library's responses to censorship issues in the first half of the twentieth century. During all the years covered by this study (and for some years before and after) there was only one Chief Librarian – John Barr. Management styles were undoubtedly different in those days, but even taking this into account it seems that Barr was particularly authoritarian. Staff who have never met Barr but who worked for his successor, Robert Duthie have referred to his time as head of the Auckland Public Library as 'the Barr regime.' It seems Barr had high standards and expected much of his staff. He also had very clear ideas about the purpose and role of the public library and its staff. Barr had come from Glasgow as a relatively young man, but with extensive library experience and training. This was also reflected in his subsequent work at Auckland Public Library, where he expected a higher standard of education and training of his library staff than had his predecessor, Edward Shillington. Along with Barr's training and experience came very clear ideas about the 'proper' use of a public library and the librarian's responsibility to provide books of a 'good literary standard'. These words were of course defined according to Barr's personal moral and ethical standards, so Barr's personal views were to have considerable influence on Auckland Public Library's responses to censorship issues during his time as Chief Librarian.

The report is broken down into two categories, detailing firstly the censorship pressures which affected the Auckland Public Library in the 1920s-1930s and secondly the actual censorship challenges which were faced during this time. There is then a discussion of the two themes together, focusing on any changes in censorship issues and Auckland Public Libraries' handling of censorship challenges since the earlier years covered by the study.

8.0 Censorship pressures affecting Auckland Public Library in the 1920s and 1930s

An article in the *Auckland Star* in 1929 told a series of amusing anecdotes about visitors to the Auckland Public Library. Among them was the story of a young lady who irritated the library staff by persistently standing at the desk turning over the books about to be returned. The article continued:

A person of this type had been known to turn down a book she had at first fancied because the colour of the cover did not match that of her frock. Obviously in such a case the purposed use of the book was for giving effect to some afternoon tea, or tram-car, pose.⁴¹

The columns of the Auckland press between 1920-1930 were full of concern over this type of frivolous reader, usually stereotyped as a young lady of fashion. Many of the articles do not mention the library specifically. Nevertheless they have been collected together by library staff of the time in the Auckland Public Library scrapbooks of the period. It is clear that staff saw such concerns as important to their work. Such articles also give some answers to one of the research questions posed by this project: 'What were the censorship pressures of this time?'

8.1 Non-fiction versus fiction: or the 'solid sort' versus the 'frothy stuff'

At first glance it may seem that concern over frivolous reading is a separate issue to actual censorship 'challenges'. Yet, as research in other countries has shown, censorship may occur at the selection stage. While there is no way to prove that this happened at the Auckland Public Libraries during the 1920s, discussions of the Library's annual reports and selection policy in the media repeatedly use value-laden language in their focus on the amount and quality of fiction being read by Auckland Public Library subscribers.

From 1920 onwards Auckland newspapers printed a version of the City Librarian's Annual Report. Sometimes different papers had a different view of the

statistics, but one constant is found in their close analysis of the level of fiction versus non-fiction reading among subscribers. The language they use gives clear indication of the media's opinion about the reading habits of Aucklanders. *The Month*, in a February 1920 article about 'good' and 'bad' kinds of reading, commented:

Judging from the Annual Report of the Auckland City Librarian, it would seem that the need of the day is not so much more readers as better readers.⁴²

Statistics for the amount of fiction reading followed: 83.8% of adult issues were fiction. This was described as: 'but one halfpenny worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack.'⁴³ The author of the article obviously felt strongly about this matter, and went on to guess that 'the bulk of the novels taken out were, doubtless, mostly of the flimsy sort' and mere 'frothy stuff'.⁴⁴ In January of 1923 *The New Zealand Herald* was still complaining that:

Two thirds of the books borrowed are novels; that leaves less than a score of works per annum of a more solid sort, even including magazines and children's books. It is not a particularly inspiring result.⁴⁵

It would be easy to dismiss this as a kind of literary snobbery, but such concern is inextricably linked with the development of the public library as an institution. In spite of the differing views of the reasons behind the development of this institution, there is one constant – self-education. Whether this education was for the benefit of the individual or used as a way of keeping the working classes under control, education was a major reason for the development of the public library. It is easy to see then why it was considered important that people should use the library to read non-fiction: 'to improve their knowledge and capacity for the keener battle of industrial and commercial life' in the words of an Auckland journalist in 1922.⁴⁶

Members of the Auckland Public Library staff as well as members of the Auckland City Council Libraries Committee also frequently discussed the appropriateness of 'popular' or 'light' fiction in the public library in a similarly negative manner. In an interview with *The Sun* on January 9 1929, just a few months before the City Librarian John Barr created controversy by 'banning' the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Barr stated his position clearly:

The standard of fiction is kept fairly high and the subscribers are not encouraged to an excessive reading of mediocre stuff. If we made the lending department cater for what is known as 'popular' taste, we could have the fiction alone up to the half a million mark. Instead of that we make the basis fairly high. For instance, at one time last year we had six copies of *Jew Suss* whereas we never have more than three copies of one of the popular thrill merchants. Our object is to make the library serve the public by improving the standard of reading. We try to draw the line at 'tripe' writers.⁴⁷

Ellen Melville, who was involved with the Auckland City Council's Libraries Committee for many years, was also president of the Libraries Association of New Zealand. In her March 1930 address to the Libraries Association conference Melville stated:

I take it none of us would subscribe to the doctrine of the people to whom a library means merely a place where they ought to be able to get the latest and lightest fiction of the earliest possible moment and at the lowest cost to themselves. We can all agree that the library should put freely before those it serves all that is best in the world's literature.⁴⁸

The inclusion of the value-laden 'best' naturally creates a problem, as the Libraries Committee and/or library staff must then be responsible for deciding what is 'best'.

