"The Books Are The Same As You See In London Shops": Booksellers in Colonial Wellington and Their Imperial Ties, ca. 1840–1890

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“A well-conducted colonist is of necessity a reading man: debarred from the more frivolous amusements of the mother country, he has no resource but in books, or the debasing influence of the tavern—the "bane and antidote" of colony life. ... In no colony is literature more appreciated than in New Zealand: as might be expected, from the very superior class of men who have migrated to our favourite colony.”

This statement, which was published in the New Zealand Journal in 1844, carries a number of interesting observations. Firstly, life in the colonies was characterised by monotony, and there were hardly any forms of entertainment and diversion available for the hard-working settler apart from alcohol and other frivolities of the tavern. Secondly, the only respectable and preferred alternative was reading, and New Zealanders were known for their preference for books. Thirdly, reading was seen as an expression of class, appreciating literature as a way of belonging to a "superior" class of men. But how did the nineteenth-century New Zealand settler acquire his books and reading material?

This article traces the origins and beginnings of the bookselling trade in the new colony of New Zealand, concentrating on the period between 1840 and 1890. It focuses on bookselling activities in Wellington, New Zealand to illustrate a wider, imperial network of book dissemination. My main objective is to investigate how reading material reached the colony. While my focus is on the organisation of book distribution in the colonies and across the Empire, in particular New Zealand, Australia and Britain, a closer look at the kind of material distributed illustrates that these connections were by no means merely of an economic nature. Rather, it is evident that the British World shared an imperial culture created as much by the exchange of reading material and literature as by other cultural activities.

1 New Zealand Journal, 6 July 1844. This glowing account has to be seen against the background of the New Zealand Journal being a publication of the New Zealand Company, targeting mainly potential new settlers.


3 A thorough and critical examination of the literature on reading in colonial society is beyond the scope of this essay. See, however, on the Victorian reader generally: Richard Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Jonathan Rose, The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); and David Vincent, Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750–
The fields of bookselling and distribution constitute only one aspect of New Zealand's broader book history. Robert Darnton's "communication circuit" offers a possible framework for interpreting and absorbing the mass of information that is available on the history of the book. The circuit differentiates between the roles involved in the "life" of a book; booksellers are one part in his model.6 Similarly Wallace Kirsp, working on the colonial Australian book trade, has stressed the centrality of distribution as a topic for historians of books. He reminds us at the same time that, although a division of the aspects of book culture is convenient for organizing and structuring research, "it should not create artificial and arbitrary barriers."7

Crucial to this article is an understanding of the British Empire as a web of trade, knowledge and migration.6 Networks of contacts, communication and exchange played an important role in creating an imperial culture. Simon Potter has pointed out that these diverse connections bound "core" and "periphery," but also forged links between each of the settler colonies, creating more complex webs of communication than has previously been acknowledged.7 He argues that the press was an important medium of imperial mass communication. Similarly, this article argues that in the period before technical advancements and the telegraph cable, which allowed news to flow around the Empire and to create an imperial culture through more immediate forms of communication, books and literature circulating around the Empire served an equal cause of imperial communication and culture. Settlers often saw reading as one activity to make their life in the outskirts of the Empire as British as possible, regardless of the demanding colonial surroundings. Potter has also convincingly shown that newspapers around the Empire were dependent on each other and economic reasons often resulted in a rather uniform coverage. Similarly, in the first fifty years of settlement, New Zealand's readers relied heavily on the choices made by their British suppliers.


When tracing the activities of colonial booksellers in Wellington, advertisements in newspapers and almanacs prove to be very illuminating, and they are often the main—at times only—source of information available, since only a few trade catalogues, as well as business and private records of people involved in the trade, have been preserved. In combination with trade directories, the later Cyclopedia of New Zealand (1897–1908) and the letters and diaries of settlers, they paint a vivid picture of book supply and bookseller activities in colonial New Zealand.

