

# H.D. Skinner's use of associates within the colonial administrative structure of the Cook Islands in the development of Otago Museum's Cook Islands collections

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**ABSTRACT:** During his tenure at Otago Museum (1919–57), H.D. Skinner assembled the largest Cook Islands collection of any museum in New Zealand. This paper shows that New Zealand's colonial administrative structure was pivotal in the development of these collections, but that they were also the result of complex human interactions, motivations and emotions.

Through an analysis of Skinner's written correspondence, examples are discussed that show his ability to establish relationships where objects were donated as expressions of personal friendship to Otago Museum. The structure of the resulting collection is also examined. This draws out Skinner's personal interest in typological study of adzes and objects made of stone and bone, but also highlights the increasing scarcity of traditional material culture in the Cook Islands by the mid-twentieth century, due in part to the activities of other collectors and museums.

**KEYWORDS:** H.D. Skinner, Otago Museum, Cook Islands, colonialism, material culture.

## Introduction

During his tenure as ethnologist (1919–57) and, later, director of Otago Museum, Henry Devenish Skinner (usually referred to as H.D. Skinner; Fig. 1) built a collection of at least 958 objects from the Cook Islands. Most of these objects came from individuals involved in the colonial infrastructure of the islands. The mechanics of Skinner's collecting relationships are interesting in that they show that this collection was not acquired passively, but was developed as the result of a clearly defined plan, carried out by Skinner over four decades.

It should be noted here that many Cook Islands objects made their way into Otago Museum's collections by means other than Skinner's connections in the colonial administration. Through purchases from auction houses and private

individuals, exchanges with museums, private donations and, significantly, the purchase by the New Zealand government of the Oldman collection in 1948, Otago Museum's Cook Islands collection grew to be the largest in New Zealand.

## Why Skinner collected

When Skinner was appointed assistant curator in 1919, the Otago Museum had one collection item from the Cook Islands: a paddle from Rarotonga donated in 1903. Skinner's research in Britain during the First World War into Māori and Polynesian material culture made him acutely aware of what *had* been available to European ethnographic collectors in the Pacific, including the Cook Islands. Most of the collections he studied in Britain at that time had been assembled as early as the late eighteenth century and



Fig.1 H.D. Skinner in 1928 (neg. sheet 209, Hocken Collections, Dunedin).

included textiles and staff gods, which had long since ceased being produced in the Pacific Islands (see H.D. Skinner to Buck, 23 October 1936). As Table 1 shows, even in comparison to other New Zealand museums, the Otago Museum was late in establishing its ethnographic collections (Livingstone 1998: 19–25).

This delay in acquiring ethnographic objects gave Skinner a sense of urgency, built on a belief that pre-European Polynesian material culture would soon disappear from the market. In a public lecture delivered in 1920, Skinner displayed this view and his own interest in material culture studies: '[E]thnology is the most important of all the component sections of anthropology ... This will certainly not be the case, however, in a century's time. What factor is it, then, that gives this temporary precedence over all other branches of anthropology? It is the fact that the data of ethnology are vanishing data' (Skinner 1920).

In an address given at the end of his directorship in 1957, Skinner reflected on the priorities he and Willi Fels

Table 1 A comparison of Cook Islands objects held in the collections of the four main museums in New Zealand before and at the end of Skinner's tenure at Otago Museum.

	Pre-1919	1957
Auckland War Memorial Museum, Auckland	165	420
Dominion Museum (now Te Papa), Wellington	230	279
Canterbury Museum, Christchurch	13	117
Otago Museum, Dunedin	1	958

(Otago Museum's most significant benefactor) had made in their Pacific collecting:

What, you may ask, was the plan? The making of the plan began on the day of my appointment, and was forged in never-ending discussions with Willi Fels, our greatest benefactor. There were two preliminary requirements: 1. Quality in material purchased. 2. Careful costing.