Reading through statements made by both the press and library staff about the annual statistics given out in John Barr's official reports, it seems that one way in which the library's progress was judged was in the amount of non-fiction being read by library subscribers. Through the 1920s and early 1930s circulation figures for non-fiction were generally low. However, during the Depression figures lifted. John Barr believed that this was a reflection of the public's need to understand what was going on in the world. As proof of this, he pointed to the fact that books on economics had shown a particularly large increase in issues.⁴⁹

From March 25 1927 *The Sun* began publishing a list of 'Books in demand at the Auckland Library'. This is similar to the lists of 'top 10 videos/movies' that are published today and gives some substance to the theory that popular fiction reading was the television of the 1920s. What is especially interesting about these lists is that the 'non-fiction' sections were often biographies, many with 'adventures of' or even 'confessions of' prefixes. These hardly sound as though they were a great deal more 'serious' than the fiction that was being read.

8.2 The public taste for popular fiction

However, although the journalists writing articles on John Barr's latest Annual Report in Auckland newspapers usually came down firmly on the side of education, as did the library staff they quoted, letters to the editor often criticised the Auckland Public Library's fiction section as uninteresting. Complaints were made by 'Fed up' and 'Disappointed' in July 1928 and these continued into the next year.⁵⁰ One written to *The Sun* in April 1929 by 'Money-penny' is typical:

As a subscriber to the Public Library I must protest against the quality of the fiction on the shelves of the circulating branch. It is extremely difficult to select readable stuff from the depressing mass of 'dated' novels ... Of course I am aware that there is nothing so ephemeral as contemporary fiction, and I make due allowance for that. It still remains that the bulk of the books on the shelves are old and uninteresting to the reader.⁵¹

Perhaps this was the result of the selection policy which was described by Ellen Melville in October 1933 during a meeting of the Libraries Committee. Mr G. Grey Campbell remarked that there had been many complaints that the library did not keep up to date with books of a popular type. *The New Zealand Herald* reported the discussion that followed:

Miss Ellen Melville: What do you mean by popular books?

Campbell: I mean popular fiction.

Melville: We have never tried to cater for the taste for ephemeral literature. In fact, we make it a rule that we do not buy a book unless it has been 'alive' for six months.⁵²

At this, Councillor T. Bloodworthy, who had been opposed to the 'banning' or as Ellen Melville had put it 'non-selection' of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, remarked that he had found it difficult to find the books he wanted to read in the Auckland Library. If the committee's rule was to wait for six months before buying a new book he was not surprised at his own experience.⁵³

Statements made by John Barr to the media when being interviewed about the Annual Report statistics in the 1920s and 1930s indicate that he was in full agreement with the Libraries Committee selection policy. Indeed in Glasgow, John Barr's place of origin, no novel could be placed on the shelves until it was two years old and had survived the critics.⁵⁴ In January of 1925, in commenting on high levels of fiction reading

among Auckland Public Library's subscribers, Barr was paraphrased by the *Auckland Star*:

It must be remembered that fiction is the popular literary vehicle of the day. It is only natural that such works should be in greatest demand among the reading public. Moreover, the fiction in the Auckland Library [is] carefully chosen and represent[s] a good literary standard.⁵⁵

However, it is apparent that other factors were at work to keep John Barr from stocking the library with masses of popular fiction. In the pieces published by the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Auckland Star* on the January 1925 Annual Report there was also much discussion of the library's poor accommodation for books and readers.⁵⁶ It must be remembered that New Zealand was a relatively young country, and Auckland a young city. Demands on the Auckland City Council's resources were great, and in 1936 John Barr used his Annual Report to complain about the need for those resources to be channelled into the library: 'The funds available are not sufficient to meet the reasonable demands of borrowers.'⁵⁷ In fact, in 1939 he was still issuing similar statements: 'Placed in this impotent position, the library cannot fulfil those functions which the community has a right to expect of it.'⁵⁸ During the 1920s and the Depression years of the 1930s then, there were also financial pressures which may have necessarily demanded very careful selection of books.

8.3 Children's services and censorship pressures

John Barr was very pleased with the inroads which had been made into linking the Auckland Public Library with schools.⁵⁹ Children's departments and services had also been established at the Auckland libraries by the 1920s, and these were hailed as a great success by the media. A writer for the *Auckland Star* summed this up in 1919:

the growing boys and girls who are rapidly getting into touch with the library are laying a good foundation for their future character, and will be helped to be much finer men and women by what they read in these, their plastic years.⁶⁰

It was generally believed that reading good literature not only 'laid a good foundation' in terms of character, but also created a 'good' reader, who would discriminate between great literature and light popular fiction.