Literacy and reading were widespread amongst the European settlers in New Zealand and regarded as a cultural activity worth striving for. Most of the “superior class” of settlers, to whom the New Zealand Journal was referring in 1844, brought with them their own private collections of books, but soon felt the desire for new reading matter. However, the first ten to fifteen years of European settlement in New Zealand, which began to be on a larger and systematic scale around 1840, were characterised by sporadic supplies of books and a general shortage of recreational literature, particularly the latest novels. As expressed in letters of early settlers during the 1840s and early 1850s New Zealanders were starved of books. In 1850 a Nelson settler, Samuel Stephens, complained that very few of the new publications ever reached the colony. Geographical distance and the limitations of overseas and local distribution networks were, in part, responsible: “Our distance from England also operates against getting a regular supply of Books and periodicals.” A year later the enterprising Charlotte Godley wrote that a parcel of books had just arrived from England, which was “in answer to my husband’s commission to Charles, begging him to send out any new books worth having, regardless of expense; they are worth twice as much out here.”

In the first decade of European settlement stores specialising solely in books were rare, even in the larger towns. However, this does not mean that there was no reading matter available. If there were no bookseller, stationer, or newspaper office in the community, then the general store would offer a few books for sale.

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8 The few catalogues and records available are mainly relics from the 1840s and 1850s. Kathleen Coleridge has made use of those in a recent article about access to new reading material in the early colonial period. Kathleen Coleridge, “‘New Books, Just Received from London’: Access to New Publications in Colonial Wellington,” in Paradise: New Worlds of Books and Readers, ed. Sydney Shep, special issue, Script & Print 29:1–4 (2005): 57–65.

9 Samuel Stephens wrote in a letter to his sister Anne: “[Lack of books] is one of the deprivations I feel exceedingly. Very few of the new publications ever reach us, and I know only a little about them from the occasional reviews that I meet with.” Samuel Stephens, Nelson, 8–9 September 1850, quoted in Dulcie Gillespie-Needham, “The Colonial and his Books: A Study of Reading in 19th-Century New Zealand” (PhD diss., Victoria University of Wellington, 1971), 98–99.


importantly, existing booksellers soon expanded their services to customers who could not visit their store in town and offered to mail books to those in the country. Wellington was the first town in New Zealand to offer the services of a bookstore along accepted British lines. William Lyon had opened a bookselling business soon after his arrival in February 1840. However, a specialist bookstore was not yet self-sufficient. William Lyon also dealt with "Havannah Cigars, Scotch snuff, French rappee and Cherry brandy," items clearly regarded as complementary to reading, certainly for the "superior classes."13

Other bookselling facilities were set up within a short period of time, even if they did not meet the requirements of all settlers. Wellington was a favourable place for book buyers and passionate readers. Newspaper advertisements show that book auctions frequently took place, whether of new books, consignment orders, or the onselling of effects from migrants returning home. In September 1842 readers of the *New Zealand Colonist & Port Nicholson Advertiser* were informed that "Mr. John Wade, Will Sell by Auction ... at his Stores Te Aro" an "Extensive" range of "Merchandise, Cut Glass, Valuable Books, and Elegant Furniture" etc. (See Figure 1.) There were several companies engaged in auctions: A. Perry advertised "bibles and prayer books" for sale by auction in August 1842; one month later, Edward Catchpool announced "an assortment of elegant Bibles, Prayer Books, Albums &c." along with coffee, tea and "Tortoiseshell Side combs" for sale; the firm Bethune and Hunter auctioned shipments of books and other goods frequently from 1845. During the first two decades of European settlement in New Zealand it was also common for newspaper owners to be involved not only in printing, but also selling books, pamphlets and other printed material, in addition to newspapers. In Wellington the office of the *New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian* also sold stationery and a selection of books.

In the 1850s the book trade in Wellington welcomed a few new actors in the bookselling field. Robert Holt Carpenter expanded the bookbinding business that he had established in 1842. He offered chiefly second-hand but also new books for sale. Although no records of his business activities have survived, he was in

