

**KAPITI BRANCH
NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF GENEALOGISTS INC.**

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 30 SEPTEMBER 2007

Introduction

I have pleasure in presenting the Annual Report for the year ending 30 September 2007.

The Branch remains one of the largest in the country with a membership of 222. Our membership breakdown is as follows, (comparative yearly figures in parenthesis).

	<u>2006/2007</u>	<u>2005/2006</u>	<u>2004/2005</u>
Branch only	130	(118)	(76)
NZSG	92	(103)	(107)
Total	222	221	183

The NZSG proportion of our total Branch Membership is on the decline, down to 41% for 06/07, as against 47% and 58% in the two preceding years. In the main though, this is more as a result of healthy growth in “Branch Only” Membership rather than a serious collapse in NZSG Membership. The NZSG membership rolls for the Kapiti Branch area reveal that we have 140 NZSG Members in our midst, from which it can be deduced that 48 of them (34%) choose not to belong to our Branch. Amongst the decline in NZSG numbers can be seen the names of several senior and experienced Branch Members who are classified as Resigned/Unpaid/Lapsed.

It is something of an under-statement though to have to say that with now almost 60% of our members not belonging to NZSG and therefore not eligible to serve on the Committee, an undue strain is being placed upon the other 40%. who are left to run the show. The issue of allegiance to one group or another is a matter of personal choice. This leaves us wondering once again whether our future lies with servicing our membership as an independent Group rather than a Branch of NZSG. We are not alone among branches who are seriously considering options. This matter is raised again in a later section of this report.

As in previous years we have continued to provide a programme of activities across a wide spectrum which we hope captures the diverse interests of such a large group. We know not everyone wants to attend Branch sessions, or read the newsletter, or come on outings to centres of interest, or even use our research facilities. Indeed, as the above figures and comments show, members have different allegiances depending on their perspectives and interests. Modern lifestyles seem to be extraordinarily complex and busy, but hopefully there has been something in the programme that has appealed to each of you.

The 2006-2007 Committee was not at full strength and consequently keeping the flow going was not always easy. This will have to improve, otherwise we have little option but to drastically curtail activities to little more than monthly meetings.

Programme of Activities

A full range of activities was offered including the monthly meeting at our well established venue, the Kapiti Community Centre. Attendances at these monthly meetings have fallen off as the year progressed and whether this is because of poor weather, information overload or perhaps not hitting the spot is difficult to determine. Programme content was alternated between sessions at which we invited a guest speaker, to informal research sessions focussing on geographical regions.

We again ran a number of special help sessions on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings at the Library during the winter months and there was steady support. These supplemented our regular weekly Wednesday morning sessions. Numbers going on trips to various centres of family history excellence were only modest and a visit to Totara Park Family History Centre was cancelled through lack of response. A trip to Alexander Turnbull/National Library is planned for late October.

On the more formal education front we have continued to import NZSG Education Courses. A very successful Scottish Course was held again in September with 38 registrants and with support from the Wellington Scottish Special Interest Group. A proposed Starters Course in August had to be postponed until November due to the last minute unavailability of the tutor.

The magazine round robin continues to receive good support. With the cessation of publication of "Irish Roots", the magazine "Ancestors", published by National Archives (UK), has been added to those available for circulation – "Family Tree Magazine" (UK) and "Australian Family Tree Connections".

Attendance at main monthly meetings averaged out at 45, which is about 10% down on the previous year, which in turn was about 10% down on the year before that. At the time of publishing COMSIG figures were not available but in each of the preceding years, averaged about 20 per meeting, and we have no reason to believe that they would be significantly different for the 06/07 year.

Requests to members for more feedback on what we should be offering and the format of activities largely fall on deaf ears, so the Committee has to make what are hopefully intelligent choices.

In addition to activities for members, we also put considerable effort into bringing the fun and challenge of family history research to the wider public audience.

Research facilities

Our arrangements with the KCDC Libraries continue to be highly satisfactory. A new Libraries Manager and Information Librarian, who strongly support family history research, have enhanced this relationship. In addition to housing our research collection, we get frequent access to display space to advertise events. Management have also allowed us access to the KCDC broadband facility which allows us to go online at research sessions. The public also have access to Ancestry.com funded by the Library on computers at all three district locations and we have been active in encouraging our members to 'use it or lose it'.

Library management are also assisting us put together a major grant application for a copy of the NZ Gazette Archive with the support of Kapiti & Otaki Branches of NZSG and Te Wananga-o-Rauwaka of Otaki. If successful, access to this huge database will be available across the local library network.