However, even the library's most rigorous standards had to be relaxed a little for younger patrons. John Barr put it this way in an interview with the *Auckland Star* in November 1927:

Care has been taken, of course, to ensure that the literary standard is not lowered

... With this end in view, we have secured popular school and adventure stories that the child would naturally be interested in, and when it has acquired a taste for reading it invariably asks for something better.⁶¹

Nevertheless, in an interview the next month in *The Sun*, Barr's Chief Assistant Miss McGuire reflected that 'the children's library ... is where we have to select most carefully. An adult has to be left to select his own books, but children must be protected from reading rubbish.'⁶² Judging from the recorded comments of John Barr and the Libraries Committee about adult fiction selection policy in section 1.2 however, it is debatable how much adults were left to select their own books. Certainly they were not openly restricted, but their choice of books was undoubtedly narrowed to books of 'a good literary standard' according to library authorities.

8.3.1 Literature and young people (especially women)

In February of 1920, an article was published in *The Month* which was to be influential in creating a minor moral panic among Aucklanders.⁶³ While it is difficult to determine how much panic was caused by the piece itself, it may be assumed that a Lenten Pastoral delivered by the Auckland Bishop of the Anglican Church the next month had some impact.⁶⁴ It seems probable that Bishop Cleary had read *The Month's* article. His sermon included similar warnings about risky books and moral infection and ended in the same way, with a reminder to be as careful of the books children read as of the company they kept.

It may seem strange to today's librarian that 'reading too much' was seen as a problem among young people in *The Month's* article.⁶⁵ However this was not the first time the problem had been identified, nor was it to be the last. In the time of John Barr's predecessor, Edward Shillington, a letter had been written to the press complaining about the possible moral corruption of a 'good number of very young boys' who 'changed their books' too much – apparently as often as twice a day.⁶⁶ Wynne Colgan, in his history of the Auckland Public Library notes this, and dryly observes that these books could not have contained too much corrupting material, as the Auckland Library catalogue of the time did not list any controversial titles.⁶⁷ Presumably there was something innately dangerous about the amount these boys were reading.

Bishop Cleary, in his sermon, called this 'promiscuous reading', and used extremely dramatic language to describe the consequences of it – language which made clear parallels between the reading of immoral books and sexual immorality.

The contagion is spread among the untainted young chiefly by the failure of parents to realise that books and magazines must be regarded as intimate company.⁶⁸

Interestingly, Cleary concluded that what was wanted was a 'professor of books' to guide the young mind along 'safe, pleasant and profitable' paths.⁶⁹ Perhaps this was the librarian's role.

The author of the original article in *The Month* had concluded that 'the bulk of the novels taken out (of the Auckland Public Library) were, doubtless, mostly of the flimsy sort' and mere 'frothy stuff'.⁷⁰ This language is also indicative of the links which were drawn between 'unsuitable' reading and the fashions a young lady of the time might have worn. This implies that young girls, because they were more frivolous, were seen as more susceptible to corruption.

In fact, young girls may have also been seen as carriers of what Bishop Cleary called 'moral contagion'. Statements by an Auckland bookseller to the *New Zealand Herald* in September 1924 were to the effect that the demand for 'crude rubbish' was 'very extensive ... among young women'.⁷¹ In fact, the bookseller estimated that 75% of those who asked for books which were 'dangerous to the immature' were young women.⁷² In the same piece the following story was told:

One New Zealand library used to adopt the practice of placing questionable books on a shelf below the counter so that they would not be issued unless officially asked for. This became known and some girls used to ask, "What is there on the naughty shelf to-day?"⁷³

This article mixed the really 'unsuitable' books (presumably containing 'immoral' themes) with the 'potboilers' and lamented that there was no discrimination between great literature and best-sellers among the young. Best-sellers were deemed to be as unwholesome as any truly 'dangerous' book and the author blamed them for many of society's ills. With their 'maudlin introspection' they were probably responsible for ... a vast deal of that unnatural, romantic posing which so often spoils the sane relationships of healthy young manhood and womanhood, and which, later, blights the sensible camaraderie essential to happy married life.⁷⁴

The *New Zealand Herald*, in May of 1920 had remarked on the value of the suburban libraries' 'winter courses', that it was

... extraordinary how many people, especially women, seem to require the guidance of the stimulus of a literary society in order to induce them to read anything worthwhile.⁷⁵

Some women and young girls were clearly a risk not only to others, but also to themselves, when left alone to read as they pleased.

