

New Zealand is No Longer New

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Summary

As one of the last landmasses discovered by humans, New Zealand has consistently been viewed as a 'young' nation, but is the idea of our youth hindering our progress? Many New Zealanders have reflected upon, discussed and put forward ideas about this nation's long-term future. Some ideas have been taken up and become mainstream, others have not. However, without a group of New Zealanders working hard to evaluate our history, to analyse current events and to consider future trends, our nation could not have progressed to where it is today. This Think Piece recognises their achievements, in the hope that they will continue to support and inspire New Zealanders now and in the future. It is, after all, our watch, and therefore our time to think hard and solve complex problems. The alternative is to simply pass on our problems to future generations. Such an approach is not ethically acceptable, and it is not in keeping with the spirit of generosity and sacrifice of those who have gone before us. This Think Piece therefore argues that New Zealand is no longer new, and as such, it is time we grew up – which, as any adult will remember, can be a painful process.

Introduction

Our ancestors worked, and often fought, both nationally and internationally for our rights as a people and our place in the world. They understood that 'New Zealand was new', so their focus was on developing a platform on which to build a nation. The pursuit of a robust nation was seldom pursued by government alone, but was often led, cajoled and applauded by individuals and organisations who felt a genuine desire to leave New Zealand in a better position than they had found it. In order to develop foresight into New Zealand's future, it is critical to learn the lessons of our past.

The Big Picture

The very big picture starts with the beginnings of our planet, over 4.5 billion years ago. Only in the last 200,000 years (approximately 0.004% of time to date) have humans lived on the planet. Of this time, humans have only been in New Zealand since Polynesians arrived in about the 13th century,¹ less than 1,000 years ago. So although the land itself has been here for many millions of years, the late arrival of humans means New Zealand is often considered young by world standards. As a nation state, however, we are relatively old, and certainly no longer in our infancy. The birth of our nation-state can be marked by one or more of the six stages listed below:

- i. The 1830s saw the selection of the United Tribes Flag by 25 chiefs from the northern part of New Zealand (see Figure 1), and the signing of a 'Declaration of the Independence of New Zealand' in 1835.
- ii. 1840 saw the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, which brought with it the adoption of the Union Jack as the official flag of New Zealand.
- iii. 1852 saw the British Government passing the New Zealand Constitution Act.
- iv. 1867 saw Māori adult males winning universal suffrage;² in 1879 the vote was extended to all adult males,³ and in 1893 it was extended to all adult women.⁴
- v. By the 1900s it was generally agreed that New Zealand needed to be seen as a unique country. In response, a new flag was chosen, and approved under the New Zealand Ensign Act 1902; to date this flag remains unchanged. Interestingly, it is possible to see how the United Tribes Flag and the 1840 Union Jack led to the design of the Signalling Flag of 1899 (see Figure 2), which is only a small step away from the flag we have today.
- vi. 1907 saw New Zealand become a Dominion.⁵

These six steps, in effect, encompass the seventy-odd years of New Zealand's development into a nation-state, and consequently quantify the era of the nation's birth.

When New Zealand was 'New'

As if to celebrate our birth and affirm our status as a newly born nation, the New Zealand government held a design competition to develop a coat of arms, which would become the official symbol of New Zealand.



Figure 1 United Tribes Flag 1834⁶ Figure 2 Signalling Flag 1899⁷

The winning entry, conferred in 1911, remains largely unaltered today. The initial coat of arms was granted by King George V on 26 August 1911, and the current version was granted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956 (see Figure 3).

The central shield has remained unchanged since 1911. The first quarter of the shield contains four stars, representing the Southern Cross constellation (as depicted on New Zealand's flag); the second quarter denotes a golden fleece, representing the farming industry; the third contains a wheat sheaf, representing agriculture; and the fourth depicts two hammers, representing mining and industry. In the middle is a vertical strip with three ships, representing sea trade and the immigrant nature of all New Zealanders. Minor changes to the coat of arms were made in 1956 – the lion at the top became a crown; the wording on the scroll at the shield's base was changed from 'Onward' to 'New Zealand'; and the colour of the female character's hair was changed – but the essence of what it was saying about New Zealand did not change. While our country's economy continues to be based upon farming, agriculture, mining and a population that trades and ventures globally, today it is also so much more. Do these symbols still portray an accurate representation of contemporary New Zealand?

What is significant about the era of New Zealand's birth is that all the changes that took place between 1834 and 1907 were brought about by strong leadership from within the country, and although these changes were at times painful, they occurred over a relatively short period of time and put New Zealand in a position where it was able to face the challenges of the twentieth century. It is significant that very little of importance in our nation's structure has changed in the last hundred years.

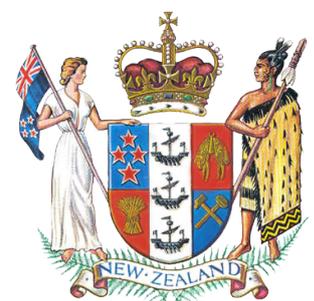


Figure 3 The New Zealand coat of arms⁸

When New Zealand Embraced Written History

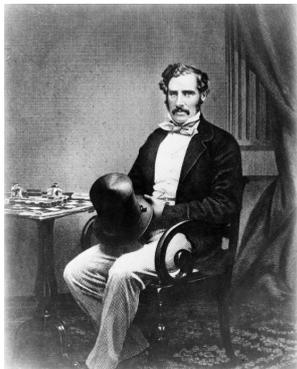
There is further evidence that New Zealand is no longer new on the shelves of our country's many libraries. Three gentlemen – Sir George Grey, Thomas Hocken and Alexander Turnbull, known as the pre-eminent New Zealand trinity of effective promoters of New Zealand history⁹ (see Figure 4) – worked hard to make our past accessible to future generations. All three donated collections to the people of this country, with Turnbull specifically gifting his collection 'as the nucleus of a New Zealand National Collection'.¹⁰ Turnbull insisted on keeping his collection in one place, emphasising that the value of a collection goes beyond that of the individual books, and that the essence of a nation might be captured within the pages of such a collection.

