

JOHANNES CARL ANDERSEN, 1873–1962

The long life of Johannes Andersen is eloquent of the achievement of industry, ability and a wide-ranging mind. Although he knew of no relationship to another Hans Andersen, there was an undeniable resemblance of features. He was born in Denmark in 1873, and came to New Zealand in early childhood. From 1887–1915 he was in the Lands and Survey Department, Christchurch, whence he transferred to the General Assembly Library for three years. Upon the bequest to the nation of Alexander Turnbull's Library in 1918, he was appointed Librarian, which post he held till his retirement in 1937.

His many qualities and activities have been described elsewhere, but here it is of interest to review his work in the library.

As a librarian he was devoted, even jealous, in the care of his books, and he set the Library upon its feet as a public research centre, performing wonders of cataloguing and service with a minimum staff. The Library grew appreciably in strength and richness under his hand, and in appraising its resources today one cannot always be sure whether the credit for certain acquisitions lies with Alexander Turnbull or Johannes Andersen. But many a student in the 1920's and 1930's acknowledged the help he had received from this knowledgeable Turnbull Librarian.

One example of his attitude to his work is illuminating. An opportunity occurred to secure a set of Gould's "Birds of Australia" at £250, a huge sum in the 1920's, but the Department of Internal Affairs, less interested in the Library then than it later became, would not approve the expenditure. Mr. Andersen concluded the purchase, insisting that it was his duty to ensure that such a work was available in some public library in the country. Reluctantly payment was made. Time has proved its value to scientists, while its monetary worth has nearly quadrupled.

The story of the Kinsey Collection shows him in yet another light. For many years the close friendship with Sir Joseph Kinsey continued, with occasional visits and frequent correspondence. When Sir Joseph died, Lady Kinsey sold the collection, valued at £4,000 to the Turnbull for the price of the death duty, £1,400. It owed much, in its development, to the guidance of Johannes Andersen, and supplemented most valuably the resources of the Turnbull.