8.3.2 The cinema versus the library

In September 1924, the *New Zealand Herald* had speculated that part of the problem of young people reading unhealthy popular fiction was due to the cinematograph, which had created a generation of young people who 'think that good books must be a series of thrilling or passionate episodes.'⁷⁶ Indeed, it seems that the Auckland Public Library had identified the cinema as serious competition by April 1930, when book marks were designed advertising the cinema on one side and the library on the other. One side read: 'George Arliss gives you the best in motion picture entertainment. See Alexander Hamilton at the Regent Wednesday April 27.' Overleaf was the message: 'The public libraries provide you with the Best Reading serious and light, for the smallest outlay. A 5/- subscription will give you unlimited pleasure for 6 months.'⁷⁷

As late as 1937 E. B. Ellerm of the Leys Institute remarked in an article for the *Linwood Library Gazette*:

Many children read far too much. The parent should see that they have a healthy outdoor life, and the teacher, that the charms of the book world do not lead to the neglect of tasks set at school.⁷⁸

8.3.3 Comics versus the library

The early 1938 debate over 'degrading' imported American magazines was joined by John Barr, so could be said to have been a censorship issue for the Auckland Public Library. However, the debate has been placed in the discussion of pressures rather than challenges, since these comics were not seen in libraries, and certainly would not have been in the Auckland Public Library. However, they caused Barr concern, since children seemed to prefer to read them rather than the quality literature libraries were supplying to schools. Most of these comics had 'gangster' themes and were considered of a 'sexual' type since their female characters were often drawn in a very shapely way, with flimsy

clothes. Miss E. A. Chaplin of the Libraries Association submitted a remit stating that the association urges the Minister of Education and Minister of Customs to take action to prevent the import and sale of cheap magazines.⁷⁹ This was seconded by Barr who, according to the *Auckland Star*:

... did not think that there was any question of literary censorship ... These magazines caused a perversion of the aesthetic sense.⁸⁰

Barr had good reason to dislike these comics. In June 1938 his statistics showed there had been a drop in the amount of reading among school age children. Although Barr attributed this to many things including the attractions of radio, pictures and sports, he also mentioned the 'serious menace of pulp magazines.'⁸¹

The issue was a divisive one for the Libraries Association. Some members clearly agreed that action must be taken, some argued that it should be in a less dramatic form and still others did not agree that anyone should decide what was good literature.⁸² However, the incident was important, as it was the first time that an open debate on censorship had been reported at a Libraries Association meeting. Clearly, by 1938 the association was beginning to recognise that librarians' professional role might include helping the government to formulate some policy on this issue.

9.0 Censorship challenges at Auckland Public Library in the 1920s and 1930s

That there was not much documentary evidence of censorship challenges in the 1920s and 1930s may be a reflection of Auckland Public Libraries strict selection practices as discussed in section 2.2. The practice of intramural censorship was suggested by Kenneth Donelson as a possible reason for a lack of censorship challenges over a given period.⁸³ In addition, any censorship challenges which were dealt with by the library would probably not have been recorded at this time. The few which were recorded are found in newspaper debates and letters to the editor. These are discussed in the following sections.

9.1 The debate over German books

The 1920s were to be an eventful time for the Auckland Public Library in terms of censorship challenges, not necessarily in number but in their repercussions. In January 1920 a *New Zealand Herald* journalist wrote an article about a subscriber who had complained about German literature in the library ending with: 'it is not the intention of the librarian to add any German literature to Auckland's library for some time.'⁸⁴ John Barr wrote a denial of this about a week later, which the *Herald* published. He stated that the library was not closing its shelves to German literature, although there was nothing the library thought worth purchasing in the latest catalogue from Germany. However, Barr continued, Nietzsche's works had been added shortly after the war commenced.⁸⁵ This incident again parallels one in Anthony Thompson's book in which a newspaper apparently misquoted the librarian in order to have a sensational article. In this instance, Barr handled the situation well by publishing a denial. If he had failed to do so, the papers may have made more of the incident than they did.

9.2 A parent's complaint

In July 1925, 'Ad Astra' wrote a letter to the *Herald* complaining about some of the 'horrible books' currently available on the Auckland Public Library's shelves. Although responsible parents monitored their children's reading, something must be done in the interests of those who did not have the time or the inclination to do so. The solution, in Ad Astra's opinion, was for the library to take a more active role in censoring

books which could be read by children and young people.⁸⁶ The comment made by Miss McGuire in section 1.3 probably reflects fairly accurately the attitude the library had towards children's book selection at this time, and it was clearly a protective one. Certainly, there are no further recorded complaints about this issue at this time, and the library did not feel the need to respond. However, the incident highlights that even when standards were as rigorous as Auckland Public Library's there were still those who saw the need for more protection of young minds.

9.3 John Barr and the *Remarque* controversy

On June 21 1929, *The Sun* ran the headline: Banned! Great War Novel Kept From Aucklanders. The article that followed gave the reasons why this decision had been reached: 'its general circulation is impossible owing to coarseness of some of its expression and some of the subjects mentioned.'⁸⁷ In *The New Zealand Herald* the following day John Barr complained that reporting the incident so sensationally had only made matters worse: 'Now that attention has been drawn to the prohibition an interest in some cases undesirable has been aroused.'⁸⁸ An interest had certainly been aroused, and the debate that followed was to play a significant role in the development of professional attitudes towards censorship among New Zealand librarians.

John Barr felt it necessary to defend his selection policy in the face of the ensuing controversy.