The general principles followed were to secure in the first place Maori and Moriori material with scrupulous attention to locality. Next came Polynesian material, followed by Melanesian and other Oceanic material. (H.D. Skinner 1957)

Skinner's collecting priorities radiated out from New Zealand. From his research perspective, the comparative analysis of Pacific material culture could be used to determine the migration routes of the Polynesian peoples. This research could be practically undertaken only in a museum environment, where objects of similar form – but from a variety of locations – could be studied in one place in an attempt to determine their morphological relationships and significance (Freeman 1959).

Adzes and other stone implements were 'the most important class of evidence relating to Polynesian origins, for from many islands in the Pacific they are almost the only evidence we have' (H.D. Skinner 1924: 30). Of the 958 Cook Islands objects accessioned into the Otago Museum's collections during Skinner's tenure, 358 were adzes.

Skinner was also lecturer in anthropology at the University of Otago. His goal was to develop Otago Museum's collections to provide a global sweep of material culture for his students to study, while also providing objects for his own comparative studies.

## How Skinner collected

In developing Otago Museum's collections, Skinner was able to draw on the Fels Fund, established by Willi Fels in 1920. Of the 958 Cook Islands objects collected during Skinner's tenure, 356 are noted in the museum's registers as having been purchased through the Fels Fund.

In general, Skinner's ability to purchase objects, rather than having to rely solely on donations, allowed him greater control over the types and quality of objects coming into the museum. In particular, he considered his ability to purchase collections to be the most significant factor in the development of the museum's collections (H.D. Skinner 1951: 9). The purchasing process was undertaken in close discussion with Fels, with whom Skinner shared a vision for developing the museum's collections. They also shared an ambition to bring high-quality and representative collections from throughout the Pacific and the world to Dunedin.

One factor in particular was significant in fostering donations to the Otago Museum. This was Skinner's personal ability to inspire others with his own passion. In a testimonial written in 1924 as part of Skinner's application for the position of curator at the Auckland Museum, Otago Museum's then curator William Benham wrote: 'Mr Skinner has a charm of manner that almost compels people who own a collection to present it to the museum when he approaches them about it' (Benham 1924).

Richard Skinner also considered that his father's personality was pivotal:

Dad's personality, it was an electric personality. I think that if you talked with him, you became ... I won't say you became a collector, but you became extraordinarily interested in what he was doing. And if the opportunity arose, because you happened to be in Egypt or something like that, or doing other work, but at the same time you'd think, 'By Jove, Skinner would have appreciated this opportunity'. (H.R.W. Skinner, interview with author, 2 September 2006)

Alongside H.D. Skinner's 'electric personality', Richard Skinner also emphasised his father's ability to draw influential and wealthy members of the Dunedin community into active involvement with Otago Museum through the numerous dinner parties held at 'Rustar', the Skinner family home: 'There were countless dinner parties at Rustar at which different people were the invited guests, and they would find themselves arriving and by the time they left they were museum enthusiasts' (H.R.W. Skinner, interview with author, 25 July 2006).

J.D. Freeman, himself a former student of Skinner's who aided the donation of several Cook Islands objects to the museum in the early 1940s, believes that through the 'sheer example of his enthusiasm' Skinner 'directed towards the Museum the civic pride of the merchants who had established in Dunedin business houses of national scope' (Freeman 1959: 19).

## Skinner's social networks – the Cook Islands administration

Skinner's ability to enthuse others with his vision led to the development of long-standing collecting relationships with individuals involved in New Zealand's Cook Islands colonial administration. Most of Skinner's relationships were developed or maintained through written correspondence, as he had few opportunities to undertake fieldwork himself owing to his teaching obligations and logistical or funding restraints.

New Zealand administered the Cook Islands after its annexation from Britain in 1901, with all subsequent governance directed from Wellington until independence in 1965. The colonial administrative structure was headed by a resident commissioner, with resident agents in charge of local administration on the various islands within the group. School teachers and medical officers were also provided by the New Zealand government during this period (Scott 1991).

## Collecting through resident commissioners

The first two collecting relationships discussed here relate to two individuals who successively held the most senior role in the Cook Islands: that of resident commissioner. Personal friendship and a sense of obligation were the driving elements behind these donations.

