CONNECTED READERS:
READING PRACTICES AND COMMUNITIES
ACROSS THE BRITISH EMPIRE, c. 1890-1930

BY

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is a study of reading practices and communities across various sites of the British Empire between 1890-1930, a period marked by near universal literacy levels and affordable, mass print production. It draws on the extensive archive of Fred Barkas (1854-1932), an English-born New Zealand resident, whose reading and writing has left a uniquely rich record of reading practices over a forty-year period, and the records of other individual and group readers in Canada, Britain and Australia. As a social history of reading, the study explores how reading shaped personal relationships, fashioned individual and collective identities, and contributed to the processes of community formation, locally and across space. The remarkable depth of Barkas's records allows an examination of how a reader situated in a provincial centre on the outskirts of empire could be at the "centre" of a British reading world. Barkas's records are supplemented by library records, by the minute books and scrapbooks of the Canadian reader Margaret McMicking (1849-1944) and the Victoria Literary Society, B.C., and by the publications of the National and the Australasian Home Reading Union, active in the British Empire between 1889 and 1930. Like Barkas, McMicking and members of the Home Reading movement participated in a social world of reading that was simultaneously defined by local specifics and by imperial connections.

The study considers reading within a variety of spaces, times and social environments. The discussion leads from an exploration of local reading networks in Timaru which connected in a number of spaces, to a particular place of reading: the Timaru Public Library. Reading, and writing about reading, was central to Fred Barkas's relationship with his daughter Mary. Mary lived in England for most of her adult life from 1913; the lengthy and detailed correspondence between Fred and Mary provides a basis for the exploration of reading in a family intimacy spanning space and time. Group reading cultures are discussed through Barkas's involvement with several reading and discussion groups in Timaru, and McMicking's membership in the Victoria Literary Society in British Columbia. These local reading groups were embedded in existing associational cultures and constituted important spaces for sociability within prevailing notions about class and gender. The empire-wide Home Reading movement addressed concerns about the right kind of reading, stressing in particular the importance of reading in circles. The Union extended the debate about reading to notions of

citizenship of nation and empire, a responsibility especially emphasized during World War One. During the war, civilians in different sites across the empire used their reading for information as well as escape, and reading turned into a mechanism to cope with heightened anxiety. A diversity of reading practices is evident across these spaces and included reading that was variously entertaining, recreational, productive, instructive, informative, social and solitary. Connections to other readers influenced the choice of reading material and reading practice. Reading alone and silently, reading out loud at group meetings or with friends, taking notes, reflecting on reading in writing, re-reading texts, and discussing one's reading in writing or talk with others all contributed to reading cultures that were highly social.

The thesis argues that in order to understand the place of reading in specific localities and in the wider British Empire in this period, we need to train our gaze simultaneously on the local and on the imperial, and move beneath and beyond national histories of reading. The readers in this study connected to places outside their local communities, and to a larger reading world not only through what they read but how they read. Recent scholarship on the new imperialism has emphasized the notion of the British Empire as a "web" – a set of networks facilitating the flow of people, goods and ideas across the empire. Print and other forms of the written word formed an important part of this movement and exchange. Reading material and suggestions for reading flowed back and forth, books were bought and shipped as commercial goods, were sent as gifts in private mail, or lent to other readers within existing networks. Across the lines of connections, discussion about reading flowed profusely in newspapers, journals, NHRU magazines and letters. This study offers insights into the ways in which reading and reading practices operated across the webs of empire.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AHRU	Australasian Home Reading Union
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
BL	British Library, London
CM	Canterbury Museum, Christchurch
CPL	Christchurch Public Library, Christchurch
GFS	Girls' Friendly Society
IODE	Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire
NHRU	National Home Reading Union
TCOS	Timaru Choral and Orchestral Society
TOS	Timaru Orchestral Society
TPL	Timaru Public Library, Timaru
SCM	South Canterbury Museum, Timaru
VLS	Victoria Literary Society, Victoria, B.C.
VPL	Victoria Public Library, Victoria, B.C.
WEA	Workers' Educational Association

INTRODUCTION

In 1886 British publishers produced nearly sixteen million books. By 1916 that number had risen to nearly thirty-five million.¹ A sizeable portion of the British book production was shipped to places within the Empire, the Australasian colonies being Britain's largest book export market.² Whereas print is mobile and exists in multiple times and places simultaneously, the practice of reading occurs somewhere: reading and readers are specific in time and place.³ This study examines readers and reading between 1890 and 1930, a period marked by near-universal literacy levels and affordable, mass print production. The study explores readers and reading primarily in Timaru (New Zealand), and also in Victoria (British Columbia, Canada), London (England), and several other sites within the British Empire. The central focus is on the ways in which readers constituted and participated in both local and global reading communities. Throughout the study period, reading is revealed to be a highly social activity that often included writing, talking and otherwise sharing reading experiences with other readers. As the discussion will show, readers were part of a variety of reading communities and "reading connections". The character of these communities and connections, and sometimes disconnections, is the concern of this study.

This exploration of reading practices and communities across disparate places within the British Empire combines two often distinct fields: the history of reading and the history of empire. The focus is on the kind of readers that are difficult to trace and often escape the historical record: "ordinary" middle-class adult readers and their sociable and informal, recreational and informative, general and "everyday" reading. The research pursues two main objectives: firstly, to provide a detailed account and analysis of reading and readers in particular local settings, for whom archives provide the possibility of accessing reading patterns. Here, the discussion focuses mainly on Timaru, New Zealand. Secondly, the study explores whether and in what ways these

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¹ Alexis Weedon, *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market, 1836-1916* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 55.

² Ibid., 39-40. Available export statistics only reveal the volume of book exports from Britain in monetary value, rather than quantities of books. None of the major studies on British book production and exports offers suggestions as to the proportion of exports in relation to the total British book production, but the high import figures that do exist for several British dependencies indicate the importance of the imperial book market to British publishers.

³ This is a point which is also noted in Lydia Wevers's recent study, *Reading on the Farm: Victorian Fiction and the Colonial World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2010), 23.

particular local readers and reading cultures connected to other local readers and reading cultures within the empire, and thus participated in a broader reading world. In doing so, it moves beneath and beyond the nation in order to explore the “global construction” of local reading cultures.⁴ To explore these questions, the study draws on the personal records of the individual readers Fred Barkas and Margaret McMicking, the archives of the Timaru Public Library and the Victoria Public Library, the minute books of the Victoria Literary Society, and the publications of the National and the Australasian Home Reading Unions.

By the late nineteenth century, technological advances in book and paper production, coupled with new forms of marketing “on a national and international scale” had resulted in a mass market of affordable print production including a proliferating newspaper and periodical press. This expanded market catered for the “mass reading public.”⁵ Legislation providing for compulsory primary education throughout much of Western Europe as well as North America, Australia and New Zealand during the 1870s resulted in near universal literacy levels in the Western world by the close of the nineteenth century.⁶ For this largely literate population, print and reading constituted an important means of information, education, recreation and entertainment. Before radio and cinema became popular alternative forms of entertainment and information through the 1910s and 1920s, print was, as Martyn Lyons points out, “for a brief moment, supreme, and debates about its uses were debates about the nature and the workings of society.”⁷ These debates included differing ideas about what to read, but equally about who was reading, how to read,

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⁴ Doreen Massey speaks of the “global construction” of place. Doreen Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 183. Tony Ballantyne has termed the dual focus on locality and transnational connections as thinking “under as well as across the nation.” Tony Ballantyne, “Thinking Local: Knowledge, Sociability and Community in Gore’s Intellectual Life, 1875-1914,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 44, no. 2 (2010): 138.

⁵ Martyn Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 137-52, quote 37.

⁶ David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Carl F. Kaestle et al., *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading since 1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Michel Verrette and Yvan Lamonde, “Literacy and Print Culture,” in *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 2: 1840-1918*, ed. Yvan Lamonde, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Fiona A. Black (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Lydia Wevers, “Literacy and Reading,” in *Book & Print in New Zealand: A Guide to Print Culture in Aotearoa*, ed. Penny Griffith, Ross Harvey, and Keith Maslen (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997). While measurements of literacy were often limited to the ability to sign one’s name and thus disguise the range of the uses of literacy, it is still fair to say that by the end of the nineteenth century the majority of the population had basic reading abilities.

⁷ Martyn Lyons, *Readers and Society in Nineteenth-Century France: Workers, Women, Peasants* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 157. This point does not only relate to the nature of print culture in France, but more generally to print in the Western world.

where, when and to what end. Many of the debates of the late nineteenth century rested on notions of self-improvement and were concerned with the question of what constituted “good” or “bad” literature and the right kind of reading.

In the history of the British Empire the period spanning from the 1890s to the 1930s saw the empire shift from “the moment of high imperialism in the late nineteenth century” to the beginning of the formal and protracted disbandment of empire, where World War One became the ultimate test of empire.⁸ By the end of the nineteenth century, Catherine Hall notes, close to a “third of the world was dominated by the British, both economically and culturally.”⁹ In the last third of the nineteenth century, new transportation and communication technologies including the steamship, telegraph, cables, and rail – what Chris Bayly has called the “hardware” of empire – enabled the “expansion of information networks.”¹⁰ The disparate parts of empire were held together by trade and political rule, migration, and information flows, as well as common cultural values.¹¹ As a result, a thriving print culture as well as a flood of personal and official correspondence connected disparate parts of the British Empire.

THE HISTORY OF READING AND READING COMMUNITIES

Recent scholarly interest in the history of reading – as against the more broadly conceived history of the book, print production or literary analysis – dates from the publication of major studies by Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier in the 1980s.¹²

⁸ Catherine Hall, “Introduction: Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking the Empire,” in *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Reader*, ed. Catherine Hall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ C.A. Bayly, “Informing Empire and Nation: Publicity, Propaganda and the Press 1880-1920,” in *Information, Media and Power through the Ages*, ed. Hiram Morgan (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2001), 190.

¹¹ For a concise overview of these processes see Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

¹² Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). For introductions to the broader field of book history see David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *An Introduction to Book History* (New York: Routledge, 2005); David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds., *The Book History Reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002); Leslie Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006). For reflections on trends and overviews of book history research see Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982); Joan Shelley Rubin, “What Is the History of the History of Books?,” *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003); David D. Hall, “What Is the History of the Book? A Response,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007); Leslie Howsam, “What Is the Historiography of Books? Recent Studies in Authorship, Publishing, and Reading in Modern Britain and North America,” *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 4 (2008).

Darnton has stressed that reading has a history, and is neither uniform nor unchanging.¹³ The history of reading foregrounds the reader, rather than the texts, and recognises that reading is “a complex social event.”¹⁴ As Chartier has argued, “[r]eading is not uniquely an abstract operation of the intellect: it brings the body into play, it is inscribed in a space and a relationship with oneself or with others.”¹⁵ Therefore, Chartier continues, “the history of reading must be radically distinguished from a history of what is read”, and instead needs to “ascertain the networks of reading practices and the rules for reading proper to the various communities of readers.”¹⁶ By 2011, the coming-of-age of the field has been signalled by the appearance of a number of book-length studies of individual readers or of reading communities, and by the publication of several “Readers” and essay collections on the approaches, strategies and the “history” of the history of reading.¹⁷

Studies in the history of reading explore questions of literacy and education, “the reception of texts or diffusion of ideas”, discourses about reading, as well as concerns with actual reading practices.¹⁸ The field draws on a range of methodologies and concepts from history, literary criticism, cultural studies, sociology and bibliography. While literary scholars, influenced by literary theory and reader-response criticism, have

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¹³ Robert Darnton, “History of Reading,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998 [1992]), 141. (First published in *Australian Journal of French Studies* 23 (1986): 5-30.) Scholarly interest in reading, however, has a longer history. Within English-speaking academia Amy Cruse and Queenie Leavis are often cited as early historians of reading, examining Victorian readers and the early twentieth-century reading public respectively. Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Books* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962 [1935]). Amy Cruse, *After the Victorians* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938); Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932). Still influential is also Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967 [1957]).

¹⁴ Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 8. See also Erich Schön, “Geschichte des Lesens,” in *Handbuch Lesen*, ed. Bodo Franzmann, et al. (München: Saur, 1999), 323; Roger Chartier, “Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of Publishing to the History of Reading,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 97, no. 2 (1987).

¹⁵ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ Bonnie Gunzenhauser, ed. *Reading in History: New Methodologies from the Anglo-American Tradition* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010); Shafquat Towheed, Rosalind Crone, and Katie Halsey, eds., *The History of Reading: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2011); Rosalind Crone and Shafquat Towheed, eds., *The History of Reading, Vol. 3: Methods, Strategies, Tactics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). See also, Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens, eds., *The History of Reading, Vol. 1: International Perspectives, c. 1500-1990* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Katie Halsey and W. R. Owens, eds., *The History of Reading, Vol. 2: Evidence from the British Isles, c. 1750-1950* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); DeNel Rehberg Sedo, ed. *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyberspace* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World*; Ruth Clayton Windscheffel, *Reading Gladstone* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁸ Leah Price, “Reading: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 7(2004): 304.

been concerned with uncovering the implied, intended, informed or ideal reader in the text,¹⁹ historians of reading are interested in “real readers in specific historical circumstances.”²⁰ As such, they turn to personal records, autobiographies and diaries, letters and scrapbooks, library registers, subscription and membership lists for reading societies, school records, social surveys, letters-to-editors and “correspondence pages” in newspapers, court proceedings, oral interviews and even non-verbal, material forms of evidence, such as annotations and marginalia, to find traces of historical reading practices.²¹ Recently, large-scale projects like the “Reading Experience Database” (RED) and “What Middletown Read”, which record the reading experiences and habits of vast numbers of individual readers, have begun to enable scholars to identify general reading patterns.²²

Increasingly, historians have moved their attention to “common” or “ordinary” readers, individuals “whose names” are “unknown in the grand narrative of history”,²³ and who did not read books in a professional capacity.²⁴ This thesis explores such readers. The reading practices of common readers, however, are difficult to trace. Library records and surveys can tell us something of what people read, and reveal trends

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¹⁹ For concise summaries of the different notions of readers developed within reader-response theory see Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie Ästhetischer Wirkung* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1976), 50-67; Carl F. Kaestle, “The History of Readers,” in *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading since 1880*, ed. Carl F. Kaestle, et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 43-9; M.A.R. Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 708-36; Gunter Grimm, “Einführung in die Rezeptionsforschung,” in *Literatur und Leser: Theorien und Modelle zur Rezeptionsforschung literarischer Werke*, ed. Gunter Grimm (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1975), esp. 75-84.

²⁰ Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World*, 3.

²¹ For example, Stephen Colclough, “Recovering the Reader: Commonplace Books and Diaries as Sources of Reading Experience,” *Publishing History* 44(1998); Christine Pawley, “Retrieving Readers: Library Experiences,” *The Library Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2006); Teresa Gerrard, “New Methods in the History of Reading: ‘Answers to Correspondents’ in the *Family Herald*, 1860-1900,” *Publishing History* 43(1998). For exemplary studies that use marginalia as evidence of reading practices see H. J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); and H. J. Jackson, *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

²² The Reading Experience Database (RED), hosted by the Open University, UK, collects records of reading experiences (“a recorded engagement with a written or printed text”) of British subjects between 1450 and 1945. RED contains over 30,000 searchable records. In 2010, the project was extended to World-RED, an international collaboration including Dalhousie University, Canada, the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, Griffiths University, Australia and Victoria University, New Zealand. <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/>

What Middletown Read is a database of the circulation records of the Muncie (Indiana) Public Library, between 1891 and 1902. The project description states: “It documents every book that every library patron borrowed during that period.” The registered library patrons numbered roughly 6,300 readers and the database contains 180,000 borrowing transactions. <http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/wmr/index.php>

²³ Rosalind Crone, Katie Halsey, and Shafquat Towheed, “Examining the Evidence of Reading: Three Examples from the Reading Experience Database, 1450-1945,” in *Reading in History: New Methodologies from the Anglo-American Tradition*, ed. Bonnie Gunzenhauser (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 33n6.

²⁴ Jonathan Rose, “Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 1 (1992): 48.

in taste and patterns of what was read. But they offer little evidence for how, why and where readers read, and what they made of their reading. Reading is an elusive and an “evanescent” practice.²⁵ As Chartier has noted, it is a practice “that only rarely leaves traces, that is scattered in an infinity of singular acts, and that easily shakes off all constraints.”²⁶ The difficulties of locating reading in the historical record apply to singular and communal reading alike. As Heather Murray has pointed out, many informal reading groups, for example, met in members’ homes, did not keep minutes and were “less likely to have their activities noted by local newspapers.”²⁷ “Egodocuments” – letters and diaries – therefore provide insights that other sources cannot, and are invaluable for this study.²⁸ They lead us, in Martyn Lyons’s words, “to the real flesh-and-bone readers, who write or speak of their books, preferences, loves, and hates, and inform us consciously or unconsciously about the status and function of reading in different phases of their lives.”²⁹

Historians of reading have used the term “reading communities” to describe groups of readers who have something in common “in their choice of literature, in their reading strategies, and in their conception of what constitutes ‘literature’”.³⁰ This understanding is based on Stanley Fish’s concept of “interpretive communities”, but enlarged with sociological and historical questions to better comprehend reading as a social activity.³¹ Members of a reading community do not always know each other. Rather, a community is constituted along such lines as gender, class or ethnicity; it could

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²⁵ Karin Littau calls reading an evanescent practice. Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies, and Bibliomania* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 3.

²⁶ Chartier, *The Order of Books*, 1-2. This point is also stressed in Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” 74; and Robert Darnton, “Histoire Du Livre. Geschichte des Buchwesens. An Agenda for Comparative History,” *Publishing History* 22 (1987).

²⁷ Heather Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement! The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002), 84.

²⁸ Rudolf Dekker provides this brief definition for “egodocuments”: “Texts in which an author writes about his or her own acts, thoughts and feelings.” The term “egodocuments” thus usefully offers a generic term for a “variety of textual forms”, including diaries, letters, memoirs, and other forms of autobiographical writing. Rudolf Dekker, “Introduction,” in *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in Its Social Context since the Middle Ages*, ed. Rudolf Dekker (Hilversum: Verloren, 2002), 7.

²⁹ Martyn Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 7. On the value of personal sources see also Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), viii; and Stephen Colclough, “Readers: Books and Biography,” in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

³⁰ Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France*, 155.

³¹ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

be made up of “readers of the same newspaper”,³² or, for instance, of members of a particular literary society.³³ This broad definition has thus been applied to small groups of readers within the same place and to “imagined” communities across space.³⁴

This thesis builds on this broad notion of reading communities with a particular emphasis on shared reading practices, and explores a number of reading communities in different spaces. The term “reading connections” is used here to describe the differently-natured personal relationships readers entered into with each other through their reading, sometimes within “reading communities”, sometimes just between two readers. Both notions of “reading communities” and “reading connections” highlight the social aspect of reading.

A number of influential studies have examined reading practices during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Based more broadly on reading communities defined by gender, class affiliation, or nationality, these studies have revealed the variety of reading practices that existed in this period. Kate Flint’s study of women readers examines both discourses about the nature, opportunities and dangers of women reading, and actual reading practices women engaged in. Drawing on advice manuals, the writings of reviewers, educationalists and journalists, and on autobiographical sources, Flint illustrates that women readers often resisted prescribed ideas on how and what to read. For women in the nineteenth century, Flint argues, such “moments of rebellion which took place through reading” were a means “through which an individual’s sense of identity was achieved or confirmed.”³⁵

Joseph McAleer and Jonathan Rose have focussed on working-class and lower-middle-class reader, emphasizing the nature of popular taste and partially compensating for years of inattention on working-class readers. McAleer’s research on readers in Britain between 1914 and 1950 focuses on the questions of what and why readers read.

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³² Martyn Lyons, “The History of Reading and Reading Communities,” *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (1997): 8.

³³ There are now numerous studies of reading communities defined along a range of shared criteria. Examples for studies of class, gender and ethnicity-defined reading communities, or reading communities formed as literary societies are Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995 [1993]); Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement!* See also the section on reading communities in Towheed, Crone, and Halsey, eds., *The History of Reading: A Reader*.

³⁴ On this point see also Christine Pawley, “Seeking ‘Significance’: Actual Readers, Specific Reading Communities,” *Book History* 5 (2002): 145.

³⁵ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 14.

Relying largely on the records of the Mass Observation Project as well as publishers' records and trade publications, McAleer found that readers belonging to the British lower-middle and working classes read primarily light fiction (mainly romance and detective stories), newspapers and periodicals, for escapism and relaxation. McAleer concludes that reading habits were divided along class lines: the working classes read more fiction than any other segment of the reading public. This, McAleer contends, is explained by their "scattered" reading practices, taking to fiction and popular magazines which were "easy to pick up and put down", and reading "in public transport, at work, during mealtimes, in bed – whenever there were a few spare moments."³⁶ Complementary to McAleer's study, and enlarged by a focus not just on what and why, but also on how and where readers read, Jonathan Rose's landmark study of British working-class readers found that such readers came together in a range of contexts, including adult schools, libraries, dramatic societies, reading circles as well as informal networks, where they shared material as well as reading practices.³⁷ Reading practices included reading aloud, recitation, discussions with others readers, as well as reading silently, for study and for diversion. Working-class readers, Rose argues, read newspapers and popular fiction, but they also appropriated the English canon and "high-brow" works in their own ways and for their own purposes.

In contrast to Flint, McAleer and Rose, who have drawn on personal records and other published sources, Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa have relied on oral histories to explore the reading practices of Australian readers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In *Australian Readers Remember* (1992) Lyons and Taksa chart a social history of reading for the period 1890-1930 based on eighty interviews with sixty-one male and female interviewees of different class backgrounds.³⁸ Lyons and Taksa were interested in newspaper and magazine consumption, what books respondents recalled as present in their homes and how they accessed reading materials. They also asked what respondents could remember about the reading practices of their parents. The

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³⁶ Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 86. The point that working-class readers had limited time for reading and used short passages of time whenever available is also made by Martyn Lyons, "Reading Models and Reading Communities," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 375.

³⁷ Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*; see also Jonathan Rose, "How Historians Study Reader Responses: Or, What Did Jo Think of Bleak House?," in *Literature in the Market Place: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, ed. John O. Jordon and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁸ Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading 1890-1930* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992).

survey thus “explored the cultural life of two generations of Australians.”³⁹ The oral interviews unveiled a richly-layered reading culture, which included performative, collective and solitary acts of reading. Australian readers used texts from the Victorian era, contemporary bestsellers now forgotten, and a surprisingly large quantity of newspapers and magazines, accessed through local, informal dissemination networks.⁴⁰

In New Zealand, localised studies of reading practices and reading communities are few. Lydia Wevers’s 2010 study of readers and reading at Brancepeth, a provincial sheep station, in the late colonial period provides a rich case study of a contained reading community, defined by the geographical parameters of the station and by the use of a particular book collection. This collection is still largely intact. Drawing on the marginalia in many of the library books, and an extant letter book of the station clerk, Wevers’s study reveals that given the “restricted recreational options” of farm life, reading was a popular pastime, especially the reading of fiction and newspapers.⁴¹ Wevers devotes a large part of her study to the texts read, and in this respect differs from this thesis. She argues that the farm workers who used the Brancepeth library connected to a wider British world through reading the same fiction as readers in Britain, and more importantly, by reading “novels about other colonial and Anglophone societies.”⁴² Wevers’s study also complicates any arguments about class-based reading habits. While most library users were workers, the station clerk and librarian was highly educated and from a middle-class background. Building on these existing studies of reading communities and practices, this thesis explores the reading of middle-class readers in Timaru, and across the British Empire.

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³⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁰ Other studies have focussed on particular political groups or movements, which also provided the basis for reading communities. See for example Bruce Scates, *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism, and the First Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). The radical and political readers discussed by Scates shared their topical interests and reading practices with readers in New Zealand, as revealed by James E. Taylor, “‘To Me, Socialism is Not a Set of Dogmas but a Living Principle’: Harry Atkinson and the Christchurch Socialist Church, 1890-1905.” (MA Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010).

⁴¹ Wevers, *Reading on the Farm*, 175. See also Lydia Wevers, “Reading on the Farm: A Study of the Brancepeth Farm Library,” *Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of New Zealand and Australia* 28, no. 1-2 (2004).

⁴² Wevers, *Reading on the Farm*, 181, quote 200.

PLACE, SPACE AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF READING

Rogier Chartier has stressed that reading is not only an embodied practice, but also one that is “realized in specific [...] places.”⁴³ This study of reading practices and communities acknowledges that readers are “historically and geographically situated”, by focusing on particular local settings.⁴⁴ Miles Ogborn and Charles Withers write that paying attention to the spatial aspects of reading means grounding “the act of reading in place and space: a geography of reading as well as a history.”⁴⁵ The “geographical positioning of readers” and their “located reading practices”, Ogborn and Withers argue, “shapes how books were consumed.”⁴⁶ A geography of reading encompasses the particular places of reading (for example, the library, the home, the street or the railway carriage), and the metaphorical and material spaces of reading (among them local reading communities, imagined reading communities and correspondences).⁴⁷

This study’s exploration of the geographies of reading is driven by underlying notions of *space* and *place* as social constructs, open and constantly being made through links to other places.⁴⁸ Doreen Massey’s propositions for *place* capture this notion as follows:

Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether it be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local.⁴⁹

As Massey further notes, “there are real relations with real content, economic, political, cultural, between any place and the wider world in which it is set.”⁵⁰ This is not to

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⁴³ Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, “Introduction,” in *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 2.

⁴⁴ Pawley, “Seeking ‘Significance’,” 144.

⁴⁵ Miles Ogborn and Charles W.J. Withers, “Introduction: Book Geography, Book History,” in *Geographies of the Book*, ed. Miles Ogborn and Charles W.J. Withers (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 20.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁷ David N. Livingstone, “Science, Text and Space: Thoughts on the Geography of Reading,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 4 (2005): 395.

⁴⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

⁴⁹ Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today* (June 1991): 28; see also Doreen Massey, “Power-Geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place,” in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird, et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. 66-8.

⁵⁰ Massey, “Power-Geometry,” 66. Elsewhere, Massey notes that “these global relationships as much as the internal relationships of an area will influence its character.” Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” 186.

suggest that places do not have local particularities or to deny the importance of the specificity of place, but, as Massey explains, that the “‘local uniqueness’ is always already a product of wider contacts”. The “local is always already a product in part of ‘global’ forces”, with global referring to “the world beyond the place itself.”⁵¹ Thus, places are not static; they are processes. They do not have boundaries, and they can have multiple “identities”, that is, they can mean different things to different people depending on their social relations.⁵²

Building on this notion of place, *space* is the sum of a number of places, and can also signify metaphorical spaces. According to Massey, *space* is characterised by three essential characteristics: like place, space is the product of interrelations; it entails the possibility of multiplicity “in the sense of contemporaneous plurality”; and it “is always in the process of being made”, it is open and temporary.⁵³ Acknowledging the multiplicity, openness and temporality of space allows us, in Massey’s words, “to replace the single history with many.”⁵⁴ The difference between space and place, then, is that space is “the simultaneity of stories-so far”, while places “are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space.”⁵⁵ Thus, the readers and reading cultures described in this thesis existed alongside a multitude of reading cultures, and were defined by their interrelations with other readers and cultures internally as well as with places elsewhere. As a result, the readers in this thesis (in their particular places) were not just communicating with each other and connecting across space, they were also *making* that space.⁵⁶

NETWORKS, WEBS AND IMPERIAL CONNECTIONS

This study is concerned with readers and reading in particular localities, and in the possibility of connections between these localities. The focus is on the local and the global, bypassing the nation as analytical category. The global in this thesis encompasses chiefly the world of the British Empire, in the period at which the empire reached its maximum expanse. Recent scholarship in the history of empire has emphasised the

⁵¹ Massey, “Places and Their Pasts,” 183; see also Massey, “Power-Geometry,” 66.

⁵² Massey, “Power-Geometry,” 66.

⁵³ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE, 2005), 9-11, see also 107-19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁵⁶ Massey argues that “space and place emerge through active material practices.” *Ibid.*, 118.

networked nature of the empire, interrogating and challenging the links that existed between metropole and peripheries. This scholarship, as Tony Ballantyne notes, has also begun to recover the “pathways that linked colonies and that also reached out of the British imperial system into other empires and agents of long-distance connections.”⁵⁷ Scholars like Chris Bayly, Tony Ballantyne, Alan Lester, Zoe Laidlaw and Simon Potter have highlighted the connected histories of imperial knowledge, information, communication, and print culture throughout the long nineteenth century.⁵⁸ The production and circulation of print, and the links of writing, as these scholars show, created and sustained the imperial world.⁵⁹ Although these works do not explicitly examine the connected histories of reading practices or the formation of reading communities, this thesis has drawn on these studies for how they have conceptualised the connections of empire.

Bayly’s study of British political intelligence gathering in nineteenth-century north India, and Laidlaw’s study of the role of personal networks across the imperial space for colonial government in the early nineteenth century, have illustrated the extent to which links between personal and “social communicators” shaped official politics.⁶⁰ The networks at the heart of Laidlaw’s work – war veterans, humanitarian, and scientific communities – facilitated ties and the flow of information between Britain and its colonies, between different colonies, and simply within one colony, though connections to Britain remained particularly important. These networks varied in nature considerably and changed over time; some afforded patronage, some facilitated the exchange of ideas; some were clearly defined in membership, others more intangible. Most significantly for

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⁵⁷ Tony Ballantyne, “The Changing Shape of the Modern British Empire and Its Historiography,” *Historical Journal* 53, no. 2 (2010): 451. Much of this scholarship is situated within the field of the “new imperialism”. For a useful introduction to the main contributors to this field, see Stephen Howe, ed. *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

⁵⁸ For an overview of recent scholarship on empire and knowledge see Tony Ballantyne, “Colonial Knowledge,” in *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. Sarah Stockwell (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

⁵⁹ There are numerous other studies which do not explicitly focus on the role of print culture or communication networks within the British Empire, but nevertheless illuminate the importance of newspapers and other forms of writing for transmitting information and knowledge. For example, the scandals that rocked Cape Town in the nineteenth century, and which are the subject of Kirsten McKenzie’s book, only took on imperial significance after discussion in South African, Australian and British newspapers. Likewise, as Deane Heath illustrates, debates about obscene literature and the consumption thereof occurred simultaneously in India and Australia, and connected and shaped both locales. Kirsten McKenzie, *Scandal in the Colonies: Sydney and Cape Town, 1820-1850* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2004); Deane Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India and Australia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

this thesis, Laidlaw stresses that networks overlapped; “many individuals belonged to more than one network [and] sets of individuals had more than one network in common.”⁶¹ Similarly, John Griffiths has examined networks of government and administration, focussing on the links between civic administrators in New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere in the empire from the 1890s to the 1930s. These networks were sustained through the mobility of people, letters and print. Town clerks situated in centres at the “peripheries” read and contributed to professional publications, predominantly *The Municipal Journal*, which circulated ideas and information. Though Griffiths’s focus is not on reading practices *per se*, the group he has studied formed the basis for a reading community that spanned “the British World and beyond.”⁶²

Other studies have foregrounded the connections of empire established through newsprint. As Simon Potter has argued in his study of the British and Dominion press in the period from 1876 to 1914, newspapers were one of the most important institutions that “bound ‘core’ and ‘periphery’, but also forged links between each of the settler colonies.”⁶³ Potter engages with Benedict Anderson’s argument that print cultures create “imagined communities”, but rejects the emphasis on nationalism.⁶⁴ Instead, Potter points out that “[n]ewspaper readers in the Dominions were regularly confronted with reports taken from British newspapers. [...] This made it easier for them to imagine themselves as members of an imperial community.”⁶⁵ Likewise, colonial and dominion papers provided the material for extracts in the British metropolitan and provincial press, as well as for newspapers throughout the empire.⁶⁶ Potter further argues that the “industrialization of the press” towards the end of the nineteenth century meant that technological advances such as the telegraph and cable,

⁶¹ Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815-45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 15, for her discussion of the nature of networks and personal connections see particularly chapter two.

⁶² John Griffiths, “Were There Municipal Networks in the British World c. 1890-1939?,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 4 (2009): 578.

⁶³ Simon J. Potter, “Communication and Integration: The British and Dominions Press and the British World, c. 1876-1914,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31, no. 2 (2003): 191.

⁶⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁶⁵ Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 215. For the ways in which New Zealand’s newspapers were tied into imperial press networks see also Ross Harvey, “Bringing the News to New Zealand: The Supply and Control of Overseas News in the Nineteenth Century,” *Media History* 8, no. 1 (2002).

⁶⁶ Simon J. Potter, “Empire and the English Press, c. 1857-1914,” in *Newspapers and Empire in Ireland and Britain: Reporting the British Empire, c. 1857-1921*, ed. Simon J. Potter (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004). See also Alan Lester, “Historical Geographies of British Colonization: New South Wales, New Zealand and the Cape in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *Imperial Communication: Australia, Britain, and the British Empire c. 1830-50*, ed. Simon J. Potter (London: Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, 2004).

“did not simply reinforce existing imperial networks” but “reshaped and, to some extent, restricted them.”⁶⁷ High costs of cable and telegraph meant that coverage around the British world became increasingly dominated by news cartels and was characterised by uniformity.⁶⁸ Potter’s study is significant for revealing the imperial connections of newsprint production as a basis for imperial reading communities.

Tony Ballantyne has suggested the metaphor of the “web” to conceptualise the connected nature of empire, and the thesis explores whether the cultures of “ordinary” readers could usefully be imagined as web-like structures. The web metaphor “underscores that the empire was a *structure*, a complex fabrication fashioned out of a great number of disparate parts that were brought together into a variety of new relationships”, connecting

disparate points in space into a complex mesh of networks. Moreover, the image of the web also conveys something of the double nature of the imperial system. Empires, like webs, were fragile (prone to crisis where important threads are broken or structural nodes destroyed), yet also dynamic, being constantly remade and reconfigured through concerted thought and effort: the image of the web reminds us that empires were not just structures, but processes as well.⁶⁹

The “inherent relationality of nodal points or ‘centres’ within an empire” suggests that connections in the web or webs of empire can be conceptualised horizontally as well as vertically.⁷⁰ The web thus rejects previous notions of the empire based on “centre-periphery” models.⁷¹ As Ballantyne goes on to explain, the empire was not just a single web, but “a complex agglomeration of overlapping webs”, in which “certain locations,

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⁶⁷ Simon J. Potter, “Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire,” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 3 (2007): 630. See also Simon J. Potter, “Empire, Cultures and Identities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain,” *History Compass* 5, no. 1 (2007): 58-9.

⁶⁸ The significance of press syndicates and their commercial concerns for creating a homogenous print culture is also discussed in Christopher Hilliard’s study of serialised fiction in provincial newspapers across the British world. Christopher Hilliard, “The Provincial Press and the Imperial Traffic in Fiction, 1870s-1930s,” *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009).

⁶⁹ Tony Ballantyne, “Race and the Webs of Empire: Aryanism from India to the Pacific,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2, no. 3 (2001): para. 39. See also Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, “Introduction: Bodies, Empires, and World Histories,” in *Bodies in Contact, Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), esp. 3.

⁷⁰ Alan Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,” *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2006): 133.

⁷¹ The “centre-periphery” notion is still prevalent in book history, especially in studies of publishing. See for example, I.R. Willison, “Centre and Creative Periphery in the History of the Book in the English-Speaking World and Global English Studies,” *Publishing History* 59 (2006).

individuals or institutions in the supposed periphery, might in fact be the center of complex networks themselves.”⁷²

Similarly, Alan Lester’s study of early nineteenth-century personal and communication networks of “three competing projects of colonialism” in the Cape Colony – missionaries, government officials and settlers – has revealed how each of these groups used connections in Britain to further their own interests.⁷³ Pointing to the relationality, connectedness and instantaneity of places throughout the empire, Lester suggests imagining colonial networks “like the patterns in a kaleidoscope, the precise constitution of the interconnections is momentary, although the networked nature of interconnectedness itself is constant.”⁷⁴ Lester describes the kaleidoscope of empire “as a dynamic bundle of overlapping and intersecting networks of communication.”⁷⁵ He sees places “not so much as bounded entities, but rather specific juxtapositions of multiple trajectories” (those of people, objects, texts or ideas), while imperial space is “the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories.”⁷⁶ Lester’s notion of a kaleidoscope perhaps intrinsically entails the aspect of power relations more obviously than Ballantyne’s web metaphor – one has to ask who does the turning of the kaleidoscope to achieve new patterns – but both concepts are useful for highlighting the “*connective history*” of colonial knowledge production in particular and imperial culture more broadly.⁷⁷ Both concepts also powerfully convey the complexity and constant re-making of connections between a myriad of places through a never-ending flow of people, goods, ideas and information.

Studies emphasizing the connected nature of empire overlap with a parallel debate among historians about the usefulness of the “British World” as a concept to describe the space which these webs and networks constructed. The “British World” emerged in the late 1990s in an attempt by historians of empire to move beyond national histories, to re-evaluate the role of “the colonies of settlement”, later dominions, in the imperial project, and to shift the focus from trade and military ties to questions of a shared

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⁷² Ballantyne, “Race and the Webs of Empire,” para. 41.

⁷³ Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks,” 132; Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001); Alan Lester, “British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002).

⁷⁴ Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks,” 135.

⁷⁵ Lester, “Historical Geographies of British Colonization,” 91.

⁷⁶ Lester, “Imperial Circuits and Networks,” 135.

⁷⁷ Tony Ballantyne, “Mr. Peal’s Archive: Mobility and Exchange in Histories of Empire,” in *Archive Stories. Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 99.

“trans-imperial” Britishness.⁷⁸ The places seen to be at the core of this British World – Britain together with New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa – coincide with the places explored in this study, and a strand in this thesis will explore the usefulness of the British World concept for questions of readers and reading. These “neo-Britains”, proponents of the British World concept argue, were tied together by the constant flow of people, capital, goods, ideas, and cultural practices, particularly between the metropole and its peripheries.⁷⁹ They thus shared in a space of common identity, language, values and culture, which, in the words of Phillip Buckner “was the real glue of the empire.”⁸⁰ This shared sense of belonging, Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich argue, was not in opposition, but complementary to emerging national, and existing regional or local identities.⁸¹

What exactly Britishness entailed at “Home” in Britain and in the British colonies, however, was contested among contemporaries and is still debated among historians. Moreover, critics of the “British World” concept rightly emphasize its exclusive nature, which privileges the experiences of British settlers and colonisers to the neglect of those being colonised and other non-British minority groups. As Bridge and Fedorowich

⁷⁸ Simon J. Potter, “The British Empire,” *Historian* 81 (2004): 36; Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 21, no. 3 (2003): 3. “Trans-imperial Britishness” is Alan Lester’s term for the shared sense of identity within the colonies of settlement, though Lester does not call it the British World. Lester, “Historical Geographies of British Colonization,” 109. One point of the debate is whether the US should be included in this shared space, given the substantial flows of migration from the British Isles, and the strong connections of commerce and trade. To this end, James Belich has proposed the term “Anglo World”. See James Belich, “The Rise of the Angloworld: Settlement in North America and Australasia, 1784-1918,” in *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005); James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Some scholars also suggest that British communities in the “informal empire”, notably in South America, formed “mini-Britains” and were part of the British World. Robert Bickers, “Introduction: Britains and Britons over the Seas,” in *Settler and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas*, ed. Robert Bickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2, 14.

⁷⁹ Phillip Buckner, “Introduction: The British World,” *History of Intellectual Culture* 4, no. 1 (2004): 1. See also P.A. Buckner and Carl Bridge, “Reinventing the British World,” *The Round Table* 92, no. 368 (2003); Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, “Introduction,” in *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005); Gary Bryan Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Kate Darian-Smith et al., eds., *Exploring the British World: Identity, Cultural Production, Institutions* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2004); Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, and Stuart Macintyre, *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2007). For a useful recent summary of the history of the British World concept in historiography and its comparison to postcolonialism see Katie Pickles, “The Obvious and the Awkward: Postcolonialism and the British World,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 45, no. 1 (2011).

⁸⁰ Buckner, “Introduction: The British World,” 3.

⁸¹ Bridge and Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” 6. For a detailed discussion of parallel “national” identities see Phillip Buckner, “The Long Goodbye: English Canadians and the British World,” in *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: Calgary University Press, 2005).

admit, “‘whiteness’ was a dominant element”, though Britishness was open to individuals not of British origin.⁸² But what about those who were excluded from or did not desire to participate in a British World, but nevertheless were affected by the imperial project?⁸³ And, as Sujit Sivasundaram asks, how did they respond “to being excluded from this network that allowed such luxuries as migration and the cultivation of new ideas, commodities, and identities?”⁸⁴ To this, British World scholars reply that attention to the nature of a British World-wide community largely made up of white settlers does not deny the negative impact of colonisation on indigenous populations, nor the “wider inequalities that characterised British imperial rule.” As Simon Potter points out, the “hierarchies of race, class and gender” are still part of any examinations of Britishness.⁸⁵

IMPERIAL PUBLISHING AND BOOKSELLING CONNECTIONS

The study of readers and reading in Timaru, Victoria, London and some other local settings within a larger space – whether conceptualised as the “British World”, the empire, or the globe – rests on underlying publishing and distribution structures. The places in this study were connected by imperial copyright, publishing and distribution networks. The following section briefly outlines these networks that linked New Zealand readers with their counterparts in Britain, Australia and Canada into a shared world of reading, or, as Martyn Lyons puts it, into “a global English-language reading community”.⁸⁶

The imperial webs of dissemination, exchange and circulation ensured that much of the reading matter available in local bookstores and libraries throughout the empire was similar. International copyright legislation guaranteed British publishers exclusive

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⁸² Bridge and Fedorowich, “Mapping the British World,” 3.

⁸³ A number of scholars have taken issue with the exclusive nature of the British World. See for example Saul Dubow, “How British Was the British World? The Case of South Africa,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 20.

⁸⁴ Sujit Sivasundaram, “Review: Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, Eds, *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005),” *Journal of British Studies* 46, no. 2 (2007): 404.

⁸⁵ Simon J. Potter, “Review: Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, Eds, *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005) and Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, Eds, *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006),” *The Round Table* 96, no. 391 (2007): 511.

⁸⁶ Martyn Lyons, “Britain’s Largest Export Market,” in *A History of the Book in Australia, 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 25.

copyright in all British possessions.⁸⁷ The International and Colonial Copyright Act of 1886 (passed to allow changes in light of Britain's signing of the Berne Convention), and the 1911 Copyright Act, maintained British copyright for all British possessions including the self-governing dominions and the Commonwealth of Australia.⁸⁸ As a result, colonial readers shared "an imperial cultural space, dominated and defended by London publishers" throughout the period 1890-1930.⁸⁹ According to Alexis Weedon, by the 1870s the Australasian colonies were the largest export market for books produced in the United Kingdom. In 1868, the declared value at customs of books produced in the United Kingdom and exported to the Australasian colonies amounted to £148,413; by 1898 the value had significantly risen to £418,215.⁹⁰ Lyons states that Australia remained the largest export market for British books until 1953, with a quarter of all "British book exports [...] destined for the Australian market between 1900 and the Second World War."⁹¹

The United Kingdom was also the dominant country of origin for book imports into the Australasian colonies. Statistics of book imports into New Zealand between 1890 and 1930 show a significant increase in book imports over the period. In forty years, the value of books imported into the country more than quadrupled, rising from a value of £105,344 in 1890, to £136,891 in 1900, £213,328 in 1910, and to £481,151 in 1930.⁹² Books published in the United Kingdom dominated the import market.

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⁸⁷ The legislation for imperial copyright only served publishers in the United Kingdom, however, and held no advantages for colonial publishers. As Catherine Seville notes, "publication in a colony did not give copyright throughout the Empire." Catherine Seville, "Copyright," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Vol. 6: 1830-1914*, ed. David McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 229; see also Catherine Seville, *The Internationalisation of Copyright Law: Books, Buccaneers and the Black Flag in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); James J. Barnes, *Free Trade in Books: A Study of the London Book Trade since 1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

⁸⁸ The Act had to be adopted by the self-governing dominions. Newfoundland, Australia and South Africa adopted the 1911 Act, Canada and New Zealand adopted similar, independent Acts. Seville, "Copyright," 231-7; Catherine Seville, *The Internationalisation of Copyright Law*, 144-5. The dominance of British publishers in the Australian and New Zealand book market continued until the 1970s with the British Market Rights Agreement, under which British publishers retained copyright for their publications throughout the Commonwealth, and, when acquiring the rights for an American book, would automatically "do so for the whole of the Commonwealth." John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 189.

⁸⁹ Lyons, "Britain's Largest Export Market," 22.

⁹⁰ The second-largest export market was the USA. Weedon, *Victorian Publishing*, 39, see also Appendix Three, Table A3.4.

⁹¹ Lyons, "Britain's Largest Export Market," 19.

⁹² *Statistics of the Colony of New Zealand for the Year 1890* (Wellington: George Didsbury, Government Printer, 1891), 112; *Statistics of the Colony of New Zealand for the Year 1900* (Wellington: John Mackay, Government Printer, 1901), 124; *Statistics of the Dominion of New Zealand for the Year 1910* (Wellington: John Mackay, Government Printer, 1911), 219-221; *Statistical Report on Trade and Shipping in the Dominion of New Zealand, 1930, Part I* (Wellington: W.A.G. Skinner, Government Printer, 1931), 262.

Throughout the period, approximately seventy per cent of all books imported into New Zealand came from the United Kingdom; an additional twenty to twenty-five per cent reached New Zealand from or via Australia. Books produced in the United States of America amounted to four to seven per cent of book imports, peaking at nine per cent in 1930.⁹³ Although these figures relate to official customs' records and would not include undocumented American imports, it is fair to say that British books made up the majority of books available in New Zealand.

British publications were imported and distributed by booksellers and colonial agents such as George Robertson of Melbourne, Edward Petherick and the wholesale firm Gordon & Gotch.⁹⁴ Alison Rukavina has recently highlighted the importance of transnational connections and of international networks for the imperial book trade. After George Robertson established an office in London in 1857, business transactions with British publishers could be facilitated without delay in communication and payment, and as a result Robertson cemented his position as book wholesaler and bookseller for the Australasian markets, shipping approximately 32,000 parcels to Australia and New Zealand in 1881.⁹⁵ The New Zealand firm Whitcombe & Tombs also operated offices in Australia and in London, and in its function as wholesale stationer and bookseller worked as the agent for the Scottish publisher Chambers in the 1880s.⁹⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century British publishers had begun to establish their own agents in the colonies, and an increasing number of booksellers imported stock directly from overseas, in particular from Britain.

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⁹³ The peak of imports from the USA in 1930 with a parallel fall of imports from Australia to fifteen per cent in the same year indicates a diminishing role of Australian companies as wholesalers, and an increased direct trade between New Zealand and the USA. Apart from 1920, import figures referred to the country whence books were imported, not the country of book production. However, in 1920 the statistics differentiated between these two categories. The only noteworthy information to be derived from the more detailed table is that Australian firms acted as wholesalers for British books, handling books to the value of £40,000 not produced in Australia, most of which were produced in the United Kingdom. Figures relating to imports from the USA reveal that only a small proportion went through Australian wholesalers; less than ten per cent of US publications found their way into New Zealand via Australia. *Statistics of the Dominion of New Zealand for the Year 1920, Vol. 2: Trade and Shipping* (Wellington: Marcus F. Marks, Government Printer, 1921), 278.

⁹⁴ *Gordon and Gotch (Australasia) Limited: Centenary 1853-1953* (Melbourne: Gordon and Gotch, 1953).

⁹⁵ Alison Rukavina, *The Development of the International Book Trade, 1870-1895: Tangled Networks* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 54-5.

⁹⁶ Noel Waite, "The Octopus and Its Silent Teachers: A New Zealand Response to the British Book Trade," in *World of Print: Diversity in the Book Trade*, ed. John Hinks and Catherine Armstrong (New Castle DE: Oak Knoll, 2006), 15. For a general business history of Whitcombe & Tombs see Noel Waite, *Books for a Nation* (Auckland: Whitcoulls, 2008).

Copyright legislation, cultural ties, as well as “the dominance of the British publishing cartel” hindered the growth of national and local publishing and printing industries and to some extent the development of national literatures well into the twentieth century.⁹⁷ New Zealand and Australian writers moved to London both in order to participate in metropolitan literary culture and to secure British publishers for their works.⁹⁸ The imprint of British, and in particular London publishing houses, carried “far greater value in terms of cash and recognition”, and authors who were published in Britain maintained copyright for the entire empire.⁹⁹ In New Zealand, publishers focussed on school books and practical titles, such as cookbooks and manuals for gardeners and farmers, “but fiction was rare”¹⁰⁰ and until the late 1930s “there were no publishers who regularly published novels.”¹⁰¹ The few existing Australian and New Zealand publishers produced a comparably small number of titles, and the majority of reading matter in book form in both countries consisted of imported British publications. Exact numbers are difficult to come by, but one Sydney bookseller estimated that less than ten per cent of books sold during the 1930s were Australian publications.¹⁰² Many of the imported British publications were “colonial editions”, special editions of British publications for the colonial markets, issued in series, and consisting mainly of works of fiction. “Colonial editions” catered for colonial and post-colonial readers between 1843 and 1972. Colonial booksellers received a much higher discount than their British counterparts which ensured cheap retail prices despite high transport costs.¹⁰³ As a result, British publishers satisfied the demand for fictional

⁹⁷ Richard Nile and David Walker, “The ‘Paternoster Row Machine’ and the Australian Book Trade, 1890-1945,” in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 8, 12.

⁹⁸ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Felicity Barnes, “New Zealand’s London: The Metropolis and New Zealand’s Culture, 1890-1940” (PhD Thesis, The University of Auckland, 2008), especially chapter four.

⁹⁹ E. H. McCormick, *New Zealand Centennial Surveys, Vol. 5: Letters and Art in New Zealand* (Wellington: Dept. of Internal Affairs, New Zealand, 1940), 130.

¹⁰⁰ Dennis McEldowney, “Publishing, Patronage, Literary Magazines,” in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), 556.

¹⁰¹ Terry Sturm, “Popular Fiction,” in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), 496.

¹⁰² George A. Ferguson, “Changes in the Australian Book Trade 1935-1974,” in *The Australian Book Trade: The Report of the Australian Book Trade Working Party* (Richmond South, Victoria: The Australian Book Trade Working Party, 1975), 86.

¹⁰³ Graeme Johanson, *A Study of Colonial Editions in Australia, 1843-1972* (Wellington: Elibank Press, 2000), 1-2.

reading and simultaneously maintained control, particularly of the Australian book market.¹⁰⁴

Not all imported books came to Australia or New Zealand from the British Isles. Import statistics show a small number of books arriving from Continental Europe, mostly Germany. In addition, legitimate American publications as well as pirated editions of British copyright titles found their way into the Australasian market. In 1880 the agent of Australian wholesaler George Robertson “encountered the open sale” of an American piracy of Mrs Henry Wood’s *East Lynne* in a Christchurch bookshop, which at 1s6d was sold significantly cheaper than the British edition for 7s6d.¹⁰⁵ The difficulties of protecting British copyright throughout the empire, however, were particularly pronounced in the Canadian book market. Geographical proximity to the United States of America meant cheaper American reprints easily and quickly moved across the border, shattering sales prospects for British editions. The inability of British publishers to protect the Canadian market from American piracies had led to the Foreign Reprints Act as early as 1847, permitting “the import of foreign reprints on payment of duty.”¹⁰⁶ Canadian publishers, however, were not permitted to reprint British books, and “since British editions were expensive, this left Canada dependent on supplies from the United States.”¹⁰⁷ In 1891 the United States conceded the principle of international copyright, entering an agreement with Britain. The Anglo-American treaty allowed American publishers to secure copyright for the whole of the British Empire “by publishing simultaneously in Britain”,¹⁰⁸ and extended American copyright to British subjects “if the work was manufactured in the United States.”¹⁰⁹ The regulation

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¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 286-7.

¹⁰⁵ Brian Hubber, “A ‘Free Trade’ in the Antipodes: American Reprints in the Australasian Colonies,” *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 16, no. 1 (1992): 21.

¹⁰⁶ Seville, *The Internationalisation of Copyright Law*, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Luke Trainor, “Imperialism, Commerce and Copyright: Australia and New Zealand, 1870-1930,” *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 21, no. 4 (1997): 203.

¹⁰⁹ Seville, “Copyright,” 234. Canadian publishers and legislators repeatedly lobbied the British government for more protection from American reprints, or to allow Canadian publishers to reprint British publication for the payment of duty. The Anglo-American Agreement of 1891 and ongoing confusion about imperial copyright legislations essentially crippled the development of a Canadian publishing industry throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and had far-reaching consequences for the structure of the Canadian publishing and bookselling trade. For a recent exploration of this issue see Eli MacLaren, *Dominion and Agency: Copyright and the Structuring of the Canadian Book Trade, 1867-1918* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2011).

for duty payment on imported foreign reprints into Canada remained unchanged, although the extent of American piracy reduced significantly.¹¹⁰

American publications swamped the Canadian book market for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Fiona A. Black concludes, “the United States was overwhelmingly the principal source for books in Canada.”¹¹¹ Frédéric Brisson refers to Canadian Import Statistics, noting that before 1939, “American books accounted for 50 to 70 per cent of imports, down from that 80 cent during the First World War, while British books represented between 25 and 40 of imports.”¹¹² That a sizeable proportion of these books were reprints of, mostly, British publications, for which a duty had to be paid, is indicated by the import statistics for duty-free books. “[D]uty-free books from the United States climbed steadily from 22.9 per cent of total book imports in 1895 to 41.2 per cent in 1915”, while free book importations from Great Britain rose “from 31.4 per cent in 1895 to 39.1 per cent in 1910.”¹¹³ The Canadian book market, and reading material available to Canadian readers, was therefore like Australia and New Zealand an import economy.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

The study draws extensively on the personal records of Fred Barkas (1854-1932). Barkas was born in England, but lived in New Zealand for most of his adult life. He created a substantial archive of his reading in the form of a collection of letters and personal records that is remarkable for its longevity and detail, spanning a period of almost sixty years. Barkas engaged in extensive correspondence with relatives and friends, keeping copies of most of the correspondence, including copies of his own letters. After Barkas’s death in 1932, the archive was bequeathed to family, and eventually was donated to the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington in the early 1980s.

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¹¹⁰ L. George Parker, “Authors and Literary Culture: English-Canadian Publishers and the Struggle for Copyright,” in *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 2: 1840-1918*, ed. Yvan Lamonde, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Fiona A. Black (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 156.

¹¹¹ Fiona A. Black, “Marketing and Selling Book: Supplying the Retail Trade,” in *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 2: 1840-1918*, ed. Yvan Lamonde, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Fiona A. Black (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2005), 206.

¹¹² Frédéric Brisson, “Systems of Distribution: International Sources of Supply,” in *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 3: 1918-1980*, ed. Caroline Gerson and Jacques Michon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 390.

¹¹³ Black, “Supplying the Retail Trade,” 207-8.

Born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 3 April 1854 into a middle-class and “bookish” background (his father had owned a bookstore), Barkas immigrated to New Zealand via Sydney, arriving in Lyttelton in 1881. With a degree in Chemistry, he took up a position as lecturer in science at the School of Agriculture at Lincoln, near Christchurch. He resigned from the college two years later and found employment with the Loan and Mercantile Agency Company in Christchurch, a commercial stock and station agent. He remained with the company until his retirement in 1919, acting as the manager of its Wellington branch from 1905-1909, and thereafter managing the Timaru office. Barkas lived in Timaru, a provincial centre in the South Island, until his death in September 1932. It is for the Timaru years between 1909 and 1932 that his archive is particularly rich and detailed.

The Barkas collection comprises sixty-seven bound volumes of letters, diaries and notebooks, plus several folders of family papers, certificates and passports, some dating back to 1854, but mainly covering the years between 1872 and 1932.¹¹⁴ Most of the volumes contain interspersed photos, drawings, concert programmes, newspaper clippings, and other ephemera. Twenty-eight of the volumes consist of letters to and from his daughter Mary Barkas (1889-1959). Mary left New Zealand for England in 1913, where she lived until 1932. The two wrote what they called their “daily page” to each other, including their reflections on reading, for around twenty years. While Barkas’s reading records are exceptional for their richness and for their survival, Barkas, as this thesis contends, was not an uncommon reader. His letters reveal connections to other readers within his local community and beyond, and offer insights into the reading of a number of other people, and into Barkas’s readers’ networks and reading communities.

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¹¹⁴ The majority of the Barkas family papers are arranged in the series “Frederick Barkas – Barkas Family Scrapbooks and Papers, MS-Papers-2491”, with individual volumes and folders labelled MS-Papers-2491-01 to MS-Papers-2491-69. Some further certificates, documents and ephemera are contained in the “MS-Group-0175, Barkas Family: Papers of Frederick and Mary Rushton Barkas” including passports, another travel journal and an autograph album belonging to Mary Barkas. Finally, there are the “Mary Rushton Barkas Papers, 89-339”, containing five folders of unbound letters from and to Mary, further certificates, a notebook of “books read” kept by Fred Barkas from 1927 to 1931, a book of “letters sent and received”, 1927-32, also belonging to Fred Barkas, and a sketchbook kept by Fred Barkas during the 1880s and 1890s. For an introduction to the Barkas papers, see Kay Sanderson, “A Cabbage, a Bohemian, and a Genius, or Ordinary Middle-Class Folk?,” *The Turnbull Library Record* 19, no. 1 (1986). For an overview of the Barkas archive in relation to the history of reading see Susann Liebich, “Letters to a Daughter: An Archive of Middle-Class Reading in New Zealand, c. 1872-1932,” in *The History of Reading, Vol. 1: International Perspectives, c.1500-1990*, ed. Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

The Barkas correspondence is a *mélange* between a diary and letters. The frequency and the nature of Fred's and Mary's writing are reminiscent of diaries, mixing brief recordings of what they had been doing during the day with longer reflections. But the primary reason for the letters was to keep father and daughter, physically separated, connected across space and over time. However, the form in which the diary-letters survive is complicated by Fred Barkas's subsequent intervention. He kept Mary's letters and copies of his own. After 1913 Fred used a typewriter, which made carbon copies easy. Mary wrote her letters at times using a typewriter, at other times by hand. In retirement, Barkas typed Mary's hand-written letters, as well as letters received from other relatives and friends. Few of Mary's original hand-written letters are included in the collection. Fred assumed the role of editor, but just how much retrospective editing went into the project is unclear. For some of Mary's letters, two typed-up versions have survived, differing slightly in wording yet overall conveying the same content and presumably made by Fred at different times. Unfortunately, the originals have not survived.

Barkas then arranged the typed-up letters, his own, as well as Mary's and letters by other family members and friends, into bound volumes. In between the typed letters, he pasted ephemera such as theatre tickets, restaurant menus, concert programmes and newspaper clippings, and photographs. In this way, the volumes partly resemble scrapbooks. He also added retrospective comments, and it becomes evident that he re-read the volumes, using them as letters as well as diaries. Barkas's "self-fashioning" was highly conscious; he created the collection with an audience in mind. He passed on most of his travel diaries to friends in Timaru, and the entire collection, he hoped, would "afford amusing, and perhaps instructive, reading for my daughter or my nephews and nieces in the years to come."¹¹⁵

Barkas understood the bound correspondence to be part of his family biography. He gave parts of the collection titles, which hint that he was also aware of the biography genre's conventions. Mary's early, teenage-letters, for example, he called "The Story of a New Zealand Girl", which evokes Jane Mander's 1920 publication *The Story of a New Zealand River*.¹¹⁶ His own letters written before 1919 to various recipients became "Some Memories of a Mediocrity", and one cannot help but be reminded of George and Weedon Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody*. Though Barkas's letters do not reveal the same

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¹¹⁵ Undated note by Fred Barkas, MS-Papers-2491-01, ATL.

¹¹⁶ Jane Mander, *The Story of a New Zealand River* (London: John Lane, 1920).

measure of class anxiety as Charles Pooter's fictional diary, Pooter's reflection that he is "happy because [he is] not ambitious" resonates with Barkas's admission to his brother Charlie that "year by year I am more & more convinced that my proper role is respectable and ordinarily useful Mediocrity."¹¹⁷ Barkas's letters written to Mary after 1913 he entitled "Letters to a Daughter". Whether Barkas had read *The Story of a New Zealand River* or *The Diary of a Nobody* we do not know, but in June 1918, walking home from his office for lunch, he noticed Hubert Bland's *Letters to a Daughter* in a bookseller's window, and being reminded of his own correspondence with Mary, promptly bought a copy, read it, and used the title for his own collection.¹¹⁸

As a conglomerate of various types of egodocuments the Barkas archive entails methodological challenges shared by autobiographies and correspondences. Retrospective comments by Barkas on some of the typed letters and the arrangement of the letters by chronology and author are devices to create his own life, and family, narrative and contextualise his own story. It is not the letter-writing itself, but the subsequent editing, arranging, binding and completing with photos and ephemera that take on autobiographical characteristics. In their dual function as correspondence and memoir, the diary-letters have to be understood as text as well as record. Several scholars have noted the fictional character of egodocuments. Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa caution that "[a]ll autobiography, whether written or oral, is a form of fiction" and "a subjective reimagining of lived experience", referring to the memory-tinted recollections their oral interviews necessarily constitute.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, Lyons and Taksa use the evidence gathered in these interviews to examine both attitudes to and perceptions of reading, and reading practices. Daniel Allington has gone so far to dismiss autobiographical writings as evidence of actual reading practices altogether, arguing instead to analyse such "anecdotal evidence" "as *writings*, rather than as *records of reading*" and to interpret these writings "in terms of what those anecdotes suggest about attitudes to reading and to specific reading matter."¹²⁰ However, while egodocuments

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¹¹⁷ George Grossmith and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co, 1919 [1892]), 213; Fred Barkas to Charlie Barkas, 15 April 1892, MS-Papers-2491-06, ATL.

¹¹⁸ Barkas told Mary that the book "in so many ways treats of a relationship so like yours & mine that I should like you to read it again." Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 21 and 24 June 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. Hubert Bland, *Letters to a Daughter* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1907).

¹¹⁹ Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, 13, 15.

¹²⁰ Daniel Allington, "On the Use of Anecdotal Evidence in Reception Study and the History of Reading," in *Reading in History: New Methodologies from the Anglo-American Tradition*, ed. Bonnie Gunzenhauser (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 12, Allington's emphasis.

offer insights into ideas about reading, they should not be dismissed outright as evidence of actual reading practices. In the case of Barkas, his reading as well as his writing about reading were integral ingredients of his self-fashioning as a “constant reader”. He created his reader-identity at times in differentiation to other readers in his local and global reading community, at times in parallel sympathy with them.