The book collection continues to be catalogued by library staff, albeit slowly because of other commitments and we are looking at ways to assist with this process. We have continued to add items to the collection of microfiche, CDs and books, not as much as we would have liked with pressure on our financial means and a decline in grants from Community Trusts. Only one application for funding was approved, \$1290 from Pub Charity to replace an old PC and upgrade of software for the 2nd PC.

We also purchased 2 additional laptops and a small Epson inkjet portable printer from our own funds during the year, the laptops programmed with our CD collection and Internet access for use at research sessions at locations other than the Library. This has been complemented with the purchase of a 4-cable and accessories router which allows multiple broadband connections. Kapiti Community Centre has also allowed us access to their broadband line which means we have rapid access at both our research and meeting sites.

There were 346 “sign-ins” at our Paraparaumu Library collection during the reporting year which, if allowance is made for those who don’t sign-in, would average out at something like one person per day every day of the year. This translates to around 90 individuals signing-in, or 40% of our membership, which in turn means that 60% of our Branch members never once accessed our resource collection in the last twelve months. With the Paraparaumu Library now open 7 days a week, members have plenty of choice for access to our facilities. The Wednesday morning volunteer roster system is working well, but the current number of volunteers listed is down to 10 persons.

In early August, we lost our Librarian with the sudden death of Alison Procter, who joined the Branch shortly after it was formed in 1984 and was actively involved over the years in several Committee portfolios. With the agreement of her family, our research facility at the Paraparaumu Public Library is to be named “The Alison Procter Family History Collection.” Discussions are underway on a suitable memorial format.

Publicity and marketing

The promotion of family history research and Branch activities to the general public has continued to be an important focus. Displays at venues around the district, regular updates provided to media outlets, and promotional fliers, have been a constant activity. Disappointingly the print media have largely ignored our activities for reasons unknown, but probably because they do not recognise us as a community group compared with service clubs and social service organisations, or our news is just not sensational!.

Two major events were held, a 2 day Family History EXPO in March, and a 5 day Find Your Family display at Coastlands Shopping Mall in September. Our EXPO at

the Kapiti Community Centre attracted 18 display participants and 400 people over 2 days. The event was judged a success by all parties. However the numbers attending and door and other sales did not meet expectations and we ran at a loss. A small grant from NZSG (\$450) and profits from subsequent activities have largely made up for this. We prepared an extensive report on EXPO and accepted an invitation by NZSG Council to submit it as a document which could be used by others planning similar events.

We accepted an invitation by Coastlands to participate jointly with Otaki Branch, NZSG and KCDC Libraries in their venture which was an unexpected success. This had the advantage of being at no cost to the Branch other than providing our resources and voluntary expertise. Coastlands management undertook considerable promotion and advertising. Over the 5 days we handled at least 20-30 genuine enquiries each day and helped many people with their family research. Many hundreds browsed the displays and picked up information brochures. Several new memberships and applications for our education courses resulted. Together with sales of goods these contributed welcome income. Coastlands management were also pleased with the outcome and have invited us to help with an expanded activity later next year.

Both events were very dependant on volunteer helpers on the days concerned. The response was tremendous - thank you to those who gave their time.

Special Interest Groups

Three new special interest groups were established during the year. Those with interests in *Australian Research*, the genealogy computer programmes *Family Tree Maker* and *The Master Genealogist*, now have access to periodic informal meetings at a member's home to share experiences and learn more. The informality element has been a key tool. Our thanks to the group Convenors for making their own personal resources available for others to share. Interest has been expressed in setting up a Scottish group and we are looking for a Convenor.

The long established Computer Special Interest Group (COMSIG) has continued to meet monthly. When this previously independent group amalgamated with the Branch some years ago, it was on the understanding that a small informal support group would manage its affairs and appoint a Convenor who would be on the Branch Committee. In practise the Convenor has been on board but with no established support group. For personal reasons the Convenor stepped back recently from virtually having to do all. Some interim support was organised but this will need to become a more permanent arrangement if the group is to continue, at least in the present format. The problem was exacerbated by poor internet connections at the Paraparaumu Library meeting room and that room itself not being particularly user friendly.

There is a view that the wider Branch membership and particularly newer members, are put off by a perception that the group is for computer buffs. We have circulated promotional material to all Branch members on the basis that the group is there to assist in the use of computers for family history research and providing advice on the tools to do this, not a fix-it forum for crashed PCs! The programme has been adjusted for the remainder of 2007 to reinforce this goal. From October we have shifted the venue to our Kapiti Community Centre facility, where we now have access to a

broadband connection and the first meeting held was well attended. The increasing access to digitised records and interactive websites reinforces the important role this group has and especially in helping those members who are uncomfortable using computers. We need feedback particularly from newer members of the Branch as to whether this group can help them. The incoming Committee will need to review the present arrangements and management of the group.