14 For example, "PUBLIC SALE of a LIBRARY" by Mr. Waitt, on 14 November 1849, a catalogue of books, containing 196 items, some of them as unspecific as "15 doz. Pamphlets various" or "1 doz. Pocket Books." Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington: Eph A Library 1849.
15 Then followed a precise list of all goods on sale. *New Zealand Colonist & Port Nicholson Advertiser*, 2 September 1842, 3.
later life able to invest money in rural
land, which suggests that his store
earned him a secure and comfortable
income. Carpenter seems to have been
a rather interesting character, described
as a local identity and "noted for his
eccentricities." He apparently read his
own stock extensively, drawing on his
reading to illustrate political speeches
and, no doubt, pepper his everyday
conversation. His shop was situated in
Molesworth Street, central Wellington,
where it remained until he retired in
the 1880s. By then the shop contained
an extraordinary collection of old books,
many worthless but some rare and valu-
able, many of which he would refuse to
sell. 18

The number of booksellers in Wel-
lington increased consistently from
the 1860s onwards. From 1862 at least
five booksellers advertised yearly in
the almanacs. Increasingly, booksellers' 
advertisements referred to their willing-
ness to supply books to schools and
libraries at reduced prices. 19 This is an

ON MONDAY AND TUESDAY NEXT.

Extensive Sale of Merchandise, Cut Glass,
Valuable Books, and Elegant Furniture.

MR. JOHN WADE,

WILL Sell by Auction, on MONDAY AND
TUESDAY next, the 5th and 6th instant, at his
Stores To Aro, at One o'clock precisely, ex

Catherine,

(For Monday's Sale.)

A large and varied assortment of Merchandise and Goods,
consisting of:

- Deal Boards
- Sherry (imperial) in octavas
- Flour (best colonial)
- Ale in barrets
- Brandy in hogs
- Blankets, large sizes
- Biscuits in hogs
- Ten in half chests
- Flannel Shirts, red and blue
- Shoe
- Germany Frocks (woollen and cotton)
- Pin Jackets
- Velvet Coats
- Pilot Coats
- Scotch Cape
- Sea'x waistcoat
- Jim Crow Hats
- Woollen Stockings

Together with a variety of goods, too numerous to par-
ticularise.

AFTER WHICH,

On Tuesday the 6th instant, the Furniture, Books, Cut
Glass, &c., consisting of:

- Mahogany Tables
- Ditto Book Case
- Chairs, stuffed, cane bottoms
- Sideboards
- Chest of Drawers
- One superior four-post bedstead with mattress
- Cut Glass Decanters
- Ditto ditto Wash
- Ditto ditto Tumblers
- Ditto ditto Champagne
- Ditto ditto sideboard Ornaments

A variety of Kitchen Utensils

A China breakfast Service complete, plates, dishes,
bowls, forks, &c. &c.

A50.

Some superior Paintings and Engravings, beautifully
framed

One superior China Glass, gilt frame
A choice selection of Books, (the owner's private li-
brary) beautifully bound.

AFTER WHICH,

Two superior large Wooded Houses, one well suited for
a private dwelling, containing six rooms, and one
built on purpose for a shop.

Terms.—For the Books and Furniture, &c., Cash;
for the Merchandise, under £20 Cash, £20 to £50, one
month; £40 to £100, one and two months; and above
£50, one, two, and three month's credit, on approved
endorsed acceptances.

Figure 1. Advertisement for an auction conducted
by John Wade, New Zealand Colonist & Port
Nicholson Advertiser, 2 September 1842.
indicator of two factors: more booksellers in Wellington were competing for customers, and these sellers were prepared to arrange favourable trading terms. But the competition they faced was not just local. Many libraries preferred to approach traders in Australia or Britain for their book orders. This may be a reflection on the small stocks held by local booksellers, but more likely indicates that larger discounts were available from overseas. In addition, unlike most New Zealand booksellers, overseas suppliers often stocked second-hand books, and libraries made regular use of this service. One source for libraries wanting to acquire cheap "pre-loved" books were the large circulating libraries in Britain, amongst them Mudie's of London.\textsuperscript{20}

As the population grew the number of books being imported and the number of booksellers increased. Although there are no import records available for New Zealand, according to Alexis Weendon's study of publishing in the Victorian period book exports from the United Kingdom to Australasia increased significantly between the 1840s and the 1880s; the declared value of customs rose from about £20,000 in the 1840s to over £400,000 at the end of the 1880s.\textsuperscript{21} As to the number of booksellers, in the late 1840s two booksellers, Lyon and the office of the New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian, served a population of about 5,000 European settlers. By 1860 this number had increased to at least five stores dealing predominantly with reading matter, supplying about 13,000 Wellington residents. A contemporary account of New Zealand, published in 1880, states that booksellers were well represented.\textsuperscript{22} The directory of the same year lists twelve booksellers in Wellington; in 1883 there were already fifteen stores dealing with books and stationery.\textsuperscript{23}