My interpretation of the Barkas archive is facilitated by the construction of the Barkas Reading Database. Based on the letters written by Fred Barkas between 1890 and 1922, on Barkas’s copied notes from now not extant reading diaries for the years 1907-13, and on one preserved reading diary covering the years 1927-32, this database of his reading records includes 1,108 entries in relation to his reading.¹²¹ As the majority of his letter collection consists of the letters written to his daughter Mary Barkas, the database contains mostly entries for the years 1907-1911 (149 entries), 1917-1922 (520 entries), and 1927-32 (391 entries). The database entries capture the following information: text read, including copy-specific publication details if available, details of first publication, category and genre of the text (for example periodical or newspaper article, non-fiction or fiction, play, novel, poem etc); time of day; place and circumstance of reading (for example at home, at the house of friends, read aloud to other readers, or listened to other readers reading aloud); duration of reading a particular text if possible to identify from a series of letters; access to the text (for example library, own copy, borrowed from friends); method of selection (after reading a review, recommended by friends etc); whether Barkas recommended the book to another reader; as well as his qualitative statements regarding his reading experience and the text. The database has been useful as a research tool to organise the vast amount of reading records, and enabled me to undertake statistical analysis of particular aspects in Barkas’s reading.

The Barkas Reading Database shares similarities with the large-scale Reading Experience Database (RED), based at the Open University, UK, but has been developed independently from it. The project team behind the RED defines a “reading experience” as “a recorded engagement with a written or printed text – beyond the

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¹²¹ It should be noted, that I have not included evidence from Barkas’s travel diaries, and that letters written by Barkas from 1922-32 have also not been included in the database due to time constraints. However, though not included in the database, these letters have been consulted and anecdotal evidence from them has been included throughout the thesis.

mere fact of possession.”¹²² I have conceived of my database as one of reading records, rather than experiences, and as a result some entries in the database do not include any additional information other than the text read by Barkas. The number of entries in the Barkas Reading Database also does not translate into an equal number of texts read or of singular “reading events”. Barkas often read a book or a journal article stretched over several days, sometimes weeks. He began a book, got distracted and set it aside, or, as he often read at night time just before going to bed, tiredness forced him to pause his reading. At other times, he read a periodical article by himself, and deemed it sufficiently interesting to re-read or to read aloud to friends. In the RED such experiences of reading the same text over a limited period of time count as one experience. In Barkas’s case, however, treating his records of reading in the same way proved unfeasible. Barkas recorded his reading with such regularity, that his letters turned into his “reading log” and synthesizing his recording into one entry would have meant losing much of the authenticity of the source, and much of the detailed evidence.¹²³ Therefore, the Barkas Reading Database is attentive to both the evidence of reading included in the letters as well as the recording and representation of constant reading in his letters.

The evidence of reading drawn from the archive of Fred Barkas is complemented by the records of the Timaru Public Library, including monthly reports for the years 1911 to 1932, borrowing figures, numbers of newspaper room attendance and acquisition records. Furthermore, Barkas is not the only individual reader whose reading experiences are extant. In the course of this research, the records of the Canadian reader Margaret McMicking (1849-1944), in the form of her personal scrapbooks and the minute books of the Victoria Literary Society, now held at the British Columbia Archives in Victoria, were also consulted. Together with the records of the Victoria Public Library they offer a useful, if mainly indicative, comparison to Barkas’s reading and the reading cultures in Timaru, New Zealand. Placing Barkas’s and McMicking’s experiences within the larger context of the British reading world in which they participated, the thesis also analyses the activities and records of the British world-wide home reading movements. The discussion draws on the monthly magazines published

¹²² Katie Halsey, “Reading the Evidence of Reading: An Introduction to the Reading Experience Database, 1450-1945,” *Popular Narrative Media* 1, no. 2 (2008): 125.

¹²³ Siân K. and Colin G. Pooley use the term “reading log” to describe the diary of Elizabeth Lee, a young English reader at the end of the nineteenth century. Siân K. Pooley and Colin G. Pooley, “‘Such a Splendid Tale’: The Late Nineteenth-Century World of a Young Female Reader,” *Cultural and Social History* 2 (2005): 334.

by the National Home Reading Union from 1889 to 1930, and the Australasian Home Reading Union, published from 1891 to 1897, in order to explore notions of how adult readers were taught to read as well as how union members actually read and experienced a sense of connection through reading.

CHAPTER OUTLINE: READING CONNECTIONS AND READING COMMUNITIES

The thesis is organised thematically. The chapters each deal with an aspect of reading, and, in some instances, a different group of readers. The first chapter examines reading and reading connections in the locale of Timaru, New Zealand, sketching out the contours and nature of an informal reading community based on shared interests, friendships and geographical proximity, as well as class and cultural capital. This readers' network connected in a number of reading places, ranging from the street, the office and the library to the home, sports club and restaurant. The discussion reveals an often unorganised and diffuse local reading culture, inter-mixed with non-reading activities. Chapter two focuses on the Public Library in Timaru. The library was a significant place for fostering and enabling reading in the local community. It served as a place for readers to connect with each other and with a world beyond Timaru. The newspaper room was heavily frequented by different kinds of readers, and the stock and book-borrowing figures testify that readers enthusiastically participated in a wider reading world. The library itself was a product of global connections: as a "free" institution based on nineteenth-century improvement ideals circulated throughout the British world; and as a building financed by the Scottish-born American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. In this regard, the Timaru Public Library was similar to many other public libraries in the empire and in North America.

Reading, writing and talking were practices intimately interlinked. Chapter three explores the role of reading and writing in the intimacy of Fred Barkas with his daughter Mary. Their relationship and correspondence constituted an important reading space, which connected Timaru to London and connected different generations. Chapter four considers two informally-organised reading groups in Timaru: the Round Table discussion group and the drama-orientated Timaru Readers, both variously defined by class and gender barriers. These groups provided spaces for self-improvement, political participation, leisure and sociability. They were anchored in the local place and local associational culture, but existed also through their connections to

a broader space, discussing the politics of the British Empire and reading and enacting British plays. These local groups shared some aspects with the groups affiliated with the home reading movement, discussed in chapter five. The National and the Australian Home Reading unions sought not only to educate members in the practice of reading, but also to unite them into a larger reading community across the empire, and the Australasian colonies, through the simultaneity of a common reading programme and through a journal distributed to members.

Chapter six uses World War One, a single event with strong imperial dimensions, as a lens through which to review all the kinds of reading practices and communities discussed in the previous chapters. For civilians throughout the empire, reading constituted an important mechanism to cope with a situation of heightened anxiety, uncertainty and disruption. Reading also took on additional functions: information and knowledge about the realities of war, education for a post-war world, and distraction and escape from a frightening reality. Moreover, during this moment of national and imperial crisis, reading was re-defined as an act of civic duty and patriotism. The discussion concludes with a reflection on the connectivity of reading and the nature of the different reading practices and communities examined in the thesis. It will also reflect on whether it is useful to think of these reading connections as constituting the British World, the empire or something entirely different.

CHAPTER ONE

READING NETWORKS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY IN TIMARU, NEW ZEALAND

Exploration of globally connected reading cultures across the British Empire begins in the South Island provincial centre of Timaru, New Zealand. The archive of Fred Barkas, living in Timaru from 1909 until his death in 1932, enabled a detailed analysis of the nature of a local and connected network of readers and reading. Fred Barkas's local network, made up of educated middle-class professionals and their families living in geographical proximity, provided him with reading material and recommendations, afforded opportunities for the discussion of reading, and encompassed many shared and collective reading practices. Defined by spontaneity and informality, Barkas's readers' network enabled multiple connections within the local community, and beyond the local. Describing and examining this readers' network offers a first glimpse into how local reading places constitute "articulated moments" of internal social networks and global connections.¹

Tony Ballantyne's recent study of knowledge formation and intellectual exchange in another New Zealand South Island community, Gore, from 1875 to 1914, has highlighted the importance of paying attention to the local in order to reveal "the everyday practices and places that enabled colonists to share and test ideas."² As Ballantyne demonstrates in one of his examples, local farmers shared knowledge and experiences in social gatherings and organised meetings, particularly through the spoken word. Like the informal reading network discussed in this chapter, these informally constituted knowledge communities in Gore, based on "reading and writing, talking and listening, produced social connections as well as knowledge", but are difficult to trace in the historical record.³

In a similar vein, Christine Pawley's study of reading and the "day-to-day uses of printed information" in the small, rural mid-western community of Osage, Iowa, at the

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¹ Massey, "Places and Their Pasts," 183.

² Ballantyne, "Thinking Local," 139.

³ Ibid.: 150-1. Ballantyne notes that "[t]his kind of localized low-level scientific work – which included observation, data-collection and experimentation – rarely filtered up to provincial philosophical societies or specialist print culture, so it has been largely overlooked in the historiography on colonial science." Ballantyne, "Thinking Local," 143.

end of the nineteenth century has persuasively shown how a locally-focussed study can add to our understanding of how print culture operated within the lives of many readers too often invisible in the historical record.⁴ Pawley's examination of the local community and its connections to a wider world – in Pawley's study the focus is on the nation – usefully highlights the interaction between locality (place) and a world beyond the local (space). As Pawley argues, readers in Osage “made use of networks of print that linked them not only to each other but also to ‘imagined communities’ in the rest of the country – and indeed the world.”⁵ Echoing Doreen Massey's formulation of the global in the local and the notion of place as an open, ongoing process, Pawley notes that “[t]he continual shaping and reshaping of Osage as a face-to-face community owed much” to “the connections with other members of a variety of imagined print communities.”⁶ Pawley's focus is on the wider engagement with print within the local community, including such places and spaces as schools, churches, the library, voluntary organisations and the lives of individual readers. Within this broader print culture, networks akin to the readers' networks examined in this chapter existed in Osage. Readers shared reading experiences such as reading aloud, and they exchanged reading material. Immigrant communities, for example, shared newspapers and thus extended their access to reading material.⁷

Like Ballantyne's focus on Gore and Pawley's focus on Osage, this chapter is concerned with the geography of reading in a particular locale: Timaru, New Zealand. As a place shaped by the multiple identities within it and connections to other places, Timaru's reading cultures were multiple and significantly fashioned by connections to a reading world beyond. This chapter begins by briefly describing the intellectual and institutional structures through which reading was made possible and promoted in the local place of Timaru. The discussion will then introduce Fred Barkas and his circle, isolating one particular reading network in Timaru, which operated within and beyond the existing institutional structures for reading. The chapter details and analyses the spaces in which Barkas's network connected, and the nature and functions of the various connections readers established. It concludes with an assessment of how this

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⁴ Christine Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 2.

⁵ Ibid., 37. Pawley is referring to Benedict Anderson's concept of *imagined community* as laid out in Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁶ Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border*, 38. Compare Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” 28-9; Massey, *For Space*, 131.

⁷ Pawley, *Reading on the Middle Border*, 205.

particular readers' network formed part of the wider intellectual landscape in the local place of Timaru, and in the global space of a British reading world.

The chapter uses the notion of a "reading network" or "readers' network" as a particular expression of the broader notion of a "reading community" as it exists in scholarly literature. A "reading network" is defined in this thesis as a group of readers who connect through the exchange of a wide range of reading material, recommendations and conversation about reading, as well as through shared acts of reading. The notion of a "network" highlights the importance of links of exchange, of transactions, and emphasises personal connections within the network. Members of a readers' network know each other, and a readers' network usually exists in addition to other personal or professional connections. Membership can vary over time, and is determined by a number of shared characteristics, including class, social status, at times gender, education, geographical location and proximity within the local community, and a similar or shared interest in a range of leisure activities ranging from reading to music, theatre and sport.

The boundaries between reading networks and other reading communities are not rigid, and networks and other reading communities can overlap. Some members of the network described in this chapter, for example, also belonged to a number of different reading groups based on the shared reading of particular genres of texts, for instance plays or political texts. These reading groups as another form of "reading communities" are discussed in chapter four. In addition, and as this thesis argues, local readers' networks and reading communities also participated in global reading communities within the British World. But firstly, the focus in this chapter is on the informal links of exchange within the local place of Timaru.

TIMARU'S CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Timaru was a prosperous provincial port town, serving the large pastoral hinterland of South Canterbury in the early twentieth century. European colonists began to settle in the area after the Canterbury Provincial Government defined Timaru's town boundaries in 1853, but economic development was slow until the port was developed in the late 1880s. Then, the population grew steadily from under 2,000 in 1874, to 4,000 in 1895,

7,600 in 1906, reaching over 11,000 residents in the census year 1911.⁸ By 1921, the number of residents had risen to just fewer than 16,000; and by the mid-1930s 19,000 people were living in the town.⁹ Timaru was an important provincial hub connecting its residents and the South Canterbury region to a wider world in New Zealand and beyond. People, goods and letters reached Timaru by ship, rail and road. Railway lines, opened in 1878, linked the town to the larger South Island centres of Christchurch, 165 km to the north, and Dunedin, 200 km to the south, as well as to a cluster of smaller settlements up to Pleasant Point and Fairlie inland north-west.¹⁰ Coach services, and later motor cars, operated inland to the Mackenzie Country and the Mt Cook region, and a complex mesh of roads enabled transport links to smaller settlements and stations in the back country.¹¹ In 1909, mail arrived in and left Timaru twelve times daily from several directions, bringing goods, letters, and newspapers and other reading material to the town.¹² By the 1920s, Timaru had also turned into a popular destination for weekend travellers; picturesque Caroline Bay attracted people as far away as Christchurch for a day at the beach.

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⁸ "Timaru," in *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, ed. A. H. McLintock, (Wellington: Govt. Printer, 1966), in *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 22-Apr-09, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/timaru/1>, accessed 3 November 2010; Oliver A. Gillespie, *South Canterbury. A Record of Settlement*, second ed. (Timaru: The South Canterbury Centennial History Committee, 1971 [1958]), 184; Johannes C. Andersen, *Jubilee History of South Canterbury* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs, 1916), 383.

⁹ *Results of a Census of the Dominion of New Zealand Taken for the Night of 17 April, 1921* (Wellington: W.A.G. Skinner, Govt. Printer, 1925), 23; *Dominion of New Zealand, Population Census 1936, Vol. 1: Increase and Location of Population* (Wellington: E.V. Paul, Govt. Printer, 1937), 6.

¹⁰ The railway lines in South Canterbury were built during the 1870s and 1880s, and the main trunk railway between Christchurch and Dunedin opened in 1878. Gillespie, *South Canterbury*, 230-32; Neill Atkinson, *Trainland: How Railways Made New Zealand* (Auckland: Random House, 2007), 33.

¹¹ Gillespie, *South Canterbury*, 244-46.

¹² *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1909* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1909), 883; *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1913* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1913), 893.

Figure 1.1

Map of New Zealand

Source: Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

Figure 1.2

Map of Timaru, 1942, showing the many transport links in and out of Timaru: the port; railway lines south to Oamaru and Dunedin, north to Ashburton and Christchurch, and north-west inland to Pleasant Point; and a complex mesh of roads.

Source: *Timaru Map* (Wellington: Surveyor-General, printed by Whitcombe & Tombs, 1942).

Timaru was an important educational centre for South Canterbury. The Timaru Main School, established in the 1870s, provided a primary education for approximately 700 pupils; by the early 1900s the Timaru South Public School (established in 1895) and Waimataitai Public School (1882) had an additional 550 pupils on their rolls. A boys' and a girls' high school (established in 1882, and divided into separate institutions in 1887) offered secondary education for pupils aged twelve to seventeen. The Convent of the Sacred Heart, a Catholic day and boarding school for girls, operated from 1880.¹³ Other private schools also existed for various periods of time. Alton House, a private boarding school for girls offering primary and secondary education, advertised in the local newspapers in the 1890s, as did the Strathmore School for girls on Elizabeth Street

¹³ "Timaru," *Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Vol. 3: Canterbury Provincial District* (Christchurch: the Cyclopedia Company, 1903), 983-5.

run by Blanche Hall. Strathmore School existed until the mid-1910s.¹⁴ Extra-curricular and adult education institutions provided spaces for instruction beyond the public schools and beyond school age. The largely Anglican and Presbyterian population was served by a number of churches, and many of them organised Sunday schools.¹⁵ The St Stephens Presbyterian Church, for example, conducted Sunday schools from the early 1900s.¹⁶ By the 1920s, the Chalmers Church and Trinity Church (both Presbyterian) also organised Sunday schools.¹⁷ The same applied for the sizeable Catholic minority, mainly of Irish origins, and the Catholic club rooms provided space for literary edification, including a dramatic club, a literary and debating club and a glee club during the 1910s and 1920s.¹⁸ Evening classes in technical education were offered by the Timaru Technical College from 1901. By 1919 a local branch of the Canterbury Workers' Education Association (WEA) ran tutorials in psychology, economics, history and literature.¹⁹

A well-established cultural and intellectual infrastructure served the community by the end of the nineteenth century. A Mechanics' Institute and Library had opened in 1864, eventually being incorporated into the public library and moving into a larger, Carnegie-financed building in 1909.²⁰ An Amateur Drama Society and the Timaru Choral Society had formed in the 1860s. Various amateur groups started the Timaru Musical and Dramatic Club in 1880. Local interest in drama and music remained strong into the twentieth century; in 1914 the Timaru Choral Society was remodelled into the Timaru Choral and Orchestral Society and in 1927 the South Canterbury Drama League was formed.²¹ Other arts were also supported. In 1895, the South Canterbury Arts Society was established, holding eight large exhibitions of the work of local artists

¹⁴ For example, advertisements in *Timaru Herald*, 22 May 1895, 1; 29 January 1898, 1; 1 February 1900, 1.

¹⁵ Gillespie, *South Canterbury*, 382-90.

¹⁶ *The First Twenty-Five Years: An Anniversary Booklet* (Timaru: St. Stephens Presbyterian Church, [1990]), 3.

¹⁷ See for example, "Sunday Schools: Two Picnics Today," *Timaru Post*, 16 February 1924, 4.

¹⁸ Barbara Harper, *The Harvest: History of the Catholic Church in Timaru, 1869-1969* (Timaru: The Centennial Committee, the Catholic Presbytery, 1969), 87, 96-7.

¹⁹ Gillespie, *South Canterbury*, 373. Ian Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley* (Auckland: Auckland University Press in association with the Broadcasting History Trust, 1993), 134-40.

²⁰ J.S. Parker, *Timaru Centenary 1868-1968* (Timaru: Christopher E. Dawson, 1968), 41-2; David Johnson, *Timaru & South Canterbury: A Pictorial History* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1996), 31. The records of the Timaru Mechanics' Institute are now housed in the Timaru Public Library, un-catalogued and amongst the Timaru Public Library records.

²¹ Timaru Orchestral Society, 4/5, Scrapbook, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru (hereafter SCM); Gillespie, *South Canterbury*, 391-93.

between 1895 and 1920.²² In addition, several clubs provided space for cultural performance and entertainment, and Timaru was a regular stop for touring theatre and opera companies.²³ Lodges and fraternal organisations were represented by the Freemasons (established in 1864), the Ancient Order of Foresters (from 1865), an Orange Lodge (from 1874), and the Loyal Timaru Lodge, Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows (from 1864).²⁴ The Masons, Oddfellows and Foresters had their own halls, where they held regular meetings, anniversary celebration and other forms of entertainment.²⁵

Local, regional, national, and international newspapers and periodicals connected Timaru to places beyond its city limits. The *Timaru Herald*, a daily morning paper, in circulation since 1864, enjoyed a wide readership. Guy Scholefield has noted that in 1923 the *Timaru Herald* had a circulation of 7,400 copies. With a population of just under 16,000 residents it would have been found in most households.²⁶ Its main rival was the *Timaru Post*, established as a morning paper in 1899, but switching to evening publication in 1901.²⁷ Earlier local enterprises included the *South Canterbury Times* (1882-1901) and the *Timaru Evening Mail* (1887-1889).²⁸ News from the surrounding country district circulated through the *Geraldine Guardian* (1883-1931), the *Geraldine Advocate* (1898-1900), the *Gladstone Guardian* (1899-1901), the *Geraldine Mail* (1908-1913), and the *Temuka Leader* (1877-1933).²⁹ From 1905-1907, Timaru was the home of a literary journal, *The Pioneer*, but financial difficulties caused its termination.³⁰ Newspapers from further afield reached Timaru via the postal system. The rail links to Dunedin in the south and Christchurch in the north ensured that by the 1920s daily and weekly papers from both cities arrived in Timaru mid-morning.³¹ The Public Library also stocked,

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²² Ibid., 394.

²³ Ibid., 391-92. See also Nadia Gush, "Cultural Fields of the Canterbury Plains: Women and Cultural Citizenship in Canterbury c. 1890-1940" (PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2007).

²⁴ Andersen, *Jubilee History of South Canterbury*, 603-4. "First Anniversary Dinner, Loyal Timaru Lodge," *Timaru Herald*, 25 November 1865, 4; "New Freemasons' Hall," *Timaru Herald*, 1 September 1866, 2.

²⁵ Andersen, *Jubilee History of South Canterbury*, 604.

²⁶ Guy H. Scholefield, *Newspapers in New Zealand* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1958), 234. The New Zealand Census for 1921 lists 15,507 residents in Timaru. *Results of a Census of the Dominion of New Zealand, 1921*, 23.

²⁷ The *Timaru Post* ceased publication in 1939. Ibid., 236.

²⁸ Ibid., 235.

²⁹ Ibid., 237.

³⁰ Andersen, *Jubilee History of South Canterbury*, 510.

³¹ The Timaru Public Library report for June 1922 noted that morning papers from Christchurch and Dunedin were now received by 11 a.m. Timaru Public Library, Report for June 1922, unpublished manuscript, Timaru Public Library (hereafter referred to as Library Report, TPL). Prior to the 1920s, the

among other titles, the *Greymouth Evening Star*, the *Marlborough Express*, the *Sun* (Auckland), the *Oamaru Mail*, the *North Otago Times*, the *N.Z. Times* (Wellington) and the *Maoriland Worker* (Wellington).³² In addition to the New Zealand dailies, tri-weeklies, weeklies and monthlies, a range of Australian, British and North American papers and periodicals circulated in Timaru, bringing news from the empire and beyond. At various times between 1913 and 1932 the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Hibbert Journal* (UK), the *Contemporary Review* (UK), *Munsey's Magazine* (US), *Pearson's Magazine* (UK) and several other "English and Australian papers" were available in the library newspaper reading room.³³

Timaruvians could obtain their reading material – newspapers, periodicals, and books – through membership of the public library, through one of the private circulation and subscription libraries, or through a number of booksellers. The Mechanics' Institute and its affiliated subscription library stocked more than 6,000 volumes by the early 1900s.³⁴ This collection formed the nucleus of the newly-established Timaru Public Library, which opened in 1909. Residents could join the library for free. The Glen-iti Institute, situated a few kilometres outside the Timaru town centre, was a member subscription library and existed from 1886 until at least 1925.³⁵ Booksellers and stationers sometimes operated circulating libraries offering books and magazines to borrow for a fee, a common practice throughout the British world.³⁶ "B.B.B. - Baker's Book Bazaar & Circulating Library", for example, ran advertisements in the *Timaru Herald* in the 1920s.³⁷ Other institutions also offered

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earliest Christchurch and Dunedin mails arrived in the afternoon between 2.45pm and 4.10pm. See *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1909* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1909), 883; *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1913* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1913), 893.

³² These titles are mentioned in the monthly Library Reports between 1913 and 1924, TPL.

³³ The reports usually mention specific titles when they are either new subscriptions, or are repeatedly stolen by library users, such as *Pearson's* and the *Maoriland Worker*. There are many references to "English" and "Australian" papers more generally. Library Reports between 1913 and 1932, TPL.

³⁴ "Timaru," *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 3, 985.

³⁵ The records of the Glen-iti Institute, including minute books and accounts, are held by the Timaru Public Library. They are un-catalogued and interspersed with the records of the Timaru Public Library. The first entry in the Glen-iti Institute's account books is for 7 May 1886, the last entry is dated 12 December 1925. Minute Book, Glen-iti Institute, TPL. On the establishment of the institute see also "Glen-iti Institute," *Timaru Herald*, 22 March 1886, 3.

³⁶ Simon Eliot, "Circulating Libraries in the Victorian Age and After," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 3: 1850-2000, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (2006); Frédérick Brisson, "Systems of Distribution: The World of Bookselling," in *History of the Book in Canada*, Vol. 3: 1918-1980, ed. Caroline Gerson and Jacques Michon (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2007); John Arnold, "The Circulating Library Phenomenon," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001).

³⁷ For example, 23 August 1922, 8.

members the pleasures of a private library. Fred Barkas, for example, sometimes read the English paper the *Spectator* at the South Canterbury Club, a private gentleman's club, which also provided books.³⁸ Churches often housed libraries: in the 1920s the Catholic girls' school housed a parish library counting more than 3,000 volumes.³⁹

P.W. Hutton & Co on Stafford Street, in business from 1866, was the principal bookseller in the town for many years.⁴⁰ In 1909, Hutton, Thomas Wagstaff and 'Ware & Co' were listed as booksellers in the local directory; by 1914 the directory included six booksellers, all of them on Stafford Street, the main street in Timaru for shops and businesses.⁴¹ Also advertising in the local newspaper was A.J. Fyfe, on Stafford Street, announcing the latest new novels, "just arrived", with his customary slogan "Earliest with the Latest Books".⁴² By the mid-1920s readers could choose to buy their books – in addition to Hutton and Fyfe, who by then had been bought out by J. Fletcher – from Percy Coates on Stafford Street, Kennedy Armstrong on Church Street, and Edward and H. Schnack, with premises also on Stafford Street.⁴³ By 1932 the *New Zealand Post Office Directory* listed a total of seven booksellers in Timaru, a respectable number for a town of then 16,300 residents.⁴⁴

Books on offer at local booksellers were – for the most part – published in Britain. Tied to the British publishing market through copyright legislation and distribution networks – as has been explained in more detail in the Introduction – the choices for readers in Timaru did not differ greatly from those for readers elsewhere in the British Empire. "Books are the same as you see in London shops," William Pember Reeves wrote in his 1898 account of New Zealand, and his assessment still held true for reading material on offer during the first few decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ Timaru booksellers found it important to stress the connections to the London literary world in

³⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 27 September 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

³⁹ Harper, *The Harvest*, 89.

⁴⁰ An advertisement by Hutton in 1936 closes with line: "70 years of bookselling". *Timaru Herald*, 4 January 1936, 20. See also Anna Rogers and Max Rogers, *Turning the Pages. The Story of Bookselling in New Zealand* (Auckland: Reed, 1993), 129.

⁴¹ *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1909* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1909), 1790; *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1914* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1914), 2002-4.

⁴² For example, *Timaru Herald*, 29 January 1920, 6.

⁴³ *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1927* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1927), 2402-4.

⁴⁴ *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory 1932* (Dunedin: H. Wise & Co, 1932), 845, 2157-8. In comparison, the same directory listed one bookseller and four stationers for New Plymouth (with a population of 18,970); and two booksellers, one stationer, and two newsagents for Hamilton (with a population of 18,500). *Ibid.*, 471-87, 665-81.

⁴⁵ William Pember Reeves, *The Long White Cloud*, 3rd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1924), 203.

their advertisements. Hutton, for example, announced “Novels in immense variety, including the Latest from London by this week’s Post.”⁴⁶ Readers in Timaru were thus assured they could obtain the same reading matter as their metropolitan counterparts.

Figure 1.3

Advertising postcard from P.W. Hutton & Co, booksellers, c.1905

The postcard looks north up Stafford Street, Timaru, where most booksellers were located. The second building on left front was the office of the Loan and Mercantile Agency, where Fred Barkas worked between 1909 and 1919.

Source: 2176 Print, Photographic, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

THE READERS’ NETWORKS OF FRED BARKAS

Fred Barkas moved to Timaru from Wellington in 1909, the same year in which the new Carnegie-financed public library building opened its doors to Timaru residents. Barkas and his family had lived in Christchurch from 1881-1905, followed by four years in Wellington. In 1909, Barkas accepted the position of manager of the Timaru branch of the Loan and Mercantile Agency, a company he had been working for since 1883. Aged fifty-five, he still harboured professional ambitions. For his wife Amy, aged fifty-nine, the prospect of life in a provincial town within, what was to her eyes, an uncultured and

⁴⁶ Advertisement in *Timaru Herald*, 30 January 1920, 1.

“provincial” country proved unimaginable.⁴⁷ She moved to London instead. Their daughter Mary, however, remained with her father for a few years, before moving to London to study at university, and then stayed in England until 1932.⁴⁸ Back in Timaru, Barkas bought a house at 9 Hewlings Street, leased it to Jessie Douglas McIver, who offered lodge and board, and rented two rooms from McIver. Barkas captured the particular relationship with McIver in his term of calling her his “T.L.” – Tenant-Landlady. Barkas retired in 1919 and remained in Timaru, sharing a house with McIver and two of her nieces, until his death in September 1932.

Barkas was an avid reader, and his reading was a highly social activity, based on a vibrant readers’ network in Timaru. Matching his own social status and cultural capital, Barkas’s network of readers was predominantly upper and middle-class, defined by wealth, particular professions and education. His friends and acquaintances were lawyers, solicitors, politicians, doctors, managers and other high-level white collar workers. They belonged to what Roberta Nicholls and Jim McAloon have described as the social elite for the Wellington and Christchurch contexts respectively, although Timaru was a much smaller centre than these two cities.⁴⁹ William Alexander (1882-1957), the editor of the *Timaru Herald*, was a close friend of Barkas.⁵⁰ William John Cotterill (1863-1946), known as Jack, worked for a time as the agent for the New

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⁴⁷ There are several letters from Amy to Fred that reveal her dislike of New Zealand society. Initially, Amy was only planning to spend a year travelling in Europe, then return to New Zealand, and finally move the entire family to England after Fred retired. However, Amy never returned to live in New Zealand, and Fred never retired to England. See letters by Amy in the volume “Some Letters from my Wife”, 1904-1913, MS-Papers-2491-38, ATL.

⁴⁸ Mary’s story is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

⁴⁹ Roberta Nicholls, “Elite Society in Victorian and Edwardian Wellington,” in *The Making of Wellington, 1800-1914*, ed. D. A. Hamer and Roberta Nicholls (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1990), 195-226. Jim McAloon generalises that the “typical male member of the elite between 1850 and 1914 was a lawyer, merchant, bank manager, large-scale farmer or manufacturer, a member of the Canterbury Club” and likely to be involved in politics. These were the professions Barkas’s friends occupied, and while the elite in Timaru was perhaps less pronounced than in the bigger cities, the same criteria can be applied to identify them as a separate social group. Jim McAloon, “The Christchurch Elite,” in *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography, 1850-2000*, ed. John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000), 193-221, 197. See also Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago 1840-1914* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2002); and Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *A New History of Canterbury* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1982), 123-5.

⁵⁰ William Frederick Alexander was the editor of the *Timaru Herald* from 1910 to 1920, when he took over the editorship of Dunedin’s *Evening Star*. Under Alexander the conservative *Timaru Herald* “sharpened” its “news coverage”, “enriched its literary and cultural content”, and as a result outstripped the more liberal evening paper the *Timaru Post*. Alexander’s literary interests were reflected in his role as a poetry anthologist. Charles Croot, “Alexander, William Frederick 1882 – 1957,” in *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>, updated 22 June 2007, accessed 15 May 2010. After Alexander left Timaru in 1920, Barkas remarked several times that he missed Alexander’s company. See for example, Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 29 December 1921, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

Zealand Shipping Company at Timaru.⁵¹ Lilian and Blanche Hall were art and music teachers, advertising regularly in the *Timaru Herald* as offering “lessons in music, painting, carving etc”.⁵² Blanche Hall was also the principal of Strathmore School for girls in Timaru from the late 1890s until the 1910s, with Mary Barkas and another Miss Hall (no first name given, but presumably Lilian Hall), as well as Marion Hay on the staff.⁵³ Others in Barkas’s reading circle included at varying times: Francis Joseph Rolleston (1873-1946), barrister in partnership with Charles Howard Tripp from 1901, another member of Barkas’s network. Rolleston, son of the well-known politician William Rolleston and his wife Mary, was the mayor of Timaru between 1921 and 1923, member of the Timaru Harbour Board (1912-1923), Member of Parliament for Timaru for the Reform Party (1922-1928) and Minister of Justice and Defence (1926-28) in the Reform Government of Gordon Coates.⁵⁴ Then there were Dr William Howard Unwin (1871-1945), medical practitioner and brother of the British publisher Sir Stanley Unwin; Alexander P. Rule and wife Clara; their son Percy Watts Rule (1888-1953), architect and book collector and his wife Kathleen; John Paterson Newman (1860-1946), manager, and William Thomas (1879-1945), rector of Timaru Boys’ High School from 1913 until 1935.⁵⁵

The letters to his daughter Mary portray Fred Barkas as a central node within an informal network of readers. Frequently, friends and acquaintances approached Barkas to ask him for suggestions for what to read or for his opinion on a particular book or article. Other readers were enthusiastic to discuss the latest bestseller with Barkas, exchanged newspapers and periodicals and were keen to alert him to a particular title they thought he would find worthwhile. Barkas took a central role in a web of cultural

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⁵¹ *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand: Vol. 3: Canterbury Provincial District* (Christchurch: The Cyclopaedia Company, 1903), 1024. A newspaper article in 1917 mentioned Jack Cotterill as “company manager, Timaru”. “New Trust Company Promoted in Christchurch,” *Ashburton Guardian*, 31 May 1917, 4.

⁵² Advertisement in *Timaru Herald*, 24 January 1899, 2. The relationship between Lilian and Blanche Hall is difficult to establish. According to an online discussion on rootschat.com, Blanche Hall was the unmarried daughter of Charles Henry Hall and Mary Alice Spillard. None of her sisters, however, was named Lilian. None of the numerous advertisements the Halls placed in the *Timaru Herald* gives Lilian’s first name, instead referring to “Miss Blanche Hall and Miss Hall”. Barkas identified the Halls as Lilian and Blanche. It is possible that Lilian Hall was a niece of Blanche Hall.

⁵³ For example, advertisement in *Ashburton Guardian*, 1 February 1911, 3.

⁵⁴ Rosamond Rolleston, *William and Mary Rolleston: An Informal Biography* (Wellington: Reed, 1971); Parker, *Timaru Centenary 1868-1968*, 103, 169; Charles E. Hassall, *A Short History of the Port of Timaru 1852-1955* (Timaru: Timaru Harbour Board, 1955), 212. See also Timaru’s “Hall of Fame” at <http://www.timaru.govt.nz/hall-of-fame.html>, accessed 2 November 2010.

⁵⁵ “Obituary – Dr. W.H. Unwin,” *Evening Post*, 26 December 1945, 6; *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand: Vol. 3*, 1010; George Guy, *Thomas of Timaru: The Life & Work of a Great Headmaster* (Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1974).

and intellectual exchange. A series of sequential letters in February 1919 illustrates this point very vividly. On Thursday night, 20 February, he wrote:

[William] Alexander has just been in to have his usual yarn – what he more especially wanted was to know if I had a copy of last Saturday’s “Dominion” as he wanted to cut some extracts from “Liber’s” review of Weston’s recent book about N.Z. Soldiers in the War, to use in the Herald Saturday’s “Book Page”. Someone had boned his copy from the office after he had carefully put it aside for use tonight.⁵⁶

Only a couple of days earlier, a friend had stopped him on the street to tell him about “Kidd’s new book”, which he “must read”, and which was the subject of many conversations of all the “reading people” in Timaru.⁵⁷ On Monday, 24 February, Barkas told Mary how he had spent the previous day reading to his fellow boarders and landlady at Hewling Street from his latest favourite, a biography of W.E. Ford by J.D. Beresford.⁵⁸ Within less than a week, he had been talking about books, reading to and been approached by at least five other readers in Timaru, either wanting to borrow a text from him, sharing the latest literary gossip or simply enjoying a night of reading together. These readers connected in both public and private spaces, accidentally or deliberately, and as part of friendship or transitory personal connections. The example of “Kidd’s new book” will be discussed later in this chapter; the focus first is on the sites and spaces of connections, and the role of reading networks.

PUBLIC SPACES AND ACCIDENTAL CONNECTIONS

Barkas’s readers’ network connected in a variety of public spaces: among them, the library, the street, the sports’ club, the local restaurant and work places. Often, connections in these spaces were accidental and spontaneous. A letter Barkas wrote in July 1918 tells of a meeting in the public library, a site where readers – unsurprisingly – encountered each other.

When I was at the Library yesterday morning returning Walpole’s “Green Mirror”, Jack Cotterill came in & naturally annexed it, so we got talking of Walpole’s books and I mentioned that I had not yet read “The Duchess of Wrexe.” “I’ll mark it to be kept for you” said Miss Culverwell, and then added,

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⁵⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 20 February 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. The reference to Weston’s recent book refers to C.H. Weston, *Three Years with the New Zealanders* (London: Skeffington, 1918).

⁵⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 February 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁵⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 February 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. J.D. Beresford, *W.E. Ford: A Biography* (London: Collins, Sons & Co, 1917).

“but I’m afraid you’ll find it rather dirty by this time – it seems to be always out.” Then Jack Cotterill chipped in to say he had a copy, that [he] thought it was at his office, & he’d be pleased to lend it to me. Sure enough when I got back to my office after lunch it was there nicely wrapped up awaiting me; so you see I’ve got plenty to read this week.⁵⁹

The Timaru Public Library served as an important space to access reading material. Established through the Public Library Act on 1906, and opened in a new Carnegie-financed building in 1909, the public library was one of only three in New Zealand offering free access and borrowing rights to all residents. The library will be discussed in further detail in chapter two, but for Barkas and his readers’ network it was a key institution for accessing reading material, as well as a place in which connections were established and extended. In the library, readers sometimes met and discussed books, though library rules to keep quiet did not usually allow extensive conversation. Some readers used the reading room to read in the library, but interestingly, Barkas did not record reading there except once when using the reference collection.

The librarian, Evelyn Culverwell, at times acted as intermediary for members of Barkas’s network. Culverwell was appointed as chief librarian in April 1913, four years after Barkas moved to Timaru. She was an important figure for Barkas’s reading, for his network of readers, and for reading in Timaru generally.⁶⁰ As the first female chief librarian in New Zealand, she occupied this position for almost twenty-three years, resigning due to ill health in December 1935.⁶¹ Culverwell was well-liked and well-respected by readers in Timaru and by members of the Barkas network. As another node within the network, Culverwell also facilitated connections. In June 1918, she handed Barkas a collection of essays by George Macaulay Trevelyan because William Alexander, the editor of the *Timaru Herald* and a friend of Barkas, had asked her to do so.⁶² In another example drawn from his letters to Mary, Barkas wrote about just having read: “‘French Windows’ [...] a series of War Sketches by an English Catholic Priest, reprinted from ‘The Month’ about which Mrs. Westmacott has been raving – she made

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⁵⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 July 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Hugh Walpole, *The Green Mirror* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1918); *The Duchess of Wrexhe, Her Decline and Death* (London: Martin Secker, 1914).

⁶⁰ M.J. O’Connor, “The Development of the Timaru Public Library as an Educational Institution” (MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1955), 18.

⁶¹ “Obituary – Miss M.E.E. Culverwell,” *Timaru Herald*, 4 January 1936, 12.

⁶² Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 27 June 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL.

the Halls put their name down at the Library for it & they passed it on to me.”⁶³ The recommendation by one reader led other readers to take the book out of the library, and since Lilian and Blanche Hall were close friends of Barkas, he eventually ended up with the library copy, without having set a foot into the library.

In addition to the public library, a space whose purpose was reading and the provision of reading material, access to and discussion of reading occurred in more unexpected sites. Readers passed each other in the streets, visited each other to exchange reading material, met at the South Canterbury Club – an exclusively male, middle and upper class institution – and they even talked about reading while playing golf. When Barkas was handed Turgenev’s *A Nest of Hereditary Legislators* by Evelyn Culverwell he recalled that “Jack Cotterill mentioned as we were playing our round the other day that he had read it, one of the first Russian books he had read and that he’d been charmed with it; probably therefore I’ll be reading this before I set on ‘Crime & Punishment’.”⁶⁴ It is interesting to note that because his friend Jack Cotterill liked *A Nest of Hereditary Legislators* very much, Barkas decided to depart from his intended reading schedule to read this one first, before starting on the Dostoyevsky title he had chosen himself. Turgenev became a suitable “warm-up” for his foray into Russian literature.⁶⁵

Over the period covered by the Barkas Reading Database, 1889-1932, acting on recommendations by friends and fellow readers is a frequent occurrence in Barkas’s reading pattern. It shows the value he placed on recommendations and advice from his circle of reading friends and his daughter Mary, and is one way in which other readers influenced his reading. It is also an indication that Barkas was flexible in his order of reading. He had the freedom to read as he chose, and usually read at his own discretion rather than as part of an organised reading group. Choosing to read Turgenev first was an act of taking up a friend’s recommendation and could also be interpreted as the desire to connect to other readers by enabling conversation over a common text.

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⁶³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 20 July 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. John Ayscough, *French Windows* (London: Arnold, 1917).

⁶⁴ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 10 August 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev, *A Nest of Hereditary Legislators* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, [1913?]); Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (London: Heinemann, 1914).

⁶⁵ Barkas’s excursion into Russian literature was short-lived on this occasion, but in 1922 he also read Anton Chekhov’s *The Darling and Other Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918) and Peter Kropotkin’s *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (London: Smith and Elder, 1899). Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 30 May, 8 August, 8 and 10 September 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

Just a few weeks before talking about Turgenev on the golf course, Barkas ran into his friend William Alexander, the editor of the *Timaru Herald*. He told Mary:

Alexander passed me as he was going down to his office last night, stopped me, put his hand in his coat pocket saying, “You’re just the man I wanted to see, I’ve got a gem of a pamphlet here for you to read, ‘The Pale Shade’ by Gilbert Murray – delightfully written and altogether charming”. Of course I read it before I went to bed last night – it merited fully Alexander’s praise.⁶⁶

An accidental meeting in the street and passing on of reading material was no exceptional occurrence. Readers carried books around with them, and exchanges took place in spontaneous ways. On another occasion in November 1918, on his way to supper at the house of his friends Lilian and Blanche Hall, Barkas was stopped by “Tommie Thompson, [who] had just read a wonderful book about the war and pressed loan of it upon” him.⁶⁷ Barkas enjoyed the book, *Private Peat* by Harold R. Peat so much that he felt he wanted to not only recommend the title to Mary, but also tell her how he came to read it. This was part of his epistolary ritual and a way of describing his life to his daughter. By the time he wrote the letter to Mary, he had already passed the book on to his landlady McIver, who was “devouring” it.⁶⁸

Instances of such social and sequential reading practices based on the exchange of reading material and recommendations were part of a highly connected, sometimes organised, and often spontaneous local reading culture. Books were passed on, recommended, carried around and talked about in active yet informal networks of readers in Timaru, who happily and readily shared their experiences and reading material. Talk about reading was common, and essential.⁶⁹ Reading was an activity that connected Barkas to other people in the community, and an activity that could mix and overlap with other leisure activities, such as music and sport, and occurred in spaces which were not necessarily traditionally and exclusively defined by reading and literature. These instances of reading also show that reading cultures in Timaru – the kind of books readers read, conversations about books, and shared reading practices – was partly spontaneous and constantly being organically remade and reshaped. A

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⁶⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 8 July 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Gilbert Murray, *The Pale Shade* (London: Field & Queen, 1917).

⁶⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 November 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Harold R. Peat, *Private Peat* (Toronto: McLeod, 1917).

⁶⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 November 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Barkas also noted that the author, Harold R. Peat, “was a newspaper man who served with the Canadian Main Body during the Great War.”

⁶⁹ This point is also made by Tony Ballantyne in relation to the intellectual life in Gore. Ballantyne, “Thinking Local,” 143.

chance meeting on the street led to Barkas not only enjoying a title he had not heard of before, but him also passing a strong recommendation on to his daughter living in England, as well as to his landlady McIver as she was the next to read it. In this way, the initial recommendation by one reader extended to a whole group of readers, in Timaru and outside the local community, and resulted in at least three readers reading the one copy of *Private Peat*.

A decade later, Barkas himself was “snapped” by camera on Stafford Street carrying a book (figure 1.3).⁷⁰ The photo below shows Barkas, aged seventy-seven, in the town centre on the morning of 19 January 1932. Stafford Street was close to George Street, where the public library was located. Likely, Barkas was on his way there, or on his way back, as he told Mary he returned a book that morning, and got another one out. If so, the book he was carrying when “snapped” was Joseph Conrad’s *Nostromo*, a book he found on this occasion “too involved and difficult for easy reading.”⁷¹ He did not finish it, but remembered that he had read it many years ago. Indeed, in a letter in 1919, he had confessed *Nostromo* was “certainly a wonderful book. I really must read more of Conrad.”⁷² There are no records to confirm that Barkas followed his reading of *Nostromo* in 1919 with other fictional works by Joseph Conrad, though he had read his *Personal Record* in late 1918, a “sort of most discursive autobiography”, and recommended it to Mary.⁷³

Instead of Conrad, Barkas borrowed Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*, a semi-autobiographical novel.⁷⁴ It is not clear whether he appreciated Butler’s work more than Conrad’s; he did not record any other information about it. Butler also had been on Barkas’s reading list before: twice in August 1908, then in December 1911, in June 1919, in May 1922 and in December 1927.⁷⁵ In December 1927, he also read a book

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⁷⁰ Barkas pasted the photo in his typed letter and included the caption “Movie-snapped by the ‘Old Bank’ in Stafford Street on Tuesday morning, 19th of January, 1932.” Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 1, ATL.

⁷¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 19 January 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 1, ATL. Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1904).

⁷² Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 12 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁷³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 28 December 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. Joseph Conrad, *Personal Record* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1912).

⁷⁴ Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (London: Grant Richards, 1903).

⁷⁵ See Barkas Reading Database.

about Butler by Mrs R.S. Garnett.⁷⁶ Like *Nostromo*, Barkas had read *The Way of All Flesh* before, in December 1911. His judgement then was:

Samuel Butler appears to have begun writing this book just when “Erewhon” was published, 1872; it is the story of Ernest Pontifex, - really his own family story – in which he deals with Religion and Society on wider scale than in “Erewhon”; philosophic even humorous, certainly clever.”⁷⁷

Figure 1.4

Fred Barkas walking on Stafford Street, carrying a book, 19 January 1932

Source: Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 1, ATL.

These examples highlight that reading cultures are often little-organised and more lively, unexpected and complex than can be traced from more traditional sources such as library, bookseller or other institutional records. A localised study based on personal records, like the Barkas archive, might not offer broad reading trends of a large number of readers, but allows close-up and detailed insights into actual book use and reading practices as they happen in particular places. The conversations about reading, the choice of books, the particular responses to books including recommendations to other readers are vital parts of reading cultures, but, as has been noted in the introduction to this thesis, are often difficult to trace in the historical record.

⁷⁶ Entry for 13 December 1927, in notebook of books read, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 5, ATL. Martha Roscoe Garnett, *Samuel Butler and His Family Relations* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1926).

⁷⁷ List of books read for December 1911, in MS-Papers-2491-08, ATL. Samuel Butler is one of the few “New Zealand” authors Barkas read. He also read books by George Vernon Hudson, Arthur Dudley Dobson, OTJ Alpers, Alan Mulgan, Henry Scott, Walter D’Arcy Cresswell, G.B. Lancaster [Edith Lyttleton], Fred A. de la Mare, Sidney Wyndham Fitzherbert, Margory Nicholls and Guthrie Smith. See Barkas Reading Database.

Another, less formal, yet very social and public space to meet and talk about books was the local restaurant 'The "Hydro Grand Hotel"', where Barkas frequently spent his evenings (except Sunday nights) dining with friends, acquaintances or visitors to Timaru. After dinner, guests often retired to the upstairs premises to smoke and chat about the latest political, cultural or personal news. On one such evening in 1918, Barkas recorded that

the talk came round to books – it has a way of doing it. Jones considered it was not a wise thing to read too much – it so unsettled your ideas & convictions; Mrs. Edgar rather feared that most modern books (by which I fancy she meant the ordinary novel of the circulating library – I saw "Greatheart" of Mrs. Dell lying on the table) were hardly desirable reading. "I never read any books" was Phyllis's contribution to the conversation.⁷⁸

Even over supper on a Friday night, the talk came to reading, and literature, arts and music were common themes. Reading as an activity as well as talk about reading were part of the sociability and social exchange within the local community in Timaru.

Although Barkas did not comment any further on what he thought about the conversation, he was aware of distinctions in cultural taste. On the basis of other evidence in his letters, it is reasonable to suggest that Barkas would have agreed neither with Mr Jones nor Mrs Edgar about the dangers or uselessness of reading too much in general and of reading novels in particular. By pointing out that the dangers of novel reading were in relation to Ethel M. Dell's *Greatheart* – an "ordinary novel of the circulating library" – Barkas implied that Mrs Edgar's judgement about reading and novels was limited to a particular genre and could hardly hold true for all novels. This episode is interesting as an indicator of the different kinds and qualities of reading cultures in Timaru. The popular fiction stock of circulating libraries in general and books by Ethel M. Dell in particular were not books Barkas would have chosen, despite the fact that he read rather indiscriminately and was usually open to recommendations. Earlier, he had confessed to Mary that he was "not acquainted" with the work of this author. His remarks on this occasion also suggest that Dell and her romance stories did not conform to his literary taste: "The other very 'popular' writer with whose work I am also not acquainted is a Mrs Dell of Sydenham – quite an elderly lady (so Blanche [Hall] says) who only discovered her talent, or her public, I don't know which, quite late in life; her books I am told are also 'much read'."⁷⁹

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⁷⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 4 October 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Ethel M. Dell, *Greatheart* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918).

⁷⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 13 July 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

The conversation about Ethel M. Dell and novels of the circulation-library type over dinner at the Hydro Grand Hotel suggests that it mattered to Barkas who recommended books, whether he trusted these recommendations and whether they conformed to his own literary taste. Neither Mr Jones nor Mrs Edgar belonged to his regular reading network or to any of his other reading communities. This suggests that Barkas usually enjoyed or valued books recommended by his trusted peers more than titles suggested by people he did not know very well, but the evidence is not conclusive enough. What the letters do tell us is that Barkas was more likely to read a book recommended to him if he knew the other reader and was able to judge the recommendation through experience, familiarity and shared tastes. It is also reasonable to suggest that he was more likely to be alerted to books by his close network of reading friends than by people he did not know well. A rapport had to be established first before reading matter and recommendations were exchanged. In this regard, it is useful to note that one key conduit for recommending book titles was Barkas's relationship with his adult daughter Mary after she moved to London. Their relationship as well as the role of reading within it will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

READERS' NETWORKS AND ACCESS TO READING MATERIAL

A major function of Barkas's readers' network was to provide access to reading material. Recommendations for books and lending to one another were key practices in establishing, fostering and using connections. These relationships were reciprocal: Barkas recommended books to other readers, and adopted many recommendations suggested by others. Of the 829 book and periodical titles read by Barkas between 1909-1913, 1917-1922 and 1927-1932, Barkas explicitly stated who had recommended the book to him for 105 titles, or almost thirteen per cent of all entries. This number does not include all books borrowed from other readers, which needs to be added as an indirect way of recommending reading. Most of those recommendations were by the librarian Evelyn Culverwell (forty-three), although this number includes books she "handed" to him to test and report back whether suitable for circulation. The other most significant readers to recommend books to Barkas were his daughter Mary (seventeen), William Alexander (eleven) and Percy Watts Rule (seven). Again, these numbers have to be interpreted with care. Mary recommended many more titles to him, by discussing them in her letters. This number only includes instances in which Barkas

explicitly stated the book, which he read, was recommended by her. Four titles Barkas recorded as having been recommended by “everybody”; the remaining recommendations were by nineteen other readers, all suggesting only one to three titles. Despite these qualifications, these numbers are indicative of two things: an inner circle of readers within Barkas’s network, who were more significant to his reading and recommended more titles, and Barkas’s engagement within a wider network of readers, following individual suggestions by a large number of different readers.

Connections amongst readers were significant not only for knowing what to read, but for accessing reading material. Books were passed around and friends approached for particularly desired titles. Of the 829 books and periodicals read by Barkas during the period 1909-1913, 1917-1922 and 1927-1932, he recorded for 391 titles how and where he obtained them.⁸⁰ Of these, 195 he accessed through the public library. A significant proportion of his reading material – 125 titles, or one third of all reading material with identified provenance – Barkas borrowed from other readers in Timaru, most of them belonging to his network. Again, a core group of close reading friends emerges: Percy Watts and Kathleen Rule lent Barkas twenty-one titles; William Alexander fourteen; Dr Unwin lent him twenty-two titles, mainly plays during the late 1920s when both were involved in drama groups; William Thomas offered seven titles; and Lilian and Blanche Hall lent him five books. The remaining titles borrowed were supplied by thirty-seven other readers, a remarkably large number, suggesting extensive local networks. Only ten per cent of the books read by Barkas with identified provenance were in his possession. This fits with his self-proclaimed dislike of not wanting “to pile up ‘belongings’.”⁸¹ Barkas was an avid reader, but he was not a book collector. The chart below gives a breakdown for the source of books read by Barkas while living in Timaru.

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⁸⁰ For the purpose of analysing access to reading material, all book titles and periodical issues included in the Barkas Reading Database have been counted only once, even when several entries over a number of days recorded the reading of a title over a sustained time period. If Barkas re-read a title after a substantial period of time had elapsed since the first reading, the title has been included again in this count, as Barkas had to access to book or periodical anew.

⁸¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 2 August 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. Barkas did buy books, though there are few references to this in the letters. In 1925 he gifted a number of books to the Timaru Public Library, as well as to the Boys’ High School Memorial Library and to the Girls’ High School. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 23 March 1925, MS-Papers-2491-33, ATL.

Figure 1.5

Provenance of books read by Fred Barkas, 1909-1932

* “own copy” includes books Barkas noted as in his possession or recorded as bought (2)

Other: 1 book borrowed from the Christchurch Public Library
 1 book found on smoking table while on holiday
 1 book belonged to Mary Barkas
 1 book lent by a fellow traveller while on holiday

Source: Barkas Reading Database

As is evident from the interviews conducted for *Australian Readers Remember*, lending and borrowing amongst friends and family networks were also important ways of accessing books for Australian readers in the same period.⁸² There, however, Lyons and Taksa conclude, lending amongst readers was more crucial in rural areas. “Middle-class urbanites”, Lyons and Taksa note, seemed “very hostile towards book lending.”⁸³ Other Australian readers remembered borrowing books from other readers because they were either too poor or resided in too remote areas to buy books or use public libraries.⁸⁴ Fred Barkas and the custom of sharing reading material within his readers’ network suggest, however, that lending books was not just a result of access issues. Barkas obtained a large proportion of his reading through the public library, and so did other readers in Timaru. Barkas and his friends belonged to the middle classes in economic terms and were able to afford buying books if desired, at least a certain

⁸² Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*.

⁸³ Ibid., 125.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 115.

proportion. Yet, for the Timaru readers in this network, lending books and periodicals was both a function of the network and helped establish connections between readers in the first place. Recommending and lending books therefore were elements of sociability and friendships within the local community and helped constitute readers' networks and communities.

PRIVATE SPACES, FRIENDSHIPS AND ENDURING CONNECTIONS

The recommendation and lending patterns in Barkas's network suggest that the nature of the personal connections within readers' networks varied. As the patterns indicated, a large number of readers recommended or lent one or two book titles, while a small core of readers exchanged material and engaged in discussion much more extensively. Accidental meetings in public spaces as discussed earlier in the chapter often led to one-off transactions, establishing connections that were transitory, momentary or episodic. A dinner companion at the Hydro Grant Hotel might recommend a title, or offer a book, but that connection was not part of or constituted a longer-lasting personal relationship. The inner core of Barkas's network also connected in public spaces, at times incidentally. More often, however, and as part of enduring and affectionate relationships, they met in the private spaces of each others' homes and shared their reading by frequent discussion as well as shared reading practices.

The members of the network for whom reading constituted part of friendships often moved in several overlapping spaces of leisure, work and reading. An afternoon playing golf could turn into an evening at a friend's home talking books. A typical evening spent with Percy and Kathleen Rule in July 1922 involved talking about books and music, singing and borrowing new reading matter. The following excerpt illustrates the interconnectedness of reading with other activities and the constancy of reading in Barkas's life.

Percy Rule passed me on the [golf] links and called out "Are you coming up to night"; and I answered, "With Pleasure" [...]

I had a most interesting evening with Mr. & Mrs. Rule – only the three of us, and we sat around the fire in comfortable chairs talking golf, music, personal gossip (Mrs. English has resigned from her Saturday morning job with the "Herald" and has been appointed as "Lady Editor" with a room at the office for herself – and supplies daily a "Ladies' column") and BOOKS. Mrs. Rule got a great bargain in music during her recent visit to Ch.ch., to wit, Eight Volumes of Ditson's Music Lovers' Library (published in Boston @1 dol.50) for TEN SHILLINGS; she is taking lessons in technic [sic] from Mrs Mangos

and seemingly with benefit, for she played us some Scarlati and some Greig very artistically – then she sang for me some half doz. out-of-the-common songs (I didn't take a note of them at the time so can't remember exact titles & composers – one was a Rimsky Korsakof, two were by someone named Carpenter – NOT Edward of the Simple Life – and three were from a collection of Slavic folk songs, reminiscent of Korbay) which, she says, her ordinary "Parlour" friends don't seem to appreciate or like. Tea & more talk round the fire and I came away sometime after 11 (reminded me of you & me at the Whites, the road & street lights were out) taking – i.e. bringing, - with me Edward Carpenter's "Coming of Age of Love", and A. Ed. Newton's new book "The Magnificent Farce". My book stand is getting rather crowded with books for present reading, before I went to bed that night – Sunday morning, I should say, - I dipped into Sidney Dark's "Outlines of H.G. Wells" and finished it before I got to bed this morning [following day] – it's a very interesting book and throws a good deal of explanatory light on Wells' mentality & his development; if you have not already come across it, I fancy it would interest you.⁸⁵

Percy Watts Rule was a keen book collector and happy to share his collection, as well as knowledge about particular books and authors. A month earlier, in June 1922, Barkas had also spent the evening with Rule.

Saturday evening I spent over the fire at Rule's – no one else there – we talked books & music & prints & libraries most of the time; I mentioned that you'd sent me the play bill for "Reigen" and at once Percy brought out a neat, new little book of Schnitzler's Plays (English translations) but "Reigen" was not in it. It's simply wonderful the collection of books P. Watts Rule is getting together; for a year or more he has been corresponding with A. Edward Newton (of New York) and has now got "The Amenities of Book Collecting" (price One Guinea) published by John Lane, 1920 which I have been allowed to bring home with me – and in which I've been revelling at all odd moments since (not to mention from 10 pm. last night till near 1 am. this morning.) – it is a book that would be a delight to you – both of you [Mary and Percy W. Rules] being lovers of the Charing Cross Rd. book shops: I've read, over my breakfast, his chapter on Lamb & Miss Frances Maria Kelly entitles "What Might Have Been" – and over lunch I expect I shall read his chapter James Boswell – "His Book". Meanwhile, as you may judge "His Book" (Life of Samuel Johnson) is in abeyance.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 July 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. The reference to Edward Carpenter "of the Simple Life" is to Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, and Other Essays* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1889). Barkas had read *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* as well as several other works by Edward Carpenter during July 1922, being thoroughly impressed to conclude "they contain so much that I, myself am inclined to preach on Simplification of Living." Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 12, 18 and 24 July 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. The other titles mentioned are Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming-of-Age: a Series of Papers on the Relations of the Sexes* (Manchester: Labour Press, 1896); A. Edward Newton, *A Magnificent Farce and Other Diversions of a Book Collector* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921); Sidney Dark, *The Outline of Wells: the Superman in the Street* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1922).

⁸⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 19 June 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. In a letter three years later, also telling of an evening spent talking about "books, pictures, drawings & etchings", Barkas wrote that Rules's library was "a wonderful collection". Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 23 March 1925, MS-Papers-

Readers visited each other at their homes, either unannounced to return or borrow reading material, or planned to share an evening of reading and socialising. A decade later, Barkas recorded such casual visits in his letter to Mary: “While I was enjoying the cool of the dying daylight and the balmy, breezeless darkening night resting wrapped in my light rug in my deck chair on the verandah” he wrote, “I had calls from two passing visitors (1) Marion Hay bringing back my *West Coast Story* & (2) J.P. Newman, on his way to town, to leave me a bundle of ‘*New Statesman*’.”⁸⁷ Both Hay and Newman were friends of Barkas, with whom he shared other leisure interests, in particular music. The reference to his “*West Coast Story*” – a volume of travel-recollections composed by Barkas – also suggests that readers shared their own writing.

Moreover, Hay and Newman were passing Barkas’s house because they lived in geographical proximity. Most members of Barkas’s network with whom he had longer-lasting and enduring connections, lived within a walkable radius in Timaru, the exception being Dr Unwin, who lived in Glen-iti, a few kilometres out of town. The map below presents the geography of Barkas’s reading network, in which many of the reading connections were established. The blue spot marks Barkas’s home in Hewling Street, just across from Caroline Bay, a favoured swimming beach. The homes of his friends are marked in green; and public reading spaces including the library, the Hydro hotel, the South Canterbury Club and Stafford Street, where most booksellers were located, are marked in red.⁸⁸

2491-33, ATL. A. Edward Newton, *The Amenities of Book-Collecting and Kindred Affections* (London: John Lane, 1920; first published: Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1918).

⁸⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 23 March 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 1, ATL.

⁸⁸ The private residences of members of the Barkas readers’ network are based on entries in the *New Zealand Post Office Directories* for the years 1914, 1927, 1932. Several private addresses were also listed in the minute book of the Timaru Orchestral Society, of which many members of the network were subscribers. Timaru Orchestral Society, 4/1, Minute Book, SCM.

Figure 1.6

The geography of Barkas's readers' network in Timaru

Source: Detail from map of Borough of Timaru, South Canterbury, 1911 (revised 1926), Ref. G75.2, Canterbury Museum, Christchurch.

Readers within this Timaru network shared their reading by talking about books and pamphlets, and recommending and borrowing material which enabled sequential consumption of texts. They also shared simultaneous reading experiences by reading aloud in the company of each other. Barkas often recorded that he had spent the

evening reading aloud to and with friends, in particular his close friends Lilian and Blanche Hall. More often than not, he read to the Halls, and it also seems that he chose the material he wanted to share with them; usually periodical articles of a political nature. One night in August 1918, after he got home from spending the evening with some other friends, the barrister Francis J. Rolleston and his wife Mary, he sat down to his usual night-time read, in this instance the June number of the *Round Table*. He particularly liked the first article in it, “The Ordeal”, which he thought was a “wonderfully well done review of the situation during the months March/May”, referring to the events of World War One.⁸⁹ He assumed that Mary must have read it some time ago, but concluded that “all the same it strikes me as well worth a careful second reading – which I shall in all likelihood do by reading it aloud some night to the Halls.”⁹⁰ Barkas did not record reading the article to the Halls, but a few weeks later he read to them Lionel Curtis’s *The Problem of the Commonwealth*.⁹¹ Between July 1917 and August 1919, Barkas mentioned twenty-three instances of reading aloud with the Halls or other friends.⁹²

Reading aloud to family and friends as a collective reading experience is perhaps the most powerful way of connecting to other readers through reading. Reading aloud was a constant element in Barkas’s reading practices, either with friends who were part of his readers’ network in Timaru after 1909, or with his wife Amy early in their marriage during the 1890s while living in Christchurch and with his daughter Mary while she was growing up. At the beginning of the twentieth century, reading aloud “as a social practice” was still widespread.⁹³ As Roger Chartier has noted, reading aloud serves the function “of cementing the interlocking forms of sociability that are emblematic of private life in the intimacy of the family circle, in worldly conviviality, and in literary circles and spheres of scholarly sociability.”⁹⁴ Reading, Chartier stresses, is “the bond and the expression of social ties.”⁹⁵ In Barkas’s social life reading aloud was vital to the sociability of his networks and to the intimacy of some of his friendships.