### F.W. Platts

F.W. Platts was resident commissioner in the Cook Islands from 1915 to 1920. Prior to his appointment, Platts had practised as a lawyer in Dunedin, also spending one term as mayor of Port Chalmers (Scott 1991: 156). Skinner and Platts were obviously acquainted, as Platts wrote near the end of his tenure that he was 'getting together a few things for the museum' and that he would 'call upon' Skinner when



Fig. 2 A fan from Manihiki, presented to Otago Museum by resident commissioner Hugh Ayson in 1933 (D34.957, Otago Museum, Dunedin).

he arrived back in Dunedin (Platts to H.D. Skinner, 25 October 1920). With the arrival of 22 objects in 1921, ranging from fans to paddles, Skinner proclaimed that Platts had 'laid the foundation not only of our Cook Islands collection but of our whole Polynesian collection' (H.D. Skinner to Platts, 16 May 1921).

### Hugh Ayson

While studying law at Victoria University between 1906 and 1909, Skinner had met and befriended fellow law student Hugh Ayson (H.R.W. Skinner, interview with author, 13 July 2007). Ayson went on to become resident commissioner of the Cook Islands between 1922 and 1943 (Crocombe 2006).

Ayson donated 10 Cook Islands objects to Otago Museum: two in 1933 and eight in 1934. Skinner wrote that the two adzes donated in 1933 were actually given to Major Fred Waite MP by Ayson, and were handed over to Otago Museum by Waite only 'after some discussion and very evident regret'. Skinner had needed to convince Waite that the adzes, 'were safer and also of greater use to students in our galleries than in a private house. I therefore entered them as your gift' (H.D. Skinner to Ayson, 12 December 1932).

In his letter to Ayson, Skinner continued by saying that the museum's Cook Islands collection was now 'fairly large' and 'one of the most important in existence', but, 'I very

much hope that you will be able to help us further in developing our Cook Islands section – we would certainly appreciate any help you can give'. Skinner comments that he was reading a draft of Felix Keesing's *Modern Samoa: its government and changing life* (1934), adding, 'The administration of the Cook Islands is referred to occasionally in very appreciative terms'.

Skinner's opportunism bore fruit the following year with the arrival of a consignment of the eight Cook Islands objects (mainly fans; Fig. 2) from Ayson.

Skinner must have been encouraged when Ayson suggested that he would try to get a double canoe for him (Ayson to H.D. Skinner, 30 January 1933), as he later wrote to Ayson stating that Otago Museum would be happy to 'supply the timber for a boat, or whatever else you consider adequate return for the double canoe' (H.D. Skinner to Ayson, 12 December 1934). Raising this request with another correspondent, Skinner wondered whether his offer of timber would 'touch [Ayson's] conscience' (H.D. Skinner to D. Low, 1934). Unfortunately, Ayson was unable to acquire a canoe as he found it was 'not an easy matter to get the people to part with them' (Ayson to H.D. Skinner, 28 November 1934).

Ayson also facilitated Skinner's brief collecting episode in Rarotonga in 1931. Although much of Otago Museum's collections were built as a result of purchases or donations arranged via written correspondence, Skinner took any

opportunity to add to them directly. While on the return journey to New Zealand from Tahiti after several months spent working in the Society Islands with staff from Honolulu's Bishop Museum, Skinner and his family stopped for the day in Rarotonga (H.D. Skinner to Trenn, 4 May 1937) and Ayson invited them to go for a tour around the island. Richard Skinner recalls:

And Dad, of course, he took to this like lightning. And so we got into the car and so we drove around. But he had the most amazing 45° vision, or 90° vision I suppose. He could be watching the road ahead, but at the same time, if you passed anything on either side of the road that looked interesting, he would signal the driver to either slow down or stop. And he'd leap out of the car and go and investigate what he'd seen. I mean the average person would not have picked any of this stuff up. But he picked up quite a few bits and pieces.