Although not a part of the Branch, we have welcomed the very active Kapiti Legacy Users Group and have helped promote its activities.

Finance

The Branch finances remain at a viable level but with little room to move beyond managing operating costs, with some purchases of smaller items for our research facility. We remain dependent on Community Trust grants for major items, but for the first time for some years we have had several applications declined for additional resources, including another cupboard unit for our growing research collection. Funds for these trusts are diminishing with tightening up of gaming laws and increasingly support seems to favour sporting and social service organisations. In the past few years however we have received \$17,000 from a range of Trusts, so it may well be that the fund managers have decided we have had a fair run on their resources. We will continue to apply when occasion demands.

We have not increased our subscription for several years and remain one of the cheapest branches in the country. An increase in the subscription will be recommended to the Annual General Meeting.

Charities registration and tax issues

New legislation covering charitable and tax free status of sports, community and kindred organisations, comes into force early next year. This will affect the national body and Branches. Currently the national body is applying for registration with the newly set up Charities Commission and has invited Branches to also consider registration, which it can carry out on their behalf once the corporate entity has approval. There are some legal details to be sorted out regarding the status of Branches, which also involve the implications the new legislation has for organisations such as NZSG Inc., which come under the Incorporated Societies Act. Kapiti Branch has joined several other Branches indicating an interest in registration, subject to these legal issues being satisfactorily resolved. While it might be argued that Branch net funds would never go beyond the trigger point to be a tax liability, if we do not have charitable status it might put us at a disadvantage in competing for grants from community and gaming trusts. At the moment whenever we apply to a Community Trust we have to get supporting documentation from the national body, which have an IRD exemption. Obviously there are advantages in being independent. There will also be a need to change the financial year of Branches to meet the requirements of the Commission/IRD, but this is unlikely to happen until 2009.

The initial notification to Branches by the Society management was a PR disaster. It suggested that Branches would no longer be able to have non-members of the Society on their books. There was also considerable debate about the legal issues referred to above. There was a huge outcry of concern up and down the country with special regional and Branch meetings called at which NZSG representatives were present.

Many Branches made submissions to Council. Most felt Branches had become poor cousins of the Society and received little recognition of their role. Branches argued that they were at the forefront of promoting family history interest in their communities and the advantages of belonging to the Society and its Branches. Irrespective of their status, all Branch subscribers put effort into resourcing and helping with family history. While Branches spent considerable effort in encouraging full membership of NZSG, closing off the ability to have a broader membership would force some Branches to wind up and affect their provision of a community service. In response, NZSG officials reasoned that while only 1/3rd of NZSG members belonged to a local Branch, the tail could not wag the dog! However there was concurrence that what Branches did with their non-members was a local matter. The strict audit trail required annually under the new legislation requires that only NZSG members could be recognised as *members* of Branches. Some Branches, ourselves included, have therefore decided to act immediately by distinguishing between those who belong to the NZSG and those who do not. It goes without saying that pressure will continue from the national body for Branches to encourage full membership of the Society. We can live with this. This exercise has again raised the issue, particularly for larger branches, as to whether they would be better off managing their own affairs, with the possibility of an affiliate status with the NZSG.

Conclusion

Another busy and successful year has passed, but it would not have been so without the contribution of a hardy group of Branch supporters. This small core of folk are always willing to help at research sessions, help desks, public displays, library rosters, and at Branch meetings. Similarly for those who have agreed to fill specific portfolios as Appointed Officers and do their jobs without having to be involved in Committee work. To name each of these supporters runs the risk of missing someone and causing offence. I hope therefore you will all accept our very sincere thanks for your continuing help.

My personal thanks also to the team we have on the Committee. It is challenging work but we have a lot of fun and enjoy the challenge of putting the family history package together. Special thanks must go to Trish Mackay, our Publicity and Marketing Officer and Barry Thomson our Newsletter Editor, Computer whiz and Webmaster, who are stepping down. They have key roles and will be difficult to replace, although Barry has indicated he can continue to provide expertise as an Appointed Officer.

To do a proper job and spread the workload, the Committee should ideally be a minimum of 10. With a quorum of 6 and invariably occasions when not all can attend every meeting, unless we get some new blood we run the risk of having to severely curtail our activities. I put it to the membership of 200 plus that we must be able to do better than this. It would be a tragedy if our efforts of the last few years to develop a very active and large Branch ran the risk of recession because there seems a reluctance to give something back.

Clive Palmer
Convenor