Mr Barr said that from 1000 – 1500 books were passed into the library each year. A novel need not be offensive to earn exclusion. 'Trash' was rejected simply because it failed to measure up to literary standards. The widely-discussed German novel, *Jew Suss*, had been passed. The novel *Simon Called Peter* had not reached the library shelves and the 'Tarzan' series had been rejected as 'trash'.⁸⁹

It may be noted that Barr carefully included a mention of 'the German novel' *Jew Suss*, which he had first mentioned in January in a denial that he was refusing to buy German books. It seems possible that he did not want the question of the book's country of origin to become an issue. As an aside, the comment is also interesting in view of the fact that an interview with Auckland Public Library staff in May 1923 had revealed that many boys were asking for the 'Tarzan' books.⁹⁰ There were clearly tensions between the library and the public about book selection throughout the 1920s, and it was inevitable that there would be an outbreak of rebellion against too strict an insistence on high literary standards.

9.3.1 Public rebellion

It is apparent from the many letters to the editor at the time of the Remarque debacle that Auckland library subscribers did not on the whole agree with Barr's stance. In the space of a few days between June 21 and June 25 no less than seven letters to the editor denounced Barr's actions in refusing to accommodate *All Quiet on the Western Front*.⁹¹ One argued that the banning of the book from the library shelves went against the purpose of the public library:

The library belongs to the public and should contain reputable books on all subjects, and not only pretty-pretty stories fit for Sunday School prizes. After all, no one need read the book unless they like.⁹²

Miss Prude, writing to *The Sun* on June 22 1929 called for 'such a supply as meets demand.'⁹³ Judging from the headlines in almost all of the newspapers the next day the demand was high: 'They Want It', 'Aucklanders Rush For Banned Novel', and 'Inquiry In City Shops' were emblazoned on front pages.

However, Barr was not without support. Mr. H. R. French told the *Auckland Star* that he thought it:

... a great pity that the undoubted power of the book should be likely to fail in its message in this Dominion, because of offensive crudities which could well be excised.⁹⁴

Mr. French advocated actually censoring parts of the book in order to make it more acceptable as a solution to the controversy. This view was echoed by 'Cyrano' in the *Auckland Star* in July:

I sympathise with the libraries in their difficulty. Can a book like this be handed out promiscuously? Would the critics of the censors leave it lying around in their homes and like their young daughters to read it? One of the most objectionable episodes is gratuitous, and could have been omitted without serious effect.

Indeed, the text could have been judiciously edited without appreciably weakening the realism ... It is a pity the publishers did not see to this. As it is, libraries have to choose between a twofold duty to their readers. A library must draw the line of decency somewhere yet it is essential that the truth about war should be widely known. I am glad I have not to make the decision.⁹⁵

9.3.2 Censorship law: the case of artistic merit

The Offensive Publications Act 1892 prohibited "any picture or printed or written matter which is of an indecent, immoral, or obscene nature". The 1910 Indecent Publications Act replaced the 1892 law. Under the 1910 Act, the principle that a publication could be judged as having "literary, scientific, or artistic merit" was introduced. This principal remained in succeeding legislation, and is part of censorship law to this day. In the 1920s and 1930s the law was administered by Customs officials, sometimes with the help of advisors, often booksellers or librarians. Any books which were deemed inappropriate could be added to a list. The list was secret, and inquiries at bookshops for any of these banned publications would simply elicit the response that they were prohibited.

This background is important to an understanding of the seriousness of John Barr's refusal to include *All Quiet on the Western Front* in the Auckland Public Library's collection for moral reasons. Because of this law, Barr was to come under scrutiny even from within the Libraries Committee over his handling of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. On July 10 Mr. F. N. Bartram formed a notice of motion proposing that the council should give directions for the book to be placed in the central library and all branches.⁹⁶ Bartram 'challenged the right of the librarian to act as moral censor'.⁹⁷ Cr. T. Bloodworthy also argued that the book should not have been banned. If the work had been passed by Customs then the decision had already been made that the book was acceptable. However, Ellen Melville of the Libraries Committee stood by Barr's decision, arguing that the book had not been banned anyway, but simply 'not selected'.⁹⁸ In the end the Libraries Committee upheld Barr's decision. However this did not stop Cr. Bloodworthy from writing an article to *The New Zealand Worker* later that month entitled 'A book which people should be compelled to read.'⁹⁹

9.4 *Remarque repercussions*

The debate generated by this one incident makes it a highly significant one in understanding the development of a professional attitude towards censorship among New Zealand librarians. Although it was in Auckland that the main debate seems to have

been focused, many librarians were concerned about the book and whether they should provide access to it. E. J. Bell, librarian at the Canterbury Public Library, produced an interesting paper at the annual conference of the New Zealand Libraries Association in March of the next year, 1930.¹⁰⁰ It is interesting because it is rather contradictory in nature. Bell begins by saying that the librarians should not act as censors for adult readers. However, he then goes on to say that if a book describes an obscene situation and very unpleasant episodes then it can not be a masterpiece. Possibly controversial books which are written by good authors and produced by reputable publishers should not be excluded, but restricted so that they do not fall into the hands of immature readers. It seems likely that Bell would have placed Remarque's novel in this category. Even more contradictory was his final statement to the effect that if 'a wrong book' did somehow get into the library's collection, 'the best thing to do was to withdraw it quietly from circulation.' This clearly implies that this form of intramural censorship was practised in at least one New Zealand library at this time, and Bell advocates it as an easy solution to a difficult problem.