And if the fellow wanted to bargain, he'd bargain with him. And Dad was a pretty good bargainer [laughs]. He'd bargain with them and he normally won. But, however, that was how we spent the day. (H.R.W. Skinner, interview with author, 13 July 2007)

## Collecting through resident agents

### Lionel Trenn

Lionel Trenn worked for Union Steam Ship Company as a radio operator on a number of cargo ships operating between New Zealand and central Polynesia in the late 1920s to mid-1930s (Anonymous 1936), before being appointed resident agent on Manihiki and, later, Mangaia in the Cook Islands.

It seems likely that Skinner made Trenn's acquaintance in 1930 or 1931 while the former was in Tahiti. Aside from sourcing and donating Cook Islands objects, Trenn played a significant role in shipping many items free of charge to the Otago Museum.

Trenn sent five spears and paddles to Skinner in 1936. This was in gratitude to Skinner, who had been 'one of the prime movers' in securing Trenn the resident agent's position on Manihiki, which he held from the beginning of 1937. Trenn hoped that Skinner would be 'prepared to be [his] advisor and instructor in amateur anthropological research' (Trenn to H.D. Skinner, 28 September 1936). Trenn donated 54 objects from Manihiki during his tenure on the island (Fig. 3).

Skinner purchased a much-coveted shell adze from Manihiki through Trenn. The adze and several other objects were paid for with clothing and books. Trenn had suggested this form of payment because Manihiki Islanders were very poor during this period as a result of the decline in returns for copra and pearl shell, and so Skinner promised to send some literature and second-hand clothing for the adze (H.D. Skinner to Trenn, 8 November 1937). The following year, Trenn wrote: 'The man who gave me the adze, and the one who gave me the other things were really overjoyed' at the receipt of the clothing. Trenn described utilitarian items such as clothing as being like 'luxuries' at the time on Manihiki Island (Trenn to H.D. Skinner, 4 February 1938).

Near the end of Trenn's first year as resident agent on Manihiki, Skinner had written:

I was writing to [Peter] Buck two or three days ago, and was able to tell him we have now almost enough Manihiki material to make a separate collection. This does not mean that we are satisfied: far from it. The reverse in fact. As I think you know I am especially keen on adzes, and it was with the deepest regret that I read Buck's account of how the three known adzes in stone from your island have gone to the Bishop Museum. If you can lay your hands on stone or shell adzes you will put me everlastingly in your debt. (H.D. Skinner to Trenn, 8 November 1937)

Here Skinner not only shows his penchant for adzes, but also his competitive nature when trying to acquire objects ahead of other ethnologists.

Trenn also donated four objects from Rakahanga Island in 1943. Trenn was in a position to acquire these objects because the jurisdiction of his position covered both Manihiki and Rakahanga (Anonymous 1936).

In 1939, Skinner had paid Trenn for a wooden bowl from Pukapuka and a coconut grater from Tongareva (Penrhyn) (H.D. Skinner to Mr Chapman, 21 June 1939). Skinner had earlier asked Trenn to find these objects for the Otago Museum (H.D. Skinner to Trenn, 4 May 1937), but Trenn had replied that this could be difficult: '[B]ecause they are still useful household articles ... I will have to pay a few shillings for them. From where I'm writing this letter I can see a fine semi-oval legless bowl ... It is in such continual use that I doubt whether I could swap a good enamel basin for it' (Trenn to H.D. Skinner, 4 February 1938). Later that year, Skinner wrote offering £1, suggesting this would 'cover the cost of a good enamel bowl' (H.D. Skinner to Trenn, 20 May 1938).



Fig. 3 A fishhook from Manihiki, presented by Lionel Trenn in 1937 (D38.291, Otago Museum, Dunedin).

Upon reading of Trenn's transfer to Mangaia, Skinner wrote: 'We have had so much from you and I am hesitant to ask for more. Still, greed is powerful, and I am hoping that you may be able to send us material from Mangaia' (H.D. Skinner to Trenn, 3 November 1942). Skinner then goes on to list the objects he desires from Mangaia, starting with adzes, but also suggesting 'gimlets of all sizes, chisels, saws ... half-made adzes showing the process of chipping and flaking would be welcome'.

