

REPORT ON J.H. SORENSEN PAPERS HELD BY DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION, CENTRAL REGIONAL OFFICE, WELLINGTON.

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Introduction

This is an appraisal report on the J.H Sorensen papers currently in the custody of the Department of Conservation, Central Regional Office, Wellington.

The Records

The records were created by J.H. Sorensen while part of the War Cabinet venture, code named, 'Cape Expedition', to establish coast watching stations on the Sub-Antarctic islands for security reasons. Sorensen spent over 5 years on Campbell Island initially as part of the expedition (there is a hut on the island named in his honour) and shorter lengths of time on the Auckland and Kermadec Groups.

The 'Cape Expedition' was managed by the Aerodrome Services Branch of the Public Works Department who undertook responsibility for manning the stations, providing the huts and finding suitable sites for them.

The Sorensen records are relatively small in volume and were created by Sorensen in his role as a scientist, largely as a by-product of the expedition, recording the flora and fauna of the islands. Archives New Zealand does hold some records of the expedition, however they relate to the organisation of the expedition and the coast watching activities during the Second World War and not the scientific activity.

When it was established, the Wildlife Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs inherited the records, because of their scientific nature. They were later transferred to the Department of Conservation when it was established and incorporated into their Library.

The records consist of a series of diaries (c 1943-1947), negatives and photographic prints, colour transparencies, glass lanternslides, transcriptions, reports and miscellaneous papers. (See Appendix A, Sorensen diaries: materials now in-hand). The photographic material is referenced throughout the diaries so it is important this material stays together.

Content of the Records

The records are clearly the raw fieldwork data of an eminent scientist. The photographs and lanternslides are of ornithological (largely seabirds), botanical (particularly mega-herbs), and marine mammals (whales, seals, fur seals, Sea Elephants, Sea Lions and Sea Leopards). The diaries are essentially field-book observations on a day-by-day basis of flora and fauna.

Whilst these are very important from a scientific point of view (as they contain valuable information on population and distribution of flora and fauna gathered systematically over a relatively long period of time) even if they were to be published, their appeal is largely scientific.

Many of the photographs and a number of Sorensen's observations were published in his seminal book, 'Wildlife in the Sub-Antarctic' which was published by Whitcombe and Tombs in 1951.

Sorensen's papers are of substantial archival value and as such no destructions are recommended.

A Suitable Repository

Identifying an appropriate repository has been complicated by the fact that the records consist of a mix of public and non public records. The public records document his official activities as a member of the expedition with the remaining records consisting of the research Sorensen documented independently of the expedition. Actually separating the official and non official records is not practical given that there is no clear delineation in the records themselves. An expedition diary for example may record both official activities and Sorensen's "after hours" research on the flora and fauna of the area which is outside of the main objectives of the expedition.

While the mixture of public and non public records is not, on its own, an adequate reason for Archives New Zealand not to accept such a transfer, the fact is that the Alexander Turnbull Library already holds the scientific papers of other eminent scientists, such as those of both Sir Robert Falla, Sir Charles Fleming (and possibly others) who were both on the 'Cape Expedition' with Sorensen. As such these records are more closely aligned with Turnbull holdings as Archive New Zealand's and reinforces an argument in favour of a transfer to Turnbull.

There is also a relevant precedent for such an authorisation. The McIntosh papers were authorised for transfer to the Alexander Turnbull Library in similar circumstances in 1999. McIntosh was a senior diplomat with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade for a number of years with postings in key capitals such as Washington. Like Sorensen, McIntosh's papers were a mix of official and non official documentation which could not be easily delineated. This factor and a wish not to split the collection, were substantial factors in the Chief Archivist authorising transfer to the Alexander Turnbull Library as an approved repository in November 1999.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the above reasons, it is recommended that this material be approved for transfer to the Alexander Turnbull Library under Section 26 (2) (b) of the Public Records Act.