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⁸⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 12 August 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 30 September 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Lionel Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1915).

⁹² Barkas Reading Database, July 1917 to August 1918, extracted from MS-Papers-2491-27, -28 and -29, ATL.

⁹³ Stephen Colclough and David Vincent, “Reading,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume 6: 1830-1914*, ed. David McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 283.

⁹⁴ Chartier, *The Order of Books*, 8.

⁹⁵ Chartier, “Frenchness in the History of the Book,” 323.

LOCAL READERS' NETWORKS – LOCAL AND GLOBAL READING COMMUNITIES

This chapter's description of the local readers' network of Fred Barkas opened with an example of a book, that all the "reading' people" in Timaru were talking about.⁹⁶ Referred to as "Kidd's new book" on the streets of Timaru, the talk concerned Benjamin Kidd's *The Science of Power*. The reading and discussion of *The Science of Power* within this readers' network in Timaru serves as an example of how the reading of one particular title could create a "reading community" through the more or less simultaneous reading of the text. As we will see, this local reading community also participated in a broader reading community of the British Empire and beyond.

Barkas heard about "Kidd's new book" for the first time in February 1919, telling Mary that "Mrs. Smithson is full of it", and that he was stopped on the street by a friend (Clarry), and told that he "must read it."⁹⁷ Usually receptive to recommendations, he did not pick up the book, however, until a few months later, in June 1919, when it was still a topic amongst the literati in Timaru. While having supper with his friends the Halls, he took the chance of borrowing their copy of the book, which, as Barkas remarked to Mary, "everybody (reading body, I mean) seems to have read – doubtless you have too."⁹⁸ He began reading it a couple of days after taking it home. His first impressions were: "It's interesting, so far, but not exactly easy, his argument about the disastrous effects of Darwinism as applied to the Military State in Germany & the Commercial State in England has come upon me as an awakening surprise."⁹⁹ However, in July he had still not finished it: "so many interesting or attractive books came along" that it "had been pushed aside".¹⁰⁰ Apparently, it had not succeeded in grabbing Barkas's attention, who often finished a book within one or two days. Finally, on a Sunday

⁹⁶ This is Fred Barkas's term, Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 February 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁹⁷ He began talking about the book in his letter to Mary in his frequent style of asking her whether she had already read it. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 February 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. There is little information about Clarry or Mrs Smithson. During 1918 and 1919 Barkas mentioned several times that he dined with Mr Clarry at the Hydro. Mrs Smithson was likely the wife of Samuel Frederick Smithson, barrister and solicitor in Timaru. *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 3, 990.

⁹⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 June 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ In the meantime, Barkas had read the following, mostly non-fiction, books: William John Locke, *The Rough Road* (London: John Lane, 1918); "Sapper", *The Human Touch* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918); Henry Bordeaux, *The Fear of Living* (London: Dent, 1914); Samuel Butler, *The Notebooks of Samuel Butler* (New York: Kennerley, 1913); Rose Macaulay, *What Not: A Prophetic Comedy* (London: Constable & Co, 1918); W.J. Dawson, *The Father of a Soldier* (London: John Lane, 1918); William Henry Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago* (London: J.M. Dent and sons, 1918), H.M. Hyndman, *The Awakening of Asia* (London: Cassell, 1919) and G.D.H. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry* (London: G. Bell, 1917). He also felt he did not "need to hurry over it", as the Halls were happy for him to keep it as long as he wanted. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 July 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

evening in August, over three weeks later, he was able to tell Mary that he had finished *The Science of Power* that afternoon, but the argument did not strike him as realistic and plausible:

[H]e certainly makes out a strong case for his theory that the emotion of the ideal if impressed on the young would be the ruling factor of social heredity & the engine for pushing civilization ahead – but to carry it out all teachers, preachers, writers, politicians & propagandists & priests would have to be agreed upon the ideal, the emotion of or for which has to be stirred up in the young. I suppose you have read the book?¹⁰¹

While most readers of his network had reviewed the book favourably and several other readers had recommended it to him, Barkas was not convinced by the book's argument. Nevertheless, he wanted to hear Mary's opinion. That he addressed Mary directly, assuming that she had also read the book, is noteworthy. He often concluded his reflections on reading matter by asking her whether she knew the title or suspecting she would have seen the book already.

Barkas was not alone in his critical judgement of Kidd's latest work. Reviews in popular British and American newspapers and periodicals were mixed, though "overwhelmingly favourable".¹⁰² The virtues of the book, however, were found in the book's writing style and the controversial and thought-provoking content, and less so in the quality of the argument. *The Times Literary Supplement* judged that Kidd carried the reader "away as a prophet", but was unconvincing "as a philosopher". "*Nature* ... summed it up as 'a vigorous, sometimes impassioned, statement of convictions, rather than a reasoned argument.'"¹⁰³ Contemporary scholars were particularly sceptical about Kidd's methodology and "anti-rationalism"; they condemned the book's limited application of Social Darwinism and were doubtful about its "claim for the superiority of woman."¹⁰⁴

The Science of Power dominated conversations about reading in Timaru for a few months in 1919, and was a local bestseller. It received wide attention throughout New Zealand at the time of publication and was still being debated years later by various audiences. In April 1920, a meeting of the Anglican clergy in the Waiapu diocese, on the east coast of the North Island, discussed the book along with the equally pressing issues

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¹⁰¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 17 August 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

¹⁰² D. P. Crook, *Benjamin Kidd: Portrait of a Social Darwinist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 362.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 364, 370.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 364, 368.

of “Parish Difficulties” and “The Religious Atmosphere of Our Churches”.¹⁰⁵ Several women’s organisations appropriated Kidd’s book because of its argument advancing the central capacity of women for the progress of civilisation and it was also the subject of a lunch-time talk at the Rotary Club in Wellington in 1923.¹⁰⁶ How many copies there were in circulation in Timaru at the time when it dominated the literary conversations within Barkas’s network in 1919 is unclear. Barkas had borrowed his copy from his friends Lilian and Blanche Hall, and conceivably they were happy to lend it to other readers also. It is unclear whether the public library held a copy; acquisition records have only survived for the period after 1925 and copies of book orders only until 1910. Perhaps readers bought a copy from one of the local booksellers, either from P.W. Hutton & Co; Percy Coates; or Edward and H. Schnack, all in business on Stafford; or from Kennedy Armstrong on Church Street.¹⁰⁷ Or perhaps readers had a copy sent from a bookseller in Christchurch or Wellington, a practice Barkas occasionally resorted to. What we do know is that *The Science of Power* was widely read and debated in Timaru, in New Zealand and in the rest of the British, and the wider English-speaking, world. According to a biography of Benjamin Kidd, the book “sold well”.¹⁰⁸ Between 1917 and 1920 the publisher Methuen “brought out nine printings totalling 23,500 copies”, an exceptionally high number of copies within a period of four years.¹⁰⁹ Sales of the American edition, produced by Putnam, however, were disappointing.¹¹⁰

When Barkas made a note of his thoughts on Kidd’s book in his letter to Mary, he addressed her directly, assuming that she had also read the book. As stated above, he often concluded his reflections on reading matter by asking her whether she knew the title or suspecting she would have seen the book already. By assuming Mary had read *The Science of Power* already, as most of the “reading people” in Timaru, he included her in his reading community, despite the fact that her geographical location was far

¹⁰⁵ “H.B. Clerical Society,” *Waiapu Church Gazette*, 1 April 1920, 274.

¹⁰⁶ “Woman’s Place in the Future,” *Grey River Argus*, 17 February 1920, 2; “National Defence: Women’s Meeting at Lower Hutt,” *Evening Post*, 1 July 1920, 3; “Women in Print,” *Evening Post*, 8 October 1921, 10 and “Fittest to Survive: Moral and Spiritual Factors,” *Evening Post*, 6 February 1923, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Rogers and Rogers, *Turning the Pages*, 129. *Wise’s New Zealand Post Office Directory 1927*, 2402-2404.

¹⁰⁸ Crook, *Benjamin Kidd*, 361.

¹⁰⁹ Philip Waller notes, citing a pamphlet by Michael Joseph on the “commercial side of literature” (published in 1925), that “the average successful book” in this period sold between 2,000 and 3,000 copies; a book that sold between 5,000 and 10,000 could “be regarded as a substantial success, and over 10,000 as an outstanding success.” Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers, & Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 638. This is confirmed by Alexis Weedon’s research, which shows the average print run of books in 1916 was 3,406. Weedon, *Victorian Publishing*, 49.

¹¹⁰ The first six print runs were 1,500 each, the seventh printing ran to 3,000, the eight printing to 4,000 and the last printing in 1920 amounted to 7,500 copies. Crook, *Benjamin Kidd*, 361, 434 n36.

removed. In this way, the space of Barkas's reading community was not solely a geographical one, but also a mental space, in which the physical location of participating readers became secondary.

CONCLUSION

Barkas's record of reading allows glimpses into the reading practices of middle-class, educated readers in Timaru. It does not allow us any detailed insights into the reading practices of readers belonging to different classes, or even other middle-class readers who were not part of his networks. The existence of private subscription and circulation libraries and church-related reading groups as well as Barkas's involvement with the Workers' Educational Association's literature classes – discussed in chapter four – suggest there were other reading communities than the one detailed in this chapter. His is the record of a network of readers, defined by class, social status, geographical proximity, education, literary taste and shared leisure interests. This informal network facilitated exchange of materials, discussion of reading, and at times overlapped with other reading communities, based on the reading of specific texts or genres.

Other reading networks and communities existed in Timaru at the same time. For example, Barkas interacted with members of the working classes through his position with the Loan and Mercantile Agency, an agency for many station owners and runholders. But he did not socialise with working-class men or women in his leisure time, and it appears he had little notion what these sections of the local community were reading. There are no references about him exchanging literary views with working-class readers in the public library, for instance, a place he frequented weekly. Because of the nature of the information available in existing sources it is impossible to establish a breakdown of the users of the library according to occupation and class. While he occasionally made more general comments about the intellectual capabilities of readers in Timaru, these comments were primarily based on his assumptions and perceived superiority than on actual experiences and knowledge.¹¹¹

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¹¹¹ See for example, Barkas's conclusion after he tested Hugh de Selincourt, *A Soldier of Life* (London: Constable, 1916) for the library: "It's clever, it's subtle, it tries its best to be quite honest about things but it ends on a plane of transcendental, poetic idealism. I think there might be 20 or possibly 25 people in Timaru who might read it with some appreciation and understanding, but I feel sure it would bore the ordinary week-end novel reader." Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 30 April 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

Barkas's readers' network, as it emerges from the letters to his daughter Mary, connected in a variety of spaces, often in a spontaneous, informal and un-organised sort of way. Readers participated in networks for a number of reasons: as part of their individual and collective interests as readers, as part of affectionate relationships and friendships, to enjoy sociability, to access reading recommendations and material, and ultimately to participate in a wider reading world through social reading. They connected to each other in public and private spaces, some of them, like the golf course, the street or the restaurant, not explicitly places designated for reading. The mixture of spontaneous and episodic connections, and enduring relationships within the network meant that membership was – to some extent – fluid, and the network was constantly being remade and re-shaped. Barkas's readers' network, however, did not operate in isolation from others, locally and globally. The subsequent chapters in this thesis will discuss these reading connections through space, and within organised reading communities in more detail. The next chapter turns to the public library in Timaru, a significant place of reading connections and reading practices.

CHAPTER TWO

A PLACE OF CONNECTIONS: THE TIMARU PUBLIC LIBRARY

A significant site of reading in Timaru during the period 1890-1930 was the municipal public library. The Timaru Public Library was an institution that was the product of local and empire-wide debates about the provision of reading material for the newly-emerged mass reading public. Within local communities, public libraries were places of civic pride, the “cynosure of all eyes” and the centre of intellectual life.¹ Through the provision of reading material, public libraries were also nodes in local and global webs of reading. Libraries provided reading material to a wide range of readers, thus supporting various reading communities. Libraries also provided space for reading within their walls. As we have seen in chapter one, libraries were places in which readers connected personally with other readers, and as this chapter will show, libraries were places where readers connected with reading cultures and communities beyond the local, as well as with books and reading material.

Those who conceived of the design of public libraries in this period envisaged more than just storage places for books.² As Stephen Colclough points out, “the free municipal provision of books was a landmark of the late Victorian urban civilisation.”³ In Britain, the public library movement in the second half of the nineteenth century arose within the context of prevailing ideas about self-improvement and the need for further education. The provision of reading material came to be seen as a civic entitlement. A number of legislations enabled municipalities to collect rates for the purpose of public libraries.⁴ Similar legislation in New Zealand also formed the base for public libraries, including the Timaru Public Library. The Timaru library was often

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¹ Simon Pepper, “Storehouses of Knowledge: The Free Library Movement and the Birth of Modern Library Architecture,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Vol. 3: 1850-2000*, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 585. Pepper is citing a contemporary account of public libraries in J.J. Ogle, *The Free Library: Its History and Present Condition* (London: G. Allen, 1897).

² Ibid.

³ Colclough and Vincent, “Reading,” 303.

⁴ Thomas Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1975*, 2nd ed. (London: Library Association, 1977), 3-66; Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts. 1850-1914* (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1996); Alistair Black, *The Public Library in Britain, 1914-2000* (London: The British Library, 2000); Robert Snape, “Libraries for Leisure Time,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Vol. 3: 1850-2000*, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

singled out for praise. By the early 1930s, John Barr and Ralph Munn concluded in their influential survey of New Zealand public libraries that “Timaru is serving its residents more adequately than any other place.”⁵

Recent scholarship on the development and role of public libraries in this period recognises that libraries “are places that are greater than the sum of their books.”⁶ As Alistair Black, Simon Pepper and Kaye Bagshaw write, libraries are also “a series of inter-related spaces where meaning is constructed and conveyed, where people communicate and where complex signification practices occur.”⁷ This chapter explores the municipal public library as a place of connections in relation to readers and reading. Drawing on the records of the Timaru Public Library in conjunction with the Barkas archive, the chapter begins by providing a brief background of the establishment of the Timaru Public Library, before exploring its role as a reading place within the community. The chapter examines what kind of reading material the library provided. The major divisions of the library were its newspaper reading rooms, its book lending department, the reference department, and increasingly after the 1910s the provision of reading material for children. The discussion will focus on who used the library collection, and what reading practices readers engaged in. The chapter also explores how the use of the library space and the collection was regulated.

CARNEGIE IN TIMARU: INTRODUCING THE TIMARU PUBLIC LIBRARY

On the afternoon of 3 June 1909, crowds gathered for the official opening of the new Timaru Public Library building. After speeches by the mayor James Craigie, the president of the Mechanics’ Institute W.H. Foden, the wife of the building’s architect Mrs Walter Panton, and another representative of the Mechanics’ Institute, John Hardcastle, the public was officially welcomed into the new public library, and “nothing but favourable comments were heard.”⁸ Occupying a large corner section at the junction of George and Latter Streets, in the town centre, the new two-storey building

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⁵ Ralph Munn and John Barr, *New Zealand Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for Their Improvement* (Christchurch: Libraries Association of New Zealand, 1934), 27.

⁶ Alistair Black, Simon Pepper, and Kaye Bagshaw, *Books, Buildings and Social Engineering: Early Public Libraries in Britain from Past to Present* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 1.

⁷ Ibid. See also Gloria J. Leckie and John E. Buschman, “Space, Place, and Libraries: An Introduction,” in *The Library as Place: History, Community, and Culture*, ed. John E. Buschman and Gloria J. Leckie (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Limited, 2007).

⁸ “The Public Library: The Opening Ceremony,” *Timaru Herald*, 4 June 1909, 2.

offered an imposing sight. It presented what the contemporary British library architect Henry Thomas Hare hoped public libraries would be: “a worthy landmark” and “a dignified expression of the public spirit which has promoted it.”⁹ Less than three years later the building was extended to include room for municipal offices and additional library space (figures 2.1 and 2.2).

Figure 2.1

The Carnegie-funded Public Library, Timaru, c. 1910

Source: 7795, Postcard, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

⁹ H.T. Hare, “Some Suggestions For a Simple Architectural Plan,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 14 (1907): 344; cited in Black, Pepper, and Bagshaw, *Books, Buildings and Social Engineering*, 53.

Figure 2.2

The Municipal Building and Public Library, Timaru, c. 1920

Source: 7092, Print, Photographic, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

Timaru residents and officials celebrated the new library building and the establishment of a free public library as a sign of progress and source of civic pride. The editorial in the *Timaru Herald* on the day of the opening commented that

The possession of a free public library seems to be one of the marks which indicate that a town has reached a certain maturity, as the communal provision and use of such an institution is to some extent a luxury. [...] All over the civilised world, legislative provision has been made for the equipment of public libraries at the public expense, while here and there this has been done by the generosity of individuals, who thus acknowledged their personal indebtedness to the world of literature. The acquisition of a public library by Timaru, which will shortly be achieved, is a notable mark of the progress of the town.¹⁰

The new library building was the result of years of lobbying for local support and financial grants, largely by the mayor James Craigie. The Timaru Public Library Act of 1906 constituted the legal basis and enabled the insolvent Timaru Mechanics' Institute

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¹⁰ "Editorial: The Public Library," *Timaru Herald*, 4 June 1909, 4.

(founded in 1864) to be merged into the Public Library.¹¹ The Act placed the building and property, and the book stock as well as outstanding liabilities of the Mechanics' Institute, into the hands of the Borough Council on the condition that the council provided a site for a new library building and spent a sum matching the value of the Institute's property to furnish the new public library and to purchase books.¹² The new library was maintained by the Borough Council, which was entitled to collect rates of up to one penny in the pound from ratepayers for the purpose of sustaining the institution under the Libraries and Mechanics' Institutes Act of 1908. Additional funds for the upkeep of the library were generated from the Council's general income.¹³

The library building, designed by Walter Panton and built in Oamaru stone, was financed with the aid of a generous grant of £3,000 by the Scottish-born American steel magnate and library philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. Between 1886 and 1919, Andrew Carnegie and the Carnegie Corporation awarded a total of more than US\$56 million in support of 2,509 library buildings throughout the English-speaking world.¹⁴ The public library building in Victoria, British Columbia, for example, had been erected with the support of Carnegie, and opened its doors in January 1906.¹⁵ The majority of Carnegie's philanthropic efforts to create free libraries were received in the United States, where 1,679 public libraries benefited from his support. A significant number of libraries outside the United States also received grants, among them 660 in Great Britain, 116 in Canada, eighteen in New Zealand, twelve in South Africa, six in the Caribbean, four in Australia, and one each in Mauritius, Fiji and the Seychelles.¹⁶ The Carnegie scheme provided for significant amounts of funding, but attached a number of conditions to the

¹¹ Timaru Public Library Act, 1906, *New Zealand Statutes, 1906*. See also O'Connor, "The Development of the Timaru Public Library", 13-14; Andersen, *Jubilee History of South Canterbury*, 607-8.

¹² Timaru Public Library Act, 1906; see also "The Public Library and the Institute," *Timaru Herald*, 6 March 1909, 7. The value of the Mechanics' Institute's building and land was settled at £2,500. "The Public Library: the Opening Ceremony," *Timaru Herald*, 4 June 1909, 2.

¹³ Libraries and Mechanics' Institute Act, 1908, *New Zealand Statutes, 1908*.

¹⁴ George S. Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), 3, 13, 38.

¹⁵ The Carnegie-financed building of Victoria Public Library opened on 2 January 1906. *British Colonist*, 31 December 1905, 7.

¹⁶ Florence Anderson, *Carnegie Corporation: Library Program 1911-1961* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1963), 5, 94-98. Besides Timaru, the following towns and boroughs in New Zealand received a Carnegie grant in support of a new public library building: Balclutha, Gore, Dunedin, Alexandra, Fairlie, Hokitika, Westport, Greymouth, Levin, Dannevirke, Marton, New Plymouth, Hastings, Cambridge, Thames, Hamilton and Onehunga. For a brief and informative account of these libraries see Kerry Rodgers, "Carnegie's Legacy," *New Zealand Geographic* 76 (2005): 52-67. For a short account of the opening of the Levin Carnegie-financed public library building in 1911 see Francis Swanwick, "Largesse from Aboard: The Carnegie Free Library at Levin," *Historical Journal (Otaki Historical Society)* 16(1993): 42-44.

generous gift. To be successful in an application, a town had first to prove that the existing library provisions were not adequate. It then had to procure a building site, preferably in the town centre, and had to guarantee an annual upkeep of the library of a minimum of ten per cent of the grant received.¹⁷

Critics of the Carnegie Corporation took issue with the fact that Andrew Carnegie had accumulated his wealth through the capitalist means of exploiting labour and his gifts were thus “tainted money”.¹⁸ They also criticised the scheme providing money only for buildings, not for books, and argued that Carnegie was more interested in erecting built monuments of his persona rather than encouraging education.¹⁹ Several items published in the local newspaper suggested that such critical views persisted for some time after the opening of the Timaru Public Library. A letter to the editor of the *Timaru Herald* in 1916, praising the library for its “surprisingly broad and acceptable selection of reading matter” and efficient management, noted that “the few limitations of all Carnegie-aided selections exist”, but this was not surprising given that Timaru was “not yet among the chief centres of the Dominion.”²⁰ A second article in the same issue of the newspaper, summarising the latest annual report of the library to the council, doubted whether Timaruvians valued their library as much as they should. “Some feeling of reproach may have mingled with their thoughts of it as a Carnegie institution”, the article explained, “but only the bricks and the walls were actually provided by the unseen millionaire philanthropist, and the town has growing reason to feel proud of what has been placed, at its own expense, within them.”²¹ The article further highlighted the restrictions to generate revenue by the Carnegie rule “that no fee may be charged”, which hindered the purchase of more new books. In both critiques the emphasis was on the limitations imposed by the Carnegie scheme and on the good work and excellent book stock of the Timaru public library regardless.

In the run-up to the opening of the library, residents, councillors and local newspapers shared in the debate about the proper administration and role of the institution, at times referring to practices elsewhere in the empire. In a letter to the *Timaru Herald* in March 1909, “Pro Bono Publico” conveyed his experiences of using

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¹⁷ Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 38-45.

¹⁸ Abigail Ayres Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 19-21.

¹⁹ Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, 86-105.

²⁰ “Passer-by”, “Correspondence: The Timaru Library,” *Timaru Herald*, 8 March 1916, 5.

²¹ “The Timaru Public Library,” *Timaru Herald*, 8 March 1916, 6.

free public libraries in London. “Nothing seems to be known as to the method in which the free library is to be run”, he wrote. Noting that he had “lived within easy access of five free libraries in South London” and based on his “own limited knowledge of the manner of running them”, “Pro Bono Publico” was certain “that any attempt at charging for the loan of books will be met by Mr Carnegie (or his trust) with a very firm hand. The library is to be free ‘to the people of Timaru.’”²²

The Timaru Public Library was one of the earliest free public libraries in the country, offering a lending service without charge to all residents registered on the electoral roll – both male and female – of the Timaru Borough. This extended to ratepayers, as well as to residents renting property, whom the council considered to be contributing to rates indirectly. The same liberal interpretation of the term “ratepayers” was later applied in Dunedin, also a Carnegie-funded library.²³ Free access to residents had been the main condition on which the Carnegie Corporation awarded building grants. Nevertheless, as Jim Traue has noted, fifteen of the eighteen Carnegie-financed libraries in New Zealand were unwilling or unable to dedicate the necessary funds for the maintenance of the library in order to offer all services, including book lending, free of charge.²⁴ Except for Timaru, Dunedin and Alexandra, in the 1910s all other New Zealand public libraries only offered free access to their reading rooms, while charging between 2s6d and 10s6d if readers wanted to take books out.²⁵ Effectively, these public libraries operated like subscription libraries, and their dependence on members’

²² “Correspondence: The Free Library,” *Timaru Herald*, 25 March 1909, 5.

²³ Mary Ronnie, *Freedom to Read: A Centennial History of Dunedin Public Library* (Dunedin: Dunedin Public Libraries, 2008), 52. The new, Carnegie-funded Dunedin Public Library building was opened in December 1908. However, initially, only the newspaper and magazine room was operating. In November 1909, a reference department opened and in March 1910 a children’s reading room. A lending service was not established until July 1911. Ronnie, *Freedom to Read*, 49–52.

²⁴ J.E. Traue, “Sordid Duplicity or Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings?: The Fate of Andrew Carnegie’s Gifts for Free Public Libraries in New Zealand,” *Library History* 16, no. 1 (2000): 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 21–9. The charge for borrowing applied to libraries in the major centres as well as secondary towns. For example, the Wellington Public Library opened its reference section in 1893 and a lending service in 1894. While the reference section was free to access, the Wellington Public Library charged for book borrowing. This lending charge was not abolished until 1951. Mary Ronnie, *A History of Wellington Public Libraries: Administration Report* (Wellington: [no publisher], 1952), 13, 18. The other main centres in New Zealand at the time, Auckland and Christchurch, also charged for lending. The Auckland Public Library introduced a free lending service in 1946. As late as 1951 the chief librarian of the Christchurch Public Library suggested a combined subscription/free lending system, with “serious literature” to be borrowed free of charge and “popular” fiction only available for home reading through a yearly subscription membership or a one-off rental charge. Wynne Colgan, *The Governor’s Gift: The Auckland Public Library, 1880–1980* (Auckland: Richards Pub. and Auckland City Council, 1980), 85; Glenda Northey, “Accessible to All? Libraries in the Auckland Provincial Area, 1842–1919” (MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1998). R.N. O’Reilly, “Special Report on Canterbury Public Library,” unpublished, November 1951, Archive 52, Christchurch City Library.

subscriptions was often seen as unfavourably influencing their book stocks towards an emphasis on “popular” and “light” fiction.²⁶

An exceptionally high number of Timaru residents made use of the library. Within two years of opening the new building, 1,638 readers were enrolled, almost fifteen per cent of the population. By 1921, the roll had risen to 3,234 registered readers (over twenty per cent of the population). In their 1934 survey, Munn and Barr recorded that almost thirty per cent of Timaru residents were using the library. In comparison, other New Zealand, as well as Australian and British public libraries reached an average of ten per cent of the population.²⁷ The free lending service at the Timaru Public Library allowed adults and children to borrow one book at a time without charge. Additional books could be taken out for a yearly fee of 10s. For the same yearly fee (or a smaller fee for a shorter period), people living outside the borough or visitors were also allowed to borrow books.²⁸ Access to the reading room was free to anyone, including residents and visitors. Timaru was a popular summer-holiday destination, and holiday makers frequently made use of the library. In January 1912, the librarian noted that “there were a great many outside visitors to the library [...] who were evidently passing thro’.”²⁹ A steady number of additional subscribers was recorded in the monthly reports throughout the 1910s and 1920s. In July 1917, Culverwell remarked, “it was particularly gratifying that the number of subscribers representing people living outside the Borough, is also steadily increasing.”³⁰ By the end of that year, the library had registered twenty-one yearly and thirty-four monthly subscribers, in addition to the 2,308 library members on its roll.³¹ Two years later at the end of 1919, extra subscribers numbered forty-four yearly and 113 monthly subscribers, with 2,639 registered free

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²⁶ J.E Traue, “Fiction, Public Libraries and the Reading Public in Colonial New Zealand,” *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 28, no. 4 (2004); J.E Traue, “The Public Library Explosion in Colonial New Zealand,” *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 42, no. 2 (2007).

²⁷ Munn and Barr, *New Zealand Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for Their Improvement*, 27; Ralph Munn and Ernest Roland Pitt, *Australian Libraries: A Survey of Conditions and Suggestions for Their Improvement* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1935), 31; Alec Ellis, *Public Libraries at the Time of the Adams Report* (Stevenage: Clover Publications, 1979).

²⁸ “Comparative Return asked for by Clr. Hunt,” 5 September 1929, Letter book, TPL.

²⁹ Library Report for January 1912, TPL. In the early summer of 1920, the report noted that a number of visitors had been enrolled as subscribers. Library Report for December 1920, TPL.

³⁰ Library Report for July 1917, TPL. Culverwell made a similar comment in her Library Report for March 1919.

³¹ The summary for the year 1917 is included in the Library Report for January 1918, TPL.

borrowers.³² Although a comparatively small number, extra subscribers added some income to the library funds.³³

The administration of the public library lay in the hands of the Library Committee, consisting of the mayor of Timaru, three members of the Timaru Borough Council and three members elected by the subscribers of the library at their annual meeting held in May. The Library Committee appointed the chief librarian and other staff, and oversaw all business including setting “rules in respect of the management, control and use” of the library and reading rooms, and approval of book purchases.³⁴ The first librarian of the newly-established library was Samuel Mellows, who had previously worked as assistant at the Dunedin Athenaeum.³⁵ In October 1910, he was replaced by James Henry Chapple, a Presbyterian minister whose strong socialist views had resulted in a fall-out with his church superiors. Chapple held the position until March 1913 when he took over as minister of the newly-formed Unitarian church in the town.³⁶

In April 1913, Evelyn Culverwell was appointed chief librarian of the Timaru Public Library, the first woman to hold such a position in New Zealand.³⁷ Culverwell had previously been trained and worked as reference librarian in the Dunedin Public Library.³⁸ She remained chief librarian in Timaru for more than twenty years, retiring shortly before her death in December 1935. Her role as a link within Barkas’s reading network has already been touched on in chapter one. As this chapter will show, Culverwell was an influential figure for reading in Timaru within and beyond the Barkas circle. Her appointment in 1913, however, was somewhat controversial. The *Timaru Post* commented that “The Timaru Borough Council took a bold course [...] in appointing a woman to the position of librarian.” The editorial noted, “There are people in the street to-day who are saying that the selection of a woman means that a married man with a

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³² The summary for the year 1919 is included in the Library Report for January 1920, TPL.

³³ The only surviving account sheet among the records lists the library expenditure and income for the financial year ending March 1929. The total expenditure of just over £2,100 was matched by c. £1,910 rates transferred to the library, and £190 raised through subscriptions, fines and sales of old books. Summary of Expenditure, 13 May 1929, Letter book, TPL.

³⁴ Timaru Public Library Act, 1906, 282-3.

³⁵ “Personal Matters,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 20 February 1909, 5; “Local and General,” *Evening Post*, 22 February 1909, 6.

³⁶ Geoff Chapple, “Chapple, James Henry George – Biography,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 1-Sep-10, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3c12/1>, accessed 15 September 2011.

³⁷ O’Connor, “The Development of the Timaru Public Library”, 18.

³⁸ Culverwell was first appointed as Lady Assistant in the Dunedin Public Library in May 1909. Ronnie, *Freedom to Read*, 40, 47.

family to keep has been prevented from obtaining a living” and “that there are ‘delicate matters’ to be handled in connection with the library which can be discussed only with difficulty by a woman officer and a Borough council of men”. The *Post*, nonetheless, did not share this view and congratulated the council on having appointed a well-qualified librarian, and on “having the courage to seize its opportunity.”³⁹ Culverwell’s professional training and ethos was evident in the first action she took as chief librarian: during a three-week period in which the library was closed she reviewed and re-ordered the entire book stock and began cataloguing the “Class Books on the Dewey System.” This, she stated, would “bring the Timaru Library into line with the four leading libraries of the Dominion.”⁴⁰

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³⁹ *Timaru Post*, 6 February 1913, cited in O’Connor, “The Development of the Timaru Public Library”, 18.

⁴⁰ First Library Report by Evelyn Culverwell to the Borough Council, 7 April 1913, TPL. “Class books” included the categories biography, literature (British and foreign poetry, classics, essays and miscellaneous literature), history, geography and travel, natural science, philosophy, religion, and sociology.

Figure 2.3

Formal portrait photograph of Miss Culverwell and her dog, c. 1915

Source: 2009/070.002, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

The opening hours of the library accommodated working people. From 1909, the reference and newspaper rooms were open Monday to Saturday from 9am to 9.30pm and the lending department stayed open on the same days from 11am to 5.30pm, and 7pm to 9pm.⁴¹ After June 1913, when an additional library assistant was hired bringing the number of staff to three, the lending library opened continuously between 11am and

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⁴¹ There are some handwritten timetables for library staff among the monthly reports, which indicate the library opening hours. See timetable for January 1916, January 1917, January 1918, Timaru Public Library letter book, TPL.

9pm, a change which many library users welcomed.⁴² Saturdays were particularly busy, both in the lending department and in the reading room.⁴³ Thursday afternoons being a half holiday for many working people also brought a high number of readers to the library.⁴⁴

The library generally ordered books, magazines and newspapers through local booksellers, though there is some evidence that the library also communicated directly with newspaper proprietors (particularly those based in New Zealand) and used overseas booksellers, such as Mudies in London.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, there are few references within the library records that describe the library's book buying practices in detail. There are, however, occasional remarks within the monthly reports, as well as notes in some of Barkas's letters, that paint part of the picture. Hutton & Co, a well-established bookselling business on Timaru's Stafford Street, supplied seventy volumes in April 1911 – perhaps the first delivery of a list of 107 books passed by the library committee in February 1911 to be purchased.⁴⁶ Other references refer to shipments of books expected to arrive shortly, hinting at deliveries from England.⁴⁷ Book donations from local residents were also frequent, and an important avenue for the library to grow its collection.⁴⁸ Books in need of re-binding due to extensive use were usually sent to England for that purpose.⁴⁹

At times, local booksellers supplied a selection of books from which the library committee could choose, and return those not deemed suitable. In May 1911, the library committee accepted twenty-four volumes “sent by Huttons for approval”.⁵⁰ Among them were *Fields of Fair Renown*, *Roger Trivinion* and *The Scarlet Woman*, all three novels by Joseph Hocking, whose books were, according to Philip Waller, “well-known for their

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⁴² Library Report for June 1913, TPL.

⁴³ The Library Report for January 1912 stated: “On Saturday nights at times there has been scarcely moving room.” TPL.

⁴⁴ Library Report for March 1913, TPL.

⁴⁵ Library Report for June 1925, TPL.

⁴⁶ The report only stated the number of volumes, not the titles. Library Report for April 1911; List of books passed by committee, appended to Report by James Chapple, librarian, to the Borough Council, 20 February 1911, Letter book, TPL. There are also references to book deliveries by Hutton & Co in the reports for January 1912 and October 1926.

⁴⁷ Library Report for February 1929, TPL.

⁴⁸ See for example book donations recorded in the Library Reports for May 1913, October 1913, June 1914, January 1916, December 1916, January 1917, May 1917, June 1918, August 1920, December 1921, October 1922, June 1928 and April 1931, TPL.

⁴⁹ Library Reports for August 1926, February and July 1928, TPL.

⁵⁰ Report by James Chapple, librarian, to the Borough Council, 10 May 1911, Letter book, TPL.

‘tendency for preachiness’.⁵¹ The May 1911 selection also included four titles by the popular Victorian novelist Rosa Nouchette Carey,⁵² two books by the renowned American writer Helen Keller, including her bestselling autobiography *The Story of My Life*,⁵³ and a collection of stories by Allen Raine.⁵⁴

ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN

The exterior and interior design of the Timaru Public Library mirrored Carnegie libraries elsewhere. Situated close to the town centre, the neo-classical building offered an imposing sight. Although the Timaru library plans did not have to be approved by the Carnegie scheme – a condition that came into force in 1908 – the building shared characteristics with other Carnegie libraries. Abigail van Slyck notes, that these libraries “tended to put greater emphasis on rooms devoted to public service” rather than administration. Van Slyck examines what this unified architecture and prescribed space deemed most suitable for public libraries reveals about a prescribed set of ideas of how reading and the spread and diffusion of knowledge should operate. By the end of the nineteenth century, van Slyck shows, the library building began to be seen as an end in itself, which should not cater for too many other activities. Until the late 1880s, libraries commonly shared a space with museums, galleries, lecture halls and self-improving institutes. By the turn of the twentieth century a shift in the understanding of the role of public libraries as quiet and controlled study places led to a more strict separation between the library and other cultural or educational institutions.⁵⁵ However, this shift, particularly fostered by the Carnegie Scheme, was perhaps more successful in North America and Britain: in New Zealand the comparatively small size of many communities and a more liberal approach and attitude towards public libraries still resulted in a number of multi-utilised buildings by the 1920s.⁵⁶ That was also the case

⁵¹ Waller, *Writers, Readers, & Reputations*, 685; citing John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Burnt Mill, Harlow: Longman, 1988), 300-1. Joseph Hocking, *Fields of Fair Renown* (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1896); *Roger Trivinion* (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1905) and *The Scarlet Woman* (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1899).

⁵² Rosa Nouchette Carey, *Herb of Grace* (London: Macmillan, 1901); *At the Moorings* (London: Macmillan, 1904); *The Angel of Forgiveness* (London: Macmillan, 1907) and *The Highway of Fate* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1902).

⁵³ Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903); *The World I Live in* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908).

⁵⁴ Allen Raine, *All in a Month and Other Stories* (London: Hutchinson, 1908).

⁵⁵ Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920*.

⁵⁶ Traue, “Sordid Duplicity or Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings?”

with the Timaru Public Library. While the building initially only housed the library, after extensions in 1913, the building also accommodated the municipal chambers and a gallery.

The interior spaces in the Timaru Public Library were separated into the lending area, the newspaper and periodical reading rooms, the reference room, and later a children's room. The few surviving photographs of the library interior help visualise the spaces. Large bookcases dominated the lending area, offering open access for browsing, even though not entirely unsupervised. The lending desk, where the librarian or one of the library assistants was placed, was situated in the middle of the room. The arrangement of the bookcases around the outside walls and in straight aisles leading away from the lending desk guaranteed that the library staff could observe the library patrons (see figure 2.4). Notable is the absence of seating in the lending area, suggesting that reading in the library either happened in the newspaper or in the reference room. The reference room was a separate room off the lending area to allow for quiet study (see figure 2.5). The furnishing created an atmosphere conducive to study, while also attempting to make the space inviting. Wooden tables and chairs were placed in the middle of the rooms, with shelving along the walls. Several pictures of the library interior taken in 1915 and 1930 show paintings, maps and other decorations on the walls and on the mantelpieces. A globe, a German army helmet from World War One, two pot plants and two bottles adorned the mantelpiece in the children's reading room in the 1930s (see figure 2.6).

Figure 2.4

Timaru Public Library lending area, c. 1930

Source: 2009/070.380-2, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

Figure 2.5

Timaru Public Library entrance to the reference room, c. 1915.

Note also the main entrance to the Public Library on the right hand side.

Source: 2009/070.049, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

Figure 2.6

Timaru Public Library children's reading room, c. 1930

Source: 2009/070.380-3, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

Newspapers and periodicals occupied a large space of at least three connected rooms, furnished with a mixture of newspapers stands and angled newspaper tables, as well as flat desks (see figure 2.7). Library patrons could use the periodicals and newspapers laid out on the stands and tables without asking a librarian. After further extensions and alterations to the library building were carried out in 1913, the newspaper and periodical rooms were located downstairs and the lending and reference sections upstairs.⁵⁷ Black, Pepper and Bagshaw note that the newsrooms in British public libraries in this period were commonly located on the ground floors, so to allow quick access and not disturb other library patrons using the reference room or browsing the lending area.⁵⁸ Within the newspaper rooms, the newspaper stands were generally separated from the magazine tables. Female library users could read “ladies’ magazines” and other reading material at separate tables. In 1911, the librarian Mellows suggested a separate table for women users, referring to practices observed in other libraries in the

⁵⁷ Evelyn Culverwell to Borough Council, 9 January 1914, Timaru Public Library Letter Book, TPL.

⁵⁸ Black, Pepper, and Bagshaw, *Books, Buildings and Social Engineering*, 57.

country.⁵⁹ In a photograph taken in 1930, a sign labelled “Ladies” is visible on the wall in one of the reading rooms, designating an area of interest and for the use of women (see figure 2.8).

Figure 2.7

Timaru Public Library newspapers and periodicals section, c. 1915

Source: 2009/070.049, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

⁵⁹ Mellows referred to the Auckland Public Library. Library Report for January 1911, TPL.

Figure 2.8

Timaru Public Library newspapers and periodicals section, c. 1930

Source: 2009/070.380, South Canterbury Museum, Timaru.

NEWSPAPER AND PERIODICAL READING

One of the most visited areas of the library spaces and collections was the newspaper and periodicals room, providing local, regional and national daily newspapers, and national and international weeklies and monthlies. The newspaper room was the first part of the library to be opened in June 1909, while the opening of the reference and lending section followed after a few months. At the opening ceremony, the Mayor Craigie stated that seventy-five periodicals and journals would be received regularly, in addition to newspapers.⁶⁰ The library stocked a wide range of papers, including the local newspapers, the *Timaru Herald* and the *Timaru Post*, and other New Zealand papers, amongst them the *Dominion* (Wellington), the *Marlborough Express*, the *Sun* (Christchurch), the *Ashburton Mail*, the *N.Z. Times* (Wellington), the *Otago Witness* (Dunedin) and the *Waikato Times*. Readers could also use the Melbourne papers *The Age*, *The Argus*, *The Leader* (a weekly), and several other Australian, British and North

⁶⁰ "The Public Library: the Opening Ceremony," *Timaru Herald*, 4 June 1909, 2.

American publications.⁶¹ Newspapers usually laid on the tables for six weeks, before they were discarded or sold on.⁶² Frequently, the library passed discharged magazines to the Old Men's Home, the Seamen's Institution and to local hospitals.⁶³

The newspaper room was the predominant space within the library where readers actually read, rather than taking reading material from the library into other spaces. The monthly reports from the librarian to the Borough Council included the monthly total and daily average of people attending the newspaper room and thus offer some evidence of the popularity of this section. During the 1910s, the library reports noted between 7,000 and 8,000 visits to the newspaper room per month, with an average of approximately 270 patrons daily. After 1918, and until 1930, the monthly attendance number fell, but remained steady between 5,000 and 6,000 visits.⁶⁴ This suggests that the newspaper rooms continued to cater for a significant proportion of the population. It may also indicate, however, that readers in Timaru were increasingly able to access newspapers elsewhere or could afford subscriptions.

Except for numbers of readers attending the newspaper room, we know little of who these readers were, or why they came to read the papers in the library. Charles Johannigsmeier notes that historical newspaper and periodical reading practices in public libraries have left even fewer tangible traces than book borrowing patterns. While library records often include book borrowing statistics, newspaper reading is rarely recorded in detail.⁶⁵ This is true also for the Timaru Public Library. Johannigsmeier has suggested for the context of American public libraries that the newspaper room was heavily frequented by working-class readers. His careful analysis of acquisition records and periodical finding-lists for the period 1876 to 1914 reveals a steady increase in the number of periodical titles, brought about by the demand of a predominantly male and working-class readership.⁶⁶ The extant records for the Timaru library are too fragmented

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⁶¹ Letter by Samuel Mellows, librarian, to the manager of the *Timaru Herald* asking for two free copies for the library, 26 May 1909; and to the manager of the manager of the *Timaru Post* asking to transfer the free copies previously supplied to the Mechanics' Institute to the Public Library, 28 May 1909, Letter book, TPL. Other references to paper titles are in the Library Reports between 1911 and 1926, TPL.

⁶² Fred Barkas, for example, bought the *Spectator* from the library after the periodical had been available in the reading room for six weeks. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 14 September 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL.

⁶³ Library Reports for March 1911, April 1912, April and May 1913, TPL.

⁶⁴ Library Reports between 1913 and 1930, TPL.

⁶⁵ Charles Johannigsmeier, "Welcome Guests or Representatives of The 'Mal-Odorously Class'? Periodicals and Their Readers in American Public Libraries, 1876-1914.," *Libraries & Culture* 39, no. 3 (2004): 285-86.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 271-76.

to evaluate Johannigsmeier's argument in this context. But given the high percentage of the population registered on the library roll it is reasonable to suggest that the library attracted working-class readers. In addition, the records that we have of one of the library users, Fred Barkas, indicate that middle-class and wealthy readers were unlikely users of the newspaper room. Barkas had access to and read newspapers at the office or at the South Canterbury Club, and most of his periodical reading took place at his home or at the home of friends. Barkas had the means to subscribe to a number of periodicals, although he also borrowed some from the library.⁶⁷

An analysis of the attendance in the newspaper room according to seasonal variation also suggests a working-class readership. The average monthly attendance over the period 1913 to 1931 shows significantly higher numbers for the three-month period March to May, with March representing the peak at an average of 241 persons using the newspaper room daily, and December showing the lowest average number with 200 persons (see figure 2.9). In addition to colder weather attracting more people to the library, the peak in autumn also suggests that a number of itinerant workers used the newspaper room to consult job advertisements for seasonal work in local papers, especially given Timaru's role as provincial centre of a large pastoral area. The importance of the newspaper collection for local residents seeking work, as well as diversion, was further indicated during the depression years of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Attendance in the newspaper room and issues in the lending department increased substantially during this time. Culverwell commented that this was "probably due to the fact that unemployed people are devoting much of their spare time to reading."⁶⁸

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⁶⁷ While living in Christchurch from 1881 to 1905, and Wellington from 1905-1909, the Barkas family also belonged to the "Tui Magazine Club", a private subscription club of a number of families who shared subscriptions for a range of British and North-American magazines, including the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Pearson's Magazine*, *Munsey's Magazine*, the *Review of Reviews* (Australia), *Harper's Magazine*, *Pall Mall*, *Punch* and *The Century Illustrated*. The Barkas family seems to have been instrumental for organising the Tui Magazine Club, as the club moved with them from Christchurch to Wellington. However, there is no evidence to suggest that Barkas belonged to a similarly organised subscription arrangement in Timaru. Presumably, the access to reading material through his readers' network detailed in chapter one and through the library was sufficient. See several entries in MS-Papers-2491-07, ATL.

⁶⁸ Library Report for February 1931, TPL.

Figure 2.9

Daily average attendances at the Timaru Public Library newspaper room, 1913-1931 (in three-month periods)

Source: Timaru Public Library Reports between January 1913 and December 1931, TPL.

Evidence of newspaper and periodical readers and their reading practices appears in the monthly library reports when reading practices did not accord with expectations, either of the quantity of reading or of the way library users treated the reading material. That Timaru residents used the newspaper reading room regularly and frequently soon after it was opened was revealed in a note by the librarian James Chapple in August 1911, when he cautioned that “the immense amount of handling which some of the weeklies get such as the ChCh Press, Lyttelton Times, Otago Witness, Australasian etc makes it extremely difficult to keep them together.”⁶⁹ Repeatedly, the reports stated that the newspaper room was overcrowded, that more newspaper stands were needed and that extensions to the reading room were desirable.⁷⁰

Patrons’ usage of papers and some of their reading tastes were also revealed when papers and magazines were damaged or stolen. At times, library users cut pages of

⁶⁹ Library Report for August 1911, TPL. The daily Christchurch *Press* also published the illustrated weekly paper, *The Weekly Press*. The *Lyttelton Times*, also a daily paper, offered the weekly the *Canterbury Times*. The *Otago Witness* was published as a weekly between 1851 and 1932. The *Australasian* was a Melbourne-based weekly for Australian and New Zealand readers. Scholefield, *Newspapers in New Zealand*, 168-9, 217, 20-1, 25.

⁷⁰ Library Reports for May 1913, July 1915, September 1926, April and July 1927, TPL.

interest out of the newspapers, such as advertisements or soldiers' portraits during World War One.⁷¹ Theft, especially of weeklies or monthlies also occurred. Users either removed the papers from their covers or took the magazines entirely without leaving the covers behind. In March 1913, the librarian Culverwell noted that "the Hibbart Journal and the Edinburgh Review are constantly removed from the news room." She warned that "[i]f the public are so insensible of their privileges it will mean that these magazines will have to be withdrawn from the tables and be obtained only on application to a member of the staff."⁷² Two months later, the public had evidently not changed its behaviour as both journals were shifted to the lending library and only available if asked for.⁷³ The *Maoriland Worker*, *The Referee*, *Pearson's Magazine*, *Munsey's Magazine*, *The Strand Magazine* and *Physical Culture* were also frequently stolen, sometimes within hours of being placed on the table in the newspaper room.⁷⁴ When *The Ladies Field* was added to the ladies' table in the reading room, it was stolen within a few days.⁷⁵ The librarian suggested a reward be offered for information that could lead to the thieves. In February 1920 notices were "posted in conspicuous places in the library, with reference to theft of magazines, papers and books."⁷⁶

Mutilation of the public reading material housed by the library was not confined to newspapers and magazines. Library patrons sometimes did not return books in the same state as they had taken them out, an offence which occasionally is recorded in the library letter book. In October 1909, the librarian Samuel Mellows felt compelled to write to James Stewart about "the dirty condition of book No 1059 'The Wandering Jew' by E Sue, taken out on the 22nd of Sep and returned on the 1st last."⁷⁷ In this instance, Stewart was told that no more books would be issued to him until he had either replaced the book or paid 2s11d, the value of the book. A year later, one reader had apparently removed the "frontispiece illustration" from the book *Wireless Telegraphy*

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⁷¹ Library Report for October 1922, TPL. The role of newspaper reading and the cutting-out of soldiers' portraits during World War One will be discussed in chapter six of this thesis.

⁷² Library Report for March 1913, TPL.

⁷³ Library Report for May 1913, TPL.

⁷⁴ Library Report for September and December 1919, January, March and November 1920, March and 1921, October 1921, July 1922, April 1928, TPL.

⁷⁵ Library Report for October 1927, TPL.

⁷⁶ Library Report for February 1920, TPL.

⁷⁷ Samuel Mellows to James Stewart, 2 October 1909, Letter book, TPL. Eugène Sue, *The Wandering Jew* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1844).

and *Telephony*, and was kindly asked to return the picture.⁷⁸ In 1913, a volume of the *Standard English Dictionary* in the reference room was found “wilfully mutilated, Columns and pieces [had] been deliberately cut out.”⁷⁹

Regular inventories of the book stock revealed unpleasant gaps. “Mayhew’s Horse Doctor was stolen during the first week of the month”, Culverwell reported in October 1917. “This is a contemptible theft, as is the mutilation of Newspapers and Magazines, but I can suggest no remedy.”⁸⁰ A stock-take the following year revealed that another three books from the reference collection, five books in the lending library, and several novels were missing. One of them, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Culverwell reckoned to be “an unhappy theft, surely.”⁸¹ Book thefts continued to occur. Seventeen books were missing at the end of 1920, another eighteen at the end of 1924.⁸² There was little indication who were the thieves, but

the class of books missing clearly shows that it is not the popular books that are stolen but the books read by the thoughtful reader. The same remark applies to the books of Fiction missing. For example standard fiction which could be bought for a few pence, such as “Hucklebury [sic] Finn” by M. Twain; “The Romany Rye” by G. Borrow; “Geoffrey Hamlyn” by Chas. Kingsley, etc.⁸³

This impression seemed confirmed by the titles of the five books which were discovered missing from the reference room in July 1929: two dealing with veterinary medicine, one on refrigeration, one on watch-making and one entitled *The Art of Etching*.⁸⁴ Destruction of reading material and theft indicate that supervision by library staff had its limits. Culverwell pointed out that the layout of the reference room in

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⁷⁸ Samuel Mellows to W. Ferrier, 31 August 1910, Letter book, TPL. Arthur E Kennelly, *Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony* (New York: Moffatt, Yard, 1909). The book was evidently popular, as it was also among a number of books missing at the end of 1920. Report of stock-taking for 1920, in between Library Reports for 1920, TPL.

⁷⁹ Library Report for March 1913, TPL.

⁸⁰ Library Report for October 1917, TPL. Edward Mayhew, *The Illustrated Horse Doctor* (London: W.H. Allen, 1860).

⁸¹ Library Report for April 1918, TPL. The missing books were Philip H. Dalbiac, *Dictionary of Quotations* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1896); Robert Smith Surtees, *Mr Sponge’s Sporting Tour* (London: Bradbury, Agnew & Co, 1852); Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London: Bell, 1903); Max Norday, *Degeneration* (London: Heinemann, 1895); Washington B. Vanderlip, *In Search of a Siberian Klondike* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906); James M. Bell, *The Wilds of Maoriland* (London: Macmillan, 1914); Ovid, Henry T. Riley, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1869[?]); A.C. Benson, *Thy Rod and Thy Staff* (London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912).

⁸² Report of stock-taking for 1920, in between monthly reports, Letter book; Library Report for September 1924, TPL.

⁸³ Report of stock-taking for 1920, in between monthly reports, Letter book, TPL. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884); George H. Borrow, *The Romany Rye* (London: Murray, 1857); Henry Kingsley, *The Recollections of Geoffrey Hamlyn* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1859).

⁸⁴ Library Report for July 1929, TPL.

particular made supervision difficult.⁸⁵ Of the twelve books recorded missing from the lending department in October 1929, all but one had been shelved in an area directly behind the delivery desk, thus unsupervised. As a remedy, Culverwell had a mirror installed “just over the desk”, and thought “this may be useful as a means of supervision.”⁸⁶

CHILDREN AS READERS AND LIBRARY USERS

Soon after the library opened, it became apparent that children and young readers saw the library as a space for their reading. However, the reading practices of children collided with the interests and practices of adult readers. Children’s behaviour also clashed with the expectation of the library staff for the library to be a quiet space. In 1910 librarian Mellows had cause to write to the parents of one youthful offender who had repeatedly damaged the library’s newspapers.

I regret to have to draw your attention to the conduct of your son in the Public Library. For the last few weeks, a certain newspaper in the library has been removed from the reading stand and after a period has been discovered on one of the tables in a very torn and damaged condition. Tonight, after getting a watch for the culprit, I discovered your son in the act, and he by his own admission, has removed the said paper on each occasion. I gave him a talking to, which if backed up by a little action on your part, will no doubt put a stop to the offence in the future.⁸⁷

In 1912, the librarian Chapple urged that a special room for children was needed.

On several occasions I had to (much against my will) ask children to leave the library thro’ being unable to keep quiet. On a recent night about a dozen boys between the ages of 10 & 14 years had to be put out & I may say I was very loth to take the step. What is fair quietness for children is not so for adults. Most of the modern libraries cater in some special way for children & if children find both profit & pleasure in the library some provision should be made for them. It hardly seems the thing to put boys & girls out of the institution on to the street. But if they are allowed in they must be kept by themselves. In a modern library there should be no age limit. Brains have no definite age limit & neither should the library.⁸⁸

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⁸⁵ Library Report for July 1929, TPL.

⁸⁶ Library Report for October 1929, TPL.

⁸⁷ Samuel Mellows to W.A. Newton, 31 August 1910, Letter book, TPL.

⁸⁸ Library Report for July 1912, TPL.

When Culverwell took charge of the library in 1913, she immediately set aside a section in the lending library for children and juvenile readers.⁸⁹ In June 1914 she was able to report that “it is [...] pleasing to note the good use made of the Juvenile Section.”⁹⁰ The provision of reading material for young readers became one of the main functions of the library from the early 1910s, a development in which Timaru mirrored public libraries throughout the British and English-speaking world.⁹¹ As Kathleen McDowell has noted, the period 1890-1930 saw a rise in publishing activities specifically for children.⁹² Legislation introduced during the previous decades making primary schooling compulsory in New Zealand, Britain and throughout the Western world meant that by the 1890s most children of school-age were literate. Reading was both part of children’s education and became a popular pastime. In urban areas, public libraries, traditionally defined as educational institutions, were significant for providing reading material and spaces for reading for young people. In the 1920s throughout the British world, library services were extended to children living in rural areas through country schemes. More and more, specialised children’s librarians took charge of this aspect of the library work and systematic programmes like story-telling sessions and children’s reading circles “were introduced with the purpose of further instilling a love of reading amongst” young readers.⁹³

In the Timaru library, until the early 1920s, children were only served by a dedicated selection of books in the lending department. Throughout 1921 and 1922, Culverwell urged the Council and the library committee to consider altering or extending the building so to create more space for the lending library and a separate “Juvenile Section” in the downstairs rooms including a reading and reference room for children.⁹⁴ The alterations finally began in September 1922, culminating in the official opening of the children’s room on 13 December. Within a month, 340 children had

⁸⁹ Library Report for May 1913, TPL.

⁹⁰ Library Report for June 1914, TPL.

⁹¹ Debbie Denham, “Public Library Services for Children,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Vol. 3: 1850-2000*, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. 95-7. For the role of public libraries, in connection with schools, Sunday schools and domestic spaces for children’s reading during the last quarter of the nineteenth century see Christine Pawley, “What to Read and How to Read: The Social Infrastructure of Young People’s Reading, Osage, Iowa, 1870 to 1900,” *Library Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (1998). For children’s reading practices in this period more generally see for example Gretchen Galbraith, *Reading Lives: Reconstructing Childhood, Books, and Schools in Britain, 1870-1920* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

⁹² Kathleen McDowell, “Toward a History of Children as Readers, 1890–1930,” *Book History* 12 (2009): 241.

⁹³ Denham, “Public Library Services for Children,” 97.

⁹⁴ Library Reports for December 1920, July 1922, TPL.

enrolled as readers.⁹⁵ For models for the provision of library services for children, Culverwell looked to other libraries in New Zealand as well as abroad. As she noted in her plans for the juvenile library submitted to the council, she followed developments in England and the United States, the latter being in her view the “home of the juvenile movement”.⁹⁶ Public libraries in the United States not only provided for children, they also carried out surveys of children’s reading tastes and use of public libraries, which were frequently published in professional journals in the period after 1890.⁹⁷

Culverwell had ambitious and enthusiastic plans for the Timaru library. “We should try to make the children’s library an attractive room”, she wrote, “and there is no reason why, in time, children’s talks, story hours, and other features, which have proved so popular in the U.S. and in England, should not be introduced here. Also, in time, Timaru Library could be a distributing centre for country schools.”⁹⁸ She suggested to issue separate juvenile borrowing cards (thus far children borrowed books using their parents’ cards). She arranged the opening hours of the children’s library so not to interfere with school hours, and to provide children’s magazines in the juvenile reading room, including *Chums*, *My Magazine*, *The Captain* and other children’s papers. The proposed children’s section in the library, Culverwell felt sure, would be “the beginning of a large and popular part of the interests of the children of this town.”⁹⁹

BOOK LENDING AND THE “FICTION QUESTION”

The discussion has thus far explored the spaces of reading within the library, and the ways in which Timaru readers made use of the space, as well as the collection. The book lending department provided reading material that was carried into other spaces to be read, and where supervision of readers was not possible. From the onset, the nature of the book lending collection generated debate. Much of this debate, which also played out in the pages of the *Timaru Herald* at the time of the opening of the new building in 1909, centred on the question of what kind of books the library should provide. Opinions in Timaru diverged, especially in regards to the “fiction question”, which was

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⁹⁵ Library Report for December 1923, TPL.

⁹⁶ Proposal for the Juvenile Library to Borough Council, 16 November 1922, Letter book, TPL.

⁹⁷ Kate McDowell, “Understanding Children as Readers: Librarians’ Anecdotes and Surveys in the United States from 1890-1930,” in *The History of Reading, Vol. 1: International Perspectives, c. 1500-1990*, ed. Shafquat Towheed and W. R. Owens (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 147-62.

⁹⁸ Proposal for the Juvenile Library to Borough Council, 16 November 1922, Letter book, TPL.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

vigorously debated throughout the empire and the wider Western world at the turn of the twentieth century. The main issue of disagreement concerned whether or not a publicly-funded institution should provide for recreational reading as against predominantly offering reading material for educational purposes. As Robert Snape states, the debate really included two issues: “should public libraries provide fiction, and if so, what kind of fiction?”¹⁰⁰ Some of the opponents to popular fiction feared the apparently anti-social and detrimental effects of too much “light” reading. At a meeting between the Timaru Borough Council and the Mechanics’ Institute Committee in March 1909 to finalise the hand-over of the Institute’s affairs, the Mayor urged the council and the committee “that the Library should be stocked with good healthy literature, and that the Council would starve out the rubbish, of which there was too much read nowadays, and he hoped that a great point would be made of having a good reference library.”¹⁰¹ On the other hand, one of the trustees of the Mechanics’ Institute, W.H. Foden, stressed that “there must be light reading provided if they wished to get many readers.”¹⁰² The editorial commenting on the meeting applauded the mayor’s ambition but agreed with Foden, stating:

We are afraid that the Mayor overestimates the demand that will be made for the superior class of literature with which he desires to see the shelves of the library stocked. The taste for what he rightly calls “rubbish” has been so assiduously cultivated by the publishing world, that the majority of people now read only as a pastime. Opinions differ as to whether a municipality should provide pastimes for its people but the tendency seems to be in the direction of municipalising the supply of every kind of common requirement, and “light reading,” as well as “heavy,” and a great deal more of it, is undoubtedly a common requirement of the present day.¹⁰³

Editorials in the *Timaru Herald* repeatedly picked up on the “fiction question” and on the debate about the role of public libraries. An editorial on the day of the opening of the new library building commented on the appropriate library book stock:

The selection of those contents is a task to be discharged with much care and circumspection, because ratepayers who will not be able to make much, if any use of the institution, will nevertheless be compelled to contribute to its maintenance. The standard of the book selection committees year after year should therefore be a high one, educative rather than recreative (though

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¹⁰⁰ Snape, “Libraries for Leisure Time,” 43; see also Robert Snape, *Leisure and the Rise of the Public Library* (London: Library Association Publishing, 1995).

¹⁰¹ “The Public Library and the Institute,” *Timaru Herald*, 6 March 1909, 7.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ “Editorial: The Public Library,” *Timaru Herald*, 6 March 1909, 4.

recreation is a legitimate object to keep on view), so that the settled community may hope to reap substantial benefit directly or indirectly from their annual sowing of the library rate.¹⁰⁴

A few months later, an editorial carried on the discussion “whether the ratepayers should be asked to provide recreation for the public, for that is all that, with very few exceptions, the fiction of the day aspires to be.” The editorial went further to suggest the negative effects of fiction reading were comparable with the evils of smoking, though “the effects of the novel-reading habit have perhaps not yet been fully diagnosed”.¹⁰⁵ One thing, however, seemed clear: that “the devourer of novels [...] becomes an unsocial creature, living from day to day in imaginary society, and sympathising with imaginary people to such an extent as to have neither taste nor power to sympathise with the living people about them.”¹⁰⁶

Despite opposition within some circles the library stocked a large quantity of fiction, and fiction constituted by far the most popular class of books in the lending library. In this trend the Timaru Public Library fell in line with other public libraries in New Zealand, Britain and the rest of the British world.¹⁰⁷ Initially, James Chapple, the Presbyterian minister turned librarian, regretted these choices of the library users. In May 1911, Chapple reported that the “figures for fiction reading is [sic] out of all proportion to what it should be,” though he remained hopeful as “[n]ovel reading had realised its highest point & there are signs in the old land of a decreasing interest in them.”¹⁰⁸ Only two months later he re-iterated his point, this time stating:

The enormous fiction reading of course is hardly satisfactory to one who judges it from the sense of proportion; & who in the primary sense looks upon the library as an intellectual force & the amusement element secondary. This may improve. Fiction of course should have a place in the same way that a “sprig of parsley” has on a joint of meat. With us at present it is nearly all “parsley” & little “mutton.”¹⁰⁹

Evelyn Culverwell took a more moderate approach, rather emphasising and encouraging the use of “class books” (non-fiction titles, as well as poetry, “literature” and classics) than condemning fiction reading outright. This approach is reflective of a

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¹⁰⁴ “Editorial: The Public Library,” *Timaru Herald*, 4 June 1909, 4.