The success Skinner felt regarding his collecting relationship with Trenn can be gauged in a letter he wrote to Steven Savage, a former resident agent in the Cook Islands, in which he says: 'Through the help of Trenn we have secured a representative collection from Manihiki, and I am hoping he may help us still further now that he has moved down to Mangaia' (H.D. Skinner to Savage, 22 December 1942).

Despite Skinner's hopes, Trenn donated no Mangaian objects, even though he wrote that he had 'got the police keeping an eye out for stone implements and have told many officers, but so far nothing has come along' (Trenn to H.D. Skinner, 20 November 1944). There are three reasons for the lack of Mangaian donations from Trenn, and, in fact, for the lack of donations from Trenn altogether after the mid-1940s. First, his role on Mangaia kept him busy, with little time for ethnographic pursuits. Second, by the mid-1940s Trenn was married with a young daughter and family life occupied much of his spare time (Trenn to

H.D. Skinner, 4 December 1945). And third, in 1947 Trenn left Mangaia to take up the position of registrar at the High Court in Rarotonga (Anonymous 1947). This new position in the centre of the administration appears to have curtailed any further opportunities for him to assemble objects for Otago Museum.

### W.A. Allison

In the late 1940s, Skinner engaged in a collecting relationship with the resident agent of Atiu, W.A. Allison. Skinner had met Allison at Otago Museum through Gordon Anderson, the museum's first education officer (Allison to H.D. Skinner, 6 October 1947).

In another instance of Skinner encouraging the ethnographic pursuits of one of his field collectors, Allison wrote to Skinner with notes he had compiled, at Skinner's suggestion, of string games played on Atiu (Allison to H.D. Skinner, 6 October 1947). Allison remarked: 'I have not forgotten your request for certain native artefacts'. It can be argued that through mediating between his field collectors and the editors of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, Skinner created a subtle form of obligation from his collectors to repay the favour through the sale or donation of objects to Otago Museum.

In 1949, Allison sent 12 adzes to Otago Museum, accompanied by a letter in which he wrote, apologetically:

Unfortunately when some of the owners heard that I was buying these adzes they began to sharpen them on the grind stone which marks you will probably see : others again come in coated with oil , and I believe some have been rubbed with a preparation made from candle nut which is supposed to blacken the stone : some are in the raw state and I presume that is the way in which you prefer : The actions of the owners are quite understandable because they thought that a sharpened and polished axe or adze would realise a greater payment. (Allison to H.D. Skinner, 2 August 1948)

In his next letter, Allison mentions that he held little hope of finding 'rimers, needles etc' from other islands as 'the Americans during the "occupation" cleaned out all the stone and wooden artefacts of Aitutaki', although he was still 'getting quite a thrill out of collecting' (Allison to H.D. Skinner, 16 August 1948).

Skinner was obviously thrilled by this outcome as well. His eagerness is evident in the extensive requests of his following letter:

As regards ethnographic material from Atiu, we should be delighted to receive whatever you collect. Would it be possible to secure any of the coir head dresses that were used in fighting in ancient times? The wood weapons would be long ago either collected or destroyed except such as may be found occasionally in old taro swamps. Any wooden material from such swamps would be of great value. Wooden bowls or food dishes would be of great value. I ought to have said at the beginning that we would be glad to pay such prices as you think reasonable. I myself am specially interested in stone implements, not only adzes, though of course these would be welcome, but also food pounders and such long forgotten implements as gimlets, rimers, scrapers and saws. (H.D. Skinner to Allison, 1 December 1948)

In 1951, Allison left Atiu to take up the temporary position of headmaster at Avarua School in Rarotonga ('Cook Islands appointments' 1955). Skinner wrote to Allison suggesting, 'When you return to Atiu renew the hunt for artefacts with redoubled vigour' (H.D. Skinner to Allison, 24 January 1951), but Allison remained in Rarotonga, eventually becoming director of education for the colony ('Cook Islands appointments' 1955).

In 1950, Skinner attempted to purchase an adze found in the vegetable plot at Avarua School, Rarotonga. In reply to Skinner's offer, P.F. Henderson, assistant master of the school, wrote, '[I]t is the wish of the school [that] it shall be given on long term loan to any properly constituted Museum in Rarotonga, if and when, such a Museum is set

up here' (Henderson to H.D. Skinner, 27 June 1950). In lieu of the adze itself, Henderson offered Skinner a cast of it for Otago Museum.