Without the foresight of these three collectors, who purchased, crafted and then gifted their collections to the public, the era of New Zealand's birth and progression through adolescence may have been left largely unrecorded.

Now That We are No Longer 'New'

Are our official emblems – our flag, our national anthems and our coat of arms – going to bind us together, steer us in the same direction and represent us effectively on the global stage? Are our libraries and museums able to set the scene for a population that knows its history, feels secure in its identity and is well-equipped to face its future? If we are no longer 'new', who and what are we, and what do we want to be?

Figure 4 The trinity of promoters of New Zealand history



Sir George Grey 1812–1898

Soldier, explorer, colonial governor, premier, scholar

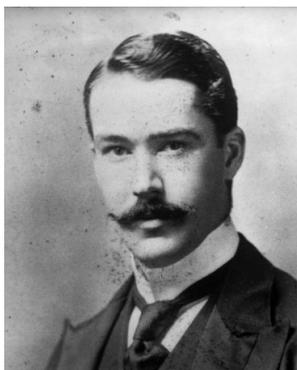
Grey, in addition to being Premier of New Zealand, was an enthusiastic naturalist and collector of manuscripts, incunabula and other rare books.¹¹ He presented two colonial libraries with substantial collections – donating approximately 5200 books to the Public Library in Capetown¹² and 15,000 books to the Auckland Public Library.



Thomas Hocken 1836–1910

Doctor, historian, collector, bibliographer

Hocken's major contribution was his collection of 4,000 books, pamphlets, newspapers, manuscripts, maps, paintings and photographs, from which the Hocken Library was established.¹³ This collection, which was opened to the public in 1910, focused on New Zealand and Pacific material, with a significant collection on the early European voyages, missionaries and the settlement of Otago.



Alexander Turnbull 1868–1918

Merchant, bibliophile, collector

Turnbull's library consisted of some 55,000 volumes of books, pamphlets, periodicals and newspapers, and thousands of maps, paintings, drawings, prints and manuscripts.¹⁴ His mantra for collections: 'Anything whatever relating to this Colony, on its history, flora, fauna, geology & inhabitants, will be fish for my net, from as early a date as possible until now.'¹⁵

Maybe there will be a time when we are no longer able to position our nation as a charming and endearing people at the bottom of the planet. Maybe we are no longer the child able to rely on a young and bountiful mother – the resource rich land of New Zealand – to be our salvation. Perhaps it is timely for New Zealanders to drop the concept of 'new' and endeavour to think more wisely. In other words, perhaps it is time for New Zealand to grow up and consider what a mature New Zealand could look and feel like.

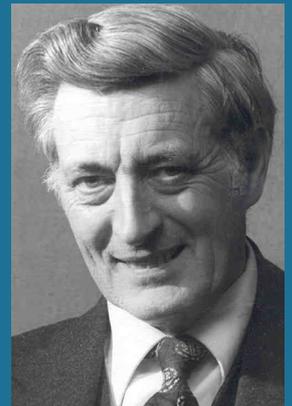
One New Zealander who worked hard to reflect on New Zealand's long-term future was Professor James Duncan – the Chair of the Commission for the Future and founder of the New Zealand Futures Trust. As Professor Duncan wrote in 1984, 'acceptance of a common vision for the future ultimately depends on mutual understanding and tolerance'.¹⁶ New Zealanders must keep talking, listening, thinking and reflecting, with the aim of creating a common vision for a mature nation.

In light of this discussion, it is timely to question whether our country's symbols are in need of a complete makeover. Is it time to consider a new flag, a new coat of arms, and possibly even a change of name (since 'New' Zealand is no longer appropriate)?¹⁷ The symbols discussed are a visual representation of New Zealand's constitutional heart and as such, any constitutional review should include a review of our symbols.

James Duncan 1921–2001

Scientist, educator, futurist

Duncan was a chemistry scholar who was eager to share his knowledge with younger generations. He is described as having a 'very keen, active and enquiring mind'. His enthusiasm for sharing knowledge and research extended to an interest in future studies, and he encouraged public figures to identify and discuss issues that they felt would be important in New Zealand's future.



By 1976 his efforts had contributed to the establishment of the Commission for the Future, a government-funded organisation that looked towards New Zealand's future, of which he became Chair. After the Commission was disbanded in 1982, Duncan was instrumental in establishing the New Zealand Futures Trust (now Futures Thinking Aotearoa) and wrote the book *Options for New Zealand's Future*.

The James Duncan Reference Library

The team at the Sustainable Future Institute have been greatly inspired by James Duncan's vision and methodology, and decided that it was fitting to name the Institute's reference library after a New Zealander who invested so much time and thought in the discussion of our nation's future. On 21 October 2009 the Sustainable Future Institute will officially open the James Duncan Reference Library. This library will be open to the public by appointment, with the intention of providing a space for New Zealanders to browse and reflect on what has been achieved, and to ponder their own visions for a sustainable future.

Find Out More...

This Think Piece was prepared to celebrate the opening of the James Duncan Reference Library. The Think Piece was externally reviewed by Yvonne Curtis of Futures Thinking Aotearoa, who also officially opened the Library on October 21, 2009. For complete references and to find out more, visit our website: www.sustainablefuture.info