¹⁰⁵ “Editorial: The Public Library,” *Timaru Herald*, 12 August 1909, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Black, *A New History of the English Public Library*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Library Report for May 1911, TPL.

¹⁰⁹ Library Report for July 1911, TPL.

general trend among library professionals, who by the 1920s were no longer debating the “fiction question” as vigorously as during the previous decades.¹¹⁰ The proportion of literature and non-fiction titles borrowed in relation to fiction issues remained reasonable steady throughout the 1910s and 1920s, approximately 1:7; or just over eighty-five per cent of all book issues were fiction. This ratio, Culverwell commented, was “slightly above the average other centres.”¹¹¹ When the number of literature and non-fiction issues increased slightly towards the end of the 1920s, Culverwell attributed this to efforts to increase and improve the stock of these books in particular.¹¹² Among non-fiction books, the categories travel, history and biography were the most popular, closely followed by literature, which included poetry and classics. Science books and works on sociology were the least favourite of library users. The graph below shows book issues in the Timaru Public Library over the period 1913 to 1931, showing the dominance of fiction throughout the period, and a steady rise in the total number of book issues (figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10

Book issues at the Timaru Public Library, 1913-1931

Source: Timaru Public Library Reports between January 1913 and December 1931, TPL.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Snape, “Libraries for Leisure Time,” 50.

¹¹¹ Library Report for January 1919, TPL.

¹¹² Library Report for May 1929 and December 1931, TPL.

¹¹³ The monthly reports for the year 1925 are incomplete. Therefore a total number of book issues for the year 1925 could not be determined.

The rise in book issues is considerable. The total number of all book issues rose from 40,100 issues in 1913 to over 177,000 issues in 1931: a more than fourfold increase. This is significant given Timaru's population did not rise at the same rate, and had only increased from around 11,000 residents in 1911 to 19,000 people in the early 1930s. The Timaru Public Library also had an exceptionally high turn-over of its book stock. On average, each fiction title was borrowed seventeen times a year. Further remarks in the library reports provide more evidence about the popularity of the lending department. In December 1925, for example, the library was closed for two weeks. When it reopened, the librarian's report for the month stated "682 people came back for books, thus showing the need for books, books and always more books."¹¹⁴ The record of the number of people utilising the lending library in one day was set in January 1929, again after the library was closed for a short period to carry out renovations. On 4 January 1929, "1,700 people changed their books", a remarkably high number especially on a day in the midst of the holiday and summer season, usually a quieter time for the library.¹¹⁵ When at the end of 1926 the roll was rewritten, all borrowers were required to re-enrol and pick up a new member's pass. Numbers dropped initially, but soon reached and surpassed 1926 levels (close to 5,000 enrolled readers). This suggests that most members on the library roll were active library users.

There is little evidence about the kind of books in the lending collection beyond the broad categories of fiction, and "class books", which included non-fiction titles as well as classics and poetry ("literature"). An extant acquisition book for the years 1913 to 1937, as well as extant lists of the book stock (in numbers) for the years 1928-1932, suggest that fiction was not only the most popular category with borrowers, it also represented the largest part of the book collection. Approximately half of all newly-acquired books were fiction. The next most acquired categories were history and biography, closely followed by "literature".¹¹⁶ The book stock at the end of the 1920s shows the same proportions. Of the 17,311 books in the lending collection of the Timaru Public Library in 1929, 9,401 titles were fiction; 1,989 titles related to "history and travel"; 1,701 titles to "biography"; and 1,466 books were classified as "literature".¹¹⁷

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¹¹⁴ Library Report for December 1925, TPL.

¹¹⁵ Library Report for December 1928, TPL.

¹¹⁶ List of Additions to Book Stock, 1913-1937, TPL.

¹¹⁷ List of Proportions of the Book Stock, 1928-1932, included in Additions to Book Stock, 1913-1937, TPL.

Borrowers could freely browse and choose most of the books in the Timaru Public Library. The majority of the books were open-access. An anecdote related through Barkas's letters, however, suggests that some books were not freely available. To access these hidden parts of the collection, readers had to approach the librarian-in-charge. The incident also provides evidence for the role of library committees and librarians as gate-keepers and key figures for shaping local reading cultures. In 1922 Barkas asked for a particular author he had just enjoyed reading, but had never before encountered in the library collection. The author in question was the ethical socialist Edward Carpenter. After Barkas had read his *Days and Dreams* in July 1922, lent to him by his friend Doris Mirams, he expressed his surprise to Culverwell that he had never come across any of Carpenter's books. He then noted her response in a letter to Mary:

She opened a cupboard near her desk and brought out two small red-bound volumes explaining that they had been among the considerable collection of books which old Wood had presented to the Library when his eyes failed and he had to give up reading. They were "England's Ideal & other essays" and "Civilization; its cause & cure"; I asked why they were not on the shelves – she'd never had time to read them and some one of the committee had heard that Ed. Carpenter was a writer on sex problems, a defender of Oscar Wilde, – so these books had been stowed in the cupboard of "Doubtfuls" and forgotten.¹¹⁸

As often before, Barkas was asked to give his opinion:

They were handed to me and I'm to read & report: as yet I've only read the essay on "England's Ideal" and that entitled "Desirable Mansions" – both of which I thoroughly enjoyed because they contain so much that I, myself am inclined to preach on Simplification of Living – if the "Cause & Cure of Civilization [?]" are no more dangerous or subversive of "Sound Morality" than these, it's quite time both books were put into rapid circulation.¹¹⁹

Both books by Carpenter were donated by Ellis Wood, a "well-known Timaru cellist" and local politician.¹²⁰ The books were donated in 1917; the library report for the month of September acknowledged "a very handsome gift from Mr. Ellis Wood. He has given us the whole of his varied collection of books for the Library and the books will, doubtless, give pleasure and interest to a large circle of our readers."¹²¹ Despite this

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¹¹⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 12 July 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams, Being Autobiographical Notes* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1916); *England's Ideal and Other Essays on Social Subjects* (London: Swan, 1887); *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure and Other Essays* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1889).

¹²⁰ "Orchestral Society's Concert," *Ashburton Guardian*, 11 June 1908, 2. The *Timaru Herald* reported in 1898 that Mr Ellis Wood "was Duly Elected a Member of the Timaru Borough Council for the North-West Ward." *Timaru Herald*, 22 March 1898, 2.

¹²¹ Library Report for September 1917, TPL.

initial affirmative judgement by the chief librarian, suggesting a rapid inclusion of the books into the library collection, the Carpenter books were still stored away five years later. Barkas's note of his conversation with Culverwell in 1922 indicates that the likely reason for this were moral concerns expressed by the library committee responsible for overseeing the daily operation of the library. The category of "doubtful" books "stocked but only loaned on request" was not uncommon in this period. Mary Hammond shows that the main British circulating libraries, such as Mudie's, also classified some of their book stock into "doubtfuls" in reference to the moral tone of the work.¹²² There is no evidence whether Barkas's recommendation to put the books into "rapid circulation" were followed. The monthly library reports during the 1920s only listed the number of books added to the shelves, but not the titles.¹²³

Barkas was a frequent library user. Although he rarely used the reference or the newspaper rooms, the majority of the books he read came from the Timaru Public Library. Chapter one has given a breakdown of the sources of books read by Barkas, based on his letters between 1909 and 1913, 1917 and 1922, and 1927 and 1932. Half of the books read by him during this time, and for which he recorded the source, he accessed through the library.¹²⁴

Barkas was also a privileged library user. He had a particularly friendly and close relationship with Culverwell. She was a crucial figure for Barkas's reading activity, recommending titles to him, serving as an intermediary in keeping contact between different readers in Timaru, passing on recommendations and advice and representing one of the main people to whom Barkas would talk about his reading and books in general. She received regular mentions in his correspondence with Mary and it becomes evident that he valued highly her advice and trusted her recommendations. When she applied for a position at the Public Library in Invercargill, he wrote a flattering reference:

Since Miss Culverwell took charge I have found the management so good, the attention so prompt & courteous, the arrangement of the books so systematic and the supply of first class literature so well chosen & "up to date" that all my

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¹²² Besides "doubtful", Mudie's also used the categories "satisfactory" (suitable for general circulation) and "objectionable" (banned). Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1890-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 28.

¹²³ Acquisition books listing book titles added to the library shelves are extant for the period after 1925 in separate volumes for the reference section, fiction, nonfiction and juvenile literature. Unfortunately, no acquisition books for the period between 1909 and 1925 or library catalogues have survived.

¹²⁴ See Barkas Reading Database.

one time dislike for using a Public Library for supplying my reading wants has gone.¹²⁵

It is not clear why Barkas had once disliked using a public library. What he identified as positive attributes of the library in Timaru might suggest that a less “up-to-date” selection in previous library experiences constituted his dislike. Barkas was a very topical and “up-to-date” reader. A large number of the books he read were published within a year or two before his reading.

Culverwell acted as gatekeeper, while Barkas often acted as adviser. Culverwell regarded Barkas as a literature expert of some kind, and as representative for “ordinary” readers in Timaru, even though perhaps better informed than most of the library users. Often, he recommended titles to be included on the library shelves, although the library committee did not always approve of his suggestions.¹²⁶ On numerous occasions, Culverwell handed him newly acquired books to “test” and report back whether suitable for general circulation.¹²⁷ One of those instances happened in June 1919:

Miss Culverwell handed me “for report” – “The Fear of Living” by Henry Bordeaux – translated by Ruth Helen Davis, Dent the publisher. Someone in Wellington had recommended it but Miss Culverwell couldn’t remember anything about it. From the Introduction, the Preface & the first four chapters which I have read, I should judge it quite suitable for the reading of even the Puritanical section of our library frequenters. Do you know anything of H. Bordeaux or his books? Miss Culverwell has two other of his among the collection which she has just received from Wellington.¹²⁸

Barkas judged the book suitable for general circulation in the library, but just to be sure, he gave the book to his “T.L.” Jessie McIver to gauge her opinion.

I have finished H. Bordeaux’ “The Fear of Living” – it is almost a “goody-goody” book – very simple & direct in its story but (to my mind) a little too insistent in its preachment. I’ve passed it on to my T.L. so as to get her view. She has read the opening & considers it “Beautiful”. [...] She has gallop’d through “The Fear of Living” & says it is a beautiful story which it would do a lot of people good to read, a very proper book to have in the Library. So I can take it back to Miss Culverwell in the morning with an easy conscience and a favourable report.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Reference for Miss Culverwell, dated 15 July 1918, in MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL.

¹²⁶ There are numerous references in the letters of Barkas recommending books to the library, as well as of Culverwell handing him a library book with the remark that he had suggested the purchase initially. See for example, Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 25 August 1918, 17 February and 24 February 1919, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL.

¹²⁷ For example, in August 1918 Culverwell asked him to read *Limanora* for how it should be classified. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 25 August 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Godfrey Sweven [John Macmillan Brown], *Limanora: The Island of Progress* (New York and London: Putnam, 1903).

¹²⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 27 June 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. Henry Bordeaux, *The Fear of Living* (London: Dent, 1914).

¹²⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 28 June 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

On another occasion, after reading and enjoying a book by Stephen McKenna, Barkas wrote:

I was so fascinated by “Sonia” that I went to the Library to learn something about the man & if he had published any other books; Miss Culverwell found for me a very short cutting from “The Bookman” with his portrait [...] further she discovered that Hutton’s had another book by him “The Sixth Sense” which had been in stock a year or more, nobody seemed to want to buy it and it had gradually got shunted higher & higher up on the shelves; “but I can get it for you to read & then you can tell me if it is worth buying for the Library”.¹³⁰

Barkas read the book, and even though he did not like it as much as *Sonia*, he thought it was “marvellously clever, delightful in style and tells a romantic story of the Militant Suffraget [sic] culmination of effort in the abduction of children of Cabinet Ministers.”¹³¹ He also “tested” it on his landlady McIver, who “found it so very interesting that she spent most of yesterday trying to get it finished before I had to take it back to the Library this morning.”¹³² As a result, Barkas recommended Culverwell to purchase it. He also asked her for other McKenna books. “Now I’ve set Miss Culverwell to get the two earlier books “The Reluctant Lover” & “Sheila Intervenes”, ‘t will be interesting to see the development of the man”, he wrote.¹³³ This episode suggests that some library users had considerable influence on the nature of the book collection, and that the reading tastes and practices of few readers could shape parts of the book provision for many other readers in Timaru. Personal connections to the librarian were crucial for these kinds of privileged rights.

CONCLUSION

Public libraries were significant local places of reading for a number of readers and reading communities. A large number of library patrons used the newspaper collection, and the discussion has suggested that these readers were largely working class. Other readers made use of the lending collection, especially as this was free, unlike in other towns. Some spaces of the library were restricted in access and use. Women readers were provided with separate reading tables; children were encouraged to behave in ways

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¹³⁰ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 17 September 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. Stephen McKenna, *Sonia* (New York, George H. Doran, 1917); *The Sixth Sense* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1915).

¹³¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 17 September 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 15 September 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. Stephen McKenna, *The Reluctant Lover* (London : Herbert Jenkins, 1913); *Sheila Intervenes* (Toronto : Bell & Cockburn, 1914).

acceptable to adult readers. Some parts of the collection, in particular morally-controversial titles, could only be accessed if asked for. The chapter has also highlighted the privileged access that some library users enjoyed. Libraries were spaces restricted by library committees and staff, but were also shaped by readers and their reading practices.

CHAPTER THREE

READING AND WRITING IN INTIMATE RELATIONS: THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN FATHER AND DAUGHTER FRED AND MARY BARKAS

On the night of 4 September 1932, Fred Barkas – living in Timaru, New Zealand – wrote a short note to his daughter Mary Barkas – living in Lincoln, England. He attached to the note his typed letters written over the last fortnight. The San Francisco mail was scheduled to leave in the morning and he was anxious to get his bundle of letters sent off. The handwritten note ends with the words: “my Budget Typing for each fortnightly mail will now, for a time, have to be suspended. Yours ever, with best love. Fred Barkas.”¹ Barkas had been unwell for a few months. His health had deteriorated to such an extent that by September 1932 surgery was unavoidable.² He was confident he would make a full recovery when he travelled to Dunedin for an operation, scheduled for 10 September. He did not survive the surgery, however.³ The handwritten note of 4 September was the last Fred Barkas wrote to his daughter in a correspondence that spanned several decades.⁴ By the time Mary received the last “budget”, she had already received a cable notifying her of her father’s death and was making arrangements for her return to New Zealand to take care of his estate.⁵

During the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, a period characterised by high levels of mobility and mass migration, letters constituted the key means to maintain personal relationships across space.⁶ Readers situated in separate

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¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 4 September 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, folder 3, ATL.

² Barkas was scheduled to undergo a prostate operation. See a letter to his friend Dr William Irving, 8 August 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 3, ATL.

³ “Obituary: Frederic Barkas,” *Timaru Herald*, 12 September 1932, 6.

⁴ It was also the last letter Barkas recorded as “sent” in a letter book he kept between 1927 and 1932. The letter book is included in the Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, ATL.

⁵ See “Personal Notes,” *Evening Post*, 9 November 1932, 13, stating the Mary had left England on 21 October 1932 for New Zealand, after receiving a cable announcing the death of her father.

⁶ James Belich estimates that by 1871, postal services in England and Wales handled thirty-two letters per capita and year. This number continued to grow. According to Martyn Lyons, by 1900 the British postal service delivered sixty letters and postcards per capita. In comparison, by the end of the nineteenth century residents in New South Wales posted fifty-two letters per capita, and residents in New Zealand posted a total of close to twenty-five million letters and postcards during 1891 (forty items per capita). The quantity of letters sent across the world exploded during World War One. On the eve of the war, David Vincent states, 3,500 million letters were dispatched yearly in England alone. In 1915, Lyons notes elsewhere, the French “military post was handling four million letters daily.” At the same time, the New Zealand post office was handling over 115 million letters and postcards a year. Belich, *Replenishing the*

geographical places connected through their correspondence and the discussion of reading therein. Letters themselves constituted reading spaces. One such example of a correspondence between readers, as well as between a father and a daughter, are the letters between Fred and Mary Barkas, written between 1904 and 1932. Fred and Mary shared and sustained a close relationship through their regular and extensive correspondence. This chapter considers the role of reading, and writing, within family relationships and within correspondences. In so doing, it responds to Martyn Lyons's call for historians of reading to occasionally focus on the "literary 'interface' between reading and writing" for "a more rounded view of cultural practices in the past."⁷ The chapter argues that the correspondence between Fred and Mary Barkas constituted an important space of reading, linking each other's local reading practices. In addition, Fred and Mary's reading, their writing, and their writing about reading constituted a form of intimacy.

A number of studies have located the act of reading within family relationships, and in particular within father-daughter relationships, in the period spanning the 1890s to the 1930s. In their fascinating case study of a young female reader in England, Elizabeth Lee, at the end of the nineteenth century, Siân and Colin Pooley emphasize "the importance of reading as an activity in its familial and social" context, arguing that for many young readers "it was the activity of reading in its own right that was most influential" for the assertion of selfhood.⁸ They point out, that the "middle-class familial environment" has predominantly been interpreted as "intellectually confining", whereas reading outside the family home has been seen as liberating and liberated, especially for young female readers.⁹ Kate Flint in her influential study on women's reading during the long nineteenth century concludes that "a girl's reading was primarily dependent on her mother's choice and guidance."¹⁰ The role of the father is described as being instrumental for providing access to reading material, through his library. Flint also highlights reading "as an area in which the father could reinforce his authority and

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Earth, 122; Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World*, 176; Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, 33; Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France*, 187; Howard Robinson, *A History of the Post Office in New Zealand* (Wellington: R. E. Owen, Govt. printer, 1964), 184.

⁷ Martyn Lyons, "Reading Practices, Writing Practices: Love Letters and *Écritures Intimes* in Nineteenth-Century France and Australia," in *The Culture of the Book: Essays from Two Hemispheres: Essays in Honour of Wallace Kirsop*, ed. David Garrioch, Harold Love, and Brian McMullin, *Occasional Publications* (Melbourne: Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, 1999), 356.

⁸ Pooley and Pooley, "Such a Splendid Tale," 329, 348, 350.

⁹ *Ibid.*: 333.

¹⁰ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 194.

influence.”¹¹ However, according to Pooley and Pooley, the role of the father on reading within the family beyond understandings of the patriarch as censor is particularly unexplored.¹²

Recent studies of intimacies as revealed and lived out in correspondences and relationships across distance have added to the more critical mass of scholarship examining intimacies of romantic and sexual relationships.¹³ Elizabeth Vibert’s analysis of the memoir of Murdoch Stewart, a mid-nineteenth century Scottish emigrant to Nova Scotia, has revealed how migrants’ narrative strategies formed part of an ongoing desire and attempt to maintain connections to home across geographical distance, and were crucial in holding on to old identities while simultaneously forging new ones. In the case of Murdoch Stewart, his intimate relationship with his brother Donald in Scotland helped him come to terms with a new life in Nova Scotia while staying connected to his old existence.¹⁴ Vibert’s “deliberate move” to understand this sibling relationship as intimate derives from her “wish to unsettle the assumption, common to much of the important recent work on intimacy and empire, that intimacy generally connotes sexual or conjugal relations.”¹⁵ As Vibert illustrates, the brotherly intimacy and the writing of his memoir enabled Murdoch to retain Scotland as “a place to locate identity.”¹⁶

Writing and reading were also the means through which friends Mary Taylor and Charlotte Brontë overcame geographical separation. Charlotte Macdonald’s analysis of Brontë and Taylor’s correspondence reveals how “in the intimacy of reading” Mary Taylor felt she was “living in two places at once”; in her actual world in Wellington,

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¹¹ Ibid., 199.

¹² Pooley and Pooley, “‘Such a Splendid Tale,’” 333.

¹³ For recent studies of intimacy in the imperial and colonial context, see Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post)Colonial Studies,” *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Philippa Levine, “Sexuality and Empire,” in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Elizabeth Vibert, “Writing ‘Home’: Sibling Intimacy and Mobility in a Scottish Memoir,” in *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 67–88.

¹⁵ Ibid., 67–68. Vibert also notes in the same passage that sibling relationships are “perhaps one of the most overlooked realms of the intimate.” To this could be added father-daughter relationships, which in contrast to mother-daughter relationships have been less often analysed as intimacies. An important study that locates intimacy within family relationships is Leonore Davidoff et al., *The Family Story: Blood, Contract, and Intimacy, 1830–1960* (London: Longman, 1999).

¹⁶ Vibert, “Writing ‘Home,’” 82.

New Zealand, and in an imaginary space back in England.¹⁷ Brontë and Taylor's "intimacy of the envelope", as Macdonald terms it, meant both women found themselves existing not "in two separate and distinct places" but inhabiting "two sides of a single entity that defined and created each other."¹⁸ Macdonald and Vibert acknowledge, as Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton phrase it, "the embeddedness of intimate spaces in many aspects of social and cultural life."¹⁹ Both Vibert and Macdonald convincingly illustrate intimacies of and through reading, which were forms of intimacy beyond sexual or marital relationships.²⁰

Building on these studies of reading, writing and intimacy, and of reading within families this chapter begins by providing a brief account of the familial and social context of Fred and Mary Barkas, and by describing the surviving archive of their correspondence. The chapter then examines Mary and Fred's relationship and their letters chronologically, focussing on what kind of reading material Fred and Mary shared, and how their relationship shaped each others' reading practices. It concludes with a discussion of how Fred and Mary, through their writing, were able to participate in each other's local reading cultures and communities.

THE ARCHIVE OF FRED AND MARY BARKAS

The correspondence of Fred Barkas (1854-1932) and his daughter Mary Barkas (1889-1959) is an extensive one. The surviving letters comprise twenty-eight volumes of letters from Fred and Mary to each other, written between 1904 and 1932. After Mary left New Zealand for London in 1913, when she was twenty-three years old, to take up further studies, the two engaged in the habit of writing each other – what they called – their "daily page". During an earlier period when Mary and her mother Amy travelled in Europe, Fred and Mary had established this continuous letter-writing practice.

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¹⁷ Charlotte Macdonald, "Intimacy of the Envelope: Fiction, Commerce, and Empire in the Correspondence of Friends Mary Taylor and Charlotte Brontë, c. 1845-55," in *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 101, 103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁹ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, "Introduction: The Politics of Intimacy in an Age of Empire," in *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, ed. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 11.

²⁰ Other studies that stress intimacy within family correspondences are David A. Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); and Alistair Thomson, *Moving Stories: An Intimate History of Four Women across Two Countries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

While frequent and long-lasting correspondences between family and friends across vast geographical distances were common in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the scope, frequency and extent of this father-daughter correspondence, and its survival and deposit are noteworthy.²¹ Equally rare is the fact that this is a two-sided collection of correspondence. Fred and Mary wrote to each other on an almost daily basis over a period spanning close to thirty years, interrupting this practice only when spending time together. Their letters were extensive: a fortnightly bundle often between fifteen and thirty pages long. What is also unusual is the fact that Barkas kept copies of all his letters, as well as the ones he received, typed them, sometimes edited them, and arranged to have them bound in “handy volumes”.²² The reason for this was partly his desire to re-read Mary’s letters. For him the typing was “a delightful form of entertainment”, affording him “to get the double essence of [Mary’s] doings, thinkings [sic] & plannings.”²³ While Mary was in Europe during her teenage years, he handed her letters on to her school teacher and friends, and typing them meant he could keep the originals. Finally, Fred also followed a conscious agenda to create and preserve his and her history, and to enable descendants to imagine and learn about their lives and that of the wider family.²⁴ Barkas was enormously encouraging and proud of Mary’s professional achievements.²⁵ By binding the letters into volumes, and arranging them into a narrative collection, he overcame the ephemerality of the correspondence. The form Barkas chose to adapt the correspondence for preservation is significant: he arranged the letters into codex volumes resembling books in format. Fred Barkas was

²¹ There is a growing body of literature concerned with family correspondences during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in connection to migration studies. See for example the six-volume collection Klaus Stierstorfer, ed. *Women Writing Home, 1700-1920: Female Correspondence across the British Empire* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006); see also Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke, eds., *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Thomson, *Moving Stories*.

²² Undated note by Fred Barkas at the front of MS-Papers-2491-01, ATL. After he retired in 1919, Fred began typing and arranging letters he had written and received, and collected prior to 1919. After that, the re-typing, arranging and binding of his correspondence was a continuous process. The last bound volume of his letters to Mary concludes in January 1932 (MS-Papers-2491-37). His typed letters after that date and before his death in September 1932 are included as loose sheets in Mary’s papers (Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, ATL).

²³ Fred Barkas to Mary, 10 January 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

²⁴ Undated note by Fred Barkas at the front of MS-Papers-2491-01, ATL.

²⁵ Another expression of his pride was the provision in his will that, after Mary’s death, his residuary trust fund should be used for the endowment of the “Mary Rushton Barkas Scholarship for the encouragement of research and study of psychological medicine”, to be administered by the University of New Zealand. Frederic Barkas, probate file, CH145, TU3588/1932, Archives New Zealand (hereafter ANZ). There is no evidence that this scholarship was ever established after Mary’s death in 1959. Possibly, Mary – a very private person – may have objected to it. Mary’s will does not mention the scholarship. Mary Rushton Barkas, probate file, BBAE 1570 1460 789 1959, ANZ.

an avid reader, and for a man for whom books held an immense meaning, the arrangement of the letters into volumes in codex form was an expression of, and added emotional value to, the correspondence.

Figure 3.1

Cover-page of “Some Memories of a Mediocrity”, volume eight

Source: MS-Papers-2491-08, ATL.

Figure 3.2

Cover-page of “Mary’s Letters”, volume eighteen

Source: MS-Papers-2491-26, ATL.

Fred and Mary’s correspondence was a continuous conversation, and this in itself, knowing about each others’ lives and of each other’s lives as readers, established an intimacy. To some extent, Fred’s and Mary’s letters shared characteristics with the correspondences between female friends analysed by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, the love letters scrutinised by Martyn Lyons, and the letters to family and friends of women in New Zealand examined by Frances Porter, Charlotte Macdonald and Tui MacDonald.²⁶

²⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1-29; Lyons, “Love Letters and *Écritures Intimes*,” 356-65; Frances Porter, Charlotte Macdonald, and Tui MacDonald, eds., *“My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates”: The Unsettled Lives of Women in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand as Revealed to Sisters, Family and Friends* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996).

The correspondence's main function was to reassure each other that they were "OK" and to keep "living connections" across distance and over time.²⁷ Lyons notes that the main message of the love letters and *écritures intimes* he analysed could be summarised as: "I have nothing to say to you, except that you are the one to whom I want to say nothing."²⁸ In a similar vein, though expressing a different kind of intimacy, a large part of the letters between Fred and Mary described everyday matters: what they had been doing during the day, what time they got up, what the weather was like, sometimes long details about food or descriptions of new clothing. They also wrote about their work and exchanged gossip about people both knew. A significant part of the letters was concerned with their reading. This could be in the form of briefly mentioning a title of a book just read, bought, lent or heard about. More often, however, Fred and Mary wrote at length about their reading, reflecting on reading material and sharing their reading practices including vivid descriptions of how, where, when and – if that was the case – with whom they read. Sometimes, they commented on other readers. Through their reading, Fred and Mary discussed their political views and philosophical beliefs. These entries about reading could fill several pages; on average they amount to about one fifth to one quarter of each letter. The father-and-daughter intimate relationship as lived out in the correspondence was substantially one of texts and ideas.

To briefly illustrate the scope and extent of the correspondence, a few of the bound volumes of the correspondence can serve as examples. The volume of Mary's teenage-letters written between 12 August 1904 and 27 January 1905 (volume number two of Mary's letters) contains a total of nine letters, typed up and numbered by Fred Barkas (letters fourteen to twenty-two) amounting to 260 pages.²⁹ All of the letters were written over several days, ranging between ten days and three weeks, and they average a length of twenty-nine pages. The volume of Mary's letters written between September 1917 and April 1918 – by that time she lived and studied in London – includes twenty-one letters, some typed by Mary and some re-typed by Fred, on average ten pages long and sent off about every ten days.³⁰ The letters tell of Mary's daily activities in a chronological order. They also include reflections on her activities; she shared her excitement about her travels and wrote about future plans and dreams. Many passages during Mary's life in London tell of visits to theatres, concerts and public lectures, and

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²⁷ Porter, Macdonald, and MacDonald, eds., *"My Hand Will Write What My Heart Dictates"*, 2.

²⁸ Lyons, "Love Letters and *Écritures Intimes*," 357.

²⁹ MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL.

³⁰ MS-Papers-2491-17, ATL.

there are many concert programmes and theatre tickets among her letters. Fred's letters were equally detailed. One volume covering the ten-month period from March 1925 to January 1926, for example, contains 220 typed pages to Mary as well as some copies of other letters sent and received plus printed ephemera.³¹ The entire collection of the father-daughter correspondence thus consists of close to ten thousand pages. The letters assumed many functions of a diary; they are accounts of Fred's and Mary's days.³² And they are accounts of their reading.

It is useful at this point to provide a few facts about the Barkas family. Mary Rushton Barkas was born on 15 September 1889, as the first and only child to Fred Barkas and his wife Amy Barkas, born Parker. At the time of Mary's birth, Amy was thirty-eight years old, Fred three years younger. Mary was a bright child, and considered to be mature for her age.³³ The family lived in Christchurch until 1905, where Fred worked as manager for the Loan and Mercantile Agency Co. Both Fred and Amy moved within the cultural spaces of middle-class Christchurch. Mary attended Christchurch Girls' High School, gaining university entrance in 1905. In 1904 when Mary was fourteen, her mother Amy deemed it necessary that her daughter should spend an extended period of time in Europe, in order to learn French and German and "visit the great cultural centres of the world."³⁴ Amy accompanied Mary on the trip, travelling herself through Europe while Mary stayed in private schools in Lausanne and Munich for several months. Fred Barkas stayed behind in Christchurch, and Mary and Fred began their practice of writing each other a "daily page". During this trip to Europe the close and frequent correspondence that Mary and Fred Barkas kept up when apart was initiated and certain elements within the letters, the particular language between the two and regular topics of conversation began to take shape.

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³¹ MS-Papers-2491-33, ATL.

³² The function of the letters as accounting for each other's time is also evidenced by the fact that Fred and Mary called their letters "budgets".

³³ See a letter to Fred Barkas by his sister Issie about a visit of Mary and Amy: "I wondered sometimes whether her outward & inward selves were as utterly different as mine were at her age – or a little older; but then she seems old for her years – but saw no signs of a revolting or aspiring self; she has self control though, and could sit and listen to her mother's exaggerations quietly, & then just as quietly and calmly contradict the statements – and it seemed to give rise to no excitement on her side, or be any check on Amy." Mrs. James P. Southern to Fred Barkas, 2 August 1904, MS-Papers-2491-38, ATL.

³⁴ Sanderson, "A Cabbage, a Bohemian, and a Genius, or Ordinary Middle-Class Folk?," 69.

Between 1905 and 1909 the family lived in Wellington where Mary attended Victoria University College studying science.³⁵ As was later memorialised in a capping song by Siegfried Eichelbaum, Fred Barkas accompanied his daughter to hockey competitions throughout the country and to sports fixtures in Wellington. Her fellow students came to call him Pa Barkas.³⁶ In 1909, Fred was transferred to the Timaru branch of the Loan and Mercantile Agency Co. By that time Amy – now fifty-nine years old – had become disenchanted with her life in New Zealand. Frequent remarks about the, in her opinion, unculturedness and dullness of New Zealand and the lack of education of other middle-class women in Wellington reveal that Amy was eager to leave.³⁷ The family move from Wellington to Timaru at the end of 1909, then, happened without Amy. Amy left for England, returning only once some time around 1911, but “didn’t care much for Timaru and went back to London by the steamer which had brought her to N.Z.”³⁸ Mary finished her degree at Victoria University College, declined a government scholarship she had been offered in 1910 and joined her father in Timaru. There, Fred and Mary lived “very happily together till February 1913.” Mary spent her time engaged in what Fred called “‘Domestic Duties’ [...] gardening, making social friends, playing tennis & golf and [...] swimming in the sea of Caroline Bay.”³⁹ Both sailed for London in March 1913; Mary began her studies at the University of London,

³⁵ Mary Barkas gained a BSc in 1908 and a MSc in chemistry from Victoria University College in 1909. Kay Sanderson, “Mary Barkas,” in *The Book of New Zealand Women / Ko Kui Ma Te Kaupapa*, ed. Charlotte Macdonald, Merimeri Penfold, and Bridget Williams (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1991), 45. See also Beryl Hughes and Sheila Ahern, *Redbrick and Bluestockings: Women at Victoria 1899-1993* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003), 21. Photocopies of Mary’s degree certificates for her BSc and MSc are included in Barkas Family Papers, fMS-Papers-4593, ATL.

³⁶ The capping song by Siegfried Eichelbaum contains the line: “And is Mary still invariably dogged by Pa?”, cited in Hughes and Ahern, *Redbrick and Bluestockings*, 34. Fred himself noted that as Amy “declined to bother the chaperonage”, he “became the [Mary’s] constant companion & a sort of elderly friend to all her chums.” Note by Fred Barkas, final three pages in MS-Papers-2491-11, ATL.

³⁷ In November 1909, when Fred had already moved to Timaru, but Amy and Mary were still living in Wellington, Amy wrote: “I have had quite enough of the kind of society N.Z. offers to me, yesterday afternoon spent with Mrs Geo. Ross and Mrs Clarke Johnson being a sort of climax. I took a map to show them where Mary & I had been, & where I proposed to go, & I came to the conclusion that neither of them knew what the Riviera was, & as to the Tyrol, Botzen, &c, &c. I might as well have talked to the Maoris.” In the same letter, Amy also proposed to live with Fred in Timaru, if he agreed to retire in 1913 and leave New Zealand then. “If I do not hear from you that you are willing to do this,” she wrote, “I shall take seriously into consideration the advisability of sticking to my freedom & the life I love, while I have the chance, as I know I can live on what I have, & you and Mary can come when you darned please.” Amy Barkas to Fred Barkas, 3 November 1909, MS-Papers-2491-38, ATL.

³⁸ Note by Fred Barkas, final three pages in MS-Papers-2491-11, ATL. Barkas does not give the date of Amy’s visit, but states it happened after he and Mary were “settled in Hewling St.” Barkas had bought the house at Hewling Street, Timaru, in 1910, where he and Mary settled in July of that year.

³⁹ Note by Fred Barkas, final three pages in MS-Papers-2491-11, ATL.

enrolling in a postgraduate course in Home Science and Economics.⁴⁰ Fred enjoyed the English summer, “touring by bicycle most of the time.”⁴¹ Fred and Mary spent one final month on vacation in France together before Fred returned to Timaru and his work. Fred concluded his arrangement of Mary’s letters ending in 1913 with the words: “Since I parted from Mary that August night in 1913 on the railway station at Grenoble, our correspondence has been pretty constant and intimate.”⁴² After 1913, Mary returned to New Zealand for one visit in 1917, but remained in England, where she completed her medical degrees and training in psychological medicine at the University of London.⁴³ During 1918-19 Mary worked as physician at the psychiatric hospital Bethlem, in London. Between 1923 and 1927 she worked and trained at the Maudsley psychiatric hospital, and after that was the psychiatrist-in-charge at the private mental hospital The Lawn, in Lincoln, north England. Fred Barkas remained in Timaru until his death in 1932, but saw Mary several times during the 1920s when he travelled to England.⁴⁴ For most of the period, however, Mary and Fred stayed connected through their letters, and it is this correspondence between 1913 and 1932 that is most revealing about the significance of reading and writing within the changing dynamics of this intimacy between father and daughter.

THE EARLY LETTERS OF 1904/1905

Mary’s teenage letters, while she was travelling Europe, are characterised by a relatively factual tone, reporting on her activities, rather than reflecting as would be typical in the later correspondence. The tone is partly a consequence of the nature of the relationship between Fred and Mary at this time: affectionate, yet between a young teenager and father on uneven terms. Another reason for the “reporting” style of her letters is the fact that she wanted them to be handed on to her school friends and teachers in

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⁴⁰ She graduated from this course in July 1914. See her degree certificate from the University of London, King’s College for Women, in Barkas Family Papers, fMS-Papers-4593, ATL.

⁴¹ Note by Fred Barkas, final three pages in MS-Papers-2491-11, ATL.

⁴² Note by Fred Barkas, last page in MS-Papers-2491-11, ATL.

⁴³ Several of Mary’s confirmations-of-enrolment, as well as degree certificates are included in Barkas Family Papers, fMS-Papers-4593, ATL. Mary was listed on the medical register in England from 1918.

⁴⁴ Fred travelled to England in 1920/21 (via the United States, returning via the Suez Canal and Australia), in 1923/24 (via Australia, Natal, Transvaal, Rhodesia, Portuguese East Africa and Nyasaland, returning via the United States), in 1926/27 (via Australia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Japan, China, Singapore, Malaya, Burma and India, returning via the United States), and in 1929 via South America. Included in the collection are letters written by Fred to Mary and to friends in New Zealand during his voyages, as well as travel diaries. See MS-Papers-2491-40 to -63, ATL.

Christchurch after Fred had read them. Her instructions in one letter in February 1904 dictated:

After reading this, please send it to Miss Gibson, Marjorie and the girls as usual, as I find it perfectly impossible to write more than one long, detailed letter. I should like Marjorie to let Miss Cook read it, if possible.

With much love to Kootchie, Isa, Mim, Marjorie, and all the girls and especially the teachers and Miss Gibson and Miss Davie (Davy?).⁴⁵

Her letters from Europe had numerous addressees and Mary was very much aware of what she wanted to share, and what should remain unsaid, with this collective of recipients. As already mentioned, Fred even typed her letters up for easier reading by subsequent readers.⁴⁶ Likewise, some of Fred's letters were both to his wife Amy and to Mary, Amy reading them first and then sending them on to Mary when they were not together. Though no letters of Fred's to Amy or Mary during this time have survived, Mary's letters often begin with thanking him for his mail. The correspondence served as communication between the family, and an extended group of friends. In this characteristic the letters were not unusual. Several studies of epistolary practices in this period have noted the commonness for letters to have multiple addresses, within families or villages.⁴⁷

Writing about reading came to be an integral part of Mary and Fred's letters. Throughout the European tour in 1904 and 1905, when Mary and Amy were spending long periods of time in France and Germany, Mary took to books to learn the local language. It is clear that she was an avid, almost compulsive and very fast reader already before she left for Europe, and during her time there.⁴⁸ Letters to her father during this trip tell of which books she was currently reading, buying or borrowing and what she thought of them. The difficulties and challenges of reading in a second language both frustrated her and stirred on her enthusiasm.

Like Fred's letters to his adult daughter later, Mary's writings were extraordinarily detailed. One letter written to her father in August 1904 serves as an example. Mary and Amy had just arrived in Stuttgart, and set off on a book-buying tour. Mary chose an

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⁴⁵ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 7 February 1904, MS-Papers-2491-09, ATL.

⁴⁶ Mary noted in one of her letters about Fred's practice of typing them up: "What a splendid idea of yours [...]- it will save those of my friends who care to read them, a great deal of time & trouble in puzzling them out." Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 26 August 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL.

⁴⁷ See for example, "French Soldiers and Their Correspondence: Towards a History of Writing Practices in the First World War," chapter ten in Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France*, especially 185-6.

⁴⁸ Mary referred to her bad eyesight as a consequence of too much reading. See Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 21 February 1904, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, folder 3, ATL.

author she knew from home. She also laid eyes on another book, the latest by Marie Corelli, a very popular writer, hoping her mother would buy it for her.⁴⁹

First of all, however, Mother decided that we would stay in bed fairly late next morning and read – but having no books we sallied forth to get some. We tried several shops in vain but at last stopped at one full of heaps of books in all languages; there is a new edition, lately published for use on the Continent by one T. Fisher Unwin, – the name seems somehow familiar to me; – this is such a nice edition with grey paper backs and good print at one mark 50 per book, and the advantage is that each book is all in one volume. Tauchnitz is so annoying for if you want a big, fat book it is always in two or three volumes at 1 fr. 50 each which comes very expensive. We bought a book each; – Mother, “Meadow Sweet & Rue” (or something like that) by Silas Hocking – and she was surprised to find it was not the rather dismal style of Joseph Hocking, – not knowing there were two. I got a book called “Nyria” by Mrs Campbell Praed; – Mother says she is the author of “The Australian Heroine” that we have at home. Nyria is the sort of book I love, all about ancient Rome. Nyria is supposed to be a girl who dimly remembers a previous existence as a barbarian princess captured and made a slave to Romans. I enjoyed reading it very much, but I read so quickly – worse luck – I never have enough. I ought to read German but can only manage little, baby books, and that with difficulty. French I find almost as easy as English, but I have only one French book with me, – Zola’s “Lourdes” – which is decidedly dismal as recreation though excellent as practice in French, it does when I want something tough & solid. I was so excited on seeing in an English paper we bought the other day that Marie Corelli’s new book “God’s Good Man” was coming out in the Unwin edition, which has all the newest books.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ During the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Marie Corelli’s books frequently featured on bestseller-lists. Troy J. Bassett and Christina M. Walter, “Booksellers and Bestsellers: British Book Sales as Documented by *the Bookman*, 1891-1906,” *Book History* 4 (2001): 227-34; Waller, *Writers, Readers, & Reputations*, 678-80; McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, 32-35. Corelli’s books were also popular with readers on Brancepeth station in New Zealand. Wevers, *Reading on the Farm*, 169.

⁵⁰ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 15 August 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL. Silas K Hocking, *Meadowsweet and Rue* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904); Rosa Caroline Praed, *Nyria* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904); Rosa Caroline Praed, *An Australian Heroine* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880); Émile Zola, *Les trois villes: Lourdes* (Paris: G. Charpentier et E. Fasquelle, 1894); Marie Corelli, *God’s Good Man: A Simple Love Story* (London: Methuen, 1904).

This is one of Mary’s letters which Fred typed up again in the early 1930s, in a shortened version, to be part of a manuscript biography of Mary he envisaged, to be entitled: *The Story of a New Zealand Girl*. Compare the later-typed version:

“First of all, however, we set out to buy some books ---- got one each, a nice edition with grey paper backs, good print, price 1 mark 50; published by T. Fisher Unwin – that name seems somehow familiar – much better than Tauchnitz. Mother bought “Meadow Sweet & Rue” by Silas Hocking, and was surprised to find it was not in the dismal style of Joseph Hocking; I got “Myra”[*Nyria*] by Mrs. Campbell Praed – the author of “The Australian Heroine” that we have at home. --- I enjoyed reading it very much, but I read so quickly, worse luck, that I never have enough books. I ought to read German but, as yet, can only manage little, baby books; and I’ve only one French book with me – Zola’s “Lourdes” which is decidedly dismal as recreation though excellent as practice in French, it fits when I want something tough & solid.

I was so excited on seeing in an English paper that Marie Corelli’s new book – “God’s Good Man” is to come out on Sept. 8th. – it is sure to come out in the Unwin edition, which has all the newest books, so I gently mentioned the publication date (the day after my 15th birthday) to Mother, in case she was feeling generous.” Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, folder 3, ATL.

Through this detailed description, Mary established a connection to her father, enabling him to imagine his wife and daughter going on their book-buying tour in distant Europe. The references to particular editions and publication details are noteworthy, and suggest that the Barkas family was “book-oriented”, accustomed to book-buying and paid attention to publication qualities. The reference to a book at their home, *The Australian Heroine* by Mrs Campbell Praed, another popular novelist, is equally noteworthy.⁵¹ Mary bought a book by an author she was already familiar with, and with whom Fred was familiar also. Perhaps they had read *An Australian Heroine* together, as they did on occasion, or had perhaps shared their enjoyment of it.⁵² In a letter a month later, Mary told Fred that Amy was reading *Lady Rose’s Daughter*, by Mrs Humphry Ward, adding “which we read in ‘Harper’ – you remember.”⁵³ By evoking the memory of shared reading experiences, Mary expressed an affectionate connection to her father reminding him of a moment when they were together. Now buying another book by Mrs Campbell Praed, and telling her father how much she enjoyed it, also was a way of recommending the title to him and assuring him that she was keeping up her reading. Gretchen Galbraith notes that recollections of family reading in autobiographies “served to convey moments of intimacy between a parent and a child”,⁵⁴ and evoking such recollections in letters served a similar function. By simply telling him about what she was doing, Mary made a connection to him.

To some extent influenced by her father in regards to her reading tastes but also following her own interests, as a teenager Mary preferred popular novels and classics. During her European trip she read, amongst many others, *Quo Vadis* (in French, then in German), *The Heavenly Twins* (a New Woman novel by Sarah Grand, which Mary was translating into French), *Thelma* (“for the sixth time”, another of Corelli’s popular novels), *The Lightning Conductor* (“a delightful book”), *My Japanese Wife* by Clive Holland (Amy had also read it), *Lady Rose’s Daughter* (by the very popular novelist Mrs Humphry Ward, a book Amy Barkas read first, and which Mary thoroughly enjoyed), and Mary

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⁵¹ For example, the Brancepeth station library also included works by Campbell Praed. Wevers, *Reading on the Farm*, 197.

⁵² Unfortunately, Fred Barkas’s letters to Mary during the 1904/1905 European trip have not survived. As evidence for Fred’s reading is mainly traced through his letters to Mary, there is little evidence for his and his family’s reading when they were together and not writing to each other.

⁵³ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 24 September 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL.

⁵⁴ Galbraith, *Reading Lives*, 28.

Johnston's *Audrey* (which Mary noted Fred had already read).⁵⁵ Mary also read *Wilhelm Tell* (in German) and Rudyard Kipling's *Captain Courageous*, and made plans to read more of the English classics including Dickens and Thackeray on her return to New Zealand.⁵⁶ Sarah Grand and Marie Corelli were two of Mary's favourite authors at the time. *Thelma*, Mary wrote in another letter, she knew "off by heart."⁵⁷ And after attempting to translate *The Heavenly Twins* into French, she did the same with German when practicing that language a few months later. Then she noted:

Yesterday, I started trying to translate my beloved "Heavenly Twins" into German, but found it too tough to translate, and got so interested in reading it again, that I can't resist until I have re-read it. Every time I take it up I find some passage I must mark – soon the book will be black with underlining.⁵⁸

While in Europe, however, the restrictions of travel meant a lack of access to a range of reading material. Though Mary had some funds to buy books, the practicalities of travel meant buying and then carrying too many books was not an option. While Mary and Amy stayed in Munich during the second half of 1904, both joined the American library, which provided them with access to English reading material.⁵⁹ In other locations, availability or non-availability of books at the various places where Amy and Mary stayed also dictated their reading choices. This led Mary to reading a number of Shakespeare plays while visiting her uncle Dr William Rushton Parker, surgeon in Kendal, north England, and himself a proponent of education and reading.⁶⁰ Once

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⁵⁵ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 22 May, 23 May, 1 August, 9 August, 27 August, 11 October, 22 October and 1 November 1904, MS-Papers-2491-09 and -10, ATL. Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue Blanche, 1900, and Wien: Hartleben, 1897); Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (London: Heinemann, 1894); Marie Corelli, *Thelma: A Society Novel* (London: R. Bentley, 1887); C.N. Williamson, *The Lightning Conductor: The Strange Adventures of a Motorcar* (London: Methuen, 1902); Clive Holland, *My Japanese Wife* (London: Constable & Co, 1895); Mrs Humphry Ward, *Lady Rose's Daughter* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1903); Mary Johnston, *Audrey* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co, 1902).

⁵⁶ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 9 October and 18 October 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL. Friedrich Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell* (Tübingen: J.G. Cotta, 1804); Rudyard Kipling, *Captain Courageous* (London: Macmillan, 1897).

⁵⁷ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 27 September 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL. There are numerous references throughout her letters in late 1904 to Marie Corelli, saying Mary had seen Corelli's latest book advertised, seen it in the shops, and finally that Amy had ordered it for Mary's birthday.

⁵⁸ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 31 August 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL.

⁵⁹ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 12 August 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL. Mary visited the library about once a week, and for a fee of ½d per day borrowed English novels, and read British and American newspapers and magazines in the reading room. See several references to the American library during 1904 in MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL.

⁶⁰ An obituary for William Rushton Parker states that while a member of the town council he succeeded in securing Carnegie-funds for a public library in Kendal and also donated large sums of money to libraries, museums and schools. "Obituary: Dr. William Rushton Parker," *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London* 156, no. 3 (1945), 217-9; available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1095-8312.1945.tb00394.x/pdf>, accessed 5 October 2011.

again, writing about her reading established the connection to her father, who could easily imagine his daughter sitting down to read *Julius Caesar* or *Hamlet*. In this particular instance, the connection that Mary evoked through her letter and through her reading was not just to her father. By reading *Coriolanus*, Mary was reminded of her school friends, who she knew were reading the same play. Mary wrote:

There are no novels in this house,- “Anna Karenina” by Tolstoi is the nearest approach to one and Uncle won’t let me read it,- tho’ I guess Mother would,- so I’ve taken to Shakespeare. There are some very nice little editions, one play in one book with very good notes. I have read “Julius Caesar”, “Coriolanus”, and Henry VIII, looking up everything I thought would have an important note, and I am now beginning “Hamlet”. I am really enjoying them very much,- specially “Coriolanus”, knowing that the girls at school will be doing that now. I suppose now they will be beginning to get ready the play for the end of term II; how I wish I were there, at least to look on, if not to act in it.⁶¹

The reference that her uncle would not let her read *Anna Karenina* is the only instance in which Mary recorded in her letters that someone barred her reading a particular title. Both her parents were very topical readers, reading new releases and popular fiction, and allowed Mary – at least by the time she was a teenager and when we have her records – an independence in her choice of reading. By that time, Fred and Amy saw Mary as an intelligent and independently-minded young woman.⁶² There is no evidence that suggests either parent attempted to discipline or supervise Mary’s reading; a practice that, as Kate Flint has shown, was common in the late Victorian period.⁶³ Mary’s parents also shared and discussed much of their fictional and non-fictional reading with her. On the European trip, for example, Amy and Mary often read a book one after the other. Mary’s uncle, on the other hand, might have felt a paternal need to guide young Mary’s reading while she was a guest at his house. A tragic love story that included an extramarital affair leading to divorce, and questioned prevailing societal expectations and pressures regarding marriage and family life, ultimately ending in the suicide of the female protagonist, perhaps seemed unsuitable to a fourteen-year old,

⁶¹ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 12 July 1904, MS-Papers-2491-09, ATL. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina: A Russian Realistic Novel* (London: Vizetelly, 1887). The Shakespeare editions are likely to be of the “Temple Shakespeare” series, published by Dent (London), all with commentary by Israel Gollansz; *Shakespeare’s Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (1886), *Shakespeare’s Tragedy of Coriolanus* (1896), *Shakespeare’s King Henry VIII* (1899) and *Shakespeare’s Tragedy of Hamlet* (1896).

⁶² For example, Amy and Mary were already visiting the University of London in 1904, just before Mary’s fifteenth birthday, and talked to medical students with the intention that Mary would in a few years begin her studies there. See several letters from Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas during 1904, MS-Papers-2491-09, ATL.

⁶³ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 192, 201, 209-18.

middle-class girl. Mary's uncle could not know that novels with similar themes were already part of her reading diet.

While her very intimate and personal letters to her father reveal a connection characterised by warmth, the mother-daughter relationship emerges from her pages as one of more distance and sometimes of a lack of understanding. This is evident in particular in later letters when Mary was living in London. Already, during her trip to Europe in 1904, however, the letters suggest that Mary was closer to her father than to her mother. In her own words, Mary described her "Daddy" as "good-natured" and her "Mother" as "the Boss".⁶⁴ The form of address Mary used is also indicative of the quality of the familial relationships. When talking about Amy, Mary referred to "Mother", when addressing Fred she wrote "My Dear Old Daddy", or just "Dear Daddy".⁶⁵ Barkas addressed his letters to her with "My Dear Mary" and usually signed them "with heaps of love, yours ever. Fred Barkas"; he always signed with his name. While living in London, Mary spent most Sundays with Amy, and her letters tell of a difficult mother-daughter relationship, made the more difficult to some extent by the obvious intimacy between Fred and Mary. In 1915, Mary asked Fred to not number the pages of his letters anymore, so she could leave out some pages when letting her mother read them. Mary explained: "If I don't show her my letters she gets cross & thinks I'm plotting against her; & if I do show them she gets cross about things in them."⁶⁶ That was precisely what had happened that afternoon:

She [Amy] waxed wrathful over your saying she said your singing of Maud was loathly to her – vowed she'd never written it & that I must have imagined it & told you – to make mischief - & then all the old diatribe, how I'd come between you & broken up the home & turned her out of Timaru &c., &c., &c., ad lib.⁶⁷

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⁶⁴ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 9 October 1904, MS-Papers-2491-10, ATL. Commenting on a young boy and his family staying in the same pension as her, Mary wrote "He lives now fortunately with his father who is stricter than his mother (the reverse of a family we know of, eh, Dad?) They won't believe me when I tell them how good-natured my Daddy is, and that Mother is the "Boss" – they say it is unnatural; I only know that it succeeds all right and that we get on pretty well under the existing arrangement, don't we?"

⁶⁵ See for example, Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 1 January, 26 August and 26 November 1904, MS-Papers 2491-09 and -10, ATL. This form of address is consistent throughout the correspondence. See for example, Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 12 May, 25 June and 5 July 1929, MS-Papers-2491-26, ATL.

⁶⁶ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 19 January 1915, MS-Papers-2491-14, ATL.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Figure 3.3

Fred and Mary Barkas in Timaru, c. 1917

Source: Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, folder 4, ATL.

One letter in 1904, just after Mary's fifteenth birthday, is an interesting example of the different dynamics in both parental relationships. It is also emblematic of the role of the correspondence and of reading for the formulation and asserting of selfhood. Mary wrote:

Monday, 3rd. Oct. [1904], Munich

I'm afraid these foreign languages are ruining my English spelling. I had expected to find a great number of words in German resembling English, but I find in French many more. There are crowds of words in French you can guess at, but in German I find comparably few. Still, I'm getting along finely, and learning a heap; Mother is rather a damper, but Frau Doktor gives me

Homer, Schiller, Goethe – und so weiter – to read and Mother says it is absolutely impossible for me to read them – now isn't that damping to my young enthusiasm? But with patience & a good Dictionary one can do something, at least, out of the toughest books – even Goethe's "Faust" which Mother says is quite impossible.⁶⁸

Mary and Fred used their letters, and in particular their writing about reading, to express and shape their identities. In this instance, Mary assured her father she was a capable young woman, more capable than her mother would think. Even the toughest books she could conquer with patience and determination. It was both the content of reading – here the classical German story of Faust – and the act of reading that defined her identity.⁶⁹

The continuous conversation about reading, which took place in Fred and Mary's letters, was an extension of shared reading experiences, including reading aloud, when they were together. Reading and books as gifts were also part of Fred's and Amy's early married life, and constituted a sign of emotional intimacy between them at that time.⁷⁰ Reading was part of family life. Although only few letters exist written during the period 1905-1913, Fred kept notebooks of "books read", and transferred some extracts into his "Memories of a Mediocrity" collection of letters, which he prepared in retirement. While the family was living in Wellington, and particularly after 1909 when Mary and Fred were living in Timaru, but Amy had already left New Zealand, father and daughter often "settled by the fire and read aloud to each other."⁷¹ They read their way through Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in an edition in seven "handy volumes" during 1912 and 1913.⁷² Fred also recorded reading aloud to Mary, Motley's *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, *The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* and George Meredith's *Evan Harrington*.⁷³ Their reading aloud together focussed mainly on

⁶⁸ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 3 October 1904, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, folder 3, ATL.

⁶⁹ On this point see also Pooley and Pooley, "Such a Splendid Tale," 348.

⁷⁰ For example, in 1892 Amy and Fred were reading together *The History of David Grieve* by Mrs Humphry Ward (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1892). Fred Barkas to Charlie Barkas, 13 June 1892, MS-Papers-2491-06, ATL.

⁷¹ Note by Fred Barkas for February 1911, in MS-Papers-2491-08, ATL.

⁷² The seven-volume edition had been a gift to Fred from Amy Barkas. Note by Fred Barkas for March 1908, MS-Papers-2491-07, for February, March and August 1912, for January 1913, MS-Papers-2491-08, ATL. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1776). The edition read by Fred and Mary was in the World's Classics series by Henry Frowde, London, 1906.

⁷³ Note by Fred Barkas for May 1908, MS-Papers-2491-07; for April and November 1911, MS-Papers-2491-08, ATL. John Lothrop Motley, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (London: Chapman, 1856); Lafcadio Hearn and Elizabeth Bisland, *The Japanese Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co, 1910); George Meredith, *Evan Harrington* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1861).

historical non-fiction. Before starting on Gibbon, they had also read Justin McCarthy's *A History of Our Own Times*, Freeman's *Historical Sketch of Europe* and *Memoirs of the Crusades* by Ville-Hardouin.⁷⁴ It seems, when reading aloud together, Fred and Mary's reading was not purely for leisure and pleasure, but encompassed an element of instruction. Nineteenth-century reading advice manuals emphasised the usefulness of reading aloud as a family bonding, as well as guiding children's reading choices, and reading aloud between parents and children remained a common practice into the early twentieth century.⁷⁵

KEEPING ALIVE CONNECTIONS ACROSS SPACE AND TIME

After Mary moved to London in 1913, Fred and Mary re-vitalised their pact of a daily page to each other, and again began to discuss their reading through their letters. The letters now became an exchange between two adults. They still included long passages of reflections on reading, music and ideas in general. One of the key functions of the correspondence remained keeping alive an emotional connection across space. Keeping connected to Mary for Fred meant also a connection between generations. In January 1919, just a few months before his retirement, at the age of sixty-four and when Mary, aged twenty-nine, was working at a private psychiatric hospital in Bethlem, south London, he wrote:

And your generation & mine have managed to keep in touch to an unusual degree, for tho' you have been for some pretty long spells separated (in space) from me, yet by means of our free & unrestricted correspondence we have not lost touch; & I can assure you I have & do recognise the benefit of having ties – through you – with the younger generation.⁷⁶

The open nature of the correspondence was crucial and part of the intimacy between father and daughter. On one occasion Fred described Mary's letters as "delightful & intimate".⁷⁷ They wrote about mundane day-to-day routines, but they also wrote about their emotions, anxieties, ideas and beliefs. Mary was involved with the

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⁷⁴ Note by Fred Barkas for December 1911, January and February 1912, MS-Papers-2491-08, ATL. Justin McCarthy, *A History of Our Own Times* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1879); Edward Augustus Freeman, *General Sketch of European History* (London: Macmillan, 1872); Ville-Hardouin and De Joinville, *Memoirs of the Crusades* (London: Dent, 1908).

⁷⁵ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 100, 94, 204; Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, 34-5.

⁷⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 31 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁷⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 5 May 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

Fabian Society and keenly interested in Socialism. Fred belonged to the local Round Table group, part of an empire-wide political movement, and explored further in the next chapter. Their interests influenced their reading choices. Frequently, Fred and Mary discussed their political views and their political reading, now in a much more extensive way than during the years 1904/1905.

The bond the correspondence enabled across distance was first and foremost between Fred Barkas and Mary. The correspondence also allowed Mary to remain part of the local community in Timaru. Fred often included news of people they both knew in Timaru. He shared with Mary with whom he had spent the evening singing and listening to music, reading and chatting. He also told her particulars of his readers' network in Timaru, including what other fellow readers thought of specific titles. In addition to their father-daughter reading connection, Fred imagined Mary as part of his wider reading communities. For example, in January 1922 he wrote:

I wonder if you have read a novel by A.S.M. Hutchinson called "If Winter Comes" – Miss Culverwell was doubtful about it, Percy Rule said it was one of the best things he'd read for a long time, Mrs. Westmacott not very enthusiastic, so it has been handed to me to read last week & I certainly found it well worth while. The way the story is presented is clever – the chief character Mark Sabre is introduced to you in the slap-dashy, half slang ejaculation chatter of Hapgood a breezy barrister; the most of the book I & all books II & III are the writer's psychological, analytical, part poetical narrative of the mentality of ordinary England 1912 to 1919 – especially as the great events reacted on Mark Sabre – and on the other characters – Mable, his wife, Nona the woman he loves & Effie, the girl he tries to save – the IV book goes back to the story as known to & told by Hapgood; the study of Mark Sabre interested me deeply because owing to his always seeing both sides – all sides, almost, of every problem, question, situation, &c. he was hopelessly unsuccessful from the worldly point of view & very near coming to hopeless smash – he had in an exaggerated degree what I have had, more or less, all my life – viz:- the inability to see one side only – to have any strong, firm, fighting conviction.⁷⁸

This description of Barkas's reading of *If Winter Comes*, a socio-critical novel set in an English village dealing with such issues as unhappy marriages and unwed motherhood – and a bestseller in 1922 – illustrates the many interpersonal connections reading could generate as well as the different qualities of these connections.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 10 January 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. Arthur Stuart Menteith Hutchinson, *If Winter Comes* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1921).

⁷⁹ Waller notes that Hutchinson's novel "sold three-quarters of a million copies in Britain and America." Waller, *Writers, Readers, & Reputations*, 720.

readers identified by Barkas in this letter were members of his local reading network as explained in chapter one. The librarian (Culverwell) was an important link in this network; whether *If Winter Comes* however was a copy owned by the library is impossible to say. The point here is that because of the intimate bond between Barkas and Mary, he also included her in other reading spaces and communities that were important to him. It was the correspondence that allowed Mary to remain part of the local community and her distant physical location was rendered irrelevant in this case by the continuous conversation within the correspondence.

In addition to allowing Mary to read about other readers in Timaru, Barkas enabled her to also “speak” to them by handing around some of her letters. Just as her teenage-letters had multiple addressees, Fred passed on some of her letters written from London and holiday postcards when she was an adult, but only after she had given him permission to do so. There were “general” letters for a wider readership, but most were private and for Fred’s eyes only. Occasionally Mary explicitly asked him to pass a letter on; on other occasions Barkas shared her news as a proud father. “Miss McIver & her friend Miss Sheila Nevin are almost as excited about your Germany journeys & as eager for MORE as I am”, he told her in 1922.⁸⁰ By continually naming the people he socialised with, and more importantly, by naming other readers, he established also “if not an intimacy, at least a relationship of familiarity” between Mary and members of his local reading communities.⁸¹

BOOKS, READING AND THE “EPISTOLARY PACT”

All correspondence is self-referential. A common epistolary practice during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries was to state which letters arrived and which seemed missing, and to remark on “the interval since last receiving and sending” and on the mail routes used for sending letters.⁸² Fred often noted how long it took for the mail to reach New Zealand as a way of commenting on reliability of mail services. On Mary’s letters she had typed and which made it into the collection un-edited by Fred, he noted at the top the date he had received them. Fred then often commented on Mary’s letters

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⁸⁰ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 10 January 1922, MS-Papers 2491-30, ATL.