Henderson's letter displays a different attitude towards Cook Islands material culture than that generally observed in Skinner's correspondence during earlier periods of his tenure. Avarua School's desire to retain the adze in the Cook Islands, in the hope that it would eventually be displayed in a local museum, is indicative of a growing desire for indigenous cultural objects to remain in the Cook Islands at a time when little pre-European material was left. During this period there was also a growing and strong desire for independence from New Zealand, which explains the intention to establish indigenous cultural institutions such as a museum in the Cook Islands. Curiously, the headmaster of Avarua School at this time was the aforementioned W.A. Allison ('Cook Islands appointments' 1955). There must, however, have been a strong, broad consensus among those involved in the school for the adze to stay in Rarotonga.

## Donations from medical officers

Several medical officers serving with the colonial administration also donated objects to Otago Museum. Here, the ties of friendship, as well as the precedent of earlier donations, are significant in encouraging these individuals to donate. The most significant of these donors was Dr Gordon Dempster.

### Gordon Dempster

Dempster donated objects from a variety of localities in Polynesia to Otago Museum over a period of 30 years. His motivations to donate were both his friendship with Skinner and the passion for curio hunting he had shared with the ethnologist while he was a student, as the following extract from a letter written in Samoa illustrates: 'Both my wife and I are looking forward to our return to civilisation in October, and have promised ourselves a relic-digging holiday on return. We would welcome suggestions from you as to a suitable location. Unfortunately all my old searching grounds now seem to be finished' (Dempster to H.D. Skinner, 15 May 1937).

Upon graduating from the University of Otago Medical School, Dempster had been stationed as the sole medical practitioner in Niue from 1931 to 1935, later working in Samoa for several years ('Obituary: Dr G.O.L. Dempster' 1972). Dempster donated objects from both of these locations while stationed there.



Fig. 4 Three Rarotongan toki (adzes) donated by R.B. Wicks in 1927 (D27.64, D27.73 and D27.78, Otago Museum, Dunedin).

With regard to Dempster's Cook Islands donations, his first, a fishhook, was made in 1931. The bulk of his donations were made in 1951 and come from Pukapuka. These are 10 objects collected while he was leading a research group investigating 'medical and health problems in the Cook Islands' ('Dunedin medical officer promoted' 1955).

### Edward Pohau Ellison

Edward Pohau Ellison served as medical officer of health in the Cook Islands in 1926 and from 1931 to 1945. He donated few objects from the Cook Islands to Otago Museum, but the correspondence between him and Skinner shows that Skinner was not afraid to ask Ellison to collect for him. Skinner's hopes were not without precedent. From 1919 to 1923, Ellison had served in various roles in the colonial administration of Niue (Brons & Ellison 2006), resulting in his donation of 51 objects from the island to Otago Museum in 1924–26.

Ultimately, Ellison donated only three Cook Islands objects to Otago Museum, one in 1925 and two through Dr D.W. Carmalt-Jones in 1948. However, Skinner did make attempts to get Ellison to collect more for the museum. In 1932, Ellison wrote, 'I see you are as keen as ever on obtaining samples of Cook Islands material culture & I will be in the que vive in regards to collecting some material for you' (Ellison to H.D. Skinner, 20 June 1932). No further material came to the museum through Ellison, but this letter illustrates Skinner's incessant collecting zeal.

## Collecting through Department of Education staff

### R.B. Wicks

Skinner obtained 85 Rarotongan adzes through the agency of school teacher R.B. Wicks in 1927 (Fig. 4). Skinner had met Wicks in Rarotonga while travelling to San Francisco on his Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship that year.

Upon reading of Skinner's arrangement to purchase the adzes, Willi Fels wrote: 'I must say you paid an exceedingly long price for the Rarotongan lot, but as the money will be used for Native School purposes in Rarotonga, it is satisfactory to know that it will be spent in a good cause' (Fels to H.D. Skinner, 27 February 1927).

