

No. 1 B.D., Saddle Hill,



THE SECRETARY
OTAGO MUSEUM TRUST BOARD
P.O. BOX 56
DUNEDIN

Private.

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 A1 grading the arbitrators awarded it. It is the basis of what I hope will, in the not distant future, be "The History of Otago Museum. By A. D. McRobie".

You 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 J. F. Cheeseman, 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 council the requirements of finance."

"Money talks to money."

All regards your thesis, I think you ought to state clearly that on taking over the Otago Museum building the University Council, who thus entirely evaded the erection of a Biology block, should have paid rent to the Museum Committee. Until 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 Bonham's time that, due to pressure by the Museum Committee, the obligations of the University were slowly and grudgingly admitted. [By the way, J. Mc. Paterson (p. 107) is there stated in error to be the University's solicitor: he was the honorary solicitor of the Royal Society, Otago Branch