It is also interesting that the Remarque controversy did create so much discussion among those not connected with the library profession about what a librarian's role was. This is undoubtedly because the profession was a young one in New Zealand, and was poorly defined. The Libraries Association was relatively new - no professional education could be obtained in New Zealand and until the 1920s many library staff were not trained. However, this was changing in the 1920s. Certainly, John Barr believed that his staff should be educated for the job. It was a requirement that they pass matriculation and they were encouraged to take courses at the London School of Librarianship. Nevertheless, many articles and letters of the time still referred to library staff as 'attendants' rather than 'librarians' or 'library assistants'. They were seen by the public as keepers of books rather than as educated and active professionals. Ellen Melville clearly recognised the importance of raising the status of the profession in the period following the Remarque affair. In her Presidential Address to the Libraries Association conference in 1930 she stressed that the association was important to 'maintain the status of the librarian in the community as a trained professional worker'.¹⁰¹ Melville also mentioned the high standards of education now required of librarians as an indication of their professionalism.

Because librarians were still debating their role in society among themselves, and there were differences of opinion even here, the time was ripe for others to give their opinions. J. W. Shaw, a lecturer in English at the Training College in Auckland addressed the Libraries Committee on *Libraries from the Readers Point of View* on March 6, 1930. These give valuable insight into the selection/censorship role he saw for librarians. The *New Zealand Herald* reported Mr Shaw as saying that:

When the reader reached the library he had a selection which had already been narrowed down by a certain censorship. That was one of the advantages of the library, as the reader was saved the trouble of discriminating himself. Censorship could not follow public taste, as public opinion was too difficult a thing to determine. Librarians might find it possible even to extend the censorship and to raise the taste of the public.¹⁰²

This is a sophisticated and relatively modern understanding of the censorship process in libraries. Of course, librarians are largely responsible for the selection of their book stock and they will consciously or unconsciously tend to choose books which they approve of. So when the public go to choose a book, this and various other factors have come into play already. As Shaw stated, the book stock has 'already been narrowed down by a certain censorship'. However, the flavour of Shaw's speech is a distinctly 1920s one, particularly in the ambivalence Shaw shows towards the reader being 'saved the trouble of discriminating himself'. This was certainly something that many readers did not want to be rescued from, as the many unfavourable letters to the editor over the Remarque affair showed.

Wynne Colgan, in a chapter of his history of the Auckland Public Library, argues that John Barr's attitude to the Remarque novel was 'uncharacteristic'.¹⁰³ In contrast, Barr's attitude to the Remarque novel was in keeping with what he saw as his role – to provide 'quality' fiction to the Auckland library subscriber. As we have seen in the quote in section 2.0 made a few months before the Remarque controversy, Barr stated this position clearly. Admittedly, these remarks were on the subject of 'popular' rather than 'dangerous' fiction, but they nevertheless give some indication of Barr's view of his role. Like the 1920s librarians in Anthony Thompson's English study, Barr clearly saw for himself a professional role as a guide to 'good' books, if not as an actual censor. This can be seen as an extension of the reader's advisory services which were librarians' province at the time. An *Auckland Star* reporter, writing on the subject of the Auckland Public Library's jubilee in 1930 commented:

This matter of library staffs is much more important than many people would imagine. A librarian can have a tremendous amount of influence for good or bad among the frequenters of a library. There are ... hundreds and hundreds of people who rely very much on the person in charge. 'Can you recommend me a book?' is one of the most frequent remarks one hears in a library, and it is in such cases that the librarian can do such a lot to make or mar character and taste, for taste in literature can most certainly be cultivated.¹⁰⁴

After the Remarque debacle, in August 1929, Barr addressed the Auckland Advertising Club on the subject of 'Books and reading'. Put simply, he said, 'If you want to know what to read ask a librarian.'¹⁰⁵ Presumably the same would hold true if you wanted to know what *not* to read. In the debate following the Remarque incident, Ellen Melville had stated that all fiction could not be passed by the Libraries Committee and 'reliance had to be placed on the good taste of the librarian.'¹⁰⁶ It seems that at a time when librarianship was ill-defined in New Zealand, book selection and reader's guidance and advice were some of the roles that were clearly marked out as the librarian's territory.

10.0 Changes over time?

On February 21 1940, John Barr gave his Presidential Address to the New Zealand Libraries Association. It should not come as a surprise that his topic was the 'proper function' of the public library. This was, of course, in 'providing good, informative reading'.¹⁰⁷ Barr further stated that light reading for entertainment should be paid for as all other entertainments were – people should buy books. The following year, in an article marking Barr's twenty five years of service as Chief Librarian, *The New Zealand Magazine* recounted the story of Barr's early years at the library.

Upon taking over his duties in Auckland the new librarian formed the opinion that certain fiction in the lending department was below public library standards. Out they went! Mr. Barr laughingly recalls memories of one chagrined subscriber "Ah! So you're the new broom," he said to the young Scotsman. "Well if I can't have my ---" (mentioning a popular author of inferior quality) "you're losing a subscriber."¹⁰⁸

John Barr's attitude had changed little over the twenty years since 1920. It is therefore unlikely that there had been great changes in Auckland Public Library's attitude to the librarians' role in selection and censorship issues.

