7.12.1966

Dear Mr. McRobie,

I read with interest and admiration your thesis "An Administrative History of the Otago Museum." It well deserves the grading the arbitrators awarded it. It is the basis of what I hope will, in not distant future, be "The History of Otago Museum. By A.D. McRobie." You are asked for constructive suggestions, and I give some that come into my head.

But most of the best suggestions would arise out of verbal discussions, and you will find most of them will be made by people much younger than I am. All the same, long experience has its place, too. When I received my first official museum appointment in 1919 I made a special trip to Auckland to meet T. H. Glaseman, in my opinion the most notable museum man New Zealand has ever had, or Australia, for that matter. He greeted me with surprise and then advised that the first essential for a museum man was to build up the collections; the second "to delegate to your counsel the requirements of finance."
Money talks to money.

As regards your classes, I think you ought to state clearly that our taking over the Otago Museum building by the University Council, who thus entirely avoided the erection of a Biology block, should have paid rent to the Museum Committee, at least more than fifty years later not a penny was paid. The University Council should have paid half the salary of the taxidermist, at least half of whose time and ability went to the handling of dogfish, rabbits, frogs and the rest of the wild fowl required for dissection by university classes. Something approaching half the time of the janitor was likewise taken up by cleaning classroom floors, approaches, windows, and similar duties. It was only at the end of Rankam's time that, due to pressure by the Museum committee, the obligations of the University were slowly and grudgingly admitted. By the way, if Mr. Salterton (p. 117) is here stated in error to be the University's solicitor, he was the honorary solicitor of the Royal Society Otago Branch. I believe the statement about income from endowments had steadily fallen. I think that the attitude of Wallace, University Professor, at the time of F. Kell's campaign for a new wing, should have been clearly stated. When I begged for a University grant, Wallace replied that the first charge on any funds was to collect what £14 20 0 accumulated debt due to the University! And it was!!! Actually the University gave to F. K. £4 20 0 (a book debt) and demanded the balance, which he, W. C., yielded. — But there is much else that might be discussed.

Sincerely, F. D. Skinner.