The late 1880s were also characterised by businesses opening branches in several towns in the country. The firm Whitcombe & Tombs, a forerunner of Whitcoulls, started selling books in Christchurch in 1882. By 1890 there was a store in Dunedin, and in 1894 the company opened another branch on Wellington's Lambton Quay.\textsuperscript{24}


\textsuperscript{22} The "Second-hand Book Sale Department" of Mudie's advertised "cheap parcels of books" of fifty or one hundred volumes, novels or general literature, at a reduced price per parcel; sometimes second-hand books were "newly and strongly rebound." Advertisement in The Directory of Second-hand Booksellers and List of Public Libraries, British and Foreign, ed. James Clegg (Rochdale: James Clegg, 1891), n.p.

The bookselling landscape had dramatically changed by the 1890s. When William Pember Reeves wrote *The Long White Cloud* (1898), he had good reason to state: "Music, reading and flower gardening are the three chief refining pastimes. The number and size of the musical societies is worthy of note. So are the booksellers' shops and free libraries. The books are the same as you see in London shops."

Advertisements by booksellers varied in detail and in the amount of precise information. While the majority of advertisements in the almanacs only alerted readers to "books on offer" or "monthly parcel of books and periodicals," the listings in newspapers were often very specific and could occupy the best part of a single page-long column. For example, in an 1868 advertisement in *The Wellington Independent*, William Lyon listed about 130 different book and periodical titles for sale, which he had just received. The selection of literature did not suggest a particularly colonial or local focus: "Tennyson's Elaine," "The London, a first-class magazine," "Wordworth's Poetical Works" and the "Book of Scotch and English Ballads" as well as "Marmion by Sir Walter Scott" could have been on offer at any English shop at the time and were "bestsellers" at home and abroad. The sole New Zealand-related title in Lyon's listing is a map of the country, for twenty-six shillings.

Often the reputation of a particular series was strong enough to attract book buyers, and bookseller advertisements would only notify readers that a quantity of titles in a certain series were for sale, instead of listing individual titles. The *Parlour Library* (a collection of fiction), the *Bohn Libraries* (mainly non-fiction), *Chamber's* various publications (original and reprinted works), *Murray's Railway Library* (fiction and non-fiction) and *Routledge's New Cheap Series* as well as *Routledge Popular Library* (mainly non-fiction) were familiar to the Victorian reader. These lists of titles and series illustrate the demand in the colony to keep connected to the cultural and intellectual life in Britain and to create a "new" Britain in New Zealand. As Keith Sinclair has pointed out, New Zealanders still called England "Home" and retained a strong emotional and cultural attachment to the "Mother Country," even if they

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25 William Pember Reeves, *The Long White Cloud*, 3rd ed., revised (London: Allen & Unwin, 1924), 370-71. Reeves was an influential intellectual and politician and belonged to a group of colonial activists who were deeply concerned with questions of education and class warfare in liberal and socialist terms. In the 1890s he was appointed Minister of Education and Justice as well as Minister of Labour. From 1896 to 1908 he served very successfully as New Zealand's representative in London, as agent general and from 1905 High Commissioner. He was a prolific public speaker and throughout his life published poetry and short stories as well as non-fiction accounts of New Zealand. His "outstanding" short history of the country, *The Long White Cloud—An edge*, "became the standard, largely unquestioned interpretation of New Zealand history until the 1950s." Keith Sinclair, "William Pember Reeves, 1857–1932," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (updated 22 June 2007) <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>, accessed 10 June 2008.


were New Zealand-born. These connections also found their expression in the demand for British reading material, for books that were read "at Home."