The 'good cause' Fels is referring to here is made clear in a letter written by Skinner several years later: 'Some years ago through the agency of Mr. R. W. [sic] Wicks, teacher at [Takitumu School] Nga Tangiia [sic] Rarotonga, this museum was able to secure the largest collection in existence of Cook Island adzes. These were brought in by Mr. Wicks' school-children, and the money we paid secured for the school an adequate cricket outfit' (H.D. Skinner to Rutherford, 19 November 1930).

In June 1928, Wicks donated a further 92 Rarotongan adzes to Otago Museum from his new base in Christchurch, where he had accepted a teaching position at Opawa School. Wicks wrote that as Skinner had been 'hauled over the coals on account of paying so much for those adzes ... I hope that

if I present my present collection, it will make things alright for you!' (Wicks to H.D. Skinner, 21 March 1928).

### William Bird

William Bird donated nine adzes, eight of which were also from Takitumu School.

Bird spent much of his career in the Department of Education in New Zealand as inspector of native schools, rising to chief inspector of primary schools in 1926. From 1930 to 1931 he held the post of superintendent of native and island education (Renwick 2007). It can be assumed that this was the period in which Bird acquired the objects he subsequently donated to Otago Museum, as he wrote to Skinner saying that the adzes were given to him by the pupils of Takitumu School, which was located by an outcrop of basaltic rock, mined in pre-European times for adze production (Bird to H.D. Skinner, 8 May 1935). This explains the large quantity of adzes R.B. Wicks acquired from the same location in 1927.

In 1950, Bird donated a further eight Cook Islands objects to Otago Museum. These objects had been given to Sergeant J.W. Berry while training Cook Islanders for military service during the Second World War. Berry had been killed during the Italian campaign in the war and his small collection had passed into the hands of Bird (see Otago Museum anthropology register D50.255).

### Concluding comments

From resident commissioners to medical officers and teachers, Skinner forged collecting networks throughout all levels of the Cook Islands colonial administration. Personal friendships with Skinner can be seen as the primary motivation for these individuals to donate. The donations of resident commissioners Platts and Ayson, resident agent Trenn, medical officers Dempster and Ellison, and education service workers Bird and Freeman were expressions of friendship towards Skinner. For the amateur anthropologists such as Trenn, Allison and Dempster, the objects they collected were also symbols of gratitude for Skinner's support of their ethnological endeavours.

Forces beyond Skinner's control influenced all of the relationships, donations and purchases discussed here. Trenn's changing role in the Cook Islands administration and his growing responsibilities to his family meant that he

simply did not have the time to collect for Skinner by the mid-1940s. Ayson, Platts, Bird, Ellison and Dempster were limited by the duration of their tenures in the Cook Islands, as well as by the time-consuming responsibilities of their roles in the colonial administration.

The fact that much of the pre-contact material culture of many islands in the Cooks group had already been removed by Skinner's era also influenced the types and quantities of objects he was able to collect – and the willingness of Cook Islanders to part with their family possessions.

The peak period of Otago Museum's Cook Islands collection development was the mid-1930s. The Second World War brought to the Pacific Islands large numbers of servicemen who 'cleaned out' the region of its ethnographic objects (Allison to H.D. Skinner, 16 August 1948), and a government-imposed embargo on sending money off shore (H.D. Skinner to Buck, 2 October 1939) was also influential. The international growth in private ethnographic collecting, particularly from the 1950s, additionally increased the competition for collecting and the resulting prices for objects (MacClancy 1997: 30). The irony of all this is that Skinner's willingness to pay for objects also increased their value, creating difficulty for later generations of museum curators, who had to compete for highly priced objects on the open market (Leach 1972: 11–12).

Most significantly, the Cook Islands Amendment Act (1950) prohibited the export of 'Native antiquities' without the written permission of the High Commissioner. As evident in the response to Skinner's offer to purchase the adze found that year at Avarua School, the latter period of his tenure at Otago Museum saw attitudes changing, both among indigenous Cook Islanders and the Europeans living there, towards keeping and preserving indigenous material culture in the Cook Islands.

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