⁸¹ This point is made by Elizabeth Vibert, showing how Murdoch Stewart, by naming his relatives in his memoirs, made sure his own children, never having met their Scottish ancestors, could establish a familiar relationship with them and connect to their family history. Vibert, “Writing ‘Home’,” 74.

⁸² Charlotte Macdonald, “Introduction,” in *Women Writing Home, 1700-1920: Female Correspondence across the British Empire, Vol. 5: New Zealand*, ed. Charlotte Macdonald (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), xvii.

briefly and replied to her questions consecutively. Thus, the correspondence constituted a delayed, yet continuous conversation. “More delights arrived by the post this afternoon, your 24th. - 28th. November budget”, he wrote in January 1922.

[W]hat a richity [sic] we’ve had from you this past four days; after the blank from Oct 23rd. to Nov 06th. (though I’m still rather hoping that the letter will still arrive – coming by direct steamer perhaps) – but the lovely budgets we have now got from you – six big letters besides picture postcards in four days – more than compensate for any omissions or gaps. [...] What a wonderful time you are having - & how you manage to make the most of it – why, even at second hand I am revelling in the whole thing with you – so keep going, so that I may share your joyous & interesting delights.⁸³

The correspondence was a central part of Fred’s life and part of its structure. He wrote his letters in the evenings, usually before he sat down for some reading. For him, the rhythms of reading and writing were interlinked. In addition, through reading Mary’s letters, Fred felt he could participate in her life and to some extent he lived his life vicariously through Mary. He therefore relied on her daily updates or at least weekly instalments. On reading some of Mary’s postcards in 1918, Fred reflected: “I sometimes think I get more real enjoyment out of your travels than even you yourself do.”⁸⁴

The frequency of the correspondence was essential to the nature of Fred’s and Mary’s relationship. The intimacy between father and daughter was partly a result of and evidenced by the longevity and continuity of the correspondence, as well as its rhythm.⁸⁵ As Smith-Rosenberg has argued, the “regularity of [the] correspondence underline[d] the sincerity of their words.”⁸⁶ Barkas’s letters confirm that the addressees of family correspondences, bridging great geographical distance and trying to overcome physical separation, were not just longing for news from their loved ones, but for frequent and regular writing. Fred often felt disappointed when one of Mary’s “budgets” seems to

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⁸³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 10 January 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. See also: “My prayers are answered – my forgiveness has gone out freely to you – this morning, hearing the postman’s whistle I went down to the gate to meet him; he handed me a letter from Geo. Bullock (...) & began fumbling in his bag. Drew out an empty envelope surcharged 4d to pay, your writing, my address, then handed me a goodly bundle of MSS, hoping it was all there.; I paid that 4d. readily & now after lunch I have read your deeply interesting budget which covers the period 21st Oct to 30th Nov. – post-marked 1st Dec.” Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 31 January 1920, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁸⁴ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 5 May 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

⁸⁵ Analysing a voluminous family correspondence, which spanned the years 1795 to 1933 and included a large number of family members, Martyn Lyons notes that the “dynamism of the family network was sustained by the rhythm of reciprocal exchange.” Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World*, 177.

⁸⁶ Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual,” 13.

have got lost or she missed a mail.⁸⁷ Frequently, he urged Mary to keep up her regular letters:

Don't you think it would be an improvement if you were to make it a rule to post me a budget EVERY MONDAY? Then I should benefit by getting a regular weekly summary from you instead of (as has been the case this last twice) a letter written once in three weeks. At the speed you write it would not occupy more than 10 mins. (at the very most, a quarter of an hour) a day to dash me off a few of your always interesting remarks of people, books, thoughts & things. I am very gratified if you find my "pages" interesting living as I do in so remote a village the "Cabbage & Cow" sort of existence I do (according to your Mother's picturing of it), how much the more interesting your "pages", living at the "Hub" of the Great World, you so young, keen, able and intelligent.⁸⁸

What is evident in the above example is that Fred and Mary had agreed on what Cecile Dauphin has termed an "epistolary pact".⁸⁹ Epistolary pacts become visible when broken: Fred and Mary's pact was to maintain their connection by regular and intimate knowledge of each other. They vowed to write daily and to post their letters with every regular mail ship going out. The epistolary pact also dictated the topics for correspondence. The order and list of topics Barkas desired to hear about from Mary thus needs to be highlighted: "people, books, thoughts & things". Books were inseparable from other experiences, and so much part of Fred's and Mary's lives that reading became an ingredient in the correspondence as much as gossip and personal thoughts. Books were a topic they could share, and one that connected father and daughter emotionally and intellectually.

The correspondence embodied enormous emotional value for Fred. Sharing his diary-letters and his reading with Mary expressed intimacy.⁹⁰ As Martyn Lyons has argued, "[c]orrespondence fills an absence, and constitutes a ritual of separation."⁹¹ Fred's correspondence with Mary filled her absence; Mary's letters came to represent her company, especially as Fred did not form another emotional intimacy, in Timaru or across space. Mary was his only child, and the relationship with his estranged wife Amy

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⁸⁷ See for example, Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 5 January 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL: "Now I must stop & go & post this – Heaps of love & please do not miss the N.Z. mails – I feel so disappointed when nothing comes. Yours ever, Fred Barkas."

⁸⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 23 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁸⁹ Cécile Dauphin et al., *La Correspondance: Les Usages de la Lettre au XIX^e Siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), cited in Lyons, "Love Letters and *Écritures Intimes*," 358-61.

⁹⁰ Similarly, Smith-Rosenberg argues that the sharing of diaries between female friends in the early nineteenth century was "a sign of special friendship", conveying and deepening an emotional quality of love and affection. Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," 21.

⁹¹ Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing in the Western World*, 178.

had chilled, especially after she moved to London in 1909.⁹² Importantly, Mary also did not form another emotional intimacy and remained unmarried for the rest of her life.⁹³

Figure 3.4

Fred Barkas, reading a letter, c. 1915

Source: 2002/300.072, South Canterbury Museum.

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⁹² Fred and Amy continued to correspond and within the Barkas collection, there are two volumes of “Some Letters from my Wife”, covering the period 1904 to 1920 (MS-Papers-2491-38 and -39). Amy Barkas died in January 1920 aged seventy, after falling ill with influenza, followed by pneumonia. A volume with letters from relatives and friends includes several condolence letters to Fred Barkas after Amy’s death. MS-Papers-2491-65, ATL.

⁹³ Barbara Brookes notes that women who embarked on a medical career in the early twentieth century often experienced loneliness. Women doctors also encountered “formal marriage bars” or remained single as marriage would have meant abandoning a professional career. Although Mary Barkas never explicitly discussed such issues in her letters, her situation was very similar to that of the women examined by Brookes. Barbara Brookes, “A Corresponding Community: Dr Agnes Bennett and Her Friends from the Edinburgh Medical College for Women of the 1890s,” *Medical History* 52, no. 2 (2008): 254.

Figure 3.5

Mary Barkas at Bethlem Hospital, London, 1919

Source: MS-Papers-2491-18, ATL.

The reading connection between Fred and Mary was also one that connected their respective places: Timaru, and London. Fred desired Mary's updates as she was located "at the 'Hub' of the Great World". This meant both the political centre of the empire, and more importantly the literary and cultural centre of the British world. In a much earlier letter to his brother Charlie, Fred commented that he and Amy were reading a number of "Home papers" as they "liked to keep up a nodding acquaintance with the events of the Great World."⁹⁴ Alistair Thomson notes, that "[l]etters sustain ties with place as well as people".⁹⁵ Through his reading, both of newspapers and periodicals and of Mary's letters, Fred was able to participate in two places at once, something Bruce Elliott et al. have termed "transnationalized rootedness."⁹⁶ Although London appeared to be the more significant place from which newsworthy information

⁹⁴ Fred Barkas to Charlie Barkas, 13 March 1891, MS-Papers-2491-06, ATL.

⁹⁵ Thomson, *Moving Stories*, 205.

⁹⁶ Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke, "Introduction," in *Letters across Borders: Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, ed. Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 2.

originated, the flow of reading material that connected reading places like Timaru and London was two-way. Fred often included local newspaper clippings or entire newspapers, as well as locally-produced pamphlets in his letters. Mary sent political pamphlets, Fabian publications, and a range of newspapers and periodicals, including the *Observer*, the *Athenaeum*, *The Guildsman* and the *BBC Listener*.⁹⁷ An abundance of ephemera, often annotated with additional information and personal comments, (including theatre and concert programmes, and lecture notes) moved back and forth within the Barkas-correspondence. Fred might have explicitly expressed his desire to be connected to London, but Mary remained equally connected to Timaru.

It is useful at this point to briefly reflect what Fred and Mary did not write about, given the otherwise open and extensive nature of the correspondence. One topic that does not feature prominently in the letters is religion. There are no references that Fred went to church on Sundays, and a few comments in his letters suggest that the Barkas family was not particularly religious.⁹⁸ There is also no evidence, for example, of bible reading within the family, a common practice in this period.⁹⁹ The absence of religion remained a continuum throughout both Fred's and Mary's life. By the time Mary worked at the private mental hospital The Lawn in 1930, it appears she was expected to attend Sunday mass, something she did reluctantly:

Church this morning was slightly less dreary than usual. [...] The Church of England ritual & service constantly astound me – What a deadly sort of religion it is, & how any body can find anything of value in it. The Psalms, which we read verse & verse about, are typical melancholic & paranoid delusions such as our wards can reproduce by the hundred daily and, except as a psychological study of David's insanity, seem pointless.¹⁰⁰

In the same year, Fred wrote (after being prompted to re-read a psalm by some other reading) that it was “a long time” since he “had read any of the gospels, but such a collection of Fairy stories, magic, weak evidence, cryptic sayings, assumptions and positive assertions fairly astonished me.”¹⁰¹

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⁹⁷ See Barkas Reading Database.

⁹⁸ For example, during Mary's time at Victoria College in Wellington, Barkas noted, she “took an active part in all of the college doings (excepting the Students' Christian Union).” Note by Fred Barkas, final three pages in MS-Papers-2491-11, ATL. It is difficult to establish what denomination the Barkas family belonged to, but likely they were Anglicans. Fred and Amy Barkas married on 3 September 1887, at the Anglican St. Michael's Church, in Christchurch. “A Wedding Presentation,” *The Star*, 3 September 1887, 3; “Marriages,” *The Star*, 5 September 1887, 2.

⁹⁹ Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, 29-39.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 7 September 1930, MS-Papers-2491-26, ATL.

¹⁰¹ Fred to Mary Barkas, 26 January 1930, MS-Papers-2491-36, ATL.

READING, WRITING AND IDENTITY

Máire Cross and Caroline Bland have noted, that “letter-writing provided men and women with a space to explore their identity as citizens of a particular nation, as members of interest groups, as gendered subjects.”¹⁰² Fred and Mary’s correspondence testifies to this notion. They were writing as father and daughter, as older and younger generation, and as man and woman.¹⁰³ They were also writing as readers. Talking about reading often served as the opening of a conversation about personal matters or views about the parental relationship, in Fred’s letters to Mary and vice versa. It was the lens used by Fred Barkas and his adult daughter Mary to reflect on their lives and on each other. The following letter by Fred to Mary of July 1918 is an example of this:

I finished Hugh Walpole’s “Green Mirror” after I got back from the Hall’s last night. If you have not read it, I think it would interest you, for you are a very typical specimen of the “New Generation” which is smashing up the conventions & habits of the passing generation & your Mother is a sort of modified Mrs. Trenchard – a very modified sort – who, if she had been Katherine’s mother would certainly have forgiven her (after a time, may be) for her rebellion against “the family” and for breaking away to live her own life with her chosen rescuer Philip Mark. I must certainly now read his “Duchess of Wrexhe” which apparently deals with another phase of English life which is being broken up as surely as the stolid, smug, conservative Trenchard stratum.¹⁰⁴

Fred identified Mary with the young protagonist of the story, and identified the generational gap that existed between her and her parents. He likened Mary to the “new generation”; in an earlier letter he had described her as “young, keen, able and intelligent”.¹⁰⁵ Fred also referred to Mary’s mother Amy Barkas, likening her to the protagonist’s opposing figure. Referring to and writing about Amy was a regular, even though not frequent feature in the correspondence between father and daughter while

¹⁰² Máire Cross and Caroline Bland, “Gender Politics: Breathing New Life into Old Letters,” in *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter-Writing, 1750-2000*, ed. Caroline Bland and Máire Cross (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 6-7.

¹⁰³ In addition to the role of writing for the formation of identity, Fred’s and Mary’s relationship as father and daughter was equally a significant space which shaped their identities. See Davidoff et al., *The Family Story*, esp. 90-97. On middle-class families and identity during the nineteenth century see also Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1987]).

¹⁰⁴ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 22 July 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Hugh Walpole, *The Green Mirror* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1918); *The Duchess of Wrexhe, Her Decline and Death* (London: Martin Secker, 1914).

¹⁰⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 23 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

Mary studied and lived in London in the 1910s and regularly saw her mother.¹⁰⁶ Amy Barkas, despite the geographical and emotional separation that came with her move to England, remained part of the family.¹⁰⁷ In the few instances that Fred wrote about Amy, he did not speak in a hostile or bitter tone about his estranged wife. In this instance, he described Amy as a loving and forgiving mother to Mary, certainly more caring than the protagonist of the story. Mainly, he was reminded of Mary while reading *The Green Mirror*, and used his reflection on the book to express his views on Mary's personality and life. Incidentally, Mary had read both *The Green Mirror* and *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, and like her father, confessed to be "a great admirer of Hugh Walpole."¹⁰⁸

Another example from the same year can be interpreted as more obvious paternal advice. Mary had been under stress at her work, at the private psychiatric hospital Bethlem. She left the hospital in August 1919 to study psychological medicine at the University of London. Throughout the correspondence there is a strong suggestion that Mary suffered from episodes of depression and serious self-doubts. Just before Mary's resignation from Bethlem, Barkas wrote:

You were talking in a recent letter about your love for being alone as a sure sign of a liability towards lunacy; Mr. G. Sweven is certainly NOT of that opinion – if you can get the loan of a copy of "Limanora", read chapter IV on "Hermitry". "One of the early discoveries of this people in the art of progress was that, where men are too much or too long together, they confirm each other's faults & clog advance [...] But when you have some "off" time the book I feel sure would interest you – there's nothing much in the story, but it is the philosophy and anticipations of human progress which appear to me worth reading and trying to think out."¹⁰⁹

There is no evidence in Mary's letters suggesting she read the book, nor did she acknowledge his recommendation.¹¹⁰ Fred's summary perhaps was sufficient for her to

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¹⁰⁶ Mary usually visited Amy on Sundays, and many of her letters during the years 1913 to 1920 report on these Sundays spent with her mother. See Mary's letters to Fred during 1913 to 1920, MS-Papers-2491-13 to -18, ATL.

¹⁰⁷ Fred Barkas also continued to financially support Amy until her death in 1920.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 9 October 1918, MS-Papers-2491-18, ATL. In fact, Mary had already read *The Duchess of Wrexhe* several years earlier in 1915, telling her father that it was "a wonderful study of the break up of the Victorian era – you must read it - & the death of an age of shams & stupidities & muddle & hypocrisy & the hope of the dawn of the Universal Brotherhood." Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 13 February 1915, MS-Papers-2491-14, ATL.

¹⁰⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 25 August 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL. Godfrey Sweven [John Macmillan Brown], *Limanora: The Island of Progress* (New York and London: Putnam, 1903).

¹¹⁰ Mary did mention some other reading in her reply: "I had a delightful and peaceful afternoon sitting over my fire and reading Compton Mackenzie's new novel, Sylvia Scarlett, which I found quite worth reading – more so than Sinister Street, the hero of which, Michael Fane, is evidently going to marry Sylvia

read. Godfrey Sweven's *Limanora* is an utopian fantasy, criticising contemporary societal conditions and outlining a future civilisation based on individuality. Through Fred, the author Godfrey Sweven took on a voice of authority and is described as if he was known to Fred and part of his and Mary's circle of friends. The book became a source of advice on a topic that perhaps would have been too direct or awkward to discuss between father and daughter otherwise. Letting the author give his – Fred's – advice meant that Fred could talk about this sensitive topic with Mary while adding weight to his views by citing what he had been reading. The author – Godfrey Sweven – added an aura of authority to the paternal advice. Fred ended his letter by saying there was not much to the story, but the spaces to which her imagination would take her were worth exploring. Here, one of the crucial functions of books and reading comes into play: the ability of print to transcend reality and enter imaginary worlds and spaces that provide a momentary escape and help negotiate the known world.

Fred and Mary used their reading not only to offer advice or comment on the other's life, but also to reflect on their own identities. On Boxing Day 1921, after Fred had just spent over a year and a half travelling through Europe and the United States, including some time spent with Mary in England, he was back in Timaru, writing his "daily page". After reading a book the librarian Evelyn Culverwell had given him to read over the Christmas holidays, he wondered whether it was actually Mary who had recommended the book to him and to the library in the first place. "Was it you who recommended me to read 'Old People & the Things that Pass' by Louis Couperus?", Fred wrote. He judged it "a wonderfully powerful book", and continued to write: "but I hope I shall never grow old nor fear old age in the way in which this Dutch Family is described as doing (or having done) – somehow, I don't think I shall – but one never knows one's future - & now I'm getting very near to 68."¹¹¹ Fred enjoyed reading the book, and he used it to reflect upon himself, his anxieties about age and his position in life, concluding and reassuring Mary that he was not afraid of aging. In another letter he had commented that it was partly his close relationship to Mary and to younger generations that kept him from growing old.¹¹² It is not clear whether Mary had recommended the book, but she often alerted her father to titles she deemed worth

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in the sequel to follow this one." Mary Barkas to Fred Barkas, 4 November 1918, MS-Papers-2491-18, ATL. Compton Mackenzie, *The Early Life and Adventures of Sylvia Scarlett* (London: Secker, 1918), *Sinister Street* (London: Secker, 1913).

¹¹¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, Boxing Day 1921, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. Louis Couperus, *Old People and the Things that Pass* (London: T. Butterworth, 1919).

¹¹² Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 31 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

reading, and Barkas often followed her advice. Regularly, Mary also suggested titles for the Timaru Public Library, which Fred then passed on to Culverwell.¹¹³ Did Mary recommend a title that dealt with questions of growing old and with changing family relations because she wanted him to reflect on these issues? Her training as a psychiatrist and even just her part in this close father-daughter relationship suggest that this could have been the case. Books, reading and talking about the thought a particular book triggered was a conscious part of their relationship.

Fred and Mary's relationship was one of ideas and texts. Books and reading took Fred and Mary into imaginary spaces which they could share. They prompted excursions into the mind, like the one of Fred after reading H.G. Wells's *First and Last Things*:

Have finished reading Wells' "First and Last Things" a second time – one of his best books, I think – at least it is a gallant attempt to be honest & it is full of thought compelling ideas: - What is one's real purpose in life? How has one served & what service is still possible for one to attempt? Great questions.¹¹⁴

Fred and Mary actively nurtured their reading relationship by constantly writing about their reading, their political outlook and by recommending and sending each other reading material. Their reading constituted and guaranteed the reciprocity of their intimacy. This reciprocity was not always symmetrical, however. Mary's locatedness at the "Hub of the Great World", her youth in comparison to her father and her intelligence ensued authority when it came to reading, while Fred's authority was based on his fatherhood, experience and his older age.

CONCLUSION

Father and daughter, Fred and Mary Barkas were two voracious readers living for most of their adult lives on opposite sides of the globe. They shared their reading and reading practices through an extensive, regular and long-lasting correspondence. Fred and Mary's letters also constituted and shaped an intimacy. They vowed to write to each other every day and for the most part adhered to it. They shared their thoughts, hopes,

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¹¹³ There are several references in Fred's letters that mention library books that Mary had recommended. For example, on Saturday evening, 8 November 1919, the librarian Culverwell dropped of a library book at Barkas's house for his weekend reading with the words: "I think it was Miss Barkas who recommended that book." Barkas promised to return it on Monday morning. The title was Elinor Mordaunt, *The Processionals* (London: Cassell, 1918). Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 9 November 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

¹¹⁴ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 13 January 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. H.G. Wells, *First and Last Things: A Confession of Faith and a Rule of Life* (London: Archibald Constable & Co, 1908).

disappointments and worries, and conversed about everyday matters. The medium they choose to stay connected – daily “diary-letters” – enabled perhaps a more open intimacy than they would have been able to achieve by talking to each other face-to-face. Their letters came to stand for the other’s company, they were part of each other’s existence and as material representation of the relationship the letters held an enormous emotional value.

The substance of this father-daughter intimacy was largely made up of books and reading, and discussion thereof. Both Fred and Mary used the conversation about reading and their opinions about books as a “springboard” to reflect on their lives and to comment on their relationship. In addition, the space of their correspondence allowed Fred and Mary to participate in each other’s local reading cultures and communities. They connected as readers – one situated in Timaru, New Zealand, the other in London and later in provincial north England – by sending reading material and recommendations, by sharing reading practices and by discussing their reading. This exchange of reading material and ideas went both ways.

Fred and Mary’s intimacy was perhaps an unusual one for its intensity and longevity as sustained through their correspondence; unusual because neither Fred nor Mary lived in a conjugal relationship which could have competed for time, candour and affection. But there is no reason to suggest that a trusting and intimate connection between a father and daughter was uncommon. Nor was their reading or their writing uncommon. During the early twentieth century, families were important sites of reading, as well as crucial places for exploring identities. The case of Fred and Mary has illustrated some of the complexities and details of the ways in which reading and writing practices were intimately linked. The following chapter will explore another reading space, in which personal relationships were formed and lived: locally-organised reading groups as spaces of sociability.

The chapter opened with the last note written by Fred Barkas to Mary in September 1932, just before his death. It shall end with telling the rest of Mary’s story. After her return to New Zealand to take care of her father’s estate in late 1932, Mary decided to stay, and sent her resignation to The Lawn, the private psychiatric hospital in Lincoln, England, where she had worked for the previous few years. She settled in Tapu, near Thames, on the Coromandel Peninsula, and appeared to have considered setting up as medical practitioner, although there is no evidence that she opened a

practice.¹¹⁵ Very little is known about the rest of her life, and there are very few papers of hers relating to these years in the Barkas archive. Mary remained in contact with some of her Wellington friends from college-times, including Siegfried Eichelbaum, but seemed to have led a secluded life.¹¹⁶ She occasionally gave lectures to adult educational classes and otherwise spent her time “breeding schnauzers and studying Chinese philosophy.”¹¹⁷ Mary died in 1959, leaving her estate to Pat Southern, the grandson of Fred Barkas’s sister Isabella.

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¹¹⁵ See Mary Barkas’s correspondence with the Medical Council of New Zealand, which confirmed her medical registration in late 1933. Barkas Family Papers, fMS-Papers-4593, ATL.

¹¹⁶ There are a few letters between Mary Barkas and Siegfried Eichelbaum, a Wellington lawyer, in the archive, relating to Mary’s sponsoring of a portrait of Prof. George von Zedlitz, presented to Wellington College in 1936 and now on display in the Von Zedlitz Building at Victoria University of Wellington. Barkas Family Papers, fMS-Papers-4593, ATL.

¹¹⁷ Rachel Barrowman, *Mason: The Life of R.A.K. Mason* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003), 225.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING GROUPS, SOCIABILITY AND ASSOCIATIONAL CULTURE

During the period 1890 to 1930, readers often read in the company of other readers within formally or informally organised reading groups. Such groups, based on the simultaneous and collective reading of a particular genre of texts or of a wide range of reading material, offered spaces for sociability and conviviality. As Elizabeth Long has noted, “the text itself is often a pretext [...] for the conversation through which members engage not only with the authorial ‘other’ but with each other as well.”¹ Other elements that attracted readers to join groups in this period included a desire for self-improvement, topical interests, and a wish to share one’s reading with others. This chapter considers two local reading groups in Timaru: the Round Table discussion group and the drama-orientated Timaru Readers. These reading groups formed “reading communities” as defined in this thesis, as so far as members shared reading strategies and the choice of reading material. Both groups were largely informal reading communities, although some rules and assumptions agreed upon by members existed. They were defined by gender and class, as well as by their participation within the wider, local associational culture. Much of what we know about these groups is through the record of Fred Barkas, as their informal character means these groups did not leave minute books or other records.

Reading in groups, in the form of groups established for the purpose of reading and discussion, dates to the first half of the nineteenth century.² Much scholarship on reading groups during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has focussed on women’s reading groups. Studies by Heather Murray, Elizabeth Long and Christine Pawley have revealed that women groups engaged in a wide variety of reading practices, including reading aloud and recitation, as well as reading and discussing prepared

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¹ Elizabeth Long, “Textual Interpretation as Collective Action,” in *The Ethnography of Reading*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 194.

² Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement!*, 7. Book clubs already existed in the eighteenth century, but these clubs usually took the form of shared subscription libraries rather than spaces for communal reading practices. See Mark Towsey, “First Steps in Associational Reading: Book Use and Sociability at the Wigtown Subscription Library, 1795-9,” *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 103, no. 4 (2009): 455-95; Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); K.A. Manley, “Rural Reading in Northwest England: The Sedbergh Book Club, 1728-1928,” *Book History* 2(1999): 78-95; William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

essays.³ Women read for “study as well as pleasure.”⁴ Reading groups also offered opportunities for fashioning a sense of identity and, as Long notes “a sense of solidarity.”⁵ In contrast to existing scholarship on women’s groups, this chapter begins by examining the male-only Round Table discussion group and its role as a space of masculine sociability. The chapter then explores the reading practices of the mixed-gender group, The Readers, and places both groups within the wider local associational culture.

THE ROUND TABLE MOVEMENT, POLITICAL READING AND MASCULINITY

In 1910 Lionel Curtis, a former Assistant Colonial Secretary in the Transvaal administration and the “emissary” of the Round Table movement, visited New Zealand as part of an empire-wide trip including South Africa, Australia and Canada. The purpose of his visit was to promote the Round Table movement and establish contacts with suitable men who could become leaders of local groups.⁶ The Round Table movement arose in 1909 as a response to debates among British and colonial officials over the issue of imperial defence, triggered mainly by “the alarming expansion of the German navy.” The debates centred, in particular, on the extent to which “the dominions should contribute to the costs of their own defence.”⁷ Within this context, a

³ Heather Murray, “‘Great Works and Good Works’: The Toronto Women’s Literary Club, 1877-1883,” *Historical Studies in Education/ Revue de l’histoire de l’éducation* 11, no. 1 (1999); Elizabeth Long, “Literature as a Spur to Collective Action: The Diverse Perspectives of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Reading Groups,” *Poetics Today* 25, no. 2 (2004); Long, *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Christine Pawley, “‘Not Wholly Self Culture’: The Shakespearean Women’s Club, Osage, Iowa, 1892-1920,” *The Annals of Iowa* 56 (Winter/Spring 1997); see also Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980); DeNel Rehberg Sedo, “Badges of Wisdom, Spaces of Being: A Study of Contemporary Women’s Book Clubs” (Simon Fraser University, 2004); Barbara Sicherman, *Well-Read Lives: How Books Inspired a Generation of American Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Flint, *The Woman Reader*; Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women’s Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁴ Victoria Emery, “The Ladies Social Reading Club, 1903-1905,” *Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand Bulletin* 21, no. 1 (1997): 25.

⁵ Long, *Book Clubs*, 47.

⁶ John Kendle, “The Round Table Movement: Lionel Curtis and the Formation of the New Zealand Groups in 1910,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 1, no. 1 (1967): 33. On Curtis see Alex May, “Curtis, Lionel George (1872-1955),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn May 2006, accessed 5 January 2010; and Deborah Lavin, *From Empire to International Commonwealth: A Biography of Lionel Curtis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁷ Daniel Gorman, “Lionel Curtis, Imperial Citizenship, and the Quest for Unity,” *The Historian* 66, no. 1 (2004): 76. See also John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975); Andrea Bosco and Alex May, eds., *The Round Table Movement: The Empire/Commonwealth and British Foreign Policy* (London: Lothian Foundation, 1997); Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

group of young men, who had served in colonial administration in South Africa and came to be known as Milner's Kindergarten, formed the Round Table movement with the aim of promoting imperial unity.⁸

Through the establishment of local discussion groups in each of the dominions, the instigators of the Round Table movement sought to create "more general interest in the problems of empire."⁹ The movement, as Daniel Gorman points out, was "an elitist enterprise": local groups were envisaged to be "under the guidance of men 'of character and capacity.'"¹⁰ Round Table groups were also exclusively composed of men. During his New Zealand trip, Curtis succeeded in organising groups at Wellington, Christchurch, Auckland and Wanganui, forming a smaller group in Dunedin and establishing "contacts at Napier, Peel Forest, Mount Peel, Palmerston North, Bulls and Feilding"; all places that coincided with areas of wealthy runholders.¹¹ The Round Table movement also issued a magazine, the *Round Table*, which was intended to "serve as a means of correcting false impressions and misunderstandings about the attitude of the different parts of the Empire in imperial matters" and to maintain "a link between the students of the Imperial problem within [...] the different groups throughout the Empire".¹² Published by Macmillan in London, the magazine appeared as a quarterly. Individual groups contributed articles to the magazine anonymously so to "reflect group consensus."¹³ Gorman concludes that the movement's "primary significance" was "in keeping imperial issues in the political consciousness."¹⁴

By 1918, the political context, in which such groups and discussions of empire took place, had changed significantly. World War One brought questions of imperial defence, of the realities of imperial union, and of the future of the empire into sharp relief. Percival Witherby, who founded the Empire Service League in 1917, toured New Zealand the following year to advance the activities of the League. Nothing is known about Witherby, but contemporary newspaper articles suggest that the Empire Service

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⁸ Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union*.

⁹ Kendle, "The Round Table Movement," 33.

¹⁰ Gorman, "Lionel Curtis," 77-8.

¹¹ Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union*, 81.

¹² Kendle, "The Round Table Movement," 41. No records about the activities of any of these groups during the 1910s could be located.

¹³ Gorman, "Lionel Curtis," 78. The editorial note in the 1910s stated: "The affairs of *The Round Table* in each portion of the Empire [are] in the hands of local residents who [are] responsible for all articles on the politics of their own country." This way, it was hoped, the review of imperial politics would be "entirely free from the bias of local party issues."

¹⁴ Gorman, "Lionel Curtis," 79.

League was a short-lived New Zealand organisation, which overlapped with the Round Table movement in purpose and objectives, and also promoted the Round Table work.¹⁵ In January 1918 Witherby arrived in Timaru. Fred Barkas told Mary: “Witherby is here again & is proposing to start a Round Table Group here – more later.”¹⁶ At a meeting in the house of the solicitor and politician Francis J. Rolleston a few days later, Witherby “explained the duties & privileges of ‘Round Table Groups’”. Witherby read two papers by Thomas H. Laby, founding professor of physics at Victoria University College, Wellington, and by now professor of natural philosophy at the University of Melbourne, and by Heinrich von Haast, a Wellington lawyer who belonged to a prominent New Zealand family.¹⁷ Both men were connected to the Melbourne and Wellington Round Table groups respectively; their papers read by Witherby dealt “with the great & difficult question of the Federation of the British Nation and Dependencies.” Barkas reported that after some discussion a Timaru group was formed, those present becoming its first members: “Cray (secretary), Rolleston, Campbell (of Raymond, R. & Campbell), Bernard Tripp and myself. The Groups are kept small, possibly J.P. & Thomas of the Boys’ H.S. may join us.”¹⁸

The Timaru Round Table group was a reading and discussion group originating in a particular topical interest. Its main concern was imperial, but the group also debated economic questions and local issues. The formation of the group was prompted by the urgencies of the issues they were discussing. Starting in March 1918, the men in Timaru met approximately once a month in members’ homes, reading and debating selected texts and topics. The *Round Table* magazine provided material for discussion in many

¹⁵ See for example, “High Ideals for Empire Service,” *Evening Post*, 24 May 1918, 6. A search in paperspast, the digital archive of a number of New Zealand newspapers, reveals that the Empire Service League was widely discussed in the country during 1917 and 1918.

¹⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 11 January 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

¹⁷ J.C. Beaglehole notes that Laby had a keen “interest in imperial and international affairs” and that Laby’s involvement with the Round Table groups “was one of the chief interests of his life.” Laby also served as one of the patrons of Victoria College’s “Heretics Club.” J. C. Beaglehole, *Victoria University College: An Essay Towards a History* (Wellington: New Zealand University Press, 1949), 106-7, 123. After his move to Melbourne in 1915, Laby joined the Round Table group there, acting as its secretary until his death in 1946. He was also the Round Table Dominion secretary from 1916-19. Cecily Close, “Laby, Thomas Howell (1880–1946),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/laby-thomas-howell-7004/text12177>, accessed 10 October 2011. See also Rachel Barrowman, *Victoria University of Wellington, 1899-1999: A History* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999), 23-4. Von Haast was the son of German-born Julius von Haast, geologist and founder of the Canterbury Museum. Von Haast was involved with the Wellington Round Table group from 1910 until his death in 1953, and served as the groups’ secretary between 1915 and 1928. He was a supporter of the Reform Party, and only missed out on nomination for the Wellington seat in 1915 due to prevailing anti-German public sentiment. C.R.H. Taylor and Mary von Haast, *Heinrich Ferdinand Von Haast, 1864-1953: Memorial Tributes and a Graduation Address* (Wellington: Mary von Haast, printed by Whitcombe & Tombs, 1953).

¹⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 January 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

meetings, but other texts were also read. The magazine served an important function of connecting the individual groups around the empire. Members could read about local issues in other parts of the empire. Importantly, all articles were written by affiliated groups. The Timaru men jointly contributed a piece on “The Imperial War Cabinet and Conference, Political Tendencies, Industrial Disputes and the Liquor Traffic” in March 1919.¹⁹

In a series of meetings in 1918 and 1919, the Timaru group discussed the issue of imperial union based on Lionel Curtis’s *The Problem of the Commonwealth*.²⁰ The group was now enlarged, as intended, to include William Thomas, rector of the local boys’ high school, William Alexander, the editor of the *Timaru Herald* and Jim Maling, the mayor of Timaru. Curtis’s book caused much debate, and in the first meeting the group “didn’t seem to get much ‘forrader’”.²¹ The group continued discussing the book in subsequent meetings. A few weeks later Barkas wrote:

Campbell has presented me with a copy of [...] “The Problem of the Commonwealth”; I am to read a chapter or two at our future ‘Round Table Group’ meetings so as to form a basis for our study of the ‘Problem’ [...] By way of rehearsal I read the Introduction & Chap 1 to the Halls after supper last night - it is very clearly written & quite interesting.²²

A number of things are notable in Barkas’s account. First, an essential part of the meetings was to read aloud to each other, before discussing the content. Secondly, the men passed around relevant reading material they deemed suitable for debate, and based the meetings on material in the *Round Table*, but also beyond the magazine. Thirdly, and perhaps most revealing about perceived and actual cultural hierarchies in the provincial town of Timaru and Barkas’s crossing of them, the reading of political texts, the subject matter and discussion about empire, Commonwealth or imperial government did not remain within the spatial boundaries of the exclusively male and middle-class group. “By way of rehearsal” Barkas read two chapters of *The Problem of the Commonwealth* to his friends Lilian and Blanche Hall.

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¹⁹ *The Round Table* 34 (March 1919): 412–428. The article was published anonymously, but the description in Barkas’s letters made it possible to identify it.

²⁰ The very first meeting of the group took place on 23 March 1918 at the house of George Cray with the eight initial members present. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 March 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. Lionel Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1916).

²¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 31 August 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL.

²² Fred Barkas to Mary, 30 September 1918, MS-Papers-2491-28, ATL.

Sociability and socialising with like-minded men was a key reason for membership in the Round Table Group, in addition to the topical focus. Many of the men socialised in other spaces too, and belonged to the informal reading networks discussed in chapter one. One of the differences between the Round Table group and other masculine spaces of sociability like the South Canterbury Club was that the group followed a particular purpose: reading and discussion of current affairs. That purpose was its unifying element, whereas membership in the Club provided the privilege of access to a particular space and what it offered. However, boundaries between different reading spaces could blur. Frequently the discussion about the print material just read was carried over into other spaces and carried on outside the meetings.

We had a great night of the Round Table Group at Alexander's last night (I might also add- part of the early morning – for it was getting near 1 am. when Rolleston, Cray & I walked homeward down Wai-iti Rd together, and even then Cray wanted to reopen some points of our discussion when we came to the “Handy Store” at the corner of our street. We did actually make a start at Curtis's “Problem” i.e. after we had discussed the labour outlook and the position of Dominion politics, and the Peace Conference & the ridiculous demand of Massey and Ward for them both to sit at the Conference and have a vote each as representing N.Z. [...] You will easily see how it was near 11 and “Tea” (supper) announced before we got to the “Problem”; after the adjournment I read the “Introduction” of Curtis's book aloud & that kept them going till the small hour.²³

The group was an important space for these men to air current concerns without prejudice and to debate political issues that were urgent. The group was non-partisan, but the centre of political gravity within the group was at the conservative/liberal spectrum. In addition, some of the men were politicians. Jim Maling and Francis Rolleston both were at various times members of the borough council, both served terms as mayor for Timaru; Rolleston later was a Member of Parliament (1922-1928) and Minister of Defence in the Reform government (1926-28).²⁴ As with other groups, members of the Timaru Round Table belonged to the middle and upper classes, were highly educated and worked as lawyers, architects, rectors, managers, newspaper editors. And, all men also belonged to Barkas's informal network discussed in chapter one.

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²³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 26 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

²⁴ Parker, *Timaru Centenary 1868-1968*, 167-68.

By the early 1920s the Round Table movement had diminished in significance throughout the empire.²⁵ However, the men involved in the Timaru group had come to appreciate a cultivated and “systematic” discussion amongst each other, and it was decided to carry on. Barkas was the main instigator, re-invigorating the group. When he travelled to England in 1921-1922, the discussion group did not meet, lapsing for the span of Barkas’s absence. On his return, a few of the original members proposed to re-organise the group into a more informal forum and to extend the range of topics and reading material based on members’ interests. They also decided on a new, rather playful, name: Timaru Club for the Cultivation of Enjoyable Conversation (hereafter referred to as the Conversation Club).²⁶ The group had turned into a more sociable club; the emphasis moved to enjoyment of the conversation, rather than the seriousness of the discussion. Barkas was put in charge to organise and set up the first meeting:

The Timaru Round Table group was dormant all the time I was away; they never held one meeting, contributed no article to the Magazine & never made any sort of response to the Memoranda or suggestions issued by other branches or by the London Executive. All the old members whom I’ve yet met seem to regret the lapse into inaction; Cray, Campbell, Rolleston – even Jim. Maling (who is up to the neck in the “slump” & finance worries) say they would like to have our meetings revived – but on a less formal & less restricted basis than only for discussion of the “Problem of the British Commonwealth”; they suggest we should meet once a month – in rotation at each other’s houses – during the winter, March to October – for friendly discussion of any interesting matter or topic or problem which may be interesting [sic] any or all of us. Besides the four above mentioned the proposed members are “High School” Thomas, Bernard Tripp, J.P. Newman & Oliver Duff, the new editor of the Herald. They have asked me to take the thing up & call them together for the first meeting in March.²⁷

The first meeting of the revived group happened two months later, in March 1922:

In the evening we had our first meeting of the revived Round Table Group:- those attending were Bernard Tripp, G.S. Cray, Thomas, J.P. Newman, Frank Rolleston, Campbell and Prof Copland (as our visitor – he leaves for Tasmania tomorrow).

We decided to enlarge the area of our studies & conversations beyond the somewhat narrow – but very important – Problems of the British Commonwealth of Nations; as Cray said “there are lots of other things we

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²⁵ Kendle notes that enthusiasm for the movement waned significantly when the Imperial Conference of 1921 failed to include the topic of constitutional reform. Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union*, 272.

²⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 8 and 12 July 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. See also Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 2 April 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, folder 2, ATL, explaining the origins of the Conversation Club.

²⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 5 January 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

should enjoy discussing & talking about – let’s keep the evenings informal – and enjoy ourselves.”

We decided against adding ladies to our company; also against asking one of the local Labour leaders; we agreed to ask Oliver Duff (representing The Press) & Dr. Talbot (Health & Hygiene) to join us. Then we settled to have our meetings on the first Monday in each month – March/Oct. inclusive & assigned the remaining nights to the various members – Rolleston takes next meeting – 3rd. April (my 68th. birthday). We discussed the Round Table “Memorandum to Groups” & British Empire affairs till near ten, when we went into the Verandah room for tea – it was near midnight when they all departed.²⁸

The variety of subjects is illustrated by the range of topics discussed at this first meeting of the revived group. After confirming that at least one of the proposed new members, Dr Talbot, had accepted the invitation to join, Barkas gave a lengthy report of the meeting:

The group was evidently tired of discussing the Status of the Over-seas Dominions & their relations to the Home Country arising out of their having signed the Covenant of the League of Nations; “Seems so futile” remarked Cray, and added “Let’s just talk of things in general – any interesting subject that may turn up – and enjoy ourselves”, which was carried almost without a formal murmur of dissent. I think we shall have to give ourselves a new name; – “The Timaru Talking Society, for the cultivation of enjoyable Conversation”. That should about meet the case.

What we did talk about on Monday was of a varied nature:- Appointment of Dominion Governors [...]; Tariffs, reciprocal & preferential; Finance & General Economy; Sentiment or material Interest the main factor in loyalty to the Constitutional Monarchy; Schackleton’s [sic] burial, his “South” expedition & his curiously simple superstitions (the “Fourth Man” who guided them across South Georgia);- it was a very interesting evening.²⁹

The men had lost interest in discussing issues of the Commonwealth exclusively, yet remained committed to political issues of the day, both of local, national and international relevance. The group still based the discussion on reading, either on a particular text or on wider reading about a particular subject in newspapers and periodicals. They circulated copies of the *Round Table*, *United Empire* (the journal of Royal Colonial Institute) and *Headway* (a journal produced by the League of Nations), as well as the *Spectator*, the *Observer* and the *American Geographical Magazine*. In 1922 they read *The Economic Consequences* by John Maynard Keynes and debated the economic situation in Europe. In the same year they also talked about a proposed War Memorial

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²⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 7 March 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

²⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 8 March 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

in Timaru; the New Zealand Meat Control Board; and taxation and the real financial position of the Dominion, which, the group concluded, was “drifting towards insolvency.”³⁰ Several years later, the group’s interests continued to combine global and local concerns. At a meeting in 1925, for instance, the men discussed the League of Nations, the English Speaking Union, the Royal Colonial Institute, the Overseas Club and the Victoria League, as well as “What sorts of Monuments to be placed on Caroline Bay Park”.³¹

Political discussions, even within a space set up for debate and in which members acknowledged differing opinions, however, could not be removed from personal connections and sympathies. Not only did the men in the Conversation Club need to feel comfortable with each other during the meetings – a sentiment further supported by coming together in each other’s homes – they also felt potential conflicts outside the group would impact on the debate within it. The decision to invite the new editor of the *Timaru Herald*, Oliver Duff, to join them in 1922 and the ensuing negotiations and considerations on each side illustrate that reading and discussion groups were not removed from the personal or professional life of members. After receiving Barkas’s invitation, Duff called at Barkas’s house, preferring to talk over the proposition in person rather than reply in writing. Duff was reluctant to become a member of the group, explaining that “as a Journalist he didn’t feel he could meet men on the footing of friendly hospitality whom he might – in the course of his business – have to attack pretty roughly.” Duff identified a key issue: for the group to work, homogeneity was required within and outside it. He rebuffed Barkas’s inference that criticism in his paper surely did not have to be rude, replying: “That’s journalism as now practiced – if you don’t make your attacks rough & rude people won’t read them.”³² Duff promised to give it more thought. There is no indication that he joined the group, and he resigned from his position as the editor of the *Timaru Herald* in August 1922.³³

The new editor of *Timaru Post*, Robert B. Bell, son of the paper’s proprietor, approached Francis Rolleston expressing an interest in joining the Conversation Club.³⁴

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³⁰ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 7 April and 27 September 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (London: Macmillan, 1919).

³¹ Typed invitation to opening meeting of the Timaru Club for the Cultivation of Enjoyable Conversation to be held at the Hydro Grand Hotel and The Sunset Parlour [Barkas’s parlour], on 3 April 1925, Barkas’s 71st birthday, in MS-Papers-2491-33, ATL.

³² Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 22 March 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

³³ *Timaru Herald*, 23 August 1922, 9.

³⁴ Scholefield, *Newspapers in New Zealand*, 236.

Rolleston passed the letter on to Barkas, who was to bring the request “before the ‘Group’” at the next meeting. It seemed unlikely that Bell’s wish to join was going to be successful. Barkas told Mary that

young Mr Bell (though he has bought Jack Cotterill’s house in Wai iti Road and has become friendly with Eric & Millie Finch) has failed to impress several of us, does not seem specially endowed with brains and balance – not quite the sort of man to add value & interest to our “Group” – not like Alexander – inferior to Duff a long way, I should say.³⁵

Both examples of declining membership – declined on one occasion by the man invited, and on the other by the group – illustrate that the composition of the group was determined by personal and professional characteristics, and decided by a collective decision. Barkas appeared to have taken on a leadership position, as he was to bring Bell’s request before the group. A biography of one of the members, William Thomas, even recalled the group as “the Barkus [sic] Club.”³⁶

The Conversation Club constituted a homosocial space for masculine conviviality. Despite the fact that Barkas often socialised with and appreciated many conversations about books and reading with women in Timaru, such as his regular teas with Ada Westmacott, his frequent discussions about politics and society with Doris Mirams, his regular Sunday evenings spent supping, singing and dining with the two art and music teachers Lilian and Blanche Hall, and his friendship with the librarian Evelyn Culverwell, women had no place in this men-only circle of interested and engaged citizens.³⁷ In 1922 Barkas told Mary:

I was telling Doris Mirams about our Round Table former group meetings & the proposal for these amended – extended discussion gatherings; she at once wanted to know why there were no women to be included – personally, she wanted to meet, to know, to talk with the few men in Timaru who seemed to have some wider intellectual, social, political, economic, &c. interests – why couldn’t she be one of this “Group” – Why? – I feel there are quite a number of good reasons why not, but I shall be glad of a memo from you embodying your views.³⁸

Unfortunately, we do not have Mary’s response, nor any further comments what these “good reasons” were. The exclusion of women from the group cannot be

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³⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 25 September 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

³⁶ Guy, *Thomas of Timaru*, 99.

³⁷ In June 1922, for example, Barkas and Doris Mirams together attended a lecture on Soviet Russia, taking place in the Unitarian Hall. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 10 June 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

³⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 5 January 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

explained solely by the genre of reading and topics under discussion. As mentioned above, Barkas frequently read political essays of the *Round Table* or the *Statesman* to his female friends the Halls. Politics was a regular topic in the correspondence with his daughter Mary, and her active participation to the Fabian Society as well as her interest in Socialism during her years in London in the late 1910s, were the subject of many of their letters. That women were excluded from the Conversation Club suggests that the socialising was of a particular kind, and different from that which prevailed, or was expected, in mixed company. This form of socialising included political discussion, smoking and drinking. An exclusively male membership guaranteed an atmosphere of openness and trust, crucial to this particular kind of masculine exchange.³⁹ Reading and discussion groups thus offered additional spaces of masculine sociability similar to those discussed by Jock Phillips and Caroline Daley.⁴⁰

Women in Timaru created their own spaces to express political and civic interests and participation. Doris Mirams, Barkas's friend and neighbour, had been involved in female spaces of political engagement before moving to Timaru. In 1911, she acted as secretary to the Women's Political Reform League in Christchurch.⁴¹ After moving to Timaru she set up the Timaru Women Citizens' Association in 1922, although with some initial difficulties.⁴² Just a few days before Mirams challenged Barkas on the male-only character of the Round Table group, Barkas made suggestions for potential members of the Women's League:

Doris is very keen to start a Women's Citizenship League but finds the women of Timaru very apathetic, Dr. Paterson's wife (née Kippenberger) being the only possible supporter she has yet found. I suggested she should get the wives

³⁹ On the importance of clear gender boundaries for notions of masculinity see also Michael Roper and John Tosh, "Introduction: Historians and the Politics of Masculinity," in *Manful Assertions. Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁴⁰ Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987); Caroline Daley, *Girls and Women, Men and Boys: Gender in Taradale, 1886-1930* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999). Reading and discussion groups as sites of gendered "leisure" are also missing in Barbara Brookes, Erik Olssen, and Emma Beer, "Spare Time? Leisure, Gender and Modernity," in *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939*, ed. Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper, and Robin Law (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003); Caroline Daley, "A Gendered Domain: Leisure in Auckland, 1890-1940," in *The Gendered Kivi*, ed. Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999); and Daley, "Modernity, Consumption, and Leisure," in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Giselle Byrnes (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴¹ "The City; Christchurch Day by Day," *Asburton Guardian*, 12 August 1911, 2.

⁴² The first meeting of the Women Citizens' Association was held on 13 June 1922, with forty women present. In subsequent years the association was represented on many local boards and committees, including the library committee (represented by Mrs Dr Paterson, a member of Barkas's reading network). A report on the association's work published in 1929 concluded that since its inception, the association "had done quite a lot to benefit the women and children of Timaru." "Women Citizens' Association: Work since Inception," *Timaru Herald*, 8 November 1929, 6.

of the Borough Councillors & of the Presidents & Secretaries of the labour Unions for a start (“Half Circle Club” idea – Doris to act the part of Beatrice Webb out here) – beginning with Mrs. Frank Rolleston as the President of the League. My suggestion was treated with derisive laughter; but, if not; Why not?⁴³

Barkas’s suggestion is noteworthy for two reasons. The “Half-Circle Club” he referred to was set up in London, in July 1921, only five months prior, which testifies to Barkas’s connection to current events in Britain.⁴⁴ More interestingly, the suggestion to engage with the wives of the labour unions’ officials and not just other middle- and upper-class women was one that Barkas felt impossible for his own group. The men decided not only against women as members but also against “local Labour leaders”.⁴⁵

The exclusive nature of the Conversation Club is also expressed by its inward-looking character within Timaru. Unlike many women’s literary groups in the late nineteenth century, the Conversation Club did not get involved with community work on the local level. Its key concern was the global stage. Elizabeth Long has shown that many women’s groups in the United States during this period extended their club work, which started in literary groups, to educational purposes in their community such as funding scholarships for women, establishing kindergartens and campaigning for universal compulsory education.⁴⁶ Barkas and his male friends, as a group, were not involved in local community service. Some members did, however, hold powerful and influential positions in local politics, and others in public life, as newspaper editor and high school master.

Nevertheless, there are instances when the group attempted to actively shape the intellectual and cultural landscape of Timaru, and pursued a purpose beyond their own reading. One of these involved the American-based Chautauqua organisation. Operating within the framework of rational recreation, the Chautauqua travelling circuit provided popular educational lectures mixed with entertainment, usually in the form of concerts. During the 1910s and 1920s, Chautauqua toured throughout the United States, as well

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⁴³ Fred to Mary Barkas, 29 December 1921, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

⁴⁴ According to a recent article on Beatrice and Sydney Webb, Beatrice Webb had set up the Half-Circle-Club in 1921 “with the aim of encouraging mixing between the middle-class and working-class women of the Labour Party.” Nicholas Owen, “Macdonald’s Parties: The Labour Party and the ‘Aristocratic Embrace’, 1922–31,” *Twentieth Century British History* 18, no. 1 (2007): 14.

⁴⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 7 March 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

⁴⁶ Long, *Book Clubs*, 52-3. See also Pawley, “‘Not Wholly Self Culture’,” 37-45.

as Canada, Australia and New Zealand.⁴⁷ As Clare Slako explains, Circuit Chautauqua travelled through towns in New Zealand from 1919 to 1924, and was particularly popular in smaller cities and rural areas.⁴⁸ Chautauqua required each town to guarantee £300 in advance in order to be included on the travelling schedule. Usually, a local committee of “wealthy local citizens” undertook the guarantee.⁴⁹ In early 1920 the organisation proposed to bring its programme to Timaru. Several members of the Conversation Club pledged £10 each – to be recuperated through ticket sales to the various lectures and shows – after they had met in Barkas’s office to talk with a Chautauqua representative.⁵⁰ The group also agreed to offer more practical help. While the Chautauqua organisation provided “a large tent, speakers, musicians, entertainers, teachers & organisers”, Barkas and his friends were responsible for selling “600 season tickets” and “to arrange with the Council for permit to tent in the Park.”⁵¹ While this could be seen as a rare occasion of the Conversation Club extending its purpose to the local community, the men who supported Chautauqua financially did so as individuals, and not as group.

“Chautauqua week” took place from 29 January to 4 February 1920, opening with a concert by the “Lyric Quartette”. The programme included afternoon and evening sessions of concerts followed by lectures on such themes as “Celestial Mechanics”, “The Needs of the Hour”, “The New Era in Civilization”, “The Value of a Vision” and “Road to Happiness”. The mixture of popular science, political and philosophical lectures coupled with musical entertainment proved successful with Timaruvians. According to the *Timaru Herald*, large audiences attended the sessions stretched over 5 days, paying between 1s5d (afternoon) and 2s5d (evenings) for single admissions or up to 10s for season tickets.⁵² Circuit Chautauqua visited Timaru again in early 1922. By that time, however, local support was less forthcoming. Barkas noted that he was not prepared to pledge financial support again, as in his view the organisation was “drifting

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⁴⁷ James R. Schultz, *The Romance of Small-Town Chautauquas* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002); John E. Tapia, *Circuit Chautauqua: From Rural Education to Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth Century America* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1997).

⁴⁸ Clare Rachel Slako, “To Educate and Entertain: Circuit Chautauqua in Early Interwar New Zealand, 1919-1924” (MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 2011), 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 25 July 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² This information is taken from a printed twelve-page programme published by the Chautauqua Association Inc. of New Zealand, bound amongst Barkas’s letters in MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. See several articles in the *Timaru Herald*, between 28 January and 2 February 1920. See also Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 31 January 1930, for his experiences of Chautauqua week, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

down to the level of a second rate Variety show.”⁵³ He attended some of the lectures, but, disappointed with the greater emphasis on popular entertainment he concluded: “So I’m just about full up of Chautauqua, it has fallen away so greatly from its original aims of popular education.”⁵⁴

In Timaru, other adult educational opportunities existed by 1922. By that time, a local branch of the Workers’ Education Association (WEA) was operating. A British-born movement, the WEA first established branches in New Zealand in 1915, with classes offered in the four centres as well as provincial areas by the end of the decade.⁵⁵ The WEA ran courses on economics, literature, sociology, psychology, book-keeping and modern history, and attracted working-class and middle-class students. The Timaru branch profited from proximity to a very active WEA group in Christchurch, and several lecturers involved there visited groups in South Canterbury and ran summer camps.⁵⁶ Again, it is Barkas’s involvement with the WEA in Timaru both as student and as tutor that offers a glimpse into the reading practices and tastes of other readers in Timaru, who were not part of his network or groups. Initially, Barkas enrolled in the economics, psychology and English literature classes. When the new term started in March 1922, the English literature class still lacked a tutor. At the first meeting of the season, and on the spur of the moment, Barkas offered “to give ‘A Book Talk’ – just to keep the pot boiling.”⁵⁷ Though professing in his letters that he had perhaps committed himself to more than he felt comfortable with, and that he agreed to give the literature

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⁵³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 22 March 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ On the history of the WEA in New Zealand see Roy Shuker, *Educating Workers? A History of the Workers’ Education Association in New Zealand* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1984); Arthur Ballard Thompson, *Adult Education in New Zealand* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1945), 65–134. Shuker notes that during the 1920s the WEA grew steadily, particularly outside the main centres (55). The WEA was first established in Britain in 1903 and grew out of broader concerns with adult education, which had also led a number of university extension schemes throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the WEA in Britain see Thomas Kelly, *A History of Adult Education in Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1970), 243–86; J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living, 1790–1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1963 [1961]), 261–99.

⁵⁶ James Shelley, Professor of Education at Canterbury College ran tutorials in several places in Canterbury and organised regular WEA summer camps during the interwar years. James Hight, Professor of History and Economics at Canterbury College, also supported WEA classes in Christchurch. Incidentally, Hight was also involved with the Christchurch Round Table group, offering another example of overlap between different educational and discussion groups. Carter, *Gadfly*, 87–8, 131–58, 167–8; Shuker, *Educating Workers?*, 28–31.

⁵⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 30 March 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. Barkas also gave a class to the Economics class, focussing on “National Guilds”, and recommending students to read publications by G.D.H. Cole and to make use of the public library. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 23 June 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

class as a favour; the self-proclaimed literature expert Barkas had offered “Book Talks” at the library before, only then to be rejected by the library committee.⁵⁸ His modesty needs to be read with some scepticism, keeping in mind the many instances in which Barkas passed on and recommended books to other readers quite comfortably.

Amongst Barkas’s letters of April 1922 are copies of five essays on English literature prepared by students of the WEA class, which he in turn felt were interesting enough to type out and keep. One of them was written by Barkas’s tenant-landlady Jessie McIver – he judged it a “quaint rapsodical [sic] one” – and one by Jessie Duff, wife of the afore-mentioned editor of the *Timaru Herald* and a well-known writer in later life.⁵⁹ The other students are identified as L. Mason, R. Baistead and J. Seyb, who did not belong to Barkas’s wider network of readers and of whom nothing more is known. The transcripts, possibly extracts, of these essays provide a glimpse into what Barkas set the group to write about. They also provide a glimpse into the opinions of other readers in Timaru and into the discussions about literature within this temporary reading community coming together in the WEA class. All essays dealt with the questions “what is literature?” and “what is the status of present-day literature?”. Some added a list of worthy and unworthy authors. The collective list of good writers included H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy (both listed in three essays); Stephen McKenna and George Bernard Shaw (listed in two essays); and Rex Beach, Gertrude Page, James M. Barrie, Rudyard Kipling, John Masefield, A.S.M. Hutchinson, Horace Vatchell, John Morley, Gilbert Murray, Joseph Conrad, Edith Wharton, Arnold Bennett, Arthur Conan Doyle, Booth Tarkington, Silas Hocking, E.V. Lucas, Hall Caine, Anthony Hope, Jeffery Farnol, Rupert Brooke, Alfred Noyes and Henry Newbolt. Thomas Hardy and William Watson were singled out as the best poets. Authors named as producing “indifferent literature” were: Nat Gould (listed twice), Charles Garvice, Zane Grey and Ethel M. Dell. One essayist also criticised Kipling’s work as smacking “too much of militarism”.⁶⁰

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⁵⁸ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 22 March and 4 April 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. The reason for this rejection as relayed by Barkas was that allowing him to give book talks at the library might cause ill-feeling, as he was an “unofficial” person. Thus it could be seen as giving Barkas “some unfair preference or advantage.”

⁵⁹ In 1950, Jessie Duff, then called Jess Whitworth after divorcing Oliver Duff in 1937, “published a prize-winning autobiographical novel”, *Otago Interval* (Hamilton: Paul’s). Dennis McEldowney, “Duff, Oliver – Biography,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, updated 1-Sep-10; <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4d22/1>, accessed 18 July 2011.

⁶⁰ Extract of J. Seyb’s essay, in MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

The students of the English literature class at the WEA displayed a strong orientation towards English writers. One of the students, J. Seyb, wrote: “Across the Atlantic I see no light”, though he acknowledged that Jack London and Upton Sinclair had “written some good novels.”⁶¹ Seyb clearly situated himself as writing from England, rather than New Zealand, in his reference to the Atlantic. Several lamented the demise in intellectual standard, one student concluded that “the present social system is not conducive to good literature.”⁶² Reading aloud from works under discussion, as well as students’ essays, was part of the class. Barkas read extracts from works by Charles Dickens, Bernard Shaw, Robert Louis Stevenson, and poetry from Tennyson, Keats and Francis Thompson; and students also read sections of books being discussed.⁶³ One class dealt with the “local celebrity” Samuel Butler; another lesson focussed on Kipling as a writer of historical sketches, and Barkas shared photos taken during his travels to Europe as illustrations.⁶⁴ The group also studied works by H.G. Wells and Walt Whitman.⁶⁵

Beyond their names, we know little of the students who took the WEA literature class. Apart from McIver, who worked as housekeeper and earned money by renting additional rooms, there is little indication about the educational or class backgrounds of the students. Judging by comments in Mary’s letters, it seems that at least some of them were middle class and had enjoyed a secondary education. Barkas also hinted at the fact that few working-class students attended. After Mary had repeatedly pointed out to him that WEA classes were meant to be for working-class students, and were supposed to run as free discussions rather than “book-talks”, he stated that: “but [...] the youth & maidens of the Working Class don’t come in anything like the numbers which the classes should attract – it’s so much less trouble to go to the pictures two or three times a week – no exercise of the brains needed – no essays asked for.”⁶⁶ As Daley notes, by the late 1910s, an estimated one third of the population “went to the movies each week.”⁶⁷ Popular forms of entertainment evidently competed with opportunities for adult education and rational recreation.

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⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas 16 April and 10 June 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

⁶⁴ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 7, 12 and 30 May, 3 June 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

⁶⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 18 May 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

⁶⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 16 June 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

⁶⁷ Daley, “Modernity, Consumption, and Leisure,” 438.

PLAY READING, SOCIABILITY AND LEISURE

Besides reading communities with the explicit aim of education, instruction and discussion of political and economic affairs, play-reading groups offered spaces for communal reading for entertainment and recreation, in contradistinction to other options such as the pictures. Drama groups were a common feature of the 1920s and 1930s in the British world. The first New Zealand branch of the British Drama League was established in Timaru in 1932, testifying to the popularity of drama groups and play-reading.⁶⁸ Many women's organisations during the first decades of the twentieth century included literary and drama circles as a sociable activity. This reflected the interest of members and the popularity of theatre, and was intended to foster reading and writing amongst members. One-act plays remained very popular with these women's groups well into the 1960s. As Carol Stevenson notes, the Country Women's Institute was "active in amateur" theatre from its inception in 1925, and "one-act play production was at its height" during the 1930s and 1940s.⁶⁹ The Canterbury Women Institute (CWI) founded in 1892 encompassed a "Literary Department" from the outset. The "Literary Department" devoted time to the discussion and reading of a range of genres, including drama.⁷⁰ According to Sue Upton, several women's clubs in the Wellington region also ran play-reading and dramatic circles, becoming increasingly popular during the 1930s.⁷¹

Many play-reading groups had a mixed-gender membership. In Wellington, for example, a group called The Readers existed in the 1910s. A typed programme of a meeting in June 1916 has survived in the collection of the J.C. Beaglehole Room at Victoria University.⁷² The Wellington Readers planned to read Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* on 12 June 1916, with twenty members cast for the various roles. In the 1920s, another Wellington group, possibly the successor of The Readers as some of the membership overlaps, called The Play Readers, read A.A. Milne's *The Dover Road*, The

⁶⁸ Howard McNaughton, "Drama," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature*, ed. Terry Sturm (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), 281-90; Rachel Barrowman, *A Popular Vision: The Arts and the Left in New Zealand 1930-1950* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1991), 173-222; P.J. Gibbons, "The Climate of Opinion," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Geoffrey Rice (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), 321.