Censorship pressures had also changed little, although they altered subtly with the times. In September 1941 the *Auckland Star* was told by Auckland Public Library staff that people were again reading 'trash'.¹⁰⁹ This time the war was seen as the cause. The men were reading less trash as they became interested in the political reasons behind the hostilities and the women were reading more trash as they began to want something that didn't 'make them think' about the harsh realities of the war. In the same article women were again accused of being more interested in the 'spicy novels' than men. In the words of one librarian: 'They all look for them, but not all have the courage to ask the librarian. These books seem to appeal more to women than to men.'¹¹⁰

The war was also the reason for Dr G. H. Scholefield's pro-censorship Presidential Address to the Libraries Association conference in early 1941. Scholefield stated that 'As a body, librarians are against censorship in any shape or form.'¹¹¹ This seems a rather sweeping statement in view of some of the opinions which had been expressed at previous conferences. However, Scholefield then went on to say that:

In wartime we have to consider from a different angle the use to which books might be put and the possible results of a too-free circulation of views which, if accepted, would militate against the country's effort.¹¹²

Ultimately, there was no real difference in Scholefield's opinion on censorship at the Libraries Association conference in 1941 and Bell's opinion at the conference in 1930. Barr was clearly not just keeping the status quo at Auckland Public Library, but aligning himself with others in his profession in his stand on selection and censorship issues.

11.0 Summary and conclusion

It may be said that many of the censorship concerns affecting the Auckland Public Library in the 1920s and 1930s were not really serious cases, but about the general unsuitability and frivolousness of reading in these years. There was a sense of competition between 'serious' and 'entertaining' reading, with a clear expectation that more serious reading was far better in terms of young people's development. There was also conflict between the public's expectation that the public library was there to provide everything they wanted to read, and the public librarians' belief that their role was to provide 'the best of the world's literature.'

The only case for which we have a clear statement from the library on censorship is the Remarque case of 1929. However, this is a central case – it developed into a discussion among New Zealand librarians through the Libraries Association conference of that year about the librarian's role as censor. And the articles which were not directly related to libraries still provide some answers to the question of what censorship pressures affected Auckland Public Libraries in the 1920s and 1930s.

It is also apparent that many Aucklanders sincerely wanted some of the fiction that John Barr turned down as unsuitable. Wynne Colgan's assertion that John Barr's 'banning' or 'non-selection' of Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* was untypical is clearly inaccurate. As Ellen Melville pointed out, many books were turned down each year - the difference was that this case had happened to come to the attention of the media. From John Barr's comments it is also apparent that he saw a role for himself as a moral guardian as part of his professional duty. It is also clear that he was not alone in this view. In spite of some opposition to librarians as censors, New Zealand librarianship had not yet advanced towards a definite understanding that the public library should be for all. This is evidence that New Zealand librarianship was developing in much the same way as its British and American counterparts, who at this time were also negotiating the librarian's role in selection and censorship issues.

Endnotes

¹ Ronald R. Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*, 3rd ed. (London: JAI Press, 1997), 174.

² Allan Pratt, "Preface," in *Freedom versus Suppression and Censorship*, Charles H. Busha (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1972), 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ Alvin M. Schrader, *Fear of Words: Censorship and the Public Libraries of Canada*, (Ontario: Canadian Library Association, 1995), 120.

⁵ Chris Watson and Roy Shuker, *In the Public Good? Censorship in New Zealand*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1998), 16.

⁶ Arthur W. Hafner and Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Democratic Ideals and the American Public Library," in *Democracy and the Public Library: Essays on Fundamental Issues*, ed. Arthur W. Hafner (Connecticut: Greenwood, 1993), 9.

⁷ Michael H. Harris, "Public Libraries and the Decline of the Democratic Dogma," *Library Journal* 101 (1976): 2225-30.

⁸ Jim Traue, "Once Upon a Time in New Zealand: Library Aspirations and Colonial Reality in the Early Years of European Settlement, or, 'The Tone and Character to Civilisation'," *Stout Centre Review* 3, no.2 (1993):3-8.

⁹ W. A. Wiegand, "Main Street Public Library: the Availability of Controversial Materials in the Rural Heartland 1890-1956," *Libraries and Culture* 33, no.1 (Winter 1998): 131.

See also Louise S. Robbins, *Censorship and the American Library: the American Library Association's Response to Threats to Intellectual Freedom 1939-1969* (Connecticut: Greenwood, 1996), 2.

¹⁰ Dorothy Walker, *Censorship and the Public Library with Special Reference to New Zealand: Administration Report* (unpublished report for New Zealand Library School, 1956), 8.

¹¹ Michael F. Winter, *The Culture and Control of Expertise: Toward a Sociological Understanding of Librarianship*, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988), 135.

¹² See A. C. Burns, *Aspects of Censorship Law and Practice in New Zealand From 1841 to 1863, Mainly Concerning the Control of Indecent Publications* (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 1968)

See also Dorothy Walker, *Censorship and the Public Library with Special Reference to New Zealand: Administration Report* (unpublished report for New Zealand Library School, 1956)

¹³ Lester Asheim, "Not Censorship But Selection" *Wilson Library Bulletin* 28 (Sept. 1953): 63-67.