The main sources for book supplies in New Zealand were publishers in Britain or elsewhere in the British Empire. Book production in New Zealand was still relatively sparse and often limited to almanacs or other publications deemed particularly useful in the colony. At times booksellers would explicitly point out the provenance of their stock. William Lyon announced that "orders were received for all new books, Magazines & Reviews, Published in Great Britain and the other Colonies." The consignment trade played an important role, especially in the early years of settlement. Consignments were cases of books selected in Britain to meet the (presumed) requirements of overseas buyers. As Wallace Kirsop has pointed out, these consignments were sent essentially as a speculation for sale by auction, on the spot, and "had a genuine function in periods when and in places where booksellers hardly existed or were poorly organised." The existence of a regular flow of consignments can be verified from newspaper advertisements and from a small number of preserved catalogues.

In Wellington such auctions were held foremost by the company Bethune and Hunter, which dealt with general merchandise of all kinds. The auction lots of books were either sold to individual book buyers or, in later years, to existing retail booksellers. "Thus the offerings could include single copies of many titles or multiples of a relatively restricted selection of recent successes in Britain." The selection of books, however, did not always correspond with the needs and desires of the colonial society. Especially in the first decades of European settlement the packets of the consignment trade often rendered nothing more than an indiscriminate unloading of remainders and cheap series. Later in the 1880s and 1890s London traders dealing with consignments for the colonial readers attached more importance to this market, and their cases of books and accompanying catalogues often included rare books and collectors' items.

Bookselling was a contested market and not confined to local stores or agencies. As Gillespie-Needham has pointed out, "in the days when it was often quicker to

32 It should be noted that the consignment trade embraced everything thought saleable in the colonies and was not restricted to books.
send a letter to another part of New Zealand via Australia it is not surprising to
find Australian booksellers and publishers competing with New Zealanders and
offering books at comparable prices." The majority of competition seems to have
come from Sydney: W. R. Piddington and William Maddock, for instance, placed
advertisements in the New Zealand press in the 1850s and 1860s. There was also
the Melbourne bookseller George Robertson, who tried to expand his business
across the Tasman. As stated in their advertisements, these Australian companies
usually trusted in the services of domestic agents.

In this context it is important to note that Australian and British booksellers
and publishers not only targeted the individual buyer, but also acted as a wholesaler
for New Zealand booksellers. In 1868, Thomas Farmerly & Co., "Booksellers,
Stationers, and proprietors of The Wellington Circulating Library," advised their
customers that orders for books would be promptly executed and "forwarded to
Melbourne by every steamer." In the same year Lyon headed his advertisements
with "New Books Just received, From London Via Panama" and "Per Rangitoto,
from Melbourne." To include this kind of transport information in an advertise-
tment to individual customers indicates also that these places in the Empire, par-
ticularly London and Melbourne, were seen as the hubs of cultural production.
Connection to these centres guaranteed the reader new and fashionable reading
material. Occasionally, however, supplies would reach the country from the United
States of America, or from other areas of Europe, for example France.

British copyright conventions prohibited unauthorised reprints, and publishers
in the British colonies usually respected these prohibitions. However, the United

35 Ibid., 105. Until the 1880s, the journey from Dunedin in the South to Auckland in the North
took fifteen days by ship and on land, a trip from Wellington to Auckland at least three days. In
comparison, ships from Melbourne would have reached the colony within an average of five to seven
days. Correspondence with Gavin McLean, author of A Century of Shipping in New Zealand: The
Twentieth Century (Wellington: Gramham House, 2000). See also The New Zealand Historical Atlas,
ed. Malcolm McKinnon (Auckland: Bateman in association with Historical Branch, Department of
Internal Affairs, 1997), 52.
36 See Piddington’s advertisement in The New Zealander, 16 April 1851, 1; and Maddock’s advertise-
ment in The Wellington Independent, 9 June 1865, 6.
37 See Robertson’s advertisement in the New Zealand Spectator and Cook’s Strait Guardian, 1 September
1860, n.p. Wallace Kirsop has extensively researched George Robertson and his business activities; see
for example “Bookselling and Publishing in the Nineteenth Century,” in The Book in Australasia:
Essays Towards a Cultural and Social History, ed. D. H. Borchardt and Wallace Kirsop (Melbourne:
Australian Reference Publications in association with the Centre for Bibliographical and Textual
Studies, Monash University, 1988), 16–42.
38 The Wellington Almanack, Directory, Calendar and Diary for the Year 1868 (Wellington: Thomas
McKenzie, 1868), n.p.
40 Gillespie-Needham refers to one advertisement in the New Zealand Herald, 30 March 1868, for
41 On copyright regulations see James J. Barnes, Free Trade in Books: A Study of the London Book Trade:
since 1800 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) and Simon Nowell-Smith, International Copyright Law
States publishing industry of the nineteenth century often disregarded copyright laws and systematically pirated British copyright works. As Brian Hubber shows, large quantities of reprints were exported, very often to traditional British markets in Canada and the West Indies; and some even found their way into the Pacific region. In 1880 the agent of the Australian bookseller George Robertson encountered the open sale of American piracies. A bookseller in Christchurch "was selling a 64-page quarto edition" (a small format in flexible covers similar to paperbacks nowadays) "of Mrs. Henry Wood's popular East Lynne for 1s 6d, a price which was very much cheaper than that of the copyright English edition which sold for 7s 6d."42 The agent also observed that the said bookseller had in stock about three hundred copies of it and that American reprints were "scattered broadcast in the hands of travellers by railway from Christchurch to Dunedin."43