⁶⁹ Carol Stevenson, "Country Women's Institute Drama Groups 1925-," in *Women Together: A History of Women's Organisations in New Zealand, Nga Ropu Wahine O Te Motu*, ed. Anne Else (Wellington: Historical Branch of Department of Internal Affairs, Daphne Brasell Associates Press, 1993), 487.

⁷⁰ Gush, "Cultural Fields of the Canterbury Plains", chapter two, esp.59 and 71.

⁷¹ Sue Upton, "Women in the Club: Women's Clubs in the Wellington Region, 1895-1945" (MA Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1993), chapter five, esp. 111.

⁷² A 2010/41, J.C. Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington (hereafter JCBR, VUW).

Fantasticks by Edmond Rostand, *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell, *The Same Star* by E.V. Lucas, *Mary Stuart* by John Drinkwater and John Masefield's *Philip the King*. Members of The Play Readers were advised to purchase copies of the plays to be read from Mr Coleridge, the secretary of the group.⁷³ The central distribution of copies of the play for purchase is noteworthy, as it hints that the members of this Wellington group had the means to purchase books for each group meeting.

One of the play-reading groups in Timaru also chose to call itself The Readers. Again, it is Barkas's writing that provides us with a window into how this privately-organised group operated. The Readers in Timaru met on a regular basis, approximately every three weeks, and read aloud plays they had chosen at an earlier meeting, with most members taking a role according to the requirements of the play of the evening. Barkas joined The Readers in 1925, after he returned from a lengthy trip to Europe and Africa.⁷⁴ He described to Mary his pleasant surprise of the "hidden talent in this little town", in the form of this play-reading group.⁷⁵ Dr and Mrs Paterson invited him to their house to the opening session of the group as a "listener". "This little club", Barkas noted, was started the year before, "chiefly through the efforts of Doris Mirams". The Readers read "modern & classical" plays, and emphasised the informal and friendly nature of their meetings.⁷⁶ Barkas had been told the first president of the club, the Unitarian minister William Jelly, "had succeeded in making himself thoroughly unpopular by 'over-bossing' the show; he is full of literary learning and got into the way of boring the rest of the Readers by his long-windedness and superior airs."⁷⁷

The Readers was just one of a number of groups in Timaru and South Canterbury, which enjoyed reading plays. These groups were not amateur drama groups in the sense of staging plays; they did not dress up or hire venues for their meetings. They confined themselves to reading the plays, each taking individual parts while meeting at each other's houses. Some groups also competed at annual competitions, but primarily they provided entertainment and a cultured pastime in a private setting for their members. In August 1932, for instance, The Readers entered the Annual Festival of Community Drama, organised by the South Canterbury Drama League, but members

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⁷³ A 2010/41, JCBR, VUW.

⁷⁴ Barkas's travel diaries for this trip are included in MS-Papers-2491-46 to -50, ATL.

⁷⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 7 April 1925, MS-Papers-2491-33, ATL.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 9 April 1925, MS-Papers-2491-33, ATL.

decided on an individual basis whether they wanted to be involved in the production.⁷⁸ Thirty-two different local clubs participated in the competition. The fact that these groups were primarily reading groups was also reflected in their names: among the competitors in the 1932 festival were the Kingsdown Readers, the Orari Readers and the Candleboye Readers.⁷⁹

In 1925 the Timaru Readers read, amongst others, Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *St. Joan* by George Bernard Shaw. A few years later, in 1932, they worked through *London Wall* by John van Druten, *The Anatomist* by James Bridie, *Autumn Crocus* by C. L. Anthony, *The Dover Road* by A. A. Milne, *Widowers' Houses* by G. Bernard Shaw, *Dear Brutus* by J. M. Barrie, *Mary Stuart* by John Drinkwater and *After All*, another of John van Druten's plays.⁸⁰ Many of the plays read by The Readers were relatively recent works and theatre hits with contemporaries. *London Wall*, for example, was also read by the play reading circle connected to the Pioneer Club (a women's club in Wellington) in 1931.⁸¹ It was produced on stage in Wellington in October 1933, and the public librarian there reported it to be one of the books "in demand".⁸² The play was also staged by the Nelson Amateur and Operatic Society in November 1933.⁸³ Milne's *Dover Road* had equally entertained audiences in New Zealand just a few years before. The Wellington Repertory Theatre staged the play in 1929, and the play-reading group active in Wellington mentioned above had also read *Dover Road* in September 1926.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ See printed note to members advising them to express interest in participating in the South Canterbury Drama League Competition to The Readers' secretary Mr. Tweedy, by 31 May 1932. No date, in Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 2, ATL. "The Readers" entered the competition with *Miss Marlow at Play* by A.A. Milne. Printed programme for the 6th Annual Festival of Community Drama, held in Timaru, 15-18 August 1932, in Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 3, ATL.

⁷⁹ Other groups participating in the festival were the Geraldine Players, the Good Companions (Waimate and Geraldine), the Seekers (Timaru), the Strollers (Timaru), the Wesley Players, and the Woodbury Players. Ibid.

⁸⁰ Typed programmes for "The Readers" in Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 2, ATL. John van Druten, *London Wall* was first published in *Famous Plays of 1931* (London: V. Gollancz, 1931). The same volume also contained John van Druten, *After All* and C. L. Anthony's *Autumn Crocus*. A.A. Milne, *Three Plays: The Dover Road, The Truth about Blayds, The Great Broxopp* (New York, London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922); James Bridie, *The Anatomist* (London: Constable, 1931).

⁸¹ "Play Reading," *Evening Post*, 20 November 1931, 15.

⁸² "Repertory Theatre. A London Comedy," *Evening Post*, 5 October 1933, 7; "Books in Demand," *Evening Post*, 7 October 1933, 22.

⁸³ "Nelson News," *Evening Post*, 29 November 1934, 26.

⁸⁴ Typed programme of "The Play Readers" for August 1926, announcing the next meeting in September 1926, in A 2010/41, JCBR, VUW.

Organisation within The Readers was formal and strongly structured, with a committee deciding on the plays to be read and the respective cast. In preparation for a group evening in July 1932, the committee assembled in Barkas's parlour to discuss the cast:

Thursday, 23 June 1932

Tweedy, Secty. to "The Readers" looked in and left me a volume of 3 Plays by A.A. Milne so that I could read the middle one – "The Dover Road" – and thus be ready for the casting committee who are to meet in this Parlour at 7 pm. tomorrow. Rereading "The Dover Road" (which I'd read before, but some time ago & had mostly forgotten) afforded me good entertainment this afternoon; I just skimmed the other two – "The Great Broxopp" and "The Truth about Blaydes" by way of refreshing my memory.

Friday, 24 June 1932, Evening, 8.15 pm.

The Readers committee has just gone; we fixed up the cast for "The Dover Road" which is to be read at Mr. Thomas' on Monday week; we also practically settled about "The Readers" play to be got ready for the Drama League competitions.⁸⁵

All members were to read the chosen play at home, practise their roles and prepare appropriately for the meetings. Not all members were able to play a role at each meeting, and some were "listeners" on the day. Visitors were occasionally allowed, especially if they could make a contribution to the evening. For example, for the meeting in June 1932 Barkas was cast to play Herr Feldmann in the play *Autumn Crocus* by C. L. Anthony. His role included singing a number of songs and he wanted someone to accompany him on the piano. None of the members were willing or able, and Barkas suggested someone he knew well, Marion Hay. She, then, had to be invited by the hostess of the evening as her guest, rather than by Barkas as his guest, which suggests a set of social rules had to be adhered to by members and non-members of the club. Marion Hay joined the group for the particular meeting, after "the arrangement was happily negotiated." Her name, however, did not appear on the printed programme.⁸⁶ The complicated negotiations required to allow a guest and non-member to participate in a meeting are indicative of the underlying practices of exclusion and inclusion within the middle-class Readers. Setting these boundaries between members and non-members allowed the protection of the group and its function. While there are no explicit statements about the ideal size of the group, the number of members never exceeded twenty, and the group needed to remain small enough to fit into members' parlours. In

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⁸⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 June 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-339, folder 2, ATL.

⁸⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 21 May 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 2, ATL. The printed programmes are pasted in between the letters.

addition, meeting in members' homes also demanded respecting conventions of private hospitality.

The seriousness of the organisation was further conveyed by the typed programmes for each meeting, naming the cast and director, and the date, time and host for the evening. Meetings were the product of deliberate and elaborate preparations. The typed programme was sent out in advance and members advised to notify the hosts if they were not able to attend. According to one programme of April 1932, The Readers held Annual General Meetings, when officers for the season were elected and the balance sheet discussed (see figure 4.1). This would suggest that members paid a subscription fee, but there is no other evidence that confirms any membership fees. The pre-circulated programmes and electing of officers reveal that The Readers attached a certain amount of seriousness to their group, similar to other formally-organised associations. By circulating an agenda, the groups' meeting was more likely to follow its agreed purpose. The rules governing the organisation of the group and the meetings differentiated formally-organised reading groups from informally-operating reading networks as discussed in chapter one, and from broadly-defined reading communities.

The membership of The Readers overlapped with that of other reading groups, and with informal reading networks. This shows that members were drawn from "pre-constituted informal social networks" and other groups.⁸⁷ Friends of Barkas such as J. P. Newman, Percy Watts Rule, William Thomas and Francis Rolleston were Readers and Round Table discussants. Their wives, while not allowed to join the Conversation Club, were also Readers and also part of Barkas's reading network. Other members were Dr William Howard Unwin and wife, Dr Paterson and his wife, Herbert and Ada Westmacott and their daughter Ekka, the Websters and Buchanans, and Dr and Mrs Russell King.⁸⁸ Play-reading within The Readers provided a space for men and women, married, single or de-facto separated like Barkas, to follow their cultural interests and socialise; plays constituted a genre regarded appropriate for both sexes.

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⁸⁷ This point is made by Long for contemporary reading groups, but holds equal value for the examples discussed here. Long, *Book Clubs*, 61.

⁸⁸ Members of The Readers are usually referred to in the Barkas collection with their surnames. When possible, I have added first names, but particularly in the case of women, this has proved to be difficult.

THE READERS

CAST

The Annual Meeting and First Reading for the 1932 season will be held on Monday next the 4th April at 7.45 o'clock. Dr and Mrs King will be Host and Hostess. Members unable to be present are kindly asked to advise the Hostess as early as possible.

Business: Adoption of Annual Report & Balance Sheet.

Election of Officers

General

The Play to be read is "London Wall"

by John van Druten.

J.G. Tweedy,

Secretary.

Miss Hooper	...	Mrs Webster
Miss Janus	...	Mrs King
Miss Milligan	...	Mrs Unwin
Miss Willesden	...	Mrs Burns
Miss Bufton	...	Mrs ~~Wille~~ Raymond
Birkinshaw	...	Mr Unwin
Mr Brewer	...	Dr Benham
Hec. Hammond	...	Mr ~~Wille~~ Tweedy
Mr Walker	...	Dr Burns

Directions: Miss Westmacott

Figure 4.1

Typed programme for The Readers' meeting, 4 April 1932

Source: Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 2, ATL.

While proper organisation and fair allocation of the cast seemed necessary to ensure a successful meeting of reading – and enjoying – the play, sociability and hospitality were other key features of The Readers. After a meeting on 2 May 1932 Barkas reported to Mary, that following the play “the usual friendly crowd” had gathered “over tea & coffee & cake supper.”⁸⁹ Sociability was expressed through a number of rituals. Hospitality, food and drink were important elements within the group. The importance of food and drink as part of the meetings shows a striking similarity between the mixed-gender Readers and the male-only Conversation Club. The only difference was that when The Readers met at Barkas’s house, it was his housekeeper-landlady McIver who provided food and drink. But when Barkas hosted

⁸⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 2 May 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 2, ATL.

the Conversation Club he usually arranged for the men to meet in the Hydro Grand Hotel.⁹⁰

The sociability of the group extended into friendships, affinity and support outside it. After Barkas fell ill in mid-1932 shortly before his death and was not able to attend the meetings, he still received the printed programmes, was involved in the planning committee and many of his fellow Readers paid him visits at home.⁹¹ The Readers' main purpose seems to have been the reading of plays as well as intellectual enjoyment, but the group served many more functions. One of them was sociability, mutual support and constituting a social network within the community.

READING, MUSIC AND LOCAL ASSOCIATIONAL CULTURE

Local reading groups not only overlapped with other reading groups and networks, they also shared membership and functions with other groups within the wider associational culture. As Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa note, “[r]eading’s place [...] in the texture of daily life must be viewed in the general perspective of leisure and recreation.”⁹² Commonly, reading and music were two activities that complemented each other during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lyons and Taksa found that Australian readers were highly musical and remembered social musical evenings, “centring around family and community.”⁹³ The Barkas archive provides a wealth of detail in the New Zealand context about music groups, concerts, and music and singing as part of friendships and family life.⁹⁴ From the 1890s onwards Barkas belonged to several musical societies and singing groups. During his residence in Christchurch, he was a

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⁹⁰ It is interesting to note here that hospitality, food and drink have remained significant as aspects of reading groups into the present day, as Jenny Hartley has found. Jenny Hartley, *Reading Groups* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

⁹¹ On Saturday, 30 July 1932, the secretary of The Readers first came by at lunch time, so see if the Readers committee could meet in Barkas’s parlour. The committee met there in the afternoon from 5 to 6pm. J. P. Newman paid Barkas a short visit at 8 pm; then came Percy Rule to return a few *Listeners* and bringing Barkas some music recordings. At 9.20 pm Dr. Burns – Barkas’s doctor and a Reader – checked on him and was the last visitor for the day. Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 30 July 1932, Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 3, ATL.

⁹² Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, 179.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 179-83 (quote 181).

⁹⁴ The importance of music, and in particular the piano, for family and community life in New Zealand in the period immediately preceding the period under study here has recently been examined by Kirstine Moffat, “The Piano as Cultural Symbol in Colonial New Zealand,” *History Compass* 7, no. 3 (2009): 719-41.

member of the male-voice Christchurch Liedertafel, founded in 1885.⁹⁵ There were several Liedertafel groups in existence around New Zealand during this period.⁹⁶ The German name of these choirs reflected the preferred repertoire of folklore songs (Lieder), rather than referring to the performers, as a closer look at the subscription and membership lists, and programmes reveals.⁹⁷ John MacKenzie has argued that for the British middle classes during the late nineteenth century “singing constituted an important part of the search for rational recreation.”⁹⁸ In addition to the pleasure of performing and participating in music societies, the repertoire of this particular choir also indicated class affiliation. Like participation in discussion and reading groups, singing and publicly performing folklore songs carried an element of cultivating the mind as well as constituting part of middle-class identity.

Like reading groups, music groups were spaces in which long-lasting connections and friendships could be formed and lived. By the 1910s, some of the members of the Christchurch Liedertafel emerged again in Barkas’s life, then as members of the Timaru Choral and Orchestral Society, the Timaru Liedertafel and the Timaru Orchestral Society, as well as the Conversation Club and The Readers.⁹⁹ J.P. Newman (1860-1946), for example, was a friend of Barkas from Christchurch times. Like Barkas, Newman was English-born and immigrated to Christchurch in 1880, the year before Barkas arrived, to take up a position as bookkeeper at a local brewery. Newman moved to

⁹⁵ There are numerous references and printed programmes of the Christchurch Liedertafel amongst Barkas’s letters. See also a brochure celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Christchurch Liedertafel including a brief historical sketch in MS-Papers-2491-07, ATL. The membership of the Liedertafel was exclusively male, but at occasions ladies were invited to form a *Gemischter Abend* (mixed evening). In 1892 the Christchurch Liederkränzchen was started as “a singing, playing (piano & other instruments) & reciting society for girls”, complimentary to the Liedertafel. Fred Barkas to his brother Charlie Barkas, 10 July 1892, MS-Papers-2491-06, ATL. The Christchurch Liedertafel is still in existence today as a male-voice choir. See www.liedertafel.org.nz, accessed 27 December 2010.

⁹⁶ For example, there are references in the Barkas letters to a Liedertafel in Wellington, 6 June and 26 August 1909, MS-Papers-2491-06 and -07, ATL. Joanna Woods mentions the Dunedin Liedertafel in her biography *Facing the Music: Charles Baeyertz and the Triad* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2008), 52.

⁹⁷ See several Liedertafel programmes included in MS-Papers-2491-07. See also Fred Barkas to Charles Barkas, 27 November 1892, MS-Papers-2491-06, ATL.

⁹⁸ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 30.

⁹⁹ See several concert programmes for the Timaru Choral and Orchestral Society (TCOS) between 1914 and 1926, listing officers for the season and subscribers. Timaru Orchestral Society, 4/5, Scrapbook, SCM. In 1926 the Timaru Orchestral Society (IOS) was formed, providing Timaru with “a permanent orchestral society, which has been a long felt want”. Promotional leaflet, dated 24 June 1926, in Timaru Orchestral Society, 4/1, Minute Book, SCM. There are also references to a Timaru Liedertafel in connection with some of the members of the TCOS in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, but no records could be located. See for example the entry for John Paterson Newman, listed as president of the Timaru Liedertafel, in *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 3, 1010. It is very likely that the Timaru Liedertafel – like the Christchurch Liedertafel temporarily – changed its German name in 1914 in the wake of anti-German sentiment prevailing in New Zealand during World War One.

Timaru in 1899, taking up the post as manager of the Canterbury Farmers' Cooperative Association. Barkas's and Newman's paths crossed in various ways. Barkas's professional position first as salesman with the Loan and Mercantile Agency Co. in Christchurch and then as the manager of the Timaru branch from 1909 until 1918 meant he knew J.P. Newman well. But the two men also shared extensive cultural and recreational interests. Reading, attending lectures, discussing current affairs, singing, participating in concerts and playing golf together were important ingredients in their friendship.

According to his self-sponsored entry in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, J.P. Newman "was a member of the Liedertafel in Christchurch from its inception."¹⁰⁰ So was Fred Barkas. The minutes of the first meeting on 21 May 1886 list Barkas as one of the "original members."¹⁰¹ Singing, enjoying music, the pleasure of discovering new composers and learning new songs were all reasons for the men to join; sociability and participating in social networks were others. The minutes of the first meeting in 1886 also report "the purchase for the use of the Society of a Table, Cloth, and Stock of wines & spirits."¹⁰² After practice, the men could enjoy a drink together and exchange gossip and news. Like the Conversation Club in Timaru some twenty years later, the Liedertafel provided a space for middle-class, masculine sociability in addition to existing spaces like the Canterbury Club or the Christchurch Club, and in addition also to sports clubs and fraternal societies – yet differing in ambience, purpose and to some extent membership. The Liedertafel, through its public performances, is also an example of men's "privileged access to the public sphere" as embodied by male-only associations in this period.¹⁰³

Membership of the choral society not only guaranteed recognition of one's level of culturedness within the group, but also outside it. Like the Conversation Club and

¹⁰⁰ "John Paterson Newman," *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 3, 1010.

¹⁰¹ Christchurch Liedertafel minutes, 21 May 1886, Z Arch 11, Box 1, Christchurch City Library, Christchurch (hereafter CPL). In an article celebrating the Liedertafel's ninetieth birthday, the Christchurch *Press* mentioned both Newman and Barkas as founding members of the men's choir. "Liedertafel's ninety years," *The Press*, 13 August 1975; see also "90 Years of Liedertafel," *Star*, 13 August 1975; and "The Liedertafel: Fifty Years of Singing, Record of Notable Events, Musical Personalities of Past and Present," *The Press*, 18 October 1934; all clippings in the Christchurch Liedertafel Records, CPL.

¹⁰² Christchurch Liedertafel minutes, 21 May 1886, Z Arch 11, Box 1, CPL.

¹⁰³ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005). See also John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). To date, existing scholarship on spaces and notions of masculinity has not paid much attention to music and reading groups.

The Readers, the Liedertafel in Christchurch and the Timaru Orchestral Society not only served an intrinsic function of enjoyment and pleasure for members, though these were important. The groups were visible in the wider community by organising concerts or entering drama competitions, and felt a wider civic responsibility of contributing to “the cultivation of taste” and culture and of stimulating political education and debate. Membership in these groups was known in the wider community, at least within a similar class of people. The *Lyttelton Times* commented on the first concert of the Christchurch Liedertafel: “Judging from the first essay of the Liedertafel, it is not too much to say that it promises to do a great deal towards the cultivation of a taste for really good music in our midst.”¹⁰⁴ Fred Barkas’s solo was reviewed in the same article and described as “very successful [...] though a little more force and expression would have improved the rendition.”¹⁰⁵ While his performance seemed to leave some room for improvement, Barkas was identified as one of the men in Christchurch who cultivated the taste of the community, and his position among the cultural elite in Christchurch, and later Timaru, had begun to take shape.

Figure 4.2

Timaru Choral and Orchestral Society, c. 1918

Fred Barkas is seated in the middle, second row.

Source: 1435 Print, Photographic, South Canterbury Museum.

¹⁰⁴ *Lyttelton Times* [?], 11 June 1885, newspaper clipping in Z Arch 11, Box 1, CPL.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Barkas was central to the various reading and music groups in Timaru in which he was involved, and of which he left a record. Barkas moved among the cultural elite first in Christchurch and then in Timaru and occupied prominent roles in several societies. He was the president of the Timaru Choral and Orchestral Society during 1914, after he had served as vice-president from 1910 until 1913. Barkas was also the inaugural president of the Timaru Orchestral Society in 1926 and still a patron of that society in 1931.¹⁰⁶ In his earlier years in Christchurch, he filled offices in the Liedertafel, and on his removal to Wellington in 1905 the members of the Christchurch Liedertafel made him a life-member in gratitude for his enthusiasm for the society.¹⁰⁷ In the groups more directly concerned with reading, Barkas also appears to have been one of the main instigators and influences. The Round Table discussion group, later the Conversation Club, was partly his idea and the men heavily relied on him to keep the group in existence. Though he did not initiate The Readers, the group was shaped very much by the ideas of Fred Barkas, and his interest in plays and drama is also shown by his role as the vice-president of the South Canterbury Drama League in 1932.¹⁰⁸

With the social status acquired and expressed by membership in cultural associations came a self-expressed sense of civic responsibility to show cultural leadership in the local community. In 1922, the New South Wales Conservatorium toured New Zealand, performing in Timaru on 7 February. Barkas bought a more expensive “Dress Circle” ticket out of a perceived need to live up to his social status. He explained to Mary:

I don't particularly care for the Dress Circle (I've got the same place from which we saw “East Lynn” when you disgraced yourself by laughing at the tear-drawing parts) & I certainly don't like paying 8/3 for a concert when there will be plenty of room in the Pit (which place I should prefer) for 3/-. But, J.P.N. [J.P. Newman] & I talked it over & came to the conclusion that as past presidents of the Timaru Musical Society & as joint treasures of the Orpheus Male Choir, it was up to us to go as “Top-Notchers” – so, there we're going.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Printed programmes for both societies are included in Timaru Orchestral Society, Concert Programmes, 4/3, SCM. In 1910, Barkas's friend J.P. Newman was the president of the TCOS; Francis Rolleston, another Round Table and Readers' friend was also one of the vice-presidents, and Mary Barkas served on the committee. Barkas did not actually play an instrument. The society employed a conductor and organised regular concerts. Membership constituted an automatic subscription to the concerts.

¹⁰⁷ Christchurch Liedertafel minutes 25 August 1905, Z Arch 11, Box1, CPL.

¹⁰⁸ His fellow Readers F.J. Rolleston, J.P. Newman, W.C. Burns and W. Thomas were also elected vice-presidents, while another Reader Dr. Unwin occupied the presidency of the South Canterbury Drama League. *Timaru Herald*, 10 May 1932, clipping in Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, Folder 3. See also a letter from the South Canterbury Drama League to Fred Barkas, informing him of being re-elected to the office of vice-president, dated 30 July 1930, in Mary Barkas Papers, 89-993, folder 3, ATL.

¹⁰⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 5 February 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

Involvement in cultural activities meant, in the self-constructed social and cultural identity of Barkas, duty and privilege. At the civic reception for the New South Wales orchestra and their conductor Henri Verbrugghen, both Newman and Barkas acted in their official capacities as representatives of the musical societies in Timaru. Barkas's short note to Mary about the reception reveals a proud Barkas, who – in his own words – put “the visit on an ethical basis”, drawing “a good reply from Verbrugghen on Music as a National Work of Civilization.”¹¹⁰

Both Barkas's and Newman's involvement in the several musical societies in Christchurch and Timaru illustrates that these cultural activities were characterised by continuity in membership and organisation. Membership in choral and other musical societies also often overlapped with participation in other local cultural or political associations. Fred Barkas, J.P. Newman and other choir-singers were also members of the Conversation Club and The Readers, as well as several other associations. This testifies on one hand to the significance of associational life both for an individual's integration in the social web of the community and for the organisation and establishment of social hierarchies within the community. Secondly, reading and reading groups were part of the associational structure of the community, and membership would often overlap according to social and cultural desire.

Reading and music groups operated within an existing fabric of associational culture in the local community. Besides debating political topics, reading plays, singing and playing instruments, locals belonged to a range of sport clubs or fraternities and lodges. Barkas was also once president of the Timaru Highfield Golf Club; Newman vice-president of the Timaru Rowing Club and the Cycle Touring Club.¹¹¹ As already stated, membership and purpose of these associations could overlap, and in many instances was determined by gender and class, as well as an already established connection through informal networks. Barkas was a member of the Highfield Golf club, but switched affiliation to the North End Golf Club in 1925, where some of his

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¹¹⁰ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 9 February 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. In 1915 the Belgian Henri Verbrugghen became the “foundation director of the New South Wales State Conservatorium of Music”, establishing the New South Wales State Orchestra, which “rapidly acquired an outstanding reputation.” He also played the violin in the Verbrugghen String Quartet, equally based in Sydney and touring with the orchestra through New Zealand in early 1922. Verbrugghen left the New South Wales Conservatorium in late 1922 to take up a position as conductor at the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra. John Carmody, “Verbrugghen, Henri Adrien Marie (1873 - 1934),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Online Edition, <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A120354b.htm>, accessed 14 January 2011.

¹¹¹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 23 March 1925, MS-Papers-2491-33, ATL; “John Paterson Newman,” *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 3, 1010.

friends from the Conversation Club also played. In the early 1920s he joined the Photography Society; throughout the 1920s he supported the Philosophic Institute of Canterbury.¹¹² There were more associations and clubs in Timaru to join than just the ones Barkas belonged to. By the 1910s, Timaru offered clubs for athletics, golf, tennis, football, rugby and bowling. Several friendly societies were also represented.¹¹³ Geoffrey T. Vincent and Greg Ryan argue that in late-nineteenth century New Zealand, sport clubs were important spaces of class identity and that sport acted “as a mark of segmentation between” classes rather than “bastion of egalitarianism.”¹¹⁴ Golf was certainly a middle-class recreation. In addition to sporting spaces, reading and music groups equally constituted spaces for defining and expressing a particular class identity.

The variety in associational culture in Timaru was a common pattern throughout New Zealand in the late Victorian and early Edwardian period. Rollo Arnold’s highly localised in-depth study of settler life in Kaponga, Taranaki, between 1881 and 1914 describes an equally multi-layered culture of societies and clubs, existing side-by-side and overlapping in membership into the kaleidoscope of local society. From cricket, rugby, soccer, tennis, hockey and horse-racing to debating, chess, dancing, music, horticulture, a desire for “mutual improvement” and drama reading, settlers in Kaponga were bound to find a society to match their interests. After 1890 and lasting well into the Edwardian period, this multitude of associations cumulated to what Arnold termed “a golden age of sports and entertainments”.¹¹⁵

The interconnectedness of local associational cultures is equally evident in Caroline Daley’s study of Taradale in Hawke’s Bay, David Pearson’s study of Johnsonville and Tony Ballantyne’s work on Gore.¹¹⁶ Daley, focussing on friendly societies, drinking and physical recreation as elements within masculine leisure, found

¹¹² See various letters to Mary in MS-Papers-2491-33, ATL. In his capacity as member of the Philosophic Institute of Canterbury Barkas successfully put his name down to be a delegate to the Pan Pacific Congress held in Tokyo in 1926. He chronicled this trip in his “Obs & Imps” travel diaries, MS-Papers-2491-53 and -54, ATL.

¹¹³ Andersen, *Jubilee History of South Canterbury*, 492-99.

¹¹⁴ Geoffrey T. Vincent and Greg Ryan, “‘A Small Knot of Muscular Friends’: Class and Athletic Clubs in Colonial Canterbury, 1870-1890,” *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 8 (2009): 121. This is also argued by Charlotte Macdonald, “Ways of Belonging: Sporting Spaces in New Zealand History,” in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. Giselle Byrnes (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2009), 270-1.

¹¹⁵ Rollo Arnold, *Settler Kaponga, 1881-1914: A Frontier Fragment of the Western World* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1997), 158.

¹¹⁶ Daley, *Girls and Women, Men and Boys*; David G. Pearson, *Johnsonville: Continuity and Change in a New Zealand Township* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1980); Ballantyne, “Thinking Local.” See also the sociological study H. C. D. Somerset, *Littledene: A New Zealand Rural Community* (Auckland: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1938).

that most men socialised away from “the influence of women”, and that much of men’s leisure activities were inclusive, irrespectively of class background or political affiliation.¹¹⁷ Daley does not, however, discuss reading or music groups as gendered leisure sites. It is hard to imagine that men and women in Taradale did not read. Rather the omission testifies that reading is an activity that leaves few institutional or other records. The Timaru groups examined in this chapter offer a complementary view to Daley’s findings, and suggest that there are fine nuances to men’s involvement in associational culture. Women were members in some of these Timaru groups, as play-readers or as students in the WEA classes. If women were excluded from membership, as in the case of the Conversation Club, the texts and topics discussed within the group did not remain within the boundaries of that space. Debate about local and imperial political questions, and the communal reading of nonfiction texts occurred in spaces other than the Conversation Club meetings, and with readers other than the male members of the group.

The difference between the leisure groups in Daley’s study and the Timaru groups discussed in this chapter, which might explain the different levels of inclusiveness, is the question of class. Although Daley’s study is not explicitly set out to be a study of working-class culture, and her argument is not about class, most examples discussed are working-class men and women and their involvement in leisure activities. As Daley points out, the residents of Taradale were predominantly lower-middle class and working class.¹¹⁸ Timaru was larger, more urban and had a greater percentage of middle- and upper-class residents due to its function as the provincial centre of the South Canterbury hinterland. As already detailed in chapter one, Barkas and his circle were decidedly middle and upper class, and belonged to the social elite. The groups within which these men, and women, participated were strongly class-based, while gender constituted a barrier only to some of the groups.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined reading practices within particular local reading communities: a male-only political reading group and a mixed-gender play-reading

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¹¹⁷ Daley, *Girls and Women, Men and Boys*, 133.

¹¹⁸ Only two to four per cent of the male residents listed on the electoral roll between 1887 and 1928 belonged to Daley’s highest occupational group of “High White Collar”. Ibid., appendix B, 172-75.

group. Both groups showed some elements of formal organisation, such as pre-circulated agendas and rituals of hospitality. Access to these groups was determined by both class and gender, as well as already existing personal networks, shared leisure interests and shared political affiliations. In other respects the Timaru Conversation Club and The Readers were characterised by informality. The groups constituted spaces of sociability and friendships. The reading programme was flexible and reflected the interests of the members. It included reading aloud as well as discussion of texts and ideas contained within them. The nature of reading groups evolved over time. The Conversation Club started out as a local group of the Empire-wide Round Table movement, but changed into a more informally-organised group.

Reading groups were firmly anchored in the wider local associational culture. Together with the informal networks of readers examined in chapter one, reading groups contributed to the dense mesh of local associational life and culture. This associational culture was defined by boundaries *and* many overlaps. The local reading groups discussed here were aware of their connections to broader reading cultures, like the Round Table movement or the culture of play-reading throughout the British world. However, the groups were not officially affiliated with other groups elsewhere, and the organisation of each group remained in the hands of its members. The next chapter will continue the discussion of reading groups as forms of reading communities by looking at a reading movement that was much more formally organised, establishing branches all over the English-speaking world between 1889 and 1930: the home reading movement.

CHAPTER FIVE

ELEVATING THE MIND AND UNITING FOR CITIZENSHIP: THE HOME READING MOVEMENT

In two letters written from Christchurch in April 1892 to relatives in the north of England, Fred Barkas commented on a new reading scheme which was being promoted in the local press. “The Australasian Home Reading Circle”, Barkas wrote, was a “scheme for social improvement by means of reading & study ‘Circles’ – it specially aims at the improvement of society in small towns & villages.”¹ The movement, he explained, was “in fact a social reading society; [...] it aims at uniting in common interests old & young, rich & poor, learned & ignorant.”² Barkas reported on the establishment of local branches of the Australasian Home Reading Union (AHRU), founded in 1892. Like the British organisation the National Home Reading Union (NHRU), established in 1889, the AHRU sought to guide readers in the choice and practices of reading through the establishment of local reading circles and the publication of a monthly magazine. Through appealing particularly to working-class and lower middle-class readers, the unions saw reading as a means to enhance political responsibility and to overcome class differences, though not necessarily class distinctions. In addition to their educational agenda, the home reading unions emphasised the social aspects of reading and encouraged connections between circles in different places across the space of the British Empire, so to unite members in a “guild” of readers. Although Barkas decided not to join the movement, thousands of readers in Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, South Africa and other parts of the world did.

This chapter examines how readers across the empire were encouraged to participate simultaneously in local and empire-wide reading communities. In contrast to the locally and to some extent informally organised reading groups discussed in the previous chapter, reading groups within the NHRU followed a highly organised and systematic programme. Moreover, as the NHRU repeatedly stressed, the Union constituted more than “a loose aggregate of reading circles and individual members.”³ The chapter draws on the monthly journals of the NHRU and the AHRU published

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¹ Fred Barkas to his brother-in-law Dr. W.R. Parker, 18 April 1892, MS-Papers-2491-06, ATL.

² Fred Barkas to his brother Charlie Barkas, 15 April 1892, MS-Papers 2491-06, ATL.

³ “N.H.R.U. Notes,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 2.

between 1889 and 1930 which included topical essays, advice on reading, letters to the editor, and general union news.⁴ Much of the evidence derived from the unions' journals illustrates how people were supposed to read, rather than actual reading practices. Letters to the editor, however, reveal some aspects of how readers within the unions saw their membership.

The chapter begins by placing the British NHRU within its historical context and explaining its agenda, before giving a brief account of the origins of the AHRU in New Zealand and the Australian colonies. Both the British and Australasian unions were adamant about the importance of social group reading, and issued detailed advice on what to read, and more importantly on how to read. Guidelines on how to set up and run circles, where to meet, and how to structure circle meetings apparently ensured successful and uniform reading practices. The chapter analyses the guidance offered by both unions as an example of notions of normative and productive reading. The discussion will then primarily focus on the British NHRU in order to examine the kind of connections encouraged and realised through reading and membership: locally and across the empire. The unity offered to members through reading was defined in national and imperial terms. The terms "national" and "home" referred both to Britain and its empire, whereby nation and empire "were one and the same."⁵ Reading became a political act by being linked to understandings of citizenship. The chapter concludes by offering a brief account of the demise and legacy of the both unions, in Australasia and in Britain.

THE NATIONAL HOME READING UNION AND THE POLITICS OF CITIZENSHIP

The National Home Reading Union was founded in Great Britain in 1889 by the Congregational Minister John Brown Paton.⁶ Paton modelled the organisation on the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Reading Circle, a highly successful American adult education movement.⁷ Within a few years, the NHRU had established branches all over

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⁴ The unions' journals are the only major source to draw on, as no other archives of the either union's work have survived.

⁵ Catherine Hall makes this point discussing late nineteenth-century notions of popular imperialism. Hall, "Introduction," 2.

⁶ For biographies of Paton, see John Lewis Paton, *John Brown Paton: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914); and James Marchant, *J.B. Paton: Educational and Social Pioneer* (London: James Clarke & Co, 1909).

⁷ The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle was established in 1878, offering four-year reading courses, at the end of which members would receive a certificate. Ten years later the Circle boasted a

Britain and in many other places across the British Empire, as well as beyond. The Union set out “to guide readers of all ages in the choice of books, to unite them as members of a reading guild and to group them, where possible, in circles of mutual help and interest.”⁸ The Union’s interest to shape popular reading was conveyed in its objects:

1. To develop a taste for Recreative and Instructive Reading among all classes.
2. To direct Home Study, and thus check the spread of pernicious literature among the young.
3. To select the best books for those with little leisure.
4. To remedy the waste of energy and lack of purpose among those who have time and opportunity for a considerable amount of reading.⁹

The main instrument to achieve these goals was the Union’s monthly magazine which readers received with their membership. Paton was successful in attracting considerable support from political and church leaders. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen, the Duke of Argyle, several bishops of the Anglican Church and a number of Cambridge and Oxford professors all served as vice-presidents in the first season.¹⁰ Soon, the NHRU had established circles and branches throughout Britain, particularly in the north of England, as well as branches overseas. Within the first month, the union reported almost 6,000 enrolled members; by April 1895 more than 8,000 readers had joined; in 1905 membership reached over 13,000, though this included 6,000 school pupils affiliated through their teachers.¹¹ Membership remained relatively steady at approximately 7,000-8,000 annual members throughout the union’s existence.¹² There is evidence to suggest that members shared their magazine with non-members, so the reach of the NHRU was significantly larger than its formal membership.

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membership of about 100,000 adult readers in North America. J.G. Fitch, “The Chautauqua Reading Circle,” *Nineteenth Century* 24 (October 1888): 489. See also J.H. Vincent, “Chautauqua - a Popular University,” *Contemporary Review* 51 (May 1887): 725-35; Theodore Morrison, *Chautauqua: A Center for Education, Religion, and the Arts in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 54-70. The Chautauqua movement also succeeded in establishing numerous circles in Canada, see chapter four “Circle to Circle” in Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement!*

⁸ Robert Snape, “The National Home Reading Union,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 7, no. 1 (2002): 90.

⁹ National Home Reading Union, *Notes, Reports, and Announcements* (London: NHRU, 1894), inside cover.

¹⁰ National Home Reading Union, *First Annual Report* (London: NHRU, 1890), front cover.

¹¹ “Introductory Paper,” *The General Readers’ Magazine* I, no. 2 (November 1889): 14; “News of the Circles,” *The General Readers’ Magazine* VI, no. 7 (April 1895): 106; “N.H.R.U. Notes,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 1.

¹² There is also evidence to suggest that each year a reasonable number of new members joined, while others did not renew, so the number of readers who came in contact with the NHRU during its existence between 1889 and 1932 was significantly larger than 7,000-8,000.

Existing scholarship examining the work of the the NHRU and AHRU has discussed the movement within the contexts of the expansion of adult education; the proliferation of reading matter and rising rates of literacy; and debates around political participation. The belief that self-improvement and further education could lead to an improvement in one's social position was at its most powerful in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. As Paul Fussell notes, it "was imagined that the study of literature [...] through such schemes as the National Home Reading Union would actively assist those of modest origins to rise in the class system."¹³ Even if upward social mobility was not achieved, continuing education programmes would turn men into "better workers."¹⁴ While the workmen's institutes established earlier in the century emphasised technical and vocational training, organisations in the later nineteenth century, including the University Extension schemes, summer schools and the NHRU, shifted the focus to liberal studies. Equally important, they responded to the educational needs of both women and men.¹⁵

The NHRU was one amongst a number of initiatives concerned with the reading habits of a newly emerging mass reading public. In the decades following the 1870 Education Act in Britain, literacy reached a near-universal level. As Robert Snape notes, the increased size of the literate population, combined with "mass commercial publishing" and greater access to reading matter, led to fears in some sections of society about the effects of "recreational reading", particularly of the working and lower-middle classes.¹⁶ These late nineteenth-century anxieties about popular reading encompassed debates, predominantly within the middle and upper classes, about the role of public libraries in the provision of recreational literature, culminating in the so-called "fiction question", discussed previously in chapter two of this thesis. It is within this context that library historians have discussed the NHRU.¹⁷ Librarians and educationalists were

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¹³ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 157.

¹⁴ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 189.

¹⁵ Kelly, *Adult Education in Great Britain*, 216-39.

¹⁶ Snape, *Leisure and the Rise of the Public Library*, 114. Robert Snape has to date been the only scholar to thoroughly analyse the work of the NHRU during its entire existence. His point of departure has been library history and the history of leisure, and he has interpreted the NHRU mainly within the context of debates about rational recreation. For a valuable study of the first decade of the NHRU, see Felicity Stimpson, "Reading in Circles: The National Home Reading Union 1889-1900," *Publishing History* 52 (2002): 19-82; and Stimpson, "Reading in Circles: An Examination of the Work of the National Home Reading Union from 1889-1900 with Particular Reference to Reading Practices" (MA Thesis, University of London, 2000).

¹⁷ For a concise discussion of the "fiction question" see Snape, "Libraries for Leisure Time," 43-5. See also chapter four in Snape, *Leisure and the Rise of the Public Library*.

fighting the same battle in guiding readers towards morally-acceptable and instructive material. Public libraries co-operated with the NHRU to this end by promoting the Union, allowing the use of library rooms for meetings and providing the required books.¹⁸ Debates about the uses of print were highly political. “Through its capacity to both teach and to subvert”, reading turned into an important space for the contest of power.¹⁹ By attempting to guide and control the reading material and reading practices of the working and lower-middle classes, members of the upper classes sought to maintain their social hegemony.²⁰

The home reading movement should also be interpreted within the context of prevailing ideas about the responsibilities and duties of citizens. It is important to note that the movement emerged on the back of debates about universal suffrage. It is no coincidence that many of the NHRU’s and AHRU’s organisers and promoters had also been involved in the women’s suffrage movement: Maybanke Anderson in Australia is a prominent example.²¹ In Canada and South Africa, branches of the NHRU were often linked to national or imperial women’s organisations. The pursuit of political participation was integrally linked to involvement in educational, welfare or philanthropic projects. Archie Dick suggested that the work of the Union in South Africa was closely tied to “a nation-building project.”²² There, the National Home Reading Union co-operated with the Victoria League and the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa to “provide reading materials to ‘public libraries,’ school libraries, reading unions and reading circles, and their own members.”²³ Dick argues that through the provision of reading material in line with the organisations’ own agendas, they “assigned imperial or nation-building roles to reading.”²⁴ In Canada, the National Council of

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¹⁸ Black, *A New History of the English Public Library*, 213. See also Martin Hewitt, “Extending the Public Library 1850-1930,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Vol. 3: 1850-2000*, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 77; Snape, “Libraries for Leisure Time,” 47.

¹⁹ Snape, “The National Home Reading Union,” 86.

²⁰ The term hegemony refers to Lefebvre’s definition of the “hegemony of the ruling classes”, in Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 10.

²¹ See Beverley Kingston, “Anderson, Maybanke Susannah (1845-1927),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, available at <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu/biogs/A070061b.htm>, accessed 13 March 2007; and Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage & Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1993).

²² Archie L. Dick, “Building a Nation of Readers? Women’s Organizations and the Politics of Reading in South Africa, 1900-1914,” *Historia* 49, no. 2 (2004): 23.

²³ Archie L. Dick, “‘To Make the People of South Africa Proud of Their Membership of the Great British Empire’: Home Reading Unions in South Africa, 1900-1914,” *Libraries & Culture* 40, no. 1 (2005): 3.

²⁴ Ibid. Dick also details the work of a rival organisation called the South African Home Reading Union, established in Pretoria in 1903. This organisation had a stronger local focus, also encouraged reading in

Women of Canada promoted the work of the Union as part of its focus on families and the moral education of children, and the NHRU formed part of the “defence against the dangers of trashy books.”²⁵ Women involved in such organisations enacted their citizenship by taking responsibility for the education of children and members of the working classes, seeking to turn them into morally-sound citizens.

THE ARRIVAL OF “HOME READING” IN NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA

In January 1892, George Hogben, headmaster of the Timaru Boys’ High School and a future Director of Education, attended a meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Hobart, Tasmania.²⁶ Following a debate about the future of the literary section of the AAAS, representatives at the meeting discussed the merits of the NHRU. As a result, the Australasian Home Reading Union was founded as an independent organisation.²⁷ A few months later, at a public meeting in Christchurch chaired by the Anglican Bishop Churchill Julius, Hogben introduced the Union to an audience of about sixty persons. After explaining its aims and objectives, the chairman Julius remarked that there was

a very large number who did not read anything except the newspapers; others who read literature that was bad and novels of a third-rate character. There was also a class given to useless reading, that was reading in a desultory manner, first one subject, then another, and really learning nothing. So far as he could learn, the reading in the majority of country houses was provided by travelling canvassers, and most of their books were not worth reading. He would be thankful if they [the NHRU] could do anything that would turn the thoughts of their readers in the right channel.²⁸

In the spirit of the British NHRU, some readers were described as requiring particular guidance. The power of reading to elevate the mind of individuals and thus

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circles, but did not publish a magazine. Further exploration of this particular local union would go beyond the scope of this chapter.

²⁵ Anne-Marie Kinahan, “Cultivating the Taste of the Nation: The National Council of Women in Canada and the Campaign against ‘Pernicious’ Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 32 (2007): 163.

²⁶ Herbert Roth, “Hogben, George – Biography,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. *Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2h44/1>, accessed 7 April 2011. On Hogben’s involvement with the AHRU see also Herbert Roth, *George Hogben: A Biography* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1952), 66-9.

²⁷ The AHRU remained independent from the NHRU, and rejected a NHRU proposal to affiliate with the British Union. *Australasian Home Reader* 2, no.1 (February 1893): 14.

²⁸ “Australian Home Reading Union,” *The Press*, 23 April 1892, 6.

break down class distinctions, or at least differences, was especially emphasised in Julius's remarks. Such egalitarianism would only be achieved by "the general levelling up of the people."²⁹ At the Christchurch meeting Julius referred to the success of the movement in England, and concluded that because in New Zealand, people "had a higher average intelligence and more leisure", the work would be a success here, too.³⁰ Hogben, who served as the AHRU's secretary, then reported on the success of a group in his home town Timaru, which had already been established. The receptive crowd responded with applause, and a Christchurch group was formed at once.

The enthusiastic response to the idea of organised home reading, expressed at the meeting in Christchurch and by supporting letters to the editor to a number of newspapers, translated into healthy membership figures.³¹ During April 1892, public meetings had been held in several towns throughout New Zealand to promote the work of the Union. As a result, by May of the same year a branch in Wellington had registered forty-one members, groups in Dunedin and Christchurch recorded fifty members each, and in Timaru fifty-two readers had enrolled. During 1892 groups were also established in Auckland, Balclutha and Masterton. By early 1893, 341 readers in New Zealand had enrolled with the AHRU either as members of circles or as individual members.³² In the Australian colonies, the AHRU had been equally successful in attracting members. With branches in New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland the entire membership of all Australasian colonies in early 1893 reached close to 2,000 readers.³³

The idea of systematic and purposeful reading was not new to readers in New Zealand. The AHRU built on the work of the already established Home Reading Association (HRA). In early 1891, the educationalist Thomas R. Fleming corresponded with a number of influential men in New Zealand, including Supreme Court Judge Christopher William Richmond and William Pember Reeves, then Minister of Education, hoping to enlist their support for his plan of setting up a "home reading"

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²⁹ "Australian Home Reading Union," *The Press*, 23 April 1892, 6. Egalitarianism was repeatedly stressed at inaugural public meetings. At a meeting in Timaru on 12 April 1892, the union was described "as a social agent" and "as a means of 'levelling up'", which "should be a great civilising influence." "Home Studies," *Timaru Herald*, 13 April 1892, 6.

³⁰ "Australian Home Reading Union," *The Press*, 23 April 1892, 6.

³¹ "One who believes in it," *Otago Daily Times*, 30 April 1892, 6.

³² "Report of the Provisional Council," *Australasian Home Reader* 2, no. 1 (February 1893): 13.

³³ *Ibid.*

movement, initially in Wellington with branches throughout the country to follow.³⁴ Some of these letters were also printed in the local press and the debate thus extended to the public sphere.³⁵ Both Richmond and Reeves heartily endorsed the idea. Richmond wrote that he “thoroughly sympathize[d] with any movement to stimulate intellectual activity amongst us.” In his opinion, “Wellington [was] behind all the other three large centres in this particular.”³⁶ Out of Fleming’s proposal, the Home Reading Association was born, holding its first meeting in Wellington on 6 March 1891 at the Education Board’s offices.³⁷

Discussion about the syllabus and the courses of reading followed in the weeks after the inaugural meeting. The HRA committee reassured potential members that the programme would “probably be of a popular character, well within the scope of the average reader.”³⁸ Inclusiveness was key to attracting members. The association decided to offer courses in chemistry, astronomy, botany, English literature and political economy.³⁹ Fleming and Reeves had also exchanged precise ideas of what kind of books should be included on the reading lists. Although Fleming thought the programme should begin with literature, he agreed that science, political economy and history were also essential subjects. Within English literature, Fleming suggested several plays of Shakespeare, and novels by George Eliot.⁴⁰ Dickens, Thackeray and Scott would also

³⁴ For brief biographies see “Obituary – T.R. Fleming”, *Otago Witness*, 16 September 1930, 20; “Fleming, Thomas Reid (1863-1930),” in *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Vol. I, ed. G.H. Scholefield (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940) 266-7; Keith Sinclair, “Richmond, Christopher William – Biography,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/1r9/1>; accessed 7 April 2011; Keith Sinclair, “Reeves, William Pember – Biography,” *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/2r11/1>, accessed 7 April 2011.

³⁵ See William Pember Reeves’s letter to Thomas R. Fleming, reprinted as “The Home Reading Association,” *Evening Post*, 16 May 1891, 2; excerpts of the letter were also reprinted under the heading “Socialism” in the *Star*, 19 May 1891, 3; and in the *West Coast Times*, 27 May 1891, 2.

³⁶ C.W. Richmond to T.R. Fleming, 6 March 1891, in Thomas Reid Fleming Papers, MS-Papers-0251-17, ATL. Richmond may also have been referring to the fact that unlike Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin, Wellington did not have a university at that time.

³⁷ *Evening Post*, 7 March 1891, 2. The Home Reading Association to be formed in Wellington was first mentioned in the *Otago Witness*, 1 January 1891, 27. The *Otago Witness* reported: “A ‘Home Reading Association’ is to be formed in Wellington, the objects of which will be to encourage a systematic course of study in literary and scientific subjects, by means of lectures and guidance in private reading.” In the following months the Home Reading Association was discussed in local newspapers throughout New Zealand.

³⁸ *Evening Post*, 18 March 1891, 2.

³⁹ Advertisement of the Home Reading Association, *Evening Post*, 29 May 1891, 3.

⁴⁰ T.R. Fleming to the Secretary of the Home Reading Association, 8 March 1891, in Thomas Reid Fleming Papers, MS-Papers-0251-17, ATL. Fleming thought the works of George Eliot particularly suitable, as “she has some attraction for those, who read novels for pure excitement only and at the same time she forms a study that a lecturer can make good use of in endeavouring to cultivate the taste of his audience.”

make good studies, he felt. Reeves pushed for poetry to be included; perhaps Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*, selections of the poems of "Wordsworth, edited by Matthew Arnold", or the selection of Robert Browning's poems published by Smith and Elder.⁴¹ Reeves included publication details and prices of most of the books he suggested – none to cost more than 2s6d. Fleming was equally concerned to keep suggested titles within the reach of less affluent potential members, recommending books which "would be easily enough obtained" by borrowing them "from friends or libraries."⁴² Reeves listed a number of books on political economy, among them *A Short History of Political Economy in England*, *Life of Adam Smith* and "Trade Unions Past and Present."⁴³ He urged that, in view of the current economic situation (referring to the maritime and miners' strikes during the later months of 1890), "great attention" had to be given "to the problem of Socialism and Trade Unionism" for the course to be practically useful. To that end he suggested a book entitled *The Quintessence of Socialism* by A. Schäffle.⁴⁴

Like the NHRU and the AHRU, the objects of the HRA were to encourage "systematic home reading among all classes", to set up circles, and to design a syllabus "as a guide to literary and scientific" reading as well as organising occasional lectures on the study subjects.⁴⁵ Social reading was seen as the most effective approach for furthering education. The similarities to the NHRU in Britain were no coincidence. The Wellington-born Home Reading Association was modelled on the NHRU and the Chautauqua movement in North America. The great web of people and news travelling around the British and Atlantic worlds connected Wellington and New Zealand to educational and intellectual schemes initiated elsewhere. A newspaper article explaining the objects of the HRA left no doubt as where the origins of the campaign were to be found. "The movement is not an original one on the part of its promoters here", the article made clear, but was based on "a scheme started in England on somewhat similar lines some years ago, and still in operation, the success of which ha[d] been

⁴¹ William Pember Reeves to T.R. Fleming, 7 May 1891, in Thomas Reid Fleming Papers, MS-Papers-0251-17, ATL.

⁴² T.R. Fleming to the Secretary of the Home Reading Association, 8 March 1891, in Thomas Reid Fleming Papers, MS-Papers-0251-17, ATL.

⁴³ L.L. Price, *A Short History of Political Economy in England* (London: Methuen, 1891); R.B. Haldane, *Life of Adam Smith* (London: W. Scott, 1887). Reeves referred to the third title, "Trade Unions Past and Present" as an abridgement of an earlier work by George Howell. There is no book of that title listed in the British Library Catalogue or in the international library catalogue network www.worldcat.org. Likely, Reeves confused the title, and probably meant George Howell, *Trade Unionism, New and Old* (London: Methuen, 1891).

⁴⁴ Albert Schäffle, *The Quintessence of Socialism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1889).

⁴⁵ *Evening Post*, 7 March 1891, 2.

phenomenal.” The Chautauqua movement was also mentioned as a system “very much akin” to the proposed plan.⁴⁶

Other reading groups and literary societies were already part of the intellectual landscape in New Zealand and elsewhere before schemes like the NHRU, AHRU and the HRA were introduced. In fact, all three associations, at least in their initial phase, relied on existing reading groups for their membership. The Home Reading Association made it known that “[a]ll mutual improvement societies – such as literary, debating, and kindred societies – [were] to be asked to join the association.”⁴⁷ It was also particularly interested in co-operating with the Federated Trades’ Union Council to reach a working-class constituency.⁴⁸ On arrival in New Zealand, the AHRU amalgamated with the HRA, and absorbed other local reading societies, too.⁴⁹ In Timaru, for example, the Timaru Reading Society was quick to join the AHRU in April 1892.⁵⁰ Likewise, the organisers of the NHRU in Britain and Canada encouraged reading circles already operating to join as groups and affiliate themselves with the Union. The NHRU magazine repeatedly highlighted the advantages independent reading groups would enjoy by joining the union.

What was new about these “home reading” movements, however, was the conviction that the most valuable reading would occur in a systematic and guided way, in the company of other readers, and be followed by discussion. The advice given by experts and the union organisers was crucial for acquiring such skills of systematic reading. Moreover, membership in the unions bestowed additional benefits beyond mere membership in a local reading group.

HOW AND WHAT TO READ, AND THE ROLE OF THE UNION’S MAGAZINE

For a yearly fee of 2s6d for membership in the AHRU, or between 1s and 3s per year for the NHRU, readers received prescribed reading lists and a monthly journal for the

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⁴⁶ “Home Reading Association,” *Evening Post*, 18 May 1891, 2.

⁴⁷ “Omnium Gatherum,” *Otago Witness*, 1 January 1891, 1.

⁴⁸ *Evening Post*, 13 March 1891, 2.

⁴⁹ Advertisement of the AHRU, Wellington Branch, *Evening Post*, 3 May 1892, 3. T.R. Fleming became secretary of the AHRU New Zealand Northern Branch, see *Australasian Home Reader* 4, no. 2 (May 1895).

⁵⁰ “Home Studies,” *Timaru Herald*, 13 April 1892, 3. The Timaru Reading Society had been in existence since 1890, modelled loosely on the Chautauqua Literary Society, and likely under the leadership of George Hogben. George Hogben, “Letter to the editor: Australasian Home Reading Union,” *Timaru Herald*, 22 March 1892, 3.

nine-month reading season from Autumn to Spring.⁵¹ Both unions' journals listed titles and publication details of the required books for the various reading courses. They also contained explanatory essays to some of the titles, and suggested three or four questions for circle discussion. Often, the journals opened with an editorial on a general issue to do with reading, for example a reflection on fiction reading, usually emphasising the importance of the unions' work. In the NHRU journals, "Union Notes" was a regular feature, sharing reports received from circles, information on upcoming meetings or lectures, or any other relevant news items. In this section, the editors also reprinted a selection of letters to the editor from individual members or circles. Advertisements for booksellers and publishers, usually offering the books on the NHRU reading lists, could be found inside the front and back covers, and occasionally in the midst of the magazine. The length of the journals varied, but on average they contained twelve pages in the first few years, and grew to about thirty-two pages by the 1910s.

The NHRU journal played an essential role as a communication tool between organisers and members, and between circles and readers in different locations. Paton had envisaged the magazine to be "one of the great bonds of fellowship, and at the same time the means of continual, ever-recurring help and incentive."⁵² The journal brought the Union into the homes of its members, and was the main organ for the dissemination of its messages.⁵³ The NHRU initially published different journals for the different sections of membership – general readers, young people's section and the special courses. Later, it combined the general readers and young people issues into one magazine. The organisers frequently modified the titles of the monthly magazines, reflecting a continuing effort to enhance the publication. Ongoing financial difficulties,

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⁵¹ Subscriptions in the NHRU were 1s for Young People; 1s6d for Artisans, later General Readers, affiliated to a circle; 2s for General Readers who joined individually; and 3s for readers in the Special Courses. The NHRU's reading season stretched from October to June; AHRU circles met from April to December, with the first number of the magazine appearing in advance in February, then in monthly intervals from May to December. Both unions took a break over summer.

⁵² John B. Paton, *The Home Reading of Our Senior Scholars* (London: William Clowes & Sons, [1889]), 6.

⁵³ The Union also printed leaflets promoting its work, book lists for entire reading seasons, annual reports, occasional publications on specific topics such as "Reading in War-Time", and advertisement cards to be displayed in libraries or bookseller shop windows. Other outreach programmes included co-operation with public libraries, summer assemblies, organising joint activities with the Co-operative Holiday Association (CHA) and the Home Music Study Union. CHA members, for example, were automatically enrolled in the NHRU. Lack of space prohibits further analysis of any of these aspects here. On the overlap of the objectives and personnel of the NHRU and the CHA see Robert Snape, "The Co-Operative Holiday Association and the Cultural Formation of Countryside Leisure Practice," *Leisure Studies* 23, no. 2 (2004): especially 145-6. See also Snape, "An English Chautauqua: The National Home Reading Union and the Development of Rational Holidays in Late Victorian Britain," *Journal of Tourism History* 2, no. 3 (2010): 213-34.

as well as changing needs of members and educational contexts, further contributed to adjustments in the journal's production. In 1925, the organisers decided to combine all three sections into one journal, now called *The Reader*, issue it all year round, and sell it through the book trade to non-members as well as circulating to members. At that time, the magazine mostly contained book reviews. Essays accompanying the reading courses had vanished. Targeted communication to members was likewise attempted in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Between 1892 and 1898, the AHRU issued its own magazine, the *Australasian Home Reader*, and in 1893 a special edition for New Zealand readers with a separate cover and local advertisements was trialled, but soon abandoned.⁵⁴ After the 1890s remaining home reading circles in Australia appear to have subscribed to the NHRU publications. The South African branches of the Union also appear to have issued their own publications.⁵⁵

As previously stated, one of the journal's functions was to provide its readers with advice on how to read. The advice could be summarised as follows: to read slowly and thoughtfully; to take notes of interesting passages; and to discuss one's reading with other readers. The NHRU promoted reading predominantly as an instructive and constructive activity. Education was the main function. While some provision was made for recreational reading, reading "as a mere distraction" and "an excuse for idleness" was to be avoided. Bad reading habits and diets could be as harmful as bad eating habits: "To read aimlessly, to read what is not worth reading, is as bad a habit as to be always eating cakes and nibbling sweets. It is a waste of the mind."⁵⁶ The most important aspect of the work of the Union, however, was reading in circles.

The ideal reading circle was frequently laid out in the NHRU magazines. Such discussion illuminates how the organisers of the Union envisaged the circles would work. The target audience was working-class and lower middle-class readers, who ideally already possessed some experience of the pleasures and benefits of reading, yet were not so highly educated so as to make the role of the Union unnecessary. Initially, the Union attempted to reach predominantly working-class readers, "the toilers of our vast industrial system."⁵⁷ Soon, however, the organisers realised that most circles comprised middle-class readers, and the Union rhetoric changed to include this section

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⁵⁴ *Australasian Home Reader* 2, no. 1 (February 1892): 12.

⁵⁵ The Cambridge University Library catalogue lists an issue of the *South African Bookman and Quarterly Journal of the South African Home Reading Union*, published in 1912.

⁵⁶ "War Economy in Reading," *The Home Reading Magazine* XXVIII, no. 8 (May 1917): 227.

⁵⁷ "Occasional Papers," *General Readers' Magazine* II, no. 5 (February 1891): 38.

of society.⁵⁸ In the eyes of the Union, an ideal circle would include readers from different backgrounds, and different classes. The following 1894 passage describes the Union's vision:

An ideal reading circle.

[...] The greater the variety of attainment amongst the members the better; provided none are intellectual giants, who might, however unintentionally, be "rough" on the dwarfs. Differences of social position, intellectual attainment, and educational experience amongst the members add greatly to the profitableness of the discussions. Each one looking at the subject from a different point of view may not at the time lead to unanimity of opinion, but would certainly help to show forth the many-sidedness of the truth, and foster a liberality of thought and width of sympathy in which narrowness of mind cannot flourish. [...]

Such members will strive to master one book before going on to another – their aim will be quality rather than quantity. "A little and well" may result in slowness of advance, but the progress will be sure. For stability of superstructure the foundation must be firm.

The same passage also went on to describe the qualities of an ideal leader:

The leader of an ideal circle must not be a "paragon of perfection": such a leader would destroy any circle composed of ordinary mortals. We must not look too high for him; he must be in touch with the rank and file, though perhaps head and shoulders above them. [...] When possible, the leader could indicate lines of thought to be borne in mind while reading, or give questions to be answered – those in the Magazine and similar ones – and at the next meeting the members might state their answers, opinions, and objections.

Upon the leader rests the task of hunting up any information the members cannot obtain, and always seeking help from every available source for the better understanding of the author and his message.

Finally, the passage described the process by which, once assembled, the group might digest a book:

The books to be studied – novels perhaps excepted – are read through once very quickly so as to gain an impression of the general drift of their teaching, and then they are taken up in the circle chapter by chapter, and sometimes paragraph by paragraph. Chapters are occasionally analysed, extracts from other works are copied, and the writers read them when the circle meets.