¹⁴ Marjorie Fiske, *Book Selection and Censorship: A Study of School and Public Libraries in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

¹⁵ Kenneth L. Donelson, "Shoddy and Pernicious Books and Youthful Purity: Literary and Moral Censorship Then and Now," *The Library Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (Jan. 1981): 12-13.

¹⁶ Wiegand, "Main Street Public Library," 129.

¹⁷ Charles H. Busha, *Freedom versus Suppression and Censorship*, (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1972), 147.

¹⁸ Alvin M. Schrader, *Fear of Words: Censorship and the Public Libraries of Canada*, (Ontario: Canadian Library Association, 1995), 21.

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- ¹⁹ Victoria Chase, "Sources," *RQ* 36, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 621-622.
- ²⁰ Robbins, *Censorship and the American Library*, 2.
Evelyn Geller, *Forbidden Books in American Public Libraries, 1876-1939: A Study in Cultural Change* (Conecticut: Greenwood, 1984).
- ²¹ Cindy Mediavilla, "The War on Books and Ideas: the California Library Association and Anti-Communist Censorship in the 1940s and 1950s," *Library Trends* 46, no. 2 (Fall 1997):331.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 335.
- ²³ A. C. Burns, *Aspects of Censorship: A survey of Censorship Law and Practice in New Zealand From 1841 to 1963, Mainly Concerning the Control of Indecent Publications* (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 1968).
- ²⁴ Dorothy Walker, *Censorship and the Public Library with Special Reference to New Zealand: Administration Report* (unpublished report for New Zealand Library School, 1956), 8.
- ²⁵ Stuart Perry, *The Indecent Publications Tribunal* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1965): 43.
- ²⁶ Walker, *Censorship and the Public Library with Special Reference to New Zealand*. 15.
- ²⁷ Chris Watson and Roy Shuker, *In the Public Good? Censorship in New Zealand*. (Palmerston North: Dunomre Press, 1998).
- ²⁸ Paul Christoffel, *Censored: A Short History of Censorship in New Zealand*, (Wellington: Research Unit, Department of Internal Affairs, 1989), 20-21.
- ²⁹ Gordon Tait, *The Bartlett Syndrome: Censorship in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Freedom to Read, 1979), 4.
- ³⁰ Peter Ball, *Censorship in the Public Libraries of New Zealand: A Survey* (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 1998), 55.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ³² Ronald R. Powell, *Basic Research Methods for Librarians*, 3rd ed. (London: JAI Press, 1997), 171.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ³⁴ Robert Jones Shafer, *A Guide to Historical Method*, 3rd ed. (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1980), 176.
- ³⁵ Schrader, *Fear of Words: Censorship and the Public Libraries of Canada*, 23.
- ³⁶ Anthony Hugh Thompson, *Censorship in Public Libraries in the United Kingdom During the Twentieth Century*, (Essex: Bowker, 1975), xiv.
- ³⁷ Glenda Northey, *Accessible to All? Libraries in the Auckland Provincial Area, 1842-1919*, (Auckland: University of Auckland, 1998).
- ³⁸ Herbert Goldhor, *An Introduction to Scientific Research in Librarianship*, (Illinois: Graduate School of Library Science, 1972), 111-113.
- ³⁹ Thompson, *Censorship in Public Libraries in the United Kingdom During the Twentieth Century*, xiv.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

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- ⁴⁴ Ibid
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- ⁴⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 3 October 1923
- ⁴⁷ *The Sun*, 9 January 1929
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- ⁴⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 7 November 1931
- ⁵⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 7 July 1928
New Zealand Herald, 10 July 1928
- ⁵¹ *The Sun*, 15 April 1929
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- ⁵⁴ Wynne Colgan, *The Governor's Gift: The Auckland Public Library 1880-1980* Auckland: Auckland City Council, 1980, 47.
- ⁵⁵ *Auckland Star*, 8 January 1925
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New Zealand Herald, 9 January 1925
- ⁵⁷ *Auckland Star*, 19 May 1936
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- ⁶¹ *Auckland Star*, 1 November 1927
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- ⁶⁵ *The Month*, 14 February 1920
- ⁶⁶ Colgan, Wynne, *The Governor's Gift*, 22.
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- ⁷¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 15 September 1924
- ⁷² Ibid
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- ⁷⁴ Ibid
- ⁷⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 29 May 1920
- ⁷⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 15 September 1924
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- ⁷⁹ *Auckland Star*, 17 February 1938
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- ⁸¹ *Auckland Star*, 11 March 1938
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- The Sun*, 24 June 1929, letters signed 'S. G.' and 'Tom Jones'
- Auckland Star*, 25 June 1929, letter signed 'R. M. Thomson'
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- ⁹² *New Zealand Herald*, 24 June 1929
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- ⁹⁴ *Auckland Star*, 1 July 1929
- ⁹⁵ *Auckland Star*, 6 July 1929
- ⁹⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 July 1929
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- ⁹⁸ Ibid
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- ¹⁰⁴ *Auckland Star*, 4 September 1930
- ¹⁰⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 28 August 1929
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