Without doubt, economic profit was one of the chief incentives in maintaining imperial networks. As an English publisher put it in 1879, the "very important book-buying colonies of Australasia, ... which are by far the largest consumers of English books," had to be protected from the competition of the American reprints. In other words, American reprints were posing a considerable economic threat to British publishers and subverting the control of copyright and distribution which the British wished to maintain in their own colonies. The consequence for booksellers and book buyers in New Zealand was that British publishers supplied books on exceptionally liberal terms, giving extra length of credit so that books could be offered in New Zealand at British retail prices.44 In addition publishers were encouraged to allow higher discounts, particularly to colonial wholesalers, to make up for higher transport costs.45

It has to be stressed that, as the century progressed, interactions and influences were not solely a one-way flow from London to the Antipodes. The influence that colonial booksellers had on British publishers becomes evident in the case of "Colonial Editions," cheap editions and reprints issued for the colonial market only. Australian and New Zealand traders suggested titles for inclusion in the series of colonial paperbacks and hardbacks. They also kept the colonial edition alive until "well after it had fulfilled any useful purpose for any British interest."46 In 1890, when the agent of a British publishing firm visited booksellers in New Zealand, he encountered concrete expectations for cheap literature for the colonies, which would be better in size, price and appearance than the existing editions.47

43 Ibid., 21.
44 Ibid., 20.
47 Hallam Murray, Diary, 14 and 26 November 1890, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington: Micro-MS-0836.
The notion of the Empire as being a web of communication and a circuit of travelling information, objects and people manifests itself also when looking closer at the life stories of people involved. The booksellers of early colonial Wellington received their training and education in England or Scotland and brought with them the principles and practices of the trade. For example, William Lyon was brought up in the bookselling trade and already ran his own business in Hamilton, near Glasgow. Robert Holt Carpenter was trained as a bookbinder, presumably in London, before he emigrated to New Zealand. The key personnel in the bookselling market thus brought with them connections to colleagues in the centres of the book world of Britain. In addition, agents of British publishing firms were familiar visitors to colonial bookstores; on his tour through the Empire, the agent Hallam Murray, of the famous Murray publishing empire, was told by a Dunedin seller "that Macmillan, Routledge and many of the principal publishers have travellers in the Colonies who are frequently coming round to them and do a good deal of business in taking large orders."48 At the same time, colonial booksellers or importers sent representatives over to London to negotiate with trading partners and to select books, which would be on display the following season in the book stores of Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch or Dunedin.