The ideal circle meets once a week, and rests contented after working for nine months, though only three books have been thus carefully reviewed.⁵⁹

As the above extract demonstrates, the advice of the NHRU included a remarkable level of detail on the ideal constitution of circles, leader personalities, the

⁵⁸ See for example an address delivered in Bradford introducing the work of the union, which identified the "thousands of the middle class [...] to whom the world of books was practically almost closed." "Meetings", *General Readers' Magazine* VII, no. 3 (December 1895): 45. Snape also notes that the Union failed to attract working-class readers. Snape, "The National Home Reading Union," 95.

⁵⁹ "An Ideal Reading Circle," *General Readers' Magazine* VI, no. 1 (October 1894): 14-5.

rhythm of reading, and frequency of meetings. Reading had to be productive; members were encouraged to take notes, seek out additional information, come up with suitable questions for group discussion or bring quotes to the meetings. Reading produced thought, critical capacity and knowledge. The Union's vision constituted a perfect reading world, in which diverging opinions would melt into deeper insights, and class differences could be overcome – at first within the space of the meetings, then as a result of reading, within the nation.

In the eyes of the Union's organisers, reading in circles had three main benefits. First, an awareness of other readers added seriousness to the reading. The organisers stated that, "the fact that the purpose is common to the whole circle strengthens the purpose of each individual member."⁶⁰ The value of individual reading increased through belonging to a collective. Secondly, the Union explained, readers would compare their own reading practices to those of other readers and thus learn from each other. "[S]ome people read slowly and laboriously", the organisers noted, "others skim rapidly through a book, [...] then work again at the important parts."⁶¹ Knowledge of, or exposure to, a variety of reading approaches turned members into more experienced readers. Thirdly, and perhaps most tangibly, members would profit from the discussions held at circle meetings, by being exposed to different perspectives on the subject matter under debate and by sharing thoughts on their reading.

Although education was the ultimate goal of reading in circles, many members valued sociability as a welcome by-product. The social component of the individual circles was part of the attraction and was stressed as especially important for setting up a new group. A friendly atmosphere in the first meetings was crucial for breaking the ice, and for encouraging discussion amongst members during the reading season to follow. The NHRU suggested

that some pains should be bestowed on the first two or three meetings. Do not make the meetings instructive merely, let them be truly recreative – "social evenings." [...] However difficult it may be at first to secure a good discussion, the meetings will soon grow attractive and talk will become free and spontaneous.⁶²

The *Australasian Home Reader* printed similarly worded advice a few years later, adding that "songs and recitations" would make attractive accompaniments to "papers and

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⁶⁰ "Address by Sir William Reynell Anson, delivered at the NHRU annual meeting, 20 January 1904," reprinted in *Special Courses Magazine* XV, no. 5 (February 1904): 136.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Union Notes," *General Readers' Magazine* III, no. 1 (October 1891): 2.

discussions.”⁶³ Both unions acknowledged that sociability was an important part of the circles’ existence and emphasised that reading was both “enjoyable & profitable” (see figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1

Advertisement for the National Home Reading Union,
emphasizing both the educational and social benefits of reading.

Source: *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 4 (January 1906): 122.

The advice on how to read and make circle meetings most useful was matched by precise reading lists issued each year. Ideally, members would read the suggested titles for each course, and read them in the prescribed order, though if time was limited, members were permitted to read a selection only. The courses were at various times separated for “young” and “artisan” readers (targeting school children and young people just beyond school age, and those with limited formal education), “general” readers (with some reading experience but not highly educated), and for readers of the “special courses” (better educated readers wishing to study a subject in more depth). The NHRU thus attempted to attract a wide range of readers, both in order to guarantee sufficient membership and as an expression of its inclusive ideology.

⁶³ “How to Work with the A.H.R.U.,” *Australasian Home Reader* II, no.1 (February 1893): 16.

Book lists included fiction and non-fiction, as well as poetry, and were remarkably extensive. The NHRU did not universally condemn fiction, but hoped its precise advice would help members to attain “a capacity for judgement” of good and bad fiction.⁶⁴ The book lists for all three sections of the NHRU for the reading season 1895-96, for example, add to an impressive twenty-eight pages of tightly printed reading courses and book titles. The reading lists contained required and recommended titles, as well as reference works for the special courses. Reading courses offered in 1895/96 covered “English History, 1660-1815”, “English Literature, 1630-1780”, “Shakespeare”, “Modern English Literature”, “History of the British Colonies and Dependencies”, “Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature”, “Modern French”, “Modern German” and “Economic Geography” (all offered within the special courses). The general course was organised into more broad-based subjects (Science, History, Literature), and suggested a small number of titles in each of these. Here, we find Holyoake’s *The Co-operative Movement of Today*, Gardiner’s *French Revolution*, *Travels* by Livingstone, a selection of titles dealing with coal, Bentley’s *Botany Primer*, Dickens’ *Pickwick Papers*, *Poems* by Lowell, Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Plato’s *Crito and Phaedo*.⁶⁵ In the same year, Australasian Home Readers could choose courses in English, French or German Literature; history courses including “History of England - 1789 to Present Time”, “History of Europe - 1789 to Present Time” and “The British in India”. Science courses ranged from “Geology and Mineralogy”, “Biology”, “Ethics”, “Political Economy”, “Physiology”, “Physics” and “Chemistry” to “Travel in Africa” and a course on education. The overlap between the unions is visible even in this small sample. Within the empire-related courses, many of the suggested titles were identical.

The unions emphasised the reading of books over periodical and newspaper reading. The latter – if undertaken too often and too extensively – was deemed not only a waste of time, but fostering undesirable reading practices. A lengthy editorial in the NHRU *Home-Reading Magazine* in February 1921 acknowledged “the necessity and the value of the periodical press”, but explained that the rise of the mass periodical and newspaper press over the last fifty years had resulted in journalism becoming “a monster from whose clutches no one can escape.”⁶⁶ The “snippet” style of newspaper items, the Union warned, engendered “a restless habit, a feverish grasping at something

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⁶⁴ “How to Read Fiction,” *The Home-Reading Union Magazine* XXXIV, no. 8 (May 1923): 228.

⁶⁵ National Home Reading Union, *Complete Book List for all Sections for 1895-96* (London: NHRU, 1895).

⁶⁶ “Newspaper Reading,” *The Home Reading Magazine* XXXII, no. 5 (February 1921): front page.

new to tickle the mental palate, a fatal weakening of the power of concentrated and continuous thought.” A gloomy prediction followed:

Unless [...] you can “ration” your newspaper reading your thought will grow more and more shallow, your mental life will become thin, empty and perhaps morbid, and you will lose all that deep pleasure and high inspiration which reading in the true sense can give.⁶⁷

If the consumption of newspapers held dangers for the intellect, magazines were worse still. Condemning the dominance of magazine culture within the American reading market and the hastened pace of reading that came with it, the NHRU warned members that “the average American lack[ed] culture because he [was] little more than a magazine-fed machine, having little, if any use for real scholarship.”⁶⁸ This judgement, voiced in the mid-1920s, suggests as much about the British Union’s failure to keep abreast with the changing world of modernity, as it remains true to the Union’s conviction that reading required time and systematic perusal. In the words of the same editorial, culture was “gained as much from intensive as from extensive reading.”⁶⁹

THE REALITIES OF HOME READING AND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN READERS

ACROSS SPACE

Ideals and realities of reading did not always match. In practice, not all circles were as easy to set up and flourishing as the guidelines in the magazine and most letters to the editor suggested. It was not uncommon for discussions at the meetings to be rather muted or tentative and for members to feel too shy to express their opinions, especially when they perceived themselves to be not as educated as others. In 1893, “Nil Desparandum”, a reader who struggled to make his or her circle meetings successful, wrote to the editor asking for advice. “Nil Desparandum” described the circle’s experiences thus far:

We meet at 7:30 at our schoolroom – a very bare, ugly room. There are seven members, none of them great talkers, at least at the meetings. [...] We met about six times last year. I cannot say that it was invigorating, but I kept on going. So many of our correspondents write telling of vigorous discussions and lively talks; I should be very grateful for advice; my heart sinks as I look

⁶⁷ Ibid. The use of bodily metaphors, like “palate” and “morbid”, also testify to, as Kate Flint notes, the “common equation between bodily and mental health.” Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 50-70, quote 50.

⁶⁸ “Editorial,” *The Reader* I, no. 11 (August 1926): 485.

⁶⁹ Ibid.: 486.

forward to the winter. I cannot write an essay each month on the book chosen, and, besides, I yearn after those merry, animated meetings which I hear others have. [...] we are mostly clerks, but one or two work in shops, so we have a certain amount of knowledge, but our circle is certainly rather dreary, and we want some “sweetness and light”.⁷⁰

“Nil Desparandum” found the account of other, more successful circles discouraging and saw them as a reflection on his or her own circle’s inadequacies. “Nil Desparandum” expressed despair and helplessness about how to improve the meetings and to increase the fruits of the circle’s reading. A few elements described in the letter seemed to hinder the success of the meetings in particular: the space of the meeting, lack of time to prepare sufficiently and a certain level of timidity amongst members.

The editors did not reply immediately, at least not in the magazine, to “Nil Desparandum’s” request for advice. However, general guidelines on the ideal circle were published at regular intervals in the magazine.⁷¹ The editors also thought that more positive reports of circles could serve as models for others.⁷² Yet the despair expressed in this letter found resonance with other members and to some extent reports of unsuccessful circles offered more encouragement. In the *General Readers’ Magazine* two months later, in January 1894, a “circle member” responded to “Nil Desparandum”:

We have been feeling rather depressed in mind, and then our secretary turned to me and said, “Oh, we needn’t give up yet. Here’s ‘Nil Desparandum,’ who is surely worse off than we are.” This sounds poor comfort, but, by the law of contraries, it is encouraging to hear that others only flourish moderately. Somehow, the very prosperous circles almost depress us. We don’t grow by leaps and bounds – there are only twelve of us, and mostly not more than five or six come. But though we were very shy at first, and none of us knew each other well, and we all belong to different religious bodies and to different creeds of politics, I do believe we shall break down the walls of British reserve before long. “Nil Desparandum” must take courage, and perhaps take counsel with the other members. That is what we are doing.⁷³

Such letters established connections between readers of different circles and offered another outlet of the Union’s function of mutual support and companionship.

By publishing those less successful accounts of the work of individual circles, the Union and the editors of the magazine acknowledged and emphasised to members that the skill of reading – reading the right kind of material and reading in the right kind of

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⁷⁰ “Letter to the editor,” *General Readers’ Magazine* V, no. 2 (Nov 1893): 28.

⁷¹ See, for example, “About Starting a Circle,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 9-11.

⁷² Heather Murray found that this was also a strategy employed by the editors of the Chautauqua Circle’s magazine in North America, the *Chautauquan*. Murray, *Come, Bright Improvement!*, 90-2.

⁷³ “Letter to the editor,” *General Readers’ Magazine* V, no. 4 (January 1894): 25.

way – was not an easy task or mastered quickly. As the organisers of the NHRU often stressed, reading required practice, was hard work and could only be achieved by undergoing some sacrifices. At the same time, the very existence of the union rested on the conviction that reading was a universal skill, and by publishing accounts of other readers who struggled, the organisers urged members not to give up.

Organisers encouraged connections between different circles by means of the monthly magazine. One suggestion for a successful circle meeting was to discuss other circles' queries, printed in the journal, in order to enliven the discussion of the text. This, it was hoped, would also "serve as a means of bringing circles in different parts of the country into touch with each other. We want gradually develop by such methods a feeling of real solidarity – a corporate spirit – among members of the Union."⁷⁴ The connections were both lived and imagined. Another reader related how her circle struggled with the prescribed reading pace. "We read so slowly", she wrote, "that we are unable to make full use of the delightful articles which introduce us to the books, but we imagine, with real interest, the exciting discussions which must take place in some circles on the subjects suggested by the articles."⁷⁵

Connections could sometimes be established through direct communication between members, without the Union acting as an ongoing intermediary. For "isolated readers who [for] various reasons cannot join circles", the Union set up correspondence circles based on subjects in the special courses section, starting in 1905.⁷⁶ Members of the correspondence circles were asked to send in short essays every month on the chosen subject. Individual members residing in places in which no circle had been or could be set up (predominantly in rural areas) always had the option of joining as individual members, which involved sending in essays to and communication with the union secretary. Previously, the closest individual members would get to other members was reading the reports and letters to the editor in the magazine. The correspondence circles set up for advanced readers taking the special courses enabled direct exchange as well, and readers were able to learn from each other even over a distance.

The NHRU attempted to build on personal connections of members in order to ensure the organisation's viability. Persistent financial pressure to attract new members resulted in a number of outreach activities. Many of these activities sought to build on

⁷⁴ "Union Notes," *General Readers' Magazine* III, no. 3 (December 1891): 17.

⁷⁵ "Letter to the editor," *General Readers' Magazine* VI, no. 6 (March 1895): 95.

⁷⁶ "Correspondence Circles," *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 3.

existing personal relationships and existing associational structures. Besides asking members to write letters to local newspapers in order to promote the Union, home readers were encouraged to meet with local librarians and elementary teachers, and visit Sunday-school classes, “Girls’ clubs and lads’ clubs, Church Guilds, Literary and Mutual Improvement Societies.”⁷⁷ The Union also suggested that a “prospectus and a few pages about the N.H.R.U. posted to friends in the colonies and out-of-the-way places will often bring in individual members”, revealing a conviction of the necessities and opportunities of reaching out to potential readers across distance.⁷⁸ Personal relationships and communication, in which trust would add to the value of recommendations, were understood to be the most effective ways of winning over potential members.

Knowing about other readers created a sense of mutuality and solidarity, and helped in overcoming perceived shortcomings. Members could also help each other in the very real form of lending books. The NHRU’s “Book Union” facilitated connections between readers by allowing members to borrow books from each other, regardless of their place of residence. The Union secretary acted as the intermediary between willing book lenders and interested borrowers, by collecting offers of books for lending and matching them with expressions of interest. Books on offer were frequently listed in the magazines. The secretary would pass on addresses of possible lenders, and both parties arranged the exchange of the books between each other. The Union charged both sides in this lending relationship a fee of 6d to cover “expenses in communication with members”, mainly the postage for sending on names and addresses.⁷⁹ Borrowers also paid a loan fee of 2d directly to the lender, and were allowed to keep books for four weeks. “Pencil marks, turning down of pages, or pasting in of labels” were strongly prohibited and borrowers would be held responsible for any damage to the books. All transactions between borrowers and lenders were to be communicated to the “Union Librarian” (the secretary) promptly so records of books available for lending at any particular time could be kept up-to-date.

The time-consuming administration of the Book Union likely hindered its large-scale implementation. As with the organisation of circles and circle meetings, the practicalities of real readers diverged from the Union’s idealistic goals. Time and again,

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⁷⁷ “Ways of Helping,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 4.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “The Book Union Rules,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 2 (November 1905): 44.

the NHRU reminded members of the Book Union rules, which were crucial to the success of the scheme, and by so doing hinted that rules were not always adhered to. The scheme was vulnerable in a number of areas. Lenders and borrowers might not have sent the books on in good time, failed to inform the secretary of their transactions, or book owners might have been concerned about possible damage to their books or even loss. It is easy to see how the risks and complicated organisation frightened off some potential users, in addition to the fees charged. Besides, the Union praised itself for predominantly choosing books for the courses of reading which would be comparatively cheap to buy or easy to obtain through public libraries. Many members were thus likely accessing their books through other avenues. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties in making the Book Union work, this lending scheme existed for a significant number of years, and its longevity is evidence that tangible connections between members across space were achieved.⁸⁰ While there is no evidence to indicate how many members used the Book Union, some members made use of it, and knew the benefits of being connected to other readers in yet another way.

THE NHRU OUTSIDE BRITAIN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPERIAL CONNECTIONS

Despite its name as the “National Home” Reading Union, the NHRU operated within what Robert Snape has termed “an imperial consciousness.”⁸¹ Both the terms “national” and “home” referred to Britain and the British Empire, and notions of nation and empire were repeatedly conflated.⁸² From the outset, the Union had declared its aim of stretching to all corners of the empire. In 1892, on reporting on a circle in Alexandria, Egypt, organisers proclaimed that the “example should be followed in every town abroad where there is a British colony. The Union ought to have its branches everywhere and to form intellectual links between these scattered communities.”⁸³ Thirty years later that goal had not changed. In 1923, an editorial underlined that

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⁸⁰ The Book Union was still operating in 1921.

⁸¹ Robert Snape, “Reading across the Empire: The National Home Reading Union Abroad,” in *Reading Communities from Salons to Cyber Space*, ed. DeNel Rehberg Sedo (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). I would like to thank Robert Snape for sharing his chapter with me before publication.

⁸² For a discussion of the meanings of “home” in connection to the imperial centre and the nation, see Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, “Introduction: Being at Home with the Empire,” in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23-27.

⁸³ “Union Notes,” *Special Courses Magazine* III, no. 5 (February 1892): 65.

reading with the Union helped “to link the nations of our Empire together in their intellectual, no less in their civic and social life” and strengthened “the imperial bonds.”⁸⁴ Reading and the purposes of the Union were seen as relevant and needed in all British communities, both within and outside of Britain. A common intellectual and imaginary world was among the things they shared. The NHRU was most successful in reaching out to the colonies and dominions of Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand, but circles also existed in India, Egypt, Barbados, the Falkland Islands, Jamaica, and even beyond the empire in Turkey, Japan, Switzerland, Germany, France and Belgium.⁸⁵

Repeated use of imperial rhetoric in the Union’s magazine expressed a particular notion of Empire, with England, or Britain, at the heart. In the eyes of the organisers, the links established through reading more crucially served to connect colonies and dependencies to the metropole, rather than vice versa. “The distant colonist” would “have another tie to the motherland”; the ties of the motherland to the colonies could be assumed.⁸⁶ Praising the initiative of circles in Western Australia, which formed in 1906, the organisers commented: “we cannot but admire the spirit with which our colony has answered the call of the mother country.”⁸⁷ Reports from overseas branches were frequently reprinted in the magazine, especially from circles in South Africa and Canada.

In order to spread the word about the Union, organisers encouraged members to send the magazine, and books where possible, to potential readers overseas. The colonies, and geographically remote areas, featured in the Union’s rhetoric as places which would benefit from intellectual stimulation. The message conveyed in the magazine was that remoteness equalled literary deprivation. Sending a copy of the magazine, “with a copy of the book you are currently reading” would be “of help to a lonely colonist” and “much more valued than we realise”, the Union told members.⁸⁸ And members followed the advice. A letter to the editor reprinted in 1919 told how one

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⁸⁴ “The N.H.R.U. in Australia,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXXV, no. 3 (December 1923): 67.

⁸⁵ A list of places in which the NHRU operated circles was mentioned in a promotional speech by “Mrs. Day” of Victoria, B.C. to the Local Council of Women in British Columbia, held in early 1897. The address was reprinted as part of “The Canadian Branch of the N.H.R.U.,” *General Readers’ Magazine* VIII, no. 9 (June 1897): 137-41. See also the published annual reports of the NHRU which listed circles in Britain and overseas.

⁸⁶ David Balsillie, *The National Home Reading Union: A Paper read by David Balsillie, M.A. at the Conference at the Edinburgh University Gathering* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1889), 12-3.

⁸⁷ “N.H.R.U. Notes,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVIII, no. 2 (November 1906): 38.

⁸⁸ “Some Ways of Helping the Union,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXX, no. 2 (November 1918): 63.

member had sent a few books to “a nephew in Australia on a remote farm” and also occasionally posted the magazine, which the nephew found “a real help out there.”⁸⁹ Another member decided, on the occasion of celebrating her twenty-first year of membership, to “pay for a subscription for a lonely teacher in Canada”, while a reader in New Zealand “on a cattle farm there” also benefitted from having the magazine sent on by relatives.⁹⁰

Readers were reminded of imperial bonds and notions of hierarchical order within the empire through reports and letters in the magazine. Reading courses and syllabi fixed by the NHRU, together with explanatory essays printed in the journal, added to the imperial sentiment. Readers of the Union were expected to accept the greatness and the naturalness of the British Empire. In 1891, the Union offered a course on “The British Citizen” within the general reading course. The accompanying essay brimmed with imperial pride: “We all feel that it is a great thing to be citizens of the British Empire. [...] It has played no small part in the world’s history, and it is plainly destined to exercise an enormous influence for weal or woe over the immediate future of the human race.”⁹¹ Such statements emphasised the superiority of the British and carried sentiments of “unthinking racism”, as Felicity Stimpson has noted.⁹² Knowing about the empire constituted part of the responsibility of citizenship, for readers in Britain and its colonies. During 1894-95, a course in the general section dealt with “our colonies”, outlining the origins, “successes and mistakes” of “England’s colonial system.”⁹³ The books suggested for study included Green’s *Short History*, Seeley’s *Colonial Expansion*, Tancock’s *England during the American War* and Ludlow’s *War of American Independence*.⁹⁴

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⁸⁹ Letter by I.K., in “Club Corner,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXX, no. 5 (February 1919): 159. The remoteness of the Australian hinterland was also mentioned by a member, who sent the magazine “to a young cousin, who is very glad of every bit of intellectual interest once a month on his far-off ranch.” The cousin apparently also handed the magazine on to “his scattered neighbours.” Letter by D.M.J. in “Club Corner,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXXIV, no. 5 (February 1923): 160.

⁹⁰ Letter by A.W.R. in “Club Corner,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXXII, no. 4 (January 1921): 128; Letter by H.M.L. in “Some Letters,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVIII, no. 1 (October 1916): 30.

⁹¹ T.J. Lawrence, “The British Citizen,” *General Readers’ Magazine* III, no. 1 (October 1891): 3.

⁹² Stimpson, “Reading in Circles: An Examination of the Work of the National Home Reading Union”, 56.

⁹³ “Our Colonies,” *General Readers’ Magazine* VI, no. 1 (October 1894): 8.

⁹⁴ John Richard Green, *A Short History of the English People* (London: Macmillan, 1875); John Robert Seeley, *Our Colonial Expansion* (London: Macmillan, 1887); Osborne William Tancock, *England during the American and European Wars, 1765-1820* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1878); John Malcolm Ludlow, *The War of American Independence, 1775-1783* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1876).

The “Our Colonies” course proved popular. One member living in the English countryside, who signed her letter A.C.B., told the magazine editors how her circle had especially enjoyed parts of the series on “our colonies.”⁹⁵ On reading Charles Reade’s *Never too late to mend*, she reported: “The sketch of Australian life is even more interesting to many of us, as there is quite a large colony of our old neighbours in the new gold district of West Australia, and it is most instructive to compare the condition of the early gold diggers with the life of today.”⁹⁶ Personal connections made reading more relevant. Again, letters-to-the-editor highlighted the experienced fellowship with other readers: “We were delighted to see, from the Magazine, that other circles are also interested in this book. [...] We rather think of reading Sir John Seeley’s ‘Colonial Expansion’ when we finish Charles Reade.”⁹⁷ One can see why the Union organisers chose this letter to be printed in the magazine. Regardless of its positive tone, the letter indicates that readers understood themselves to be part of a wider reading community. The following year, readers of the Special Courses studied the “History of the British Colonies and Dependencies”. The reading list for the course numbered no less than fifty-one required, recommended and reference titles, among them novels by Henty, Boldrewood, and Taylor.⁹⁸ Empire was a topic approved of and encouraged as subject of study, in addition to the “imperial consciousness” the NHRU sought to promote.

Complementary to laying ground for the imperial project through fostering a shared reading culture, the Union co-operated with organisations with a more overt imperial cause, such as the Girls’ Friendly Society (GFS). In 1892, the Union reported that it would give assistance to the GFS’s educational work by allowing the Society to reprint a selected list of books accompanied by NHRU articles in its own journal *Friendly Work*.⁹⁹ In return, the GFS promoted the work of the NHRU to its own

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⁹⁵ “Letter to the editor,” *General Readers’ Magazine* VI, no. 6 (March 1895): 95. The sex of the writer is revealed as in the same letter she explained that her circle was constituted of members from the Ladies’ Working Party. Her location in the countryside is alluded to in the last sentence of her letter stating: “With renewed thanks for this new pleasure added to country life.”

⁹⁶ “Letter to the editor,” *General Readers’ Magazine* VI, no. 6 (March 1895): 95. Charles Reade, *It is Never Too Late to Mend* (London: Richard Bentley, 1856).

⁹⁷ “Letter to the editor,” *General Readers’ Magazine* VI, no. 6 (March 1895): 95.

⁹⁸ The recommended novels were G.A. Henty, *With Clive in India: or, The Beginnings of an Empire* (London: Blackie, 1894); Rolf Boldrewood, *Robbery under Arms: A story of Life and Adventure in the Bush and in the Goldfields of Australia* (London: Remington, 1888); Meadows Taylor, *A Noble Queen: A Romance of Indian History* (London: C.K. Paul & Co., 1878). The complete reading list for the course on the “History of the British Colonies and Dependencies” is included in Appendix II in Stimpson, “Reading in Circles,” 65-6.

⁹⁹ National Home Reading Union, *Third Annual Report* (London: NHRU, 1892), 6.

members and distributed its literature “at meetings and bazaars”.¹⁰⁰ Little is known how successful the arrangement was in terms of attracting new members to the NHRU. The GFS appeared to answer to a greater demand amongst its members, as beginning in the mid-1890s the Society organised its own “Reading Unions”. Surviving ephemera now housed in the British Library testify that the NHRU was not alone in its hope of uniting readers in the right kind of reading.¹⁰¹ The GFS organised two unions: the “G.F.S. Readers’ Union” offering a mixture of scripture and English literature courses, and the “G.F.S. Elementary Readers’ Union” focussing predominantly on scripture and prayer books, though some “stories” were included, such as *Alice in Wonderland* in 1924/25.¹⁰² The GFS Readers’ Union was remarkably long-lived, lasting well into the 1940s.

READING FOR UNITY

Reading with the home reading movement, and in circles, was foremost defined by its mutuality. Reading, it was alleged, would only bring about the most fruitful results if undertaken in the company of others within a home setting. As has already been indicated, the term “home” in the name of the NHRU carried a number of meanings. It partly suggested the place of reading in the household, and referred to a notion of social interaction within familial relationships. In a lengthy article on the importance and the art of reading aloud, which was held “indispensable towards full enjoyment of books”, the Union organisers elaborated:

For home-reading means much more than reading to oneself at home. It means, or ought to mean, reading as a social function, as an element in home life: as a means by which the world of knowledge, thought, and emotion may be opened out among members of a family, or among a circle of friends, and in which the sense of mutual sympathy [...] may develop intelligence and kindle a heightened enjoyment.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Branches of the NHRU outside Britain also co-operated with imperial organisations. Archie Dick notes for the South African context that the NHRU worked closely with the Guild of Loyal Women and the Victoria League. Dick, “To Make the People of South Africa Proud?”

¹⁰¹ The Girls’ Friendly Society printed monthly “Reading Union Leaflets” during the colder months October to April, plus an extra issue in June, announcing competition winners and relating information for the coming season. The earliest leaflet now in the British Library dates to 1894. See GFS Reading Union leaflets, shelf mark P.P. 1180.do and 8306.de, British Library, London (hereafter BL). In addition, the GFS printed special publications, such as *Books worth Reading: A Selected List of Writers of Fiction* [1929?] and *Some of Life’s Pleasures – Reading* [1928?]. The first title is included in a volume of miscellaneous pamphlets, shelf mark W.P. 5121, BL.

¹⁰² “Elementary Readers’ Union” Leaflet, in W.P. 5121, BL. The GFS used the term “Reading Union” when referring to both “sub”-unions. Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (London: Macmillan, 1865).

¹⁰³ “On Reading Aloud,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 8 (May 1915): 225.

Another editorial stressed that the Union aimed “to make reading part of family and communal life in the fullest sense.”¹⁰⁴ Reading contributed to the elevation of the mind, and mutuality with other readers expanded the utility and benefits of reading. Reading within the family also extended to nation and empire. “We are a Guild, which has its roots in the HOME and stretches with its branches to every corner of the NATION,” the organisers proclaimed.¹⁰⁵ Through reading, the social space of home could be opened to a wider world of knowledge, and the world could be brought into the homes of members.

Not only was reading made more effective and valuable through the contact with other readers, personal relationships were also enriched by reading with the Union. During summer assemblies, members “were all living together as brothers and sisters, sharing the same meals, enjoying the same beautiful gardens, sleeping under the same roofs.”¹⁰⁶ Reading the same texts and listening to the same lectures could be added to this list. In a speech held at a summer camp in 1905, Dr Alex Hill, the Union’s chairman, “told how the N.H.R.U. adds pleasure to knowledge, and gives to home circle and companionship new and higher meaning.”¹⁰⁷ The nature of the connections between home readers, as evoked by imagery of the home and family, was to be friendly, warm and to some extent intimate. Readers who had not known each other before could become family through their shared reading, even if they never met face-to-face. Sympathy and companionship were other terms frequently used by the Union to describe the relationship between members.

The rhetoric of kinship and the notion of home (with its feminine associations) were complemented by the language of male labour and male family. The *Australasian Home Reader*, for example, promised AHRU members “guidance and help as well as a sense of brotherhood.”¹⁰⁸ Reading together, the NHRU organisers noted, would create amongst members “a feeling of comradeship towards one another and loyalty to the

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¹⁰⁴ “Help is Better Than Sympathy,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXXI, no. 8 (May 1920): front page.

¹⁰⁵ “N.H.R.U. Notes,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 1.

¹⁰⁶ “The Summer Assembly at Row,” *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 6. The NHRU organised regular summer camps for intensive study periods mixed with outdoor activities. See Snape, “An English Chautauqua.”

¹⁰⁷ “The Summer Assembly at Row,” *NHRU Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 6.

¹⁰⁸ “How to Work with the A.H.R.U.,” *Australasian Home Reader* 2, no.1 (February 1893): 17.

Union.”¹⁰⁹ Reading also helped bridge the gap to “our kinsmen overseas”, the NHRU pointed out.¹¹⁰

Some readers expressed sentiments of this kind of unity in letters published in the *Home-Reading Magazine*. “There is a real magic about the N.H.R.U.; it unites us in such a real, actual, vital bond”, one member wrote in 1919.¹¹¹ Another member used his or her own reading to express a sense of belonging, citing an author previously read. After telling of correspondence with a friend in Canada, this member wanted to remind fellow members of the words of Walter Pater:

“The feeling of belonging to a great organization for intellectual pursuits has in itself,” [Pater] says, “the expanding power of a great experience”; and I think we should be wise if we tried in every way possible to increase the sense of comradeship with other members of the Union.¹¹²

Comradeship, forging a guild of readers, was an idea frequently evoked in letters as well as in the Union’s editorials.

A variety of symbols and material objects expressed the bond of union, that members were imagined as achieving through reading. As the magazine made clear, the logo of the NHRU, an open book in a circle, needed “no comment: it is the cause of the Union’s existence.”¹¹³ Belonging to the Union could be declared by wearing the Union’s badge on one’s collar or cuffs (see figure 5.2). Other material features that contributed to a feeling of unity were special NHRU book covers and special NHRU editions of selected titles from the reading programmes, which clearly identified these books and the owner of the books as belonging to the Union, while offering a discounted edition of the prescribed books.¹¹⁴ In this way, the benefits of membership went beyond a feeling of unity.

¹⁰⁹ “Occasional Papers: Circles and Circle Leaders,” *General Readers’ Magazine* II, no. 5 (February 1891): 38.

¹¹⁰ “The N.H.R.U. in Australia,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXXV, no. 3 (December 1923): 67.

¹¹¹ Letter by W.H.L., in “Club Corner,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXX, no. 8 (May 1919): 223.

¹¹² Letter by M.J.R., in “Correspondence,” *General Readers’ Magazine* VIII, no. 1 (October 1896): 15.

¹¹³ “Union Notes,” *The General Readers’ Magazine* III, no. 1 (October 1891): 1.

¹¹⁴ See for example the announcement of special editions in *The General Readers’ Magazine* I, no. 8 (May 1890): 87.

N.H.R.U. Badge: Regd. No. 271910.

The emblem of the *National Home-Reading Union* (the open Book, Circle, and Lamp) is now obtainable in the form of Brooches, Scarf-pins, Sleeve-links.

Prices.

A Brooches, silver (hall-marked) enamelled...	3s. 6d.
B Brooches, Electro-plated (Book only)	1s. 0d.
C Scarf-pins, silver gilt	2s. 0d.
D Sleeve-links, silver gilt, per pair	7s. 0d.

The above prices include postage.

Other qualities can be made to order.

Orders should be addressed to

Miss Mondy,
Surrey House, Victoria Embankment,
London, W.C.

Figure 5.2

Advertisement for the NHRU badge,
 a material and symbolical token of membership.

Source: *National Home-Reading Magazine, The Young People Section* VIII, no. 4 (January 1897): n.p.

THE DEMISE AND LEGACY OF THE NHRU AND THE AHRU

Financial difficulties were an issue for the NHRU throughout much of its existence. With membership numbers never exceeding a few thousand active subscribers, the Union had always operated on the brink of subsistence and struggled to build up a reserve fund. Appeals to members to recruit new subscribers, to become life members and to make much-needed donations were frequently published in the magazine. The fight to generate enough income in order to keep the Union alive became more pronounced in the 1920s. A last attempt to attract new members saw the magazine change its format and title yet again in 1925, when it was re-named *The Reader* and aimed at a general readership, not just members. The journal now contained mainly book reviews and publication announcements as well as essays on general topics. It stopped

printing letters to the editor. This proved detrimental, as it robbed the magazine of its crucial and unique function of facilitating communication and connections between members. For a general audience, *The Reader* offered little to differentiate itself from the book review and literature pages in other periodicals or literary magazines. In trying to attract the general reading public by selling the Union's journal through booksellers and removing much of the union-specific content, the NHRU failed on two fronts: for members, the magazine was too general, and for non-members not interesting enough.

Unable to attract a sufficient number of members, the NHRU ceased its work. In the last issue of the fortieth reading session of the NHRU in September 1930, the editorial of *The Reader* announced that the magazine would no longer be published. In essence, this meant the death of the Union. The magazine had been its main communication tool and without being able to advertise the reading lists and suggested courses, there was no NHRU. The page-long editorial pointed to bankruptcy as the immediate cause for the end of the Union, but also recognised that the educational and societal context of the 1920s was markedly different from that of the 1890s. The editorial stated that "the early magazine supplied guidance to readers at a time when there were no B.B.C. lectures, W.E.A., and other classes, or improved public library services such as there are now."¹¹⁵ With an array of services now assisting readers and new media channels offering educational programmes, the NHRU had outlived its purpose.

The AHRU equally struggled to secure necessary funds throughout its existence, and the *Australasian Home Reader* was discontinued after only five years, in 1896. Nevertheless, this did not mean the end of the Union or of home reading in Australia and New Zealand, as has sometimes been assumed.¹¹⁶ Individual circles of the AHRU continued to exist in Australasia at least until the early 1910s.¹¹⁷ Other circles kept reading in the style of the Union, either affiliating themselves with the NHRU in Britain

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¹¹⁵ "Editorial," *The Reader* V, no. 12 (September 1930): 463.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Webby states that the AHRU "movement was all but over by 1898", misquoting Martyn Lyons, who notes that the organisers recommended dissolution in 1898, but the AHRU nevertheless existed at least until 1913. Elizabeth Webby, "New Worlds: Australian Readers of the Early 1890s," *Paradise: New Worlds of Books and Readers, special issue of Script & Print, Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia & New Zealand* 29, no. 1-4 (2005): 362. Martyn Lyons, "The Australasian Home Reading Union, 1892-97," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 388. See also Lyons, "Bush Readers, Factory Readers, Home Readers - Expanding the Australian Reading Public c. 1890-1930," *Publishing Studies* 5(1997): 17-23.

¹¹⁷ Lyons, "The Australasian Home Reading Union," 388; Roberts, *Maybank Anderson*, 147.

or working independently as successors of AHRU groups. In November 1906 the NHRU magazine reported of a trip to Western Australia by the Union chairman Dr Alex Hill, during which “he lost no opportunity of introducing the N.H.R.U. [...] with the admirable result that a Western Australian Branch was immediately formed.”¹¹⁸ The year before, the NHRU magazine referred to a branch in Australia, and a lengthy editorial in 1923 recounted the work of a branch with headquarters in Melbourne operating since 1916.¹¹⁹ Melbourne members continued to receive the NHRU magazine, and news of the branch featured throughout the 1920s.¹²⁰

There is also evidence to suggest that, as in Australia, the NHRU re-surfaced in the early 1910s in New Zealand. At the annual conference of the Library Association of New Zealand, Thomas King successfully moved a vote of thanks to the NHRU in view “of the useful work which has been done by it.”¹²¹ As in 1889, the proposed re-invigoration of the Union in the 1910s intended to address the perceived danger and wastefulness of indiscriminate fiction reading. Drawing attention to the fact that public libraries principally catered “to the insatiable demand for fiction”, the President of the Library Association welcomed the idea of systematic reading as a counter to “this lamentable disproportion.”¹²² Although the NHRU magazine did not refer to New Zealand circles in the 1910s and 1920s, it is possible that individual groups formed. The NHRU remained known to readers in New Zealand as late as the mid-1930s, when Vera Bell, sister of Katherine Mansfield, addressed “Madame President and fellow members of the Home Reading Union” during a talk on her famous sister.¹²³

Other groups in Australia and New Zealand traced their origins to the AHRU, and while working independently, followed similar goals. These groups often kept the

¹¹⁸ “N.H.R.U. Notes,” *Special Course Magazine* XVIII, no. 2 (November 1906): 38.

¹¹⁹ *Special Courses Magazine* XVII, no. 1 (October 1905): 1; “The N.H.R.U. in Australia,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXXV, no. 3 (December 1923): 67. In the following reading season, the magazine also featured a detailed report sent in by the Australian branch. “Australian Branch,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXXVI, no. 6 (March 1925): 190.

¹²⁰ See for example, “News from Overseas Branches,” *The Reader* III, no. 2 (November 1927): 45; “News from Overseas Members,” *The Reader* III, no. 10 (July 1928): 362.

¹²¹ “The Libraries: Conference in Wellington,” *Evening Post*, 8 April 1912, 8. King also gave a talk to the Wellington Philosophical Society a year earlier, entitled “The National Home Reading Union”. Unfortunately, no records beyond the meeting’s announcement have survived. See *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand* 44 (1911); available at http://rsnz.natlib.govt.nz/volume/rsnz_44/rsnz_44_02_005570.html, accessed 20 April 2011.

¹²² “Libraries Association,” *Evening Post*, 10 April 1912, 6.

¹²³ Vera Bell – Talk on Katherine Mansfield, MS-Papers-3985-09, ATL. The copy of the speech is undated. However, the text critiques a biography of Mansfield by Ruth Mantz and Middleton Murray, which had “just been published”, referring to Ruth Mantz and Middleton Murray, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Constable & Co., 1933).

term Home Reading in their names, as, for example, the Australian Home Reading Society in Launceston, Tasmania.¹²⁴ As survivors of the AHRU, some of these groups were quick to stress their organisational independence from the NHRU in Britain. Circles in Sydney and Melbourne, which remained in communication with the NHRU organisers in London during the 1910s and 1920s, happily reported on their activities and valued the exchange with NHRU groups, but felt the need to write to the magazine editor to explain their proud independent origins.¹²⁵ The AHRU had succeeded in bringing the idea of home reading to Australia and New Zealand, and while the AHRU itself as supra-regional organisation was short-lived, the methods of the Union – systematic, instructive and social reading – lived on. The connections between readers in this part of the world to readers elsewhere in Australasia, in Britain, and in other parts of the empire might not have been facilitated any longer by the AHRU structure, but they nevertheless existed.

CONCLUSION

The NHRU and the AHRU were not unique in advocating reading in groups and in the company of other readers in the period under study. Many reading and discussion groups existed in local places, and chapter four has explored some of these in connection with the local associational culture in Timaru. What was unique about the NHRU and the AHRU was the sheer scale of organised reading, reaching across space; the degree of articulation of what and how to read; and – at least in the case of the NHRU – its longevity. While never a mass movement, by 1905 the NHRU counted close to 13,000 members, and its annual membership remained steady at about 8,000 readers throughout its forty-year existence. Both unions responded to societal concerns particular to the late nineteenth century: adult education as a means of overcoming class distinctions, or at least differences; the dangers of indiscriminate reading in the face of mass literary production; and debates about citizenship. By the 1930s many of these concerns had been addressed or had been re-evaluated and “modern” readers no longer desired nor were perceived as requiring the guidance of this late-Victorian institution. In

¹²⁴ *Walch's Tasmanian Almanac for the Year 1900* (Hobart: J. Walch & Sons; Launceston: A.W. Birchall & Sons, 1900), 315; *for the Year 1901*, 319; *for the Year 1902*, 315; *for the Year 1903*, 314; *for the Year 1904*, 314.

¹²⁵ For example, for news of the Melbourne Circle, see “Notes and News,” *The Reader* IV, no. 2 (November 1928): 52; for news of the Sydney Circle, see “Editorial,” *The Reader* V, no. 10 (July 1930): 395. The same reader who reported on the Melbourne and Sydney circles after visiting these wrote to the editors again, pointing out that the Sydney group was “an independent society, having had a separate existence for more than thirty years.” “Notes and News,” *The Reader* IV, no. 4 (January 1929): 146.

addition, public libraries, informal readers' networks, locally organised reading groups and other adult educational organisations like the WEA, all provided access to reading material and spaces for reading. These spaces allowed a larger degree of flexibility and informality for reading.

While the quest for knowledge and a desire for sociability were reasons for readers to join, members of the home reading movement also expressed a strong sense of belonging to a broader world of reading. The social function of reading was paramount. Connections between readers were established through two key strategies: reading in local circles, who met regularly, and through communication via the monthly magazine, which united readers even if they never met. The magazine brought distant readers into the home of other members and extended the sociability experienced in local circles. Thus, individual reading experiences were understood as part of a wider network, and both the individual and the wider-world context shaped the reading with the unions. Moreover, the mutuality and companionship with other readers elsewhere was defined in imperial terms. Home reading had a local, national and imperial agenda.

Reading with the home reading unions was intended to be productive, rather than recreative: it produced the skill of reading, a capacity for thought, knowledge, and membership in a broader world. The notion of reading was enlarged to incorporate writing and talking. Members were encouraged to underline interesting passages, to annotate the text and take notes. These would form part of the discussions in the circles – crucial to the act of systematic reading. The language used by organisers emphasised the seriousness of the exercise. Reading in a union or guild implied that membership was based on work rather than virtue. Reading – in a systematic and useful way – was defined as responsibility and duty of every citizen. This importance of reading as part of citizenship and the unity amongst readers across the empire was put to the test during a moment of imperial crisis: World War One.

CHAPTER SIX

A NEW SENSE OF URGENCY: READING DURING WORLD WAR ONE

On 5 November 1914, M.E. Sadler, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds, gave an address at the annual meeting of the National Home Reading Union (NHRU). The title of the address was “Reading in War Time”. Sadler’s lecture was published by the Union, and offered to members for the price of 2d.¹ In line with the Union’s general message of systematic reading, the twelve-page pamphlet outlined the heightened responsibility of British citizens to the right kind of reading in times of crisis. Laying out the effects the war was already having on everyday life, Sadler noted that the strong emotions brought about by the war had already resulted in “good reading aloud” and an unseen amount of poetry-reading as a way of relieving “full hearts.” Sadler emphasised the power of reading as a means of relief and distraction and stressed the utter importance of keeping “our minds fresh and sane” by reading “good fiction, taken sparingly,” and studying poetry, philosophy, history, politics and sciences.² Sadler’s address was an enthusiastic appeal to the members of the Union to keep up their reading and study as they had done for the last twenty-five years. But it was also more than that. The right kind of reading was now, according to Sadler, more important than ever before.

Reading in War Time was sold to members of the NHRU in England and elsewhere throughout the war. At least 2,000 copies were also distributed to British soldiers’ camps immediately after publication.³ The pamphlet sparked off an ongoing debate about the role of reading and the kind of reading necessary and desirable during wartime. Although it was an appeal to readers and potential new readers, rather than evidence of actual reading practices, it suggests that reading was thought of as a changeable practice, adaptable to prevailing demands and circumstances. According to Sadler’s address, reading in wartime was different to reading during peace in both content and purpose, and was of continued importance. This chapter examines reading

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¹ M. E. Sadler, *Reading in War Time* (London: National Home Reading Union, 1914). The publication followed the meeting, and the NHRU advertised the pamphlet in December 1914, adding that it would make a good substitute for “ordinary Christmas cards.” “Reading in War Time,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 3 (Dec 1914): 96. The surviving copy in the British Library bears a stamp by the British Museum, dated 4 December 1914.

² Sadler, *Reading in War Time*, 2-6.

³ “N.H.R.U. Work among the Troops,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 4 (Jan 1915): 127. Unfortunately there is no indication of the print run, but the pamphlet continued to being advertised to members throughout the war.

during World War One in order to understand in what ways the international political crisis affected reading practices and cultures of civilians around the empire. The events of the war interrupted many aspects of day-to-day life “at home” as well as the publishing industry and book trade. How did the reading world cope with these dramatic changes in circumstances? The chapter brings the different reading communities, practices and spaces thus far discussed in the thesis into focus at a particular time of challenge.

The war acted as a prompt to writing and print. A number of studies have examined the literary responses to World War One, during 1914-18 and in the years that followed. In *Writers, Readers, and Reputations*, Philip Waller discusses the role of British writers such as Hall Caine, Marie Corelli, Arnold Bennett, G.K. Chesterton, H.G. Wells, and Bernard Shaw in the mobilisation and propaganda of patriotic sentiment, or for giving a voice to the anti-war camp.⁴ The literary responses of soldiers have received considerable attention. Robert Nelson’s analysis of German, French and British soldiers’ newspapers, produced by soldiers behind the trenches and printed by presses carried as part of essential army equipment, is revealing for the role of reading and newspapers at the front.⁵ Nelson’s point that “no other event saw so many of these young (and old) men sitting around for so long in the same place, writing so many millions of letters and writing, distributing, and reading so many soldier newspapers” resonates with Paul Fussell’s earlier argument that the caesura of 1914-18 marked a particular historical moment in which “it was possible for soldiers to be not merely literate but vigorously literary.”⁶ Soldiers and civilians engaged in immense quantities of correspondence, something Martyn Lyons refers to as an “epistolary bulimia.”⁷ Claire Culleton has widened the attention to the literary output of women and to publications “from below”, through her analysis of women factory workers’ magazines in Britain

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⁴ Waller, *Writers, Readers, & Reputations*, especially chapter twenty-six, “Pens at War,” 926-74.

⁵ Robert L. Nelson, “Soldier Newspapers: A Useful Source in the Social and Cultural History of the First World War and Beyond,” *War in History* 17, no. 2 (2010). See also Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). An important study utilising trench newspapers is J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁶ Nelson, “Soldier Newspapers,” 168; Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 175.

⁷ Lyons, *Reading Culture and Writing Practices in Nineteenth-Century France*, 186; and Martyn Lyons, “French Soldiers and Their Correspondence: Towards a History of Writing Practices in the First World War,” *French History* 17, no. 1 (2003): 79-95. See also Martha Hanna, “A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France During World War I,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (2003).

during World War One.⁸ These magazines, Culleton argues, were motivated by the “proliferation of trench newspapers that found their way from the battlegrounds of Belgium and France”, revealing the intersections and connections between print cultures at “home” and at the front.⁹ Jay Winter has similarly shown that “home fronts” and “battle fronts” were intimately linked through the “commonality of purpose”. Popular culture and entertainments in particular, Winter continues, “linked those in uniform and their families and made this extraordinary feat of endurance possible.”¹⁰ Reading, as this chapter will show, was one of the ways civilians, like soldiers, participated in the war.

Scholarship examining the production of writing and print prompted by the circumstances of war hints at altered reading practices. But there are surprisingly few studies exploring the effects of the war on reading patterns and reading experiences as part of civilian life. The few that do exist usually focus on book publishing trends, rather than engagement with print.¹¹ Joseph McAleer concludes for the British context that the disruptions in publishing and thus the reduction in reading material, as well as restrictions on leisure activities and expenditure, “only served to intensify the demand for reading, the least expensive and most adaptable of leisure activities.”¹² Similarly, Jane Potter has argued also for the British context that demand for reading material “both on the subject of and as a diversion from the war, was enormous.”¹³ In addition, civilian readers apparently soon lost interest in war-themed reading material. McAleer notes that

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⁸ Clare Culleton uses this term to describe her study of working-class culture and women in Britain. Claire A. Culleton, *Working-Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 1. See also Martyn Lyons, “A New History from Below? The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe,” *History Australia* 7, no. 3 (2010): 59.1-59.9.

⁹ Culleton, *Working-Class Culture*, 101-02.

¹⁰ Jay Winter, “Popular Culture in Wartime Britain,” in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, ed. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 348. Winter also points out that the division between “home fronts” and “battle fronts” remains a “vexed issue in the historiography of the First World War.” Winter, “Popular Culture in Wartime Britain,” 332.

¹¹ This gap in the historiography is beginning to be addressed, however, for example by World-RED (Reading Experience Database), an international collaboration between the Open University, UK, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia, the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada and Victoria University of Wellington, started in early 2010. The UK-RED-team is currently focussing on reading during the war, and the NZ-RED project also initially focuses on reading during World War One. See <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/wtapress/NZ-RED/>, accessed 21 Oct 2011.

¹² McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, 42-6. This point is also made by Alec Ellis, *Public Libraries and the First World War* (Upton: Ffynnon Press, 1975), 42-3.

¹³ Jane Potter, “For Country, Conscience and Commerce: Publishers and Publishing, 1914-1918,” in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, ed. Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 12.

by 1915 “war stories were no longer popular”, rather the war “encouraged reading of the ‘lighter kind’.”¹⁴

There are a number of more focussed studies of soldiers’ reading during wartime – in the trenches, in front-line hospitals, or in prisoner-of-war camps – that provide a useful starting point for considering the particular context of war. Several chapters in the edited collection *Publishing in the First World War* investigate “how soldiers [...] in various locations acquired, circulated, consumed and in many cases also created print matter, and with it, fashioned a specific sense of a community based on reading.”¹⁵ Amanda Laugesen’s chapter on Australian soldiers’ engagement with print culture, for instance, shows that the Australian soldiers fighting on the European battlefields were prolific readers and writers. Their motives for reading ranged from wanting to stay in touch with events at home, “find out more about the international situation”, to fight boredom and, perhaps most importantly, to “escape from the realities of war.”¹⁶

While the focus in this chapter is on reading practices and reading patterns, these need to be interpreted within the context of wartime publishing. The war years of 1914–1918 brought about a dramatic interruption in the production of books and other print material. Paper shortages, “loss of staff to the Forces” and higher production costs due to “war inflation” forced many publishers in Britain to curtail production if not stop altogether.¹⁷ Utilising a range of statistical evidence, Simon Eliot has noted the “steady decline” in book publishing in Britain during the war years which by 1915 led to “a

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¹⁴ McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, 72.

¹⁵ Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed, “Introduction,” in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, ed. Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5.

¹⁶ Amanda Laugesen, “Australian Soldiers and the World of Print During the Great War,” in *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History*, ed. Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 95, 97. See also Laugesen, “Finding ‘Another Great World’: Australian Soldiers and Wartime Libraries,” *Library Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2006). See also Edmund G.C. King, “A Captive Audience? The Reading Lives of Australian Prisoners of War, 1914–18,” paper given at the Open University Book History and Bibliography Research Seminar: Reading in the First World War, Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 12 February 2011. I would like to thank Edmund King for sharing this unpublished paper with me. Research into New Zealand soldiers’ reading practices has yet to be undertaken, but Ria Keenan mentions that the New Zealand YMCA provided reading rooms, stocked with daily papers and writing materials. Ria Keenan, “On the Triangle Trail: The New Zealand YMCA and the Great War,” in *New Zealand’s Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War*, ed. John Crawford and Ian McGibbon (Auckland: Exisle, 2007), 357.

¹⁷ Potter, “For Country, Conscience and Commerce,” 13. For details regarding paper supply and prices, shortages of other materials and the depletion of staff see R. J. L. Kingsford, *The Publishers Association 1896–1946* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 51–60.

collapse in production.”¹⁸ Editions advertised in the *Publishers’ Circular*, for example dropped from 11,537 in 1914 to 7,716 in 1918; the British Library Catalogue revealed a decline from 8,383 titles published in 1914 to 5,260 titles in 1918.¹⁹ By 1918, Eliot estimates, book production was “reduced to about 63.5% of its pre-war volume.”²⁰ The war years meant fewer books, whether new releases, new editions or reprints, were produced and thus available to readers.

The chapter begins with Fred Barkas to explore how individual readers adapted their reading during the war. To place Barkas’s reading within the context of readers and reading in the local place of Timaru, the discussion draws on evidence from the Timaru Public Library records. The focus is in particular on the reading and consumption of newspapers and periodicals by library users; and on trends in book reading patterns. Moving away from Timaru into a different local setting, but one which was equally geographically removed from the battlefields, the chapter looks at the Victoria Literary Society, B.C., to explore the reading practices within a mixed-gender reading group, before contrasting these actual reading practices with the rhetoric and discourse about reading promoted by the National Home Reading Union.

FRED BARKAS’S READING DURING THE WAR

At the outbreak of World War One on 4 August 1914 Fred Barkas was sixty years old. He had planned to retire in that year, and to spend more time travelling, perhaps even moving to somewhere closer to his daughter Mary.²¹ Barkas was looking forward to retirement and devoting more time to his usual pastimes of golf, music and reading. The coming years changed his plans dramatically. Because many of his younger colleagues volunteered or later were drafted into service, Barkas had to keep working in his position as the manager of the Loan and Mercantile Agency Co. in Timaru and could

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¹⁸ Simon Eliot, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing, 1800-1919* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1994), 22. Eliot uses data derived from the lists of publications announced in the *Publishers’ Circular*, data from the British Museum’s Copyright Receipt Book, and the British Library General Catalogue. While all datasets reveal slightly different figures, they also reveal the same trends and together can be seen as reliable evidence. See his “Introduction” and “Section A: The Annual Pattern of Publication” for a detailed explanation of his methodology.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22; Appendix A, Table A 12, 116.

²⁰ Ibid., 25.

²¹ The plans to move closer to Mary still existed in 1918. See Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 19 June 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

not retire until October 1918.²² The war affected his personal life also in other ways. Several of his relatives, friends and acquaintances joined the forces. His English nephews Pallister Barkas and Wilfred Barkas enlisted, and so did his Timaru friend and bibliophile Percy Rule. Fred Hyde, a young, fellow Timaru Musical Society member left for the front in Europe, and, closer to home, the brother of his tenant-landlady, Angus McIver also joined up.²³

The war also challenged actual and perceived loyalties. In October 1917, anonymous accusations sent to his employers implied Barkas was a German national or at least held pro-German sentiments. Barkas vehemently defended himself explaining his British origins and his general condemnation of war, the rigour of which testifies that he deemed these accusations ridiculous.²⁴ In all likelihood, these indictments arose partly because of his unusual and non-English sounding surname, but partly also as a consequence of his openly exhibited appreciation of German culture, especially music. In response to Barkas's letter, his superior suggested that "it would be more than wise that (in the meantime) [he] would refrain from singing German songs."²⁵ This episode was no singular case; rather it is a prime example of the widespread anti-German hysteria prevalent in New Zealand during the war.²⁶ For Barkas, it was an "annoying business."²⁷

The war affected Barkas's reading life, too. In his case, it is impossible to judge whether his amount of reading increased with the outbreak of war, as McAleer and Potter have claimed for British readers. The Barkas record shows a gap between

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²² In August 1917 Barkas told Mary in some detail about the public debate surrounding plans in New Zealand to begin drafting married men under 45, and to lower the age limit for unmarried men to 19. His final comment was "So, if the War has to be carried on over 1918, we shall have to face the serious diminution of our Office, Store & Country Staffs; the most active & useful of our men will go & a pretty rough time is in front of us old fellows." Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 28 August 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

²³ See several letters in which Barkas discussed his relatives and friends serving in the army. For example, Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 29 August 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

²⁴ Barkas sent a three-page letter to his employer, a copy of which is contained in the archive. Fred Barkas to Clarke Johnson, 10 October 1917, MS-Papers-2491-08. See also Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 10 October 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

²⁵ Clarke Johnson to Fred Barkas, 16 October 1917, included in MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. In this connection it is interesting to note that the Timaru Liedertafel changed its name to Timaru Orpheus in 1914. This is explained in a 1922 concert programme, included in MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL.

²⁶ On anti-alienism, and in particular anti-Germanism, in New Zealand during World War One see Andrew Francis, "'To Be Truly British We Must Be Anti-German': Patriotism, Citizenship and Anti-Alienism in New Zealand During the Great War" (PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2009); and Francis, "Anti-Alienism in New Zealand During the Great War: The Von Zedlitz Affair," *Immigrants and Minorities* 24, no. 3 (2006).

²⁷ Fred Barkas to Clarke Johnson, 10 October 1917, MS-Papers-2491-08, ATL.

February 1913 and July 1917. But it is fair to say that Barkas had been an avid and steady reader before the war, and this does not seem to have changed. In addition, the war created specific reading interests. Chapter four has already discussed Barkas and the Round Table group in Timaru, formed in 1918 largely out of a desire to discuss topics related to the war and the geopolitical situation. Barkas's reading pattern after 1917, and beyond his involvement in the Round Table group, also offers valuable evidence to re-evaluate McAleer's argument that readers increasingly lost interest in reading about the war, rather taking to fiction in order to escape a frightening reality.

During the years 1917 to 1919, as well as 1922, Barkas read a total of 259 titles, including pamphlets, but excluding periodicals and newspapers. An analysis of these books and pamphlets shows that a significant part of Barkas's reading consisted of "war books", that is titles that dealt with the war either as non-fiction, or fiction titles that were set during the war or were concerned with the war experience. While the percentage of "war books" decreased over the period, these titles were still a significant part of his reading in the early 1920s.²⁸ In 1917, Barkas recorded reading a total of forty-five book titles and pamphlets, forty per cent of which were war-related.²⁹ That percentage slightly shrunk to around thirty-two per cent in 1918 and 1919, showing a sustained interest in reading about the war. After four years of fighting, escapism was certainly an important function of reading, but a desire for information persisted throughout and beyond the war. In 1922, seventeen per cent of Barkas' reading still consisted of war-related material (see figure 6.1).

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²⁸ As "war books" are counted all titles which explicitly deal with World War One; in the case of non-fiction titles, for example, books explaining the historical and political causes of the war, the economic consequences, or discussing possible post-war political scenarios. In this class are also included soldier memoirs. Fiction titles counted as "war books" are those which are set during the war and whose plot is concerned with the war experience.

²⁹ For the purpose of analysing the categories of books and pamphlets read by Fred Barkas, all titles included in the Barkas Reading Database have been counted only once, even when several entries over a number of days recorded the reading of a title over a contained time period. If Barkas re-read a book after a substantial period of time had elapsed since the first reading, and the reading could be considered a re-reading, then it was counted again as a separate title.

Figure 6.1

**Proportion of war-related books and pamphlets in
Fred Barkas's reading, 1917-1919 and 1922**

Source: Barkas Reading Database

A break-down of the “war books” read by Barkas shows different patterns for non-fiction and fiction reading. Generally, Barkas preferred non-fiction over fiction, in particular the categories biographies, history, politics and philosophy. The war did not alter this general ratio. Between 1917 and 1922, approximately sixty per cent of Barkas’s reading was made up of non-fiction material; forty per cent consisted of fiction. Looking only at the “war books”, this proportion shifted significantly towards a greater emphasis on non-fiction titles during 1917, which made up almost eighty per cent of Barkas’s war-related reading. “War non-fiction” continued to be overrepresented during 1918 and 1919, although slowly decreasing. Remarkably, within the category of “war books”, the portion of non-fiction titles dropped to 37.5 per cent in 1922, reversing the general reading pattern of Barkas, and indicating two things: a slow decline in war-related reading; and a persisting consumption of “war fiction” (see table 6.1). The decline in war-related non-fiction, however, should only be noted as a trend and not be over-stated. As only titles dealing explicitly with the war as their topic have been counted, a decline in non-fiction titles by 1922 must also be seen as a consequence of the changing historical and publishing context. New releases in 1922 still dealt with the

questions of a post-war world, but increasingly did so in its own right, for example exploring economic issues of the 1920s without primarily discussing these as a consequence of the war.

Table 6.1 Numbers and proportions of fiction and non-fiction in Fred Barkas's war-related reading, 1917-1919 and 1922

	1917	1918	1919	1922
Total - All Titles	45	73	49	92
Fiction	18 (40%)	28 (38%)	20 (41%)	35 (38%)
Non-Fiction	27 (60%)	45 (62%)	29 (59%)	57 (62%)
Total - 'War' Titles	18	23	16	16
'War' Fiction	4 (22%)	7 (30%)	4 (25%)	10 (62.5%)
'War' Non-fiction	14 (78%)	16 (70%)	12 (75%)	6 (37.5%)

Source: Barkas Reading Database

What were the kind of books Barkas read during the war and how can the trends in his reading patterns be explained? During 1917, for example, he read James Stephens's *The Insurrection in Dublin*, Stephen Graham's *Russia in 1916*, as well as such titles as *Essays in War-time*, *England's First Great War Minister* and *Britain and the War*.³⁰ Other books read in 1918 included Graham Balfour's *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (after Barkas read Stevenson's *Island Night Entertainments* and re-read his *Vailima Letters*), G.K. Chesterton's *A Short History of England* and the sociological studies by Barbara and John L. Hammond *The Town Labourer* and *The Village Labourer*, read in conjunction with Robert M. MacIver's *Community: A Sociological Study* and G.D.H. Cole's *The British Labour Movement*.³¹ These titles are fairly representative of Barkas's wide-ranging reading interests. Socialist titles or books dealing with labour questions were often sent or

³⁰ James Stephens, *The Insurrection in Dublin* (Dublin: Mausel & Co, 1916); Stephen Graham, *Russia in 1916* (London: Cassell & Co., 1917); Havelock Ellis, *Essays in War-time* (London: Constable, 1916); Ernest Law, *England's First Great War Minister* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1916); Andre Chevrillon, *Britain and the War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1917).

³¹ Graham Balfour, *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Methuen & Co, 1901); G.K. Chesterton, *A Short History of England* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1917); John L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Town Labourer* (London: Longmans, 1917); John L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1911); Robert M. MacIver, *Community: A Sociological Study* (London: Macmillan, 1917); G.D.H. Cole, *The British Labour Movement* (London: University Socialist Federation, 1917).

recommended by Mary. Now they were complimented by titles dealing with the war or political questions arising from the war context. Ian Hay's *The Oppressed English*, for instance, his friend Lilian Hall read to him aloud.³² The book – dealing to a great extent with the question of Home Rule for Ireland – was apparently banned from publication in Britain; at least New Zealand newspapers reported so and Barkas recorded it in his letters.³³ He found the “booklet” so entertaining, that he bought a copy for himself. After recommending it to his landlady Jessie McIver, she also obtained a copy to send to her brother Angus serving at the front.