Booksellers, publishers and printers enjoyed a high social standing, and their professions secured them a respectable reputation. They were connected to the public through their business activities, but often were also politically active. We find "bookmen" on major Committees, as representatives on councils and as elected mayors. For example, when the first election was held for Wellington mayor in 1842, George Hunter, of the auction house Bethune and Hunter, won a narrow victory, followed closely by William Lyon.49 In addition to his bookselling business, Lyon was one of the founding fathers of the Mechanics's Institute in Wellington, and was its Vice-President for many years.50 Robert H. Carpenter represented Wellington

48 Ibid., entry for 27 November 1890.
49 George Hunter secured 273 of the 4,000 votes, William Lyon received 237. *New Zealand Colonist & Port Nicholson Advertiser*, 4 October 1842, 2. There were fifty-nine candidates competing for the position of Mayor.
50 *The Wellington and Southern Province Almanack for the Year 1851* (Wellington: Published at the Office of the "Wellington Independent" and sold by William Lyon, 1851), 49; *The Wellington Almanack for the Year 1853* (Wellington: Office of the "New Zealand Spectator," 1853), 43; *The Canterbury and Wellington Almanack for the Year 1853* (Wellington: Office of the "New Zealand Spectator," 1853), 112. Mechanics's Institutes were initially set up for the working classes as a means of self-improvement and adult education in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Alttick by 1850 there were more than seven hundred such institutions in Great Britain, and their impressive libraries contained almost 700,000 volumes. However, as the century progressed the institutes lost their appeal to the lower classes, mainly because the organisation was often initiated by, and dependent on, the upper classes, and their ambitious study and lecture programmes did not match the reality of the hard-working labourer. The Wellington Athenaeum & Mechanics's Institute was originally founded in 1841. It lasted only until 1844, but was revived in 1849. As with many institutes in Britain and other parts of the Empire, the library of the Wellington Athenaeum & Mechanics's Institute formed the base for the public library.
City in the Provincial Council 1856–61 and 1864–65 and was a member of both the town board and the borough council 1867–71.51

Perhaps it is not surprising that the booktrade seems—initially—to have been a purely male sphere. From the 1870s onwards, however, female booksellers were recorded in the almanacs. In The Wellington Almanack, Directory, Calendar and Diary for the Year 1870 one can find an advertisement for Mrs. Old Smith’s “Cheap Miscellaneous Store” at Thorndon Flat, which announced “Books bought, sold, and lent to read.”52 (See Figure 2.) In 1873 a Miss H. Williams was advertising, and from 1880 Mrs. Baillie made her “Te Aro Book and Stationery Depot” in Cuba Street public.53 Still, women played a marginal role in bookselling. As elsewhere in the British World, men dominated the book trade, particularly on the side of dissemination. However, this is not necessarily an expression of a sharply divided public-male and private-female world. Women did run businesses at the time. Probably the best-known example in New Zealand is Mary Taylor, Charlotte Brontë’s friend, who owned a general store in Wellington’s Cuba Street.54

In the first years of European settlement in New Zealand the supply of books and literature, particularly new releases, was sporadic and often did not satisfy the needs and desires of readers. Settlers frequently complained about the lack of books on offer, and requested reading material in letters sent to Britain. The remoteness and geographical isolation of the country can be seen as one reason for the short supply of books. Another was the small European population in the early 1840s, whose demand and purchasing power was not yet strong enough to influence British book traders. However, book sales did occur from the early 1840s onwards, and with


52 The Wellington Almanack, Directory, Calendar and Diary for the Year 1870, 71.


increased immigration the number of booksellers rose consistently. Wellington was an especially favourable place for book buyers, and William Lyon's store was the first of its kind in the country. He also dealt with stationery and tobacco, a common undertaking to secure a sufficient income. Commonly books were sold in general stores and so available even in remote parts of the country.

New Zealand's book market was closely connected with the "Mother Country" and with other parts of the British Empire, particularly Australia. Distribution networks around the British World included New Zealand, and catalogues circulated around the Empire as a result. The majority of books on offer were published in Britain, and a significant quantity went through the hands of Australian wholesalers. It has been stressed that Australian and British booksellers and publishers targeted not only retailers, but also the individual reader. At the same time colonial booksellers came to have considerable influence on publishers at "Home" in London. They received better trading conditions and higher discounts than their metropolitan counterparts and influenced the selection of titles in the colonial editions. Ultimately, what was available in the bookshops in Wellington was not different from the stock of British shops. The literature disseminated in the colony thus contributed to the creation of an imperial culture, a shared British culture, which was not purely initiated by the metropolis, but represented an active expression of belonging and reciprocity on the part of the colonies.

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