A substantial number of the non-fiction “war books” were soldier memoirs and descriptions of the war by eye witnesses. By the end of 1917, Barkas had read an account of the British campaign in Mesopotamia (*In Mesopotamia* by Martin Swayne), reports from the fronts in France, Italy, Macedonia and the Sinai Peninsula by V.C. O'Connor (*The Scene of War*) and the memoirs of soldier, journalist and military propagandist Alec John Dawson (*For France*). In 1917, Barkas also read *With Botha and Smuts in Africa* by William Whittall, which he commented was “an interesting account of one of the ‘side shows’ of this war which one does not hear much about.”³⁴ During the years 1917-1919 and 1922, Barkas read a total of seventeen titles which fall into the category of soldier memoirs. These titles did not lose appeal after the fighting had ended, though on reading Sapper's *The Human Touch* in January 1919, Barkas judged it to be “quite good & interesting, just a little queer to read them now the war is over (or is it only suspended? I wonder).”³⁵ Barkas appreciated soldier memoirs for the details and descriptions of war experiences, but the poor writing style of some of these memoirs hampered his enjoyment. Ian Hay's popular *Carrying On*, for example, seemed “quite a good yarn tho' not so fresh as his first book – a little too long and inclined to be a trifle monotonous & (I fancied) mechanical in places.”³⁶ The only title read by Barkas dealing

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³² Ian Hay, *The Oppressed English* (London: Dent, 1917).

³³ Barkas wrote Mary: “Probably you have read it, tho' equally you may not, as its circulation in England was prohibited for some not-very-apparent-to-us-reason.” Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 5 June 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. The New Zealand paper *Truth* reviewed the title “with a whetted appetite owing to the announcement made locally that the book had been suppressed in Britain.” *Truth* concluded, however, that this must have been a marketing pun by local booksellers, as there was nothing offensive to British or Irish readers in the book. “‘The Oppressed English’: A Suppressed Volume,” *NZ Truth*, 2 March 1918, 4.

³⁴ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 15 November 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL.

³⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 19 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. Sapper, *The Human Touch* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1918).

³⁶ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 17 May 1918, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. Ian Hay, *Carrying On* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1917). The other Ian Hay book referred to is *The First Hundred Thousand* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1915).

with the experiences of New Zealand soldiers, *Three Years with the New Zealanders* by C.H. Weston, would naturally have been of interest. However, the book, lent to Barkas by his friend William Alexander, was “chatty, and tells of what he saw & did, but it’s not fascinatingly well written – not the sort of book to tempt one to sit up past midnight.” Barkas found Weston’s account “a disappointing book – he went through so much & saw so much but he hasn’t the elusive art necessary to make his writing attractive.”³⁷

Within the category of fiction, Barkas was a “topical” reader, someone who read new releases soon after publication, who was handed new books arrived in the library soon after these were unpacked and who followed suggestions of other readers in his readers’ network to be able to participate in the literary conversations within the community. He was not a keen fiction reader, however. As we have seen Barkas’s fiction consumption made up only about forty per cent of his total reading. Novels often bored him, and he “skipped & skimmed” large parts of them. Nevertheless, Barkas read “war fiction” as did many other readers, as part of the reading material circulated and discussed in Timaru, and the rest of the British world. This explains the surprisingly high proportion of “war fiction” read in 1922. Of the ten fiction titles read in 1922, he borrowed three from the library; three were lent to him by his friend Percy Rule (who had served in the war), one by John P. Newman and two by Mrs Paterson. Nine of the ten titles were copies owned by other readers or within the public library collection. Considering the publication dates of these titles further confirms that many of the “war books” were reasonably new releases. Of the ten fiction titles read in 1922, all but two had been published in 1920 or after, the other two were published in 1919.³⁸

The purpose of reading to stay connected not just to events at a geographical distance, but to the reading conversations within the community remained an important ingredient in Barkas’s choice of reading. He followed the recommendations of his friends and of the librarian Evelyn Culverwell, rather than seeking out “war fiction” purely out of interest in the subject. On reading two bestselling war novels in April 1922, he reflected:

I tried to read “Way of Revelation” and have failed – may be a true & good picture of 1914/1919, but it quite failed to grip my interest – bored me, in fact. Having failed to get interested in “Way of Revelation”, I started on “Simon Called Peter” last night, it certainly is rather more interestingly written & Peter

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³⁷ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 2 and 6 April 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. C.H. Weston, *Three Years with the New Zealanders* (London: Skeffington, 1918).

³⁸ One was published in 1922, four titles in 1921, three in 1920 and two in 1919.

Graham as preacher and War Padre is a live sort, but I'm rather fed up with accounts of the war, its muddles, stupidities & wickedness, so I rather fear I shall fail to get through the rather dismal story – the end of which seems to point to Rome as the only way of salvation & peace. I very much prefer Dr. Nicolai's long, detailed, slowly built up 500 pages of "The Biology of War".³⁹

Perhaps, by 1922, Barkas's interest in soldiers' stories had been saturated by the many memoirs read earlier. Nevertheless, whether out of a genuine interest in the war or as a result of being embedded in readers' networks which offered other motivations for reading, readers still read "war books" well into the 1920s, and still displayed an appetite in the war as a subject for reading. Many of these books passed through the hands of many readers within the local community, and many more were accessed through the public library. The following section will take a closer look at the Timaru Public Library as an important space of reading during the war. Two aspects are investigated in particular: the significance of newspaper reading and consumption, connecting readers at a geographical distance from the front to the events in Europe; and the change in book issues by genre in order to further understand the diversity and shift in reading patterns during wartime.

WAR AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Following the outbreak of war, newspapers were a key medium to obtain information about and discussions of the political crisis. Readers in Timaru flocked to the public library to access the news. The monthly report by the librarian reported almost eight thousand people using the newspaper room during August, rising to eight and a half thousand in September and October.⁴⁰ This translated into an average of more than 300 Timaru residents using the newspaper room daily, a significantly higher number than in previous months and in comparison to previous years. Considering that many people subscribed to newspapers, or read papers in different spaces such as the South Canterbury Club, these figures are noteworthy for a town of barely 11,000 residents at the time.

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³⁹ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 19 April 1922, MS-Papers-2491-30, ATL. Wilfrid Ewart, *Way of Revelation: A Novel of Five Years* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921); Robert Keable, *Simon Called Peter* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1921); Georg Friedrich Nicolai, *The Biology of War* (London: J.M. Dent, 1919). On both war novels, and the popularity of this genre in the early 1920s see Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1993).

⁴⁰ Library Reports for August, September and October 1914, TPL.

New Zealand papers, available in the library reading room, carried up-to-date news items or extracts from British papers, transmitted via telegraph and cable. Overseas papers, particularly Australian, British and some North American weeklies and monthlies offered in-depth reports and commentary. As stated in chapter two, the library stocked a wide range of local, regional, national and overseas papers, including the *Timaru Herald*, the *Timaru Post*, the *Christchurch Press*, the *Otago Daily Times*, the *Maoriland Worker*, and the *N.Z. Times*, as well as *The Edinburgh Review*, *The Contemporary Review*, *Pearson's Magazine* and the *Hibbert Journal*. Specific war-related periodicals were now added to this collection, for instance, the British *T.P.'s Journal of Great Deeds of the Great War*.⁴¹ After the war had ended, interest in war-related papers continued. In March 1919, for example, the library added *The Soldier, At Home and Abroad*, an Australian weekly published in Sydney by the Returned Soldiers' Association, to its shelves.⁴²

Increasingly, however, it became difficult to obtain a wide range of newspapers on a regular basis. Paper shortages were the reason for discontinued delivery of some domestic papers. The librarian Culverwell stated in her monthly report for August 1915 that the *Oamaru Mail* was no longer supplied to the library for that reason, and in April 1916 the problem was mentioned again. "The Newspaper Free List is very much reduced and we cannot hope for any consideration in that matter, during the war", the report noted.⁴³ Overseas papers, of which the Timaru library stocked many, were now received with great disruptions as a result of the infrequency and irregularity of mail ships reaching New Zealand.⁴⁴ The war highlighted the temporary fragility of connections linking New Zealand to the rest of the world. It is striking that the monthly reports during the war repeatedly mention the receipt or non-receipt of mail, which was not included in the reports prior to the war. By the end of 1914, English mails, Culverwell noted, "were much delayed."⁴⁵ The reports for September and October 1917 referred to "English and Australian mails" and "overseas papers" as arriving irregularly.⁴⁶ The problem of unreliable mail deliveries continued for some time after the

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⁴¹ Library Report for February 1915, TPL. The report refers to "T.P.'s Weekly Journal of the War"; the actual title of the publication was *T.P.'s Journal of Great Deeds of the Great War*, published from 1914 until October 1916, and then continued as *T.P.'s Journal for Men and Women*.

⁴² Library Report for March 1919, TPL.

⁴³ Library Reports for August 1915 and April 1916, TPL. The "Newspaper Free List" refers to the list of domestic papers which were supplied to public libraries by newspaper proprietors free of charge.

⁴⁴ On the interruptions to mail services reaching New Zealand as a result of the war, see Robinson, *A History of the Post Office in New Zealand*, 188-95.

⁴⁵ Library Report for November 1914, TPL.

⁴⁶ Library Reports for September and October 1917, TPL.

war. In August 1919 Culverwell stated that “[m]ails are coming to hand even more unsatisfactorily than during the war.”⁴⁷

As the war progressed, readers appropriated newspapers in the reading room for other reasons than keeping up-to-date with the events in Europe. Patrons in the reading room began to cut articles and photos out of newspapers. This particularly became a problem when local and national newspapers started publishing photographs of newly enlisted or killed soldiers. Both the *Otago Witness* and the *Auckland Weekly News* ran regular pages with “studio portraits of the dead, wounded or missing.”⁴⁸ At the end of 1915, the *Auckland Weekly News* published a “commemorative edition” with 4,000 images of killed or injured soldiers, the entire issue amounting to 104 pages of illustrations.⁴⁹ Patrons of the public library in Timaru would have been able to read both weeklies in the newspaper room there, and readers did consult the casualty lists in the papers. In the report for January 1916 the librarian Culverwell wrote: “I regret to state that portraits of soldiers have been frequently cut out of illustrated N.Z. weekly papers. This offence cannot be too strongly condemned, but apart from this the conduct of the public generally has been exemplary.”⁵⁰

The cutting out of portraits of soldiers known to readers – either because they were family members, friends, or local residents – is a moving testimony to the power and significance of print during wartime. Rituals of mourning and remembrance involved visual memories of lost ones, and portraits in the newspapers provided a personal memento for those grieving.⁵¹ More importantly, as Sandy Callister argues, images of soldiers in the casualty lists printed in newspapers were often “the closest the New Zealand public came to visually confronting the loss of their young men.”⁵² The images were “immediate acts of public mourning in the absence of bodies.”⁵³ Readers in Timaru cutting soldier portraits out of newspapers moved this public act of mourning back into a private sphere. The importance of libraries as sites of mourning, both public and private, was not unique to New Zealand. The “display of recruiting posters” and of

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⁴⁷ Library Report for August 1919, TPL.

⁴⁸ Sandy Callister, *The Face of War: New Zealand's Great War Photography* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), 75.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Library Report for January 1916, TPL.

⁵¹ On the importance of photographs in general and photographs published in newspapers as elements of collective mourning see Callister, *The Face of War*, especially chapter four.

⁵² Ibid., 75.

⁵³ Ibid., 79.

“casualty lists” were also common functions of newspaper reading rooms during the war in Australia, where the casualty lists especially were equally “in constant demand”.⁵⁴ After the war, some public libraries in New Zealand became sites of memory, designated war memorials displaying plaques with the names of local soldiers, killed in action.⁵⁵

Newspapers and periodicals were only one aspect of the provision of information in public libraries. Books – non-fiction and fiction – were equally important resources for coping with heightened uncertainty and anxiety. Besides an increase in attendance numbers in the newspaper room, the Timaru library reports for 1914 and 1915 also show an increase in book issues, despite a decrease in enrolled readers as a consequence of local men serving at the front. Making comparisons between figures for the winter months May, June, July and August of 1914 and 1915, the librarian noted an increase of 2,225 persons in attendance in the newspaper room and an increase of 613 volumes of books issued, with thirty-three borrowers fewer enrolled. She thus commented in her report for August 1915: “This, considering the more serious interest of the people during wartime, may be considered a steady and satisfactory increase and helps to show the appreciation of the public for the Library.”⁵⁶ This trend was reiterated in her report for the end of the calendar year 1915, when the report concluded: “Thus it will be noticed that the depression of the war has not affected either our attendance or book issues in connection with the Library, and the increase will rather prove the good use the public make of papers, journals and books.”⁵⁷ While keeping in mind that the reports had to justify the public expenditure on the library, resulting in a perhaps more positive tone by the librarian, the increased number of book issues is indisputable. Between 1913 and 1919, book issues at the Timaru Public Library increased

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⁵⁴ David J. Jones, “Public Libraries: ‘Institutions of the Highest Educational Value’,” in *A History of the Book in Australia 1897-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 164. Joy Damousi describes how the reading of casualty lists in newspapers drew women “into a collective support group”, and formed a “common identity”, defined by fear and anticipation of reading the name of a loved-one in the lists. Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory, and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 21.

⁵⁵ The Timaru Boys’ High School library, for example, is a memorial library and has a memorial window. Other libraries which are also war memorials or display a roll of honour and memorial plaques within the library space include libraries in Albany, Kawakawa, St Albans, Upper Riccarton and Warkworth. See the New Zealand War Memorial Register, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/nz-memorials-register>, accessed 14 October 2011. See also Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, *The Sorrow and the Pride: New Zealand War Memorials* (Wellington: Historical Branch, GP Books, 1990).

⁵⁶ Library Report for August 1915, TPL.

⁵⁷ Library Report for January 1916, TPL.

significantly. In 1913, a total of 47,091 books were issued. By 1919 that number had soared to 77,154 (see figure 6.2).⁵⁸ In this trend, the Timaru Public Library was similar to British public libraries during the period. Alec Ellis notes that there library use significantly increased, particularly after 1916, despite an initial decline in membership in the first two years of war as a result of men joining the forces.⁵⁹

Figure 6.2

Book issues at the Timaru Public Library, 1913-1919

“Class books” included the following categories: Biography, Literature (British and Foreign Poetry and Classics as well as Essays and Miscellaneous Literature), History, Geography and Travel, Natural Science, Philosophy, Religion.⁶⁰

Source: Timaru Public Library Reports between January 1913 and December 1919, TPL.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Numbers are based on the Library Reports between January 1913 and December 1919, TPL.

⁵⁹ Ellis, *Public Libraries and the First World War*, 42-5, 64-5.

⁶⁰ See the first report by Evelyn Culverwell to the Borough Council on taking over as Chief Librarian, Library Report for March 1913, TPL.

⁶¹ It is important to note that the library lending room was closed twice during this period. In March 1913, the lending service was closed for three weeks to re-arrange all books and classify them according to the Dewey system. This closure was advertised well in advance and as a result book issues in February 1913 were almost twice as high as the monthly average in 1913. Therefore, the closure in March 1913 had no significant impact on the year total in book issues. The second time the lending service closed was during the influenza pandemic in November 1918. This time, the closure happened without sufficient prior public notice and book issues in the year 1918 show the impact of the closure.

While revealing a steady and significant increase in books taken out of the library, the library records do not allow any conclusions about the nature of the books readers were borrowing beyond the broad categories of fiction and “class books”. Joseph McAleer argues that “the First World War plainly encouraged reading, especially the ‘lighter kind’.” Referring to evidence from publishers’ trade journals, McAleer notes that “people had grown tired of war books” already by 1915. As a result, public libraries in Britain noted “increases in fiction borrowing.”⁶² The book issue numbers of the Timaru Public Library neither confirm nor contradict the general argument that readers took to “lighter” literature, in other words to fiction, during the war. In Timaru, the percentage of fiction of all book issues remained on its pre-war high of nearly ninety percent (see table 6.2). Apart from a minor rise in “class books” in 1914 (an increase by half a per cent), fiction clearly dominated the book issues. Looking at issue numbers between 1913 and 1919, a subtle upwards trend in fiction titles from just over eighty-five per cent before the war to almost ninety per cent in 1919 might suggest more interest in fiction towards the end of the war. To what extent this small increase in percentage, however, can really be attributed to a particular reading taste during wartime is inconclusive. What is more, fiction continued to make up about ninety per cent of all book issues during the 1920s, which would suggest that the war did not markedly alter general reading patterns of a predominantly fiction consumption.

Table 6.2   Fiction and “class books” issues at the Timaru Public Library, 1913-1919

	Total Book issues	Issues – Fiction	Per cent of Total	Issues – Class Books	Per cent of Total
1913	40,102	34,373	85.7	5,729	14.3
1914	50,127	42,547	84.9	7,580	15.1
1915	53,122	46,099	86.8	7,023	13.2
1916	55,521	47,865	86.2	7,656	13.8
1917	65,505	56,821	86.7	8,684	13.3
1918	65,456	57,322	87.6	8,134	12.4
1919	77,154	68,980	89.4	8,174	10.6

Source: Timaru Public Library Reports between January 1913 and December 1919, TPL.

⁶² McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, 72.

Anecdotal evidence in the library reports and in Barkas's letters, however, suggests that at least initially readers were interested in war novels and titles related to the war. A book donation received in August 1914 contained "'The Anglo-German Problem' by C. Sarolea, and 'With the Conquered Turk' by D. James", both of which Culverwell judged were "of particular interest at the present time."⁶³ The library continued to add war novels to its shelves. In July 1917, Barkas tested for the library *Gaspard, the Poilu* by René Benjamin, a popular and acclaimed French war story, which Barkas reported "was well worth reading".⁶⁴ In November 1919 he was asked of his opinion on the latest in the "Sonia" series by Stephen McKenna, *Sonia Married*, a book he judged "a horrendous melodramatic tale" and which "bored" him.⁶⁵ As has been stated earlier, many of the books Barkas read, including titles in relation to the war, he accessed through the public library. In their initial excitement and enthusiasm for the war, as well as a strong belief in the necessity of defending their way of life, civilian readers sought to participate in the war by knowing about it.⁶⁶ However, readers did also read other, non-war-related books. It would be too restrictive to argue that readers predominantly read for escape or not. Rather, reading continued to fulfil a number of functions, and the war added to those, and to an interest in and need for reading.

When the war finally ended, readers in Timaru heard about events in Europe through newspapers and periodicals as well as private correspondence just as they had throughout the war. It is impossible, however, to deduce whether a similar sense of urgency for information translated into increased patronage of the library reading room during the last weeks of the war as was the case in August 1914. Armistice on the battlefields of World War One coincided with the outbreak of the influenza pandemic in New Zealand.⁶⁷ Except for Auckland, New Zealand towns held public armistice celebrations on 12 November – which in all likelihood contributed to spreading the

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⁶³ Library Report for August 1914, TPL. Charles Sarolea, *The Anglo-German Problem* (London: Nelson, 1912); Lionel James, *With the Conquered Turk* (London: Nelson, 1913).

⁶⁴ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 1 July 1917, MS-Papers-2491-27, ATL. René Benjamin, *Gaspard the Poilu* (London: Heinemann, 1916). According to Philip Hager and Desmond Taylor, "many French readers considered the novel to be France's literary masterpiece." Philip E. Hager and Desmond Taylor, *The Novels of World War I: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1981), 26.

⁶⁵ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 3, 4 and 6 November 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL. Stephen McKenna, *Sonia Married: A Novel* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1919). For a synopsis of the plot of *Sonia Married* see Hager and Taylor, *The Novels of World War I*, 133-4.

⁶⁶ Winter, "Popular Culture in Wartime Britain," 331.

⁶⁷ For a general overview on the influenza pandemic in New Zealand see Geoffrey Rice, *Black November: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic in New Zealand*, Rev. and enl. 2nd ed. (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2005).

disease. As a precautionary measure, the Timaru Public Library closed its doors to readers and borrowers on the same day by order of the Ministry of Health.⁶⁸ The library remained closed for the following five weeks. The monthly report for November 1918 stated that “2000 books were in circulation at the time of closing and all but 20 volumes have been returned. Books have been fumigated, cleaned, mended and generally overhauled.”⁶⁹ The report also hinted that all newspapers received until the date of closure would be destroyed. The librarian expected that a “large English mail [was] due, so that the newsroom [would] contain nothing that was formerly in use. Magazine covers and weekly Illustrated paper covers ha[d] been repapered and generally repaired.” Staff also cleaned all walls, blinds, plaster work, globes and lamps.⁷⁰ The numbers of attendance in the newspaper room suggest that readers remained cautious immediately after the library re-opened on 19 December 1918, but by January 1919 the average attendance numbers were back to pre-influenza levels.⁷¹

The world-wide pandemic added pressure to an already interrupted mail service between Europe and New Zealand. In addition, the outbreak of the disease created further cause for concern for readers in Timaru with relatives and friends at the front and overseas. Mary Barkas was infected with the virus and the delay in English mail reaching New Zealand left Barkas seriously worried about her well-being. When finally at the end of January 1919 a large mail was received, “the biggest overseas lot ever received in N.Z.”, it brought for Barkas a few letters from Mary dated 26 November and 30 November to 3 December 1918 as well as several newspapers and pamphlets (“Heralds, Guildsman, Athenaeum, Whitley Report Notes &c.&c.”).⁷² Barkas told Mary:

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⁶⁸ As outlined by Rice, on the 12 November 1918 Cabinet invoked section 18 of the Public Health Act “to close all theatres, dance halls, billiard saloons, shooting galleries, schools and places used for race meetings, shows or exhibitions.” Public libraries fell into the same category, and were also closed. *Ibid.*, 95. Other libraries in New Zealand also closed. All Wellington public libraries, for example, shut on 14 November and re-opened on 12 December. All books in the Wellington libraries were fumigated, and some were destroyed. Rebecca Lenihan, “Calamity in the Capital: The Influenza Pandemic in Wellington” (489 Research Essay, Victoria University, 2005), 36. Rice mentions the Temuka Public Library, near Timaru, also closed on 12 November 1918. Rice, *Black November*, 143.

⁶⁹ Library Report for November 1918, TPL. Given the number of registered borrowers at this time was 2,600 the number of books in circulation (2,000) again confirms high usage of the library and strong demand for reading material.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ The number of people attending the newspaper room was recorded as 2,064 (a daily average of 206) in November 1918. This number plummeted to 1,491 (daily average of 124) in December 1918, but recovered in January 1919 to 2,940 (a daily average of 220). Library Reports for November and December 1918, and January 1919, TPL.

⁷² Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

I was particularly glad to get these two further letters of yours today because the letter of Nov. 24th. which I got (and acknowledged) yesterday had a distinct atmosphere of sadness about it – unlike you – that I couldn't help fearing that your attack of Influenza had been more serious than you had cared to say and that you had not made a satisfactory recovery; but these other letters received today are full of the "joy of living" and as cheerful as one could wish; they have been a very acceptable relief to the anxiety which was in my mind.⁷³

Despite the interruptions to mail and book supplies as a result of war, readers in Timaru avidly used the public library in their need for information, distraction and recreation. The library constituted an important space for coming to terms with and living through a world at war. Reading groups were also spaces that adapted to the war by taking on additional functions. Fred Barkas and his Round Table discussion group dealt with in chapter four was a prime example of a reading community established in the context of this geopolitical uncertainty and urgency to find a solution to the dilemma of the post-war world order. But reading groups elsewhere in the British Empire not primarily established as political discussion groups also reacted to the crisis and served as spaces in which readers found solace, support and guidance. The discussion will now move to Victoria, B.C., and to Margaret McMicking and the Victoria Literary Society. How did this mixed-gender group on the west coast of Canada, at a distance from the front, yet connected to the war as one of the nations fighting alongside the allies, negotiate its war experience?

PATRIOTISM AND READING GROUPS: THE VICTORIA LITERARY SOCIETY

The Victoria Literary Society (VLS) in Victoria, British Columbia, established in 1899 initially as one of three local branches in Victoria of the National Home Reading Union, was a mixed-gender reading group, meeting in members' houses once a fortnight from October to April.⁷⁴ The group meetings consisted of a mixture of reading aloud - parts of plays, novels or poems - and the reading of papers prepared by members prior to the meeting on a set topic. The books read were mainly classics, although some recent

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⁷³ Fred Barkas to Mary Barkas, 24 January 1919, MS-Papers-2491-29, ATL.

⁷⁴ The British Columbia Archives, Victoria, B.C., hold six volumes of minute books of the Victoria Literary Society spanning the period 1899 to 1959, under the reference Q/L/V 66. On the Victoria Literary Society, see also DeNel Rehberg Sedo, "Margaret McMicking and the Victoria Literary Society," in *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 2: 1840-1918*, ed. Yvan Lamonde, Patricia Lockhart Fleming, and Fiona A. Black (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2005); Rehberg Sedo, "Badges of Wisdom, Spaces of Being".

publications were also debated. The VLS had an especial affinity for works by Shakespeare; Browning, Burns, Keats, Tennyson and Dickens also appeared frequently in the programme over the years. During the reading season immediately before the outbreak of the war, the group had been reading and discussing Bernard Shaw's *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Aurora Leigh* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Julius Caesar* and Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*.⁷⁵

When the Victoria Literary Society opened its first meeting for the season 1914/15, on 6 October 1914 in the home of Margaret McMicking, the citizens of Victoria were pre-occupied with the events in Europe. Canada, as member of the British Empire, sent more than 500,000 men to fight in Europe, including troops from British Columbia.⁷⁶ The sons and nephews of some of the members of the VLS were serving amongst them.⁷⁷ Despite, or perhaps because of, the geographical distance to the front, Victorianites, like other readers elsewhere in the British world, felt a need to comprehend the scale and probable consequences of the war. The meeting in October 1914 commenced with the usual proceedings at the opening of a new season: the election of officers and passing of a motion to allow the committee to decide on the books for "Winter study".⁷⁸ The twenty members present also unanimously supported the move by Mr Gosnell, that "Mr Christianson prepare a paper entitled 'Why Belgium has become the centre of the war, historically and geographically'" to be read at the next meeting.⁷⁹

The paper on Belgium was heard at the following meeting on 20 October. What is known about the VLS and its meetings comes from the minutes taken during the meetings. By nature, the entries are brief, usually conveying a harmonious atmosphere, and seldom reveal a flavour of the meetings or details of the discussion. The paper on

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⁷⁵ 2 December 1913, 3 March 1914, 7 April 1914, Victoria Literary Society Minute Book, volume 2, Q/L/V 66, British Columbia Archives, Victoria, B.C. (hereafter VLS Minute Book, BCA). Bernard Shaw, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, published in *Three Plays for Puritans* (London: Constable, 1901); Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: J. Miller, 1856); William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Locksley Hall*. First publication dates for the latter two titles are difficult to establish.

⁷⁶ Desmond Morton, "First World War," in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History*, ed. Gerald Hallowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), available at Oxford Reference Online, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t148.e566>, accessed 14 November 2011. See also Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin, 2007).

⁷⁷ During the war the society moved to send letters of condolence to Archbishop Sweet, whose son died at the front, and to Mrs. Stewart, whose nephew was also killed in action. 17 April 1917, VLS Minute Book, volume 3, Q/L/V 66, BCA.

⁷⁸ 6 October 1914, VLS Minute Book, volume 2, Q/L/V 66, BCA.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Belgium was described as a “very able [...] address, which was listened to with great interest by all present.”⁸⁰ Nevertheless, even the brief entries in the minute books taken during that first war-season 1914/15 illuminate the extent to which the war was on the mind of civilians. The VLS continued to hear papers on “The Effect of War on Literature” and “The Influence of Literature on War”, while also discussing *Germany and the Next War* by Friedrich von Bernhardi, a pre-war publication that had caused a sensation especially outside Germany for its overt and aggressive plea for war.⁸¹ This paper was followed by an evening devoted to Nietzsche, another of the “High Priests of the ‘Cult’ of Power at any Price”, as judged by the group.⁸² A desire to learn more about the culture of the Allies was expressed at the opening meeting for the season 1915/16, when Mr Gosnell proposed to study Italian literature, “now that the Italians are our allies.”⁸³

Like Barkas and his circle of friends in Timaru, readers in Victoria, B.C. and members of the VLS felt a desire to learn about the historical and political causes to the war as well as the history, arts and literature of allied nations. However, this desire for knowledge was complementary to reading for entertainment and pleasure, or other educational interests that had been the predominant function of the VLS before the war. War-related or inspired reading replaced some of the content read during peacetime, but did not dominate the programme. During the war, the group kept up its study of Shakespeare, devoting meeting-time to one act at the time of a play to be read over the entire season. Between 1914 and 1918, they read aloud, taking individual parts of, *Henry V*, *King John*, *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Besides Shakespeare, the members of the VLS also shared poems by Rudyard Kipling, Tennyson, Browning and Shelley and read extracts from Washington Irving’s *John Bull*, Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Bell*, Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* and from several works by Maurice Maeterlinck.

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⁸⁰ 20 October 1914, VLS Minute Book, volume 2, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA.

⁸¹ The book first appeared in Germany in 1912; the first English editions in England and the US were Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War* (London: Edward Arnold; New York: Longmans, Green, 1912). According to Walther Hubatsch, during World War One, the Allies used this book and especially the chapter entitled “The Pflicht zum Krieg” (The Duty to Fight) as propaganda against Germany. Walther Hubatsch, “Bernhardi, Friedrich Adam Julius von,” in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 2 (1955): 122; online at: <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118658468.html>, accessed 18 February 2011.

⁸² 5 January 1915, VLS Minute Book, volume 2, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA.

⁸³ 5 October 1915, VLS Minute Book, volume 2, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA.

An active reading life, consisting of instructive reading and study as well as recreational reading in the form of “good” fiction, was part of patriotism and citizenship. Patriotism and civic duty also took on more tangible forms. Margaret McMicking, vice-president of the VLS, was an active member of the local branch of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE).⁸⁴ In her role as regent of the Lady Douglas chapter of the IODE, she was closely involved with organising fund-raising events and generating financial and practical support for the war effort.⁸⁵ It is no surprise then to read in the minutes of the VLS that in October 1914, at the first meeting after the outbreak of the war, it “was resolved to send a contribution from the funds of the Society to the Emergency Fund of the Daughters of the Empire.”⁸⁶ The VLS continued its practical and financial support of patriotic societies throughout and immediately after the war. In January 1919, the members donated \$3 to the Red Cross Military Convalescence Hospital.⁸⁷ A few months later, the society decided to send a donation of \$2.50 to the “Victorian Order of Nurses”.⁸⁸

The Victoria Literary Society continued to debate war-related books and topics as time went on. They dedicated entire evenings to reading extracts from books and papers “bearing upon the war”, including articles from Victorian and English newspapers and letters from Canadian soldiers. Like Barkas, the members of the Victoria Literary Society did not lose interest in “war books” and in discussing war-related topics as the fighting progressed into its fourth year. Contrary to McAleer’s argument that reading tended to be more escapist as civilians grew war-weary, the VLS continued the study of war, for instance reading aloud and debating *The Spirit of England* by George William Russell in 1919.⁸⁹ Despite being at a geographical distance removed from the front, war had infiltrated many daily activities, including reading. The National Home Reading, with its headquarters in London, equally reacted to the outbreak of war

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⁸⁴ On the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire see Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

⁸⁵ Margaret McMicking was regent of the Lady Douglas chapter of the IODE in Victoria from 1912-1933. Ibid., 20. There is also a large number of newspaper clippings concerning the IODE and McMicking’s involvement in the twenty-nine scrapbooks kept by McMicking, and now held at the British Columbia Archives. MS 1133, BCA.

⁸⁶ 6 October 1914, VLS Minute Book, volume 2, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA.

⁸⁷ 7 January 1919, VLS Minute Book, volume 3, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA. This was the first meeting for the season, as “owing to a ban being placed on account of the prevalence of the Spanish influenza the circle could not meet” earlier in this season. 1 April 1919, VLS Minute Book, volume 3, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA.

⁸⁸ 6 April 1920, VLS Minute Book, volume 3, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA.

⁸⁹ 7 January 1919, VLS Minute Book, volume 3, Q/ L/ V 66, BCA. George William Erskine Russell, *The Spirit of England* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1915).

with a change in reading programme and with an intensified discourse about the role and functions of reading in relationship to imperial citizenship. How did the advice of the NHRU, much closer to the front, compare to the actual reading by readers in Timaru and Victoria?

READING AS WAR EFFORT: THE NATIONAL HOME READING UNION

Immediately after the outbreak of war, the NHRU issued advice on how to read in wartime. In addition to the specific address on this topic given in November 1914, the union updated the reading programme for its twenty-sixth season in accordance with the political events. A special course of reading on “Modern European History from 1870 Till To-Day, and the Causes of the Present War” was added, listing J. Holland’s *The Development of the European Nations* and G.P. Gooch’s *History of Our Time, 1885-1911* as required reading. Other titles recommended were Bernhardt’s *Germany and the Next War* (the same title read by the Victoria Literary Society), *Imperial Germany* by Prince von Buelow, *Germany and the Germans* by Price Collier, *Modern Germany* by Ellis Barker and *England and Germany* by J.A. Cramb. As usual, all titles were listed with complete publication details and prices; most of them priced at 2s6d.⁹⁰

The first issue of *The Home-Reading Magazine* also contained an editorial entitled “Hold Fast!”, which reminded members that the times called for patriotism, “not shown in talk but in action”, and that the duty of all members was “to carry on the Union’s work.”⁹¹ The editorial reported on a Government appeal that any “unrest” as a result of “interruption or dislocation of the public educational service of the country” would be disastrous. In response to this the editorial enthusiastically proclaimed:

Against unrest, as against frivolity or apathy, there is no surer or sounder protection than the systematic intelligent reading of those books in which the best thought of mankind is expressed. Such reading steadies, as it enlarges and elevates, the mind. It is a civilizing influence in the home. It adds to the purity,

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⁹⁰ NHRU, Leaflet on Special Course, “Modern European History from 1870 Till To-Day, and the Causes of the Present War”, in *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 1 (1914). The course on European history, added “in view of the stirring events that have occurred since our reading for the coming session was planned”, replaced a course arranged on “House Life in Norway.” “Union Notes,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 1 (Oct 1914): 31-2. John Holland Rose, *The Development of the European Nations, 1870-1900* (London: Constable, 1905); George P. Gooch, *History of Our Time, 1885-1911* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911); Bernhard Heinrich Martin Karl von Buelow, *Imperial Germany* (London: Cassell, 1914); Price Collier, *Germany and the Germans from an American Point of View* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1914); J. Ellis Barker, *Modern Germany* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1905); J.A. Cramb, *England and Germany* (London: Murray, 1914).

⁹¹ NHRU, “Hold Fast!,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 1 (Oct 1914): 1.

pleasure, and dignity of national life. It makes better citizens and truer patriots.⁹²

The overt connection between “intelligent reading” and patriotism added value to an everyday activity that might have been perceived as idle or non-essential during the war. The NHRU assured its members that the work they did – as reading within the union was understood as work – was not only to their personal benefit but a duty to be carried out for the benefit of the nation, if not the Empire.

The Home Reading Union realised that members might find it difficult to make the time for reading in circles, or felt pre-occupied with anxieties and uncertainties. The first issue of the monthly magazine for 1914/15 also included an open letter by the President of the Board of Education highlighting the importance of continuing the study as well as a specific plea to circle leaders to ensure their groups kept on going. “We know that it is hard to find time; we know how many claims there are, and will be, upon us”, the union organisers wrote. “But we shall be better citizens by keeping our own work going and our minds up to the mark”, they reminded members. The discourse about functions of reading now included the language of citizenship, and while time might be scarce, the union also pointed out that sacrifices had to be made.⁹³

Letters to the editor printed in the union’s magazine seemed to confirm that members were grateful and heeded the union’s advice. While these letters by nature do not offer a representative response by all union members, as they were selected for publication by the union organisers, these responses and descriptions of the work of individual reading circles tell at least one side of the story of how union readers adjusted their reading during wartime. These letters also add another layer to the discourse surrounding the importance and nature of reading during crisis. At the completion of the reading session 1914/15, a circle in Loughborough reported the following:

One of our men joined the Colours, but managed to attend a few gatherings in his khaki, whilst volunteer training and extra duties occasioned through the War detained others. [...] Members so often fail to realize that every point of view, including their own, is valuable, perhaps even more valuable than the scholarly and profound. In conclusion we have to thank the Union for leading us in anxious times to the peace which is to be found in good literature. The War depression has been lightened and all have been refreshed.⁹⁴

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⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ “To Circle Leaders,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 1 (Oct 1914): 32. Notions of reading as citizenship and patriotism were repeated over and over again in the magazine’s editorials, leaving no room for questioning the usefulness of reading during this time.

⁹⁴ “Report of the Loughborough Circle,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 8 (May 1915): 249-50.

The NHRU continued to advice on publications which explained the war, promoting books by commercial publishers and pamphlets by other imperial and patriotic societies. Publications by the Victoria League were especially endorsed. At times, the lines between advertising and propaganda were blurred. A half-page advertisement in *The Home-Reading Magazine* promoted a series of nine pamphlets, all of which were

issued with the intention of bringing home to British people the true meaning of the gigantic struggle upon which they have entered; of making clear the justice of our cause; and of preparing public opinion for any sacrifices that may be necessary to secure ourselves – finally, if possible – against a repetition of this wanton outrage upon the peace of the world.⁹⁵

The titles included *Why Britain is at War*, *Modern Germany and the Modern World*, *Britain and Gallant Belgium* and *Why the Dominions Came In*. The latter showed “how it was that our enemies thought the British Empire would crumble at the first touch of war, and why their calculations have been blown to the four winds by British patriotism and Indian loyalty.”⁹⁶ Ties of empire, loyalty and imperial patriotism were themes emphasised repeatedly. Two new lantern lectures on Canada and Australia were announced in December 1914, stressing the “special interest” in these two countries, “now by reason of the assistance they are giving the Motherland in the great War.”⁹⁷ Imperial connections provided a shared war experience and added to reading interests.

Members were encouraged to maintain an active intellectual life, and educate themselves about the reasons and necessity for war. The Union also called for financial and practical support. Like the members of the Victoria Literary Society and Barkas, members of the NHRU donated funds to various war-related causes. The NHRU used its organisational infrastructure to appeal to a large number of people. “A Calendar for Patriots”, with “appropriate quotations for every day in the year” was published by the NHRU in late 1914, and advertised in the magazine. Reasonably priced at 1s3d, the Union pledged that all proceeds were passed on “to the Belgian Relief Fund”.⁹⁸ Patriotic support could also take on more material forms. One circle reported of the practical ways in which the group combined reading and material support of the war effort. “J.W.B.”, who had been in member in Australia before moving to England, wrote of the efforts of his local circle leader:

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⁹⁵ Victoria League Advertisement, *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 2 (Nov 1914): inside back cover.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “New Lantern Lectures,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 3 (Dec 1914): 96.

⁹⁸ Advert in *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 5 (Feb 1915): n.p.

All his Reading Circle of last year is dispersed – seven have enlisted and others have moved – so that in September he found himself without a single member. He has now collected five women (who knit for the soldiers in the most steady and conscientious way during the meetings, but do not fail to contribute very trenchant and sensible remarks all the same) and four men.⁹⁹

J.W.B.'s fellow readers knitted; a popular activity of the war effort.¹⁰⁰ In March 1918 the Union urged its members to form War Savings Associations in connection with the National War Savings Committee.¹⁰¹

As the war continued into its second year, the NHRU reminded readers of the importance of “systematic reading”, “pursued steadily with a definite object and with the guidance and encouragement” of the Union. Reading had “a value that [could] hardly be overestimated – not so much for the actual pleasure got, the actual information gained, as for the discipline it applies to our whole nature, the enlargement it gives to our whole outlook on life.”¹⁰² A lengthy editorial appearing in October 1915 also acknowledged the distracting power of reading to “lead [...] away from the anxieties which weigh on all of us into a calmer atmosphere.” However, the need to study as part of “our national duty” was particularly emphasized. This war, the editorial stated, was being fought “for the existence of civilization itself”, and steady and systematic reading was crucial for “keeping up the standard of civilization.”¹⁰³ The courses for 1915/16 remained tailored to the war situation and included courses on “The War – Problems of the European Situation”, “The Balkan States”, “Belgian Literature”, “Some of Our Allies At Home” and a course on “Patriotism and Poetry”.¹⁰⁴

The war not only created a special need for reading, it also made the work of the Union more difficult. Several circles reported that they had lost members, as men joined

⁹⁹ “Correspondence”, *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 4 (Jan 1915): 128.

¹⁰⁰ Large numbers of women knitted during the war as a way of contributing to the war effort, sending thousands of socks, gloves, balaclavas, mufflers etc. to the front. For a discussion of the patriotic hand-knitting efforts during the war in New Zealand see Heather Nicholson, *The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), chapter six “Warm Socks from Warm Hearts”.

¹⁰¹ Page-long appeal “Read and Save”, *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXIX, no. 6 (March 1918): n.p.

¹⁰² “The Work of the Union in War-Time”, *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 1 (Oct 1915): 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid.: 1-2. A subsequent editorial pointed out that the future held “complex and far-reaching problems [...] problems social, national, and international.” On each member laid “the duty of contributing to the national judgement on these vast questions.” Reading would be the best preparation for these times ahead, and would “keep our brains cool, our mental temper well regulated, and [...] a wide and sane outlook upon life.” This, according to the Union, was the “best help for our brothers in the trenches.” “Munitions of War”, *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 3 (Dec 1915): 66.

¹⁰⁴ An article in the second issue of the magazine in this session explicitly explained how these courses would help understanding the war. The course on Belgian literature, for instance would “help towards a more appreciative and sympathetic understanding of the national characteristics of Belgium.” “Union Notes”, *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 2 (Nov 1915): 63.

the forces and women moved to live with relatives during the war.¹⁰⁵ The union organisers summed up the reading session 1914/15, stating that

In some respects the Session has been a disastrous one; circles have been broken up by force of circumstances, the ranks of membership have been sadly depleted by the claims of King and Country, and financial resources have been strained to the utmost limit.¹⁰⁶

The financial difficulties of the Union were a recurring problem throughout the war. Occasionally, time constraints of the staff of the NHRU affected the timely issuing of the monthly magazine.¹⁰⁷ By October 1916, paper shortages and increased postage prices resulted in the magazine appearing without a cover.¹⁰⁸ Readers also found it more difficult to obtain the recommended books. To this end, the NHRU acted as intermediary for lending books between members through its Book Union.

The importance of books and reading was not just paramount for civilians, but for soldiers and other army personnel alike. As an editorial in the magazine powerfully argued, books were amongst “the munitions of war”.¹⁰⁹ The Union extended its work from organising reading circles at Home to reaching out to soldiers as potential members and recipients of the Union’s message of systematic reading. Immediately after the outbreak of war, at the annual meeting in November 1914, the opportunities for the Union to increase its membership by enrolling soldiers and setting up affiliated groups in army camps were first aired. Thus, it was proclaimed, the Union “might bring to military discipline a touch of home life, and open a door to wider intellectual vision.”¹¹⁰ The plan was perhaps too ambitious, as there is little evidence of reading circles in the trenches or at sea.¹¹¹ But by the end of 1914, the NHRU supplied its monthly journal to military training camps, chiefly via the YMCA, which ran recreation rooms in the camps. As stated earlier, more than 2,000 copies of the address on

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¹⁰⁵ See for example, “Correspondence,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 6 (March 1915): 192; “Some Letters,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 3 (Dec 1915): 96.

¹⁰⁶ “Union Notes,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 8 (May 1915): 249.

¹⁰⁷ A note by the editor explained the lateness of the magazine thus in *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 6 (March 1916): 161; see also “Union Notes,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXIX, no. 7 (April 1918): 224.

¹⁰⁸ “Union Notes,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVIII, no. 1 (Oct 1916): 29.

¹⁰⁹ “Munitions of War,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 3 (Dec 1915): 65-6.

¹¹⁰ “Union Notes,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 3 (Dec 1914): 95.

¹¹¹ One soldier’s letter printed in the magazine in October 1917 stated: “In our dug-out there is a Circle meeting nearly every afternoon”, although this refers to the discussion of literature more generally, rather than an organised circle meeting. “Appeal,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXIX, no. 1 (Oct 1917): 30. The desire by Union organisers to set up circles was voiced many times, however. See for example “Reading for the Troops,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 6 (March 1916): 161-2.

“Reading in War Time” had also been distributed in the camps.¹¹² The Union’s magazine published appeals by the Camp Library, a British organisation which collected books donated by the general public for re-distribution to soldiers in training camps at home, at the front and to “prisoners in Germany”.¹¹³ Throughout the war, the magazine gave accounts of the ongoing work of the Camp Library, the Red Cross Library, the St. John’s War Library Committee and the Workers’ Educational Association, which were supplying reading material to fighting and wounded soldiers, and repeatedly appealed to members for book donations.¹¹⁴

Again, it was the mixture of war-related reading courses and distracting reading material that proved successful. Like readers in Victoria and Timaru, the members of the Union felt a desire to understand the world in which they found themselves in August 1914. At the same time, their interests were not exclusively focussed on the war. They kept up the reading practices established before the war in an attempt to maintain normality and to escape reality. Members of a circle in South Africa reported their gratitude:

In spite of the distractions of the War and the new and onerous duties devolving every good citizen, the National Home Reading Union has managed to hold its own. [...] First the N.H.R.U. piloted its readers through the sea of war literature, directing them to the best books from which to learn the causes – historical, political, and social – that have led to the great upheaval. Then it provided a course of reading which afforded a distinct relief from war topics.¹¹⁵

Another reader, whose sons were serving at the front, thankfully stated the book he was reading took him “out of [himself] and lets [him] live someone else’s life for a bit.”¹¹⁶ Readers did read for escape, just not exclusively. The NHRU certainly emphasised serious reading, however. The letters to the editor from members at home and at the front, reprinted in the magazine, usually re-iterated the usefulness of instructive reading and study, and the dangers of reading aimlessly. Serious reading and reading to escape

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¹¹² “N.H.R.U. Work among the Troops,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVI, no. 4 (Jan 1915): 127. The NHRU continued to co-operate with the YMCA in its distribution of the magazine. See “Union Notes,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 5 (Feb 1916): 159.

¹¹³ Advert for Camp Library, in *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 5 (Feb 1916): inside back cover.

¹¹⁴ See for example, “Union Notes – Reading in War Time,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 3 (Dec 1915): 95. An appeal in February 1916 contained a detailed list of books asked for by prisoners of war in Austria, which surprisingly only included historical and political non-fiction titles and not a single work of fiction. Perhaps the Camp Library already stocked sufficient fiction titles, or perhaps the NHRU had edited the list. See “Books for Prisoners in Austria,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 5 (Feb 1916): 160. See also “Camps Library,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVIII, no. 2 (Nov 1916): 62.

¹¹⁵ “Union Notes – South African Branch,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 6 (March 1916): 189.

¹¹⁶ “Union Notes,” *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 5 (Feb 1916): 160.

were not mutually exclusive. Some circles took to Shakespeare, just as the Victoria Literary Society had, as they “felt that [their] minds needed some strong intellectual stimulus and distraction from the ever-present woes.”¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

“Reading in War Time”, the address by M.E. Sadler with which this chapter opened, conveyed a sense of urgency and need for reading to continue despite and because of the difficulties and anxieties of war. Sadler and the NHRU stressed that reading would offer relief and distraction, but more importantly emphasized the need to keep an active and strong mind. In the rhetoric of the NHRU, systematic reading ensured the standards of civilisation and prepared members for a post-war world. As before the war, the Union defined reading as part of active citizenship and patriotism, but the political crisis highlighted this aspect. By reading the right kind of literature, in the right kind of way, civilians joined soldiers in the fight for freedom.

Members of the NHRU, as well as members of the Victoria Literary Society and readers in Timaru participated in the war by knowing about it. Access to information became a crucial factor, and newspapers as well as books offered a means to make sense of a fast-changing world. Readers desired to know about the realities of fighting and soldiers’ accounts in book format or as reprinted letters in newspapers were popular. Civilians did read for escapism, as the NHRU suggested, and reading constituted an important mechanism to cope with a situation of heightened anxiety. However, readers continued to be pre-occupied with the political situation in Europe and concerned with the future of the empire. Readers also continued to be interested in war-related reading material, both in the form of novels and non-fiction accounts, for longer than existing scholarship has suggested.

A number of reading spaces took on new meanings and helped readers negotiate the war experience. Libraries were crucial to access information, and later turned into sites of mourning and memory. Reading groups offered collective support by providing the space to discuss the war situation, to read together for distraction, as well as to share personal grief. Reading groups also provided practical support for the war effort. All of these additional functions of reading were grounded in reading practices established in

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¹¹⁷ “Union Notes – Report of the Ross Circle”, *The Home-Reading Magazine* XXVII, no. 8 (May 1916): 247.

the pre-war period and the war did not dramatically alter these practices. Readers continued to rely on informal networks and libraries to access reading material. They continued to discuss their reading with other readers, in writing or in conversations. The war, however, made reading more urgent, more necessary, and brought into sharper focus the social connections of reading.

CONCLUSION

When Fred Barkas died in September 1932, the obituary in the *Timaru Herald* remembered him as “a keen lover of music and literature”, whose death would be “regretted by large number of friends.”¹ Fred Barkas was an avid, constant reader; reading was a fundamental part of his everyday life. This was also true for the Canadian reader Margaret McMicking. In celebration of her ninetieth birthday in 1939, more than 250 Victorian citizens “paid homage” to her, attending her birthday party organised by the Sir James and Lady Douglas chapter of the IODE, of which McMicking had been a member for more than thirty years.² Both Barkas’s and McMicking’s lives were strongly embedded in local networks and associations, and their participation in local cultural activities connected them as readers to both local and global reading communities. Many of Barkas’s “large number of friends” had been part of his reading networks, his political reading and discussion group, or his drama-reading group. Many of the well-wishers at McMicking’s birthday celebrations were fellow members of the Victoria Literary Society, the Burns Club and the British Columbia Historical Society. As well as being keen readers, Barkas and McMicking were advocates of reading in the life of the societies in which they lived: through both their personal connections and relationships, and through their membership in organised groups and associations. Far from being a solitary activity, Barkas’s and McMicking’s reading was highly social and formed the base of a wide range of connections. At the time of Barkas’s death and McMicking’s ninetieth birthday in the 1930s, a world of connected reading was elaborate and well established.

This thesis has explored the reading practices, connections and communities of Barkas and McMicking; of other middle-class readers in Timaru and Victoria, B.C; and of members of the home reading movement throughout the British Empire over a period of forty years. An analysis of the archive created by these constant and connected readers, in the form of letters, notebooks, minute books, scrapbooks and published union magazines, has suggested that these “ordinary” middle-class readers engaged in a wide range of reading practices, and read for recreation and leisure,

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¹ “Obituary, Frederic Barkas,” *Timaru Herald*, 12 September 1932, 6.

² “Gathering does Honor to Mrs. R.B. McMicking,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 16 September 1939, 7.

education and information, out of curiosity, and in order to be able to participate in local networks and communities.

While Barkas and McMicking have left extraordinarily rich archives, the world they inhabited, the nature of their connections, and the habit and character of their reading was not unusual. Larger patterns of reading practices can be found in these singular cases.³ Barkas's and McMicking's involvement in a number of reading communities, as well as the patterns of reading culture evidenced by library borrowing records, suggest that other readers in these places, and in this period, engaged in similar practices. This amplifies the observation by Heather Jackson that case studies of individual readers reveal not only the specific practices of these readers, but also wider societal conditions within which reading occurs.⁴ Drawing on the records of Fred Barkas in particular has illustrated that using a singular personal archive does not preclude claims about wider local and even global reading cultures.

Underlying this study of reading cultures across the British Empire has been an interest in the geographies of reading. The thesis has sought to understand the nature of the particular local reading places (Timaru, Victoria, London) and the ways in which these places were shaped and constantly being remade by interactions with places elsewhere. Influenced by the notions of place and space put forward by Doreen Massey, and by studies of the "new imperialism" which emphasise the networks and webs of empire, this study has shown how readers in Timaru, New Zealand, Victoria, B.C., London and elsewhere in the British Empire contributed to particular, local reading cultures as well as participating in the wider web of readers across the empire. This study has deliberately bypassed the nation as an analytical category. Instead, it has explored whether, and in what ways, local reading communities and cultures connected to broader reading spaces.

The readers in this study defined and expressed particular local and regional identities as well as imperial sensibilities. Fred Barkas, for example, emerges from his archive as a proud resident of Timaru, rooted in local networks, and at the same time as an imperial citizen. He was simultaneously concerned with local body politics and with the future of the empire. Margaret McMicking took pride in her pioneer roots in British Columbia, belonged to the Historical Society of Victoria, and was an active organiser of

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³ This is a variation of a phrase used by Jackson, *Marginalia*, 256.

⁴ Ibid., 257.

the Victoria branch of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. On several celebratory occasions, she also enacted Queen Victoria, and cut a striking resemblance to the monarch. This is not to say that Barkas and McMicking were oblivious of their respective nationhood, but to suggest that their local and imperial belongings were more important than a developing sense of national identity. This embeddedness in local and imperial worlds found expression in their reading practices and reading cultures.

The chapters in the thesis have explored different kinds of communities and connections across the period c. 1890-1930. Some of these were local, others disparate. Reading and reading spaces were also seen as relating to a variety of practices, including talk and writing. The oral performance of reading has been highlighted: reading aloud, recitation, and talking about books were all crucial ingredients in reading cultures. Chapters four and five offered an analysis of reading practices which included reading aloud within reading groups, at times gender- and genre-specific. Discussion of print and politics was one reason for Timaru men to come together in the Round Table discussion group, later the Conversation Club. In such groups reading formed the base for male sociability. Play reading groups like the Timaru Readers based their meetings on recitations, while rituals of hospitality, social inclusion and exclusion related to class and cultural capital. Reading circles affiliated with the NHRU and AHRU knew that talking about their reading was an important part of their work with the union. Such groups viewed both reading and talking as preparing members for citizenship. In addition to the literal reading aloud of texts, reading practices included presenting prepared papers on a chosen subject (which in turn prompted additional reading for the preparation of such papers), and the discussion of texts.

Writing was also closely associated with reading. The thesis has shown how reading not only acted as a prompt to writing, but often constituted an integral part of reading practices. Texts were summarised in writing (or speech) for other readers, and additional information was noted down in preparation for group meetings. The Round Table discussion group contributed articles to the *Round Table* magazine, and many groups circulated printed or typed programmes for their meetings. The correspondence between Fred Barkas and Mary Barkas in particular has reminded us how much reading and writing practices were integrally tied to each other. As discussed in chapter three, Barkas's rituals included writing to his daughter in the evening before settling down to a night of reading. Both Fred and Mary used their reading and their writing to express and constantly re-define their identities, and to offer commentary on each other's

personality. Reflecting on their reading by writing about it enabled father and daughter to maintain a close and intimate relationship, not in spite of but because of their physical separation.

This thesis has demonstrated that readers read with other readers in mind. Even solitary reading took on a social function, because no reading was disconnected from that of other readers. Reading always retained a highly social and “public dimension”, in the form of subsequent discussion in informal networks, in public spaces such as the club or the library and through correspondence about reading.⁵ This was also true for the ways in which texts were acquired and interpreted. In Barkas’s case, a substantial proportion of his reading had been recommended or given to him by people he knew and trusted. At times, the judgement of other readers also influenced his reading choices and appraisal of what he read, though this relationship is much harder to trace. For instance, Barkas continued to read war novels in the early 1920s, despite disliking most of the titles he read in this genre, because these books were discussed in his reading networks. In this instance, though his judgement was not swayed by that of other readers, he continued reading such titles because he wanted to participate in conversations about reading within his readers’ network.

In analysing the ways in which reading shaped personal relationships, the chapters have illuminated a range of reading communities and “reading connections” of different natures and within particular spaces. Chapter one described the existence of informal reading networks within local communities. These were partly based on existing friendships, but also facilitated new friendships. These networks were highly fluid in their membership and constitution, and thus can be difficult for later historians to reconstruct. Through Barkas’s letters we are offered a glimpse at his network, which congregated in spaces not traditionally associated with reading, like the golf course, the restaurant or the street, as well as the more obvious, such as libraries and the Club. Reading networks differed in crucial ways to the reading groups discussed which some members of Barkas’s network in Timaru also came to form. In comparison to reading groups, we should imagine reading networks as much less organised entities, with less explicit rules of inclusion and exclusion, and more scope for negotiating belonging.

The social aims of more formally organised and large-scale reading movements like the NHRU and the AHRU were rather different. Members of these groups joined

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⁵ This is a term used by Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities, 1695-1870*, 177.

forces with other readers for reasons of sociability, too, but their first interest was in education and “improvement”. The social aspect of reading within NHRU circles focussed on the benefits to be gained from reading in company. Sharing reading strategies, and sharing additional knowledge and interpretations helped make reading more fruitful. The relationships fostered by the NHRU and other such organisations were framed as unity with other readers, in the same circle, in the same town, in the nation, and in the empire. Reading was invested with the ability to join a vast, dispersed audience into one community for the purpose of improvement. Reading with the NHRU also took on political functions and was defined as part of citizenship. Through their prescribed reading lists the NHRU promoted an imperial sentiment and enabled members to imagine connections to like-minded readers elsewhere in the empire.

Imperial connections became newly pertinent for readers in New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Britain during World War One. Chapter six focussed on the particular historical moment of the war to examine whether, and in what ways, reading practices and reading connections adapted and changed during this crisis. The discussion has shown that civilian readers were keenly interested in any information about the war, including newspapers reports, non-fictional accounts and fiction set during the war. Reading constituted a major mechanism to cope with a period of uncertainty and anxiety. The case study of the Timaru Public Library revealed that readers also read more during and immediately after the war. Reading performed a number of functions from information, education, escape and distraction to exercising and expressing patriotism and citizenship.

Much of the reading material read in Timaru, in Victoria, B.C. and by the members of the home reading unions was published in Britain. Although this thesis has largely focussed on reading practices and communities – on the “how”, “where” and “when” of the history of reading – rather than the history of the book, the observations made throughout suggest that the texts read in these different places situated within the British Empire were largely similar. Reading networks in Timaru passed around contemporary bestsellers which were also popular in Britain, Canada or Australia. The public libraries in Timaru and Victoria, B.C., stocked local and regional papers, as well as national, British and North American periodicals. The book stock in these public libraries contained contemporary fiction, non-fiction and reference works that combined some local but mainly British publications. The discussion of the correspondence between Fred and Mary Barkas illustrated how father and daughter,

living in Timaru and London respectively, could engage in a shared reading space. By recommending and sending reading material from one place to the other, Fred and Mary participated in both their respective local reading cultures simultaneously.

Envisaging the connections between readers in different locales of the British Empire as constituting webs and networks allows us to identify reading connections across multiple avenues and within multiple spaces. These networks and avenues were not static, but constantly in the process of being made or remade – as the disruptions of war reveal. New connections emerged as others disappeared; some connections persisted over a long period, while others were short-lived. Tony Ballantyne has noted that “the movements of texts and commodities were central in giving New Zealand real shape as a nation space.”⁶ This movement of texts and commodities also gave shape to the real and imaginary space of the wider empire, not least as a result of imperial book publishing and distribution networks. The constant circulation of reading material throughout the empire, together with discussion of print in letters and in the newspaper and periodical press, as well as a vast array of personal and official correspondence, facilitated an ongoing exchange of ideas and shaped the parameters of this reading world.

In addition, the exploration of Fred Barkas and his reading has illustrated how a reader situated in a provincial centre on the outskirts of empire could be at the “centre” of a British reading world. For Barkas, his location in a provincial centre in New Zealand did not render his reading “provincial”. The material he read was not different to reading material other readers in the Empire could access. While the organisers of the National Home Reading Union imagined the Empire in terms of “centre” and “periphery”, and existing publishing and distribution networks also largely operated along such lines, the connections readers engaged in across the imperial space can be conceptualised as web-like structures. Connections existed between places, and more importantly, the periphery could equally be the centre of a reading world.

The primary sets of connections in this study are between Timaru, New Zealand, Victoria, B.C, and London, England. Additional nodes of connections have been discussed through local circles of the home reading movement in Britain, Canada and Australia. These connections helped to maintain links across empire, primarily in places

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⁶ Tony Ballantyne, “Culture and Colonization: Revisiting the Place of Writing in Colonial New Zealand,” *Journal of New Zealand Studies* 9 (2010): 16.

that scholars have also argued made up the British World. But networks of reading culture transcended imperial space and included interaction with print cultures in places outside the British World. North American influences, in particular, helped shape the reading cultures described in this study. The American-based philanthropist Andrew Carnegie financed the buildings of the public libraries in Timaru and in Victoria, B.C., as well as several thousands of other library buildings in the United States and in British territories. Lecturing circuits, touring recitation performances and writers travelled along imperial circuits as well as through North America and other places.⁷ Perhaps most importantly, while the majority of reading material reaching New Zealand, Australia and Canada originated in Great Britain, American publications, and in particular American periodicals, were consumed throughout the empire or what constituted the “British World”. If we are to apply the notion of the British World to the readers in this study, we also have to acknowledge that this world, and its boundaries, must be understood to be a flexible entity, not an exclusive space.

The possibilities for further exploration of the history of readers and reading are numerous. In New Zealand in particular, the field of the history of reading, and more broadly, the history of the book, is virtually untapped. Further localised studies, whether in New Zealand or elsewhere, and focussing on particular communities, would enable us to understand Timaru’s reading networks and cultures in a comparative context, and would enable some generalisations to be made, for example, about the role of libraries as hubs of communities, or about the importance of informal networks to the abilities of individuals to access and disseminate reading material.

This thesis has been concerned primarily with the reading of books, newspapers and periodicals. But print was everywhere in Western societies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since the beginning of this period at least, reading constituted a “necessity of life” for the majority of the population.⁸ Timetables, bills, letters, posters, advertising, newspapers, and books were constantly read, and were part of everyday life. However, some people read more than others and not everyone read in the same way. In New Zealand, for example, a study of Maori reading practices and

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⁷ There are numerous examples of writers touring the Empire. Some of the examples are: Sidney and Beatrice Webb toured New Zealand, Australia and North America during 1898; Arthur Conan Doyle travelled to New Zealand and Australia in 1920-21, and to the United States in 1922; and George Bernard Shaw visited New Zealand in 1934.

⁸ This phrase is borrowed from William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

cultures would look very different to the present one. Likewise, a study of working-class reading practices may reveal different findings than those presented here. The readers in this study were predominantly educated and middle-class. To what extent their reading was decidedly middle-class, or even middle-brow, deserves further research. What all of these suggestions make clear is that the study of historical reading practices and cultures enriches our understandings of the past, because reading permeates the everyday life of individuals, whether they lived in Timaru, Victoria, London or elsewhere.

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Advertising postcard from P.W. Hutton & Co, booksellers, c. 1905, 2176 Print, Photographic.

The Carnegie-funded Public Library, Timaru, c. 1910, 7795, Postcard.

Formal portrait photograph of Miss Culverwell and her dog, c. 1915, 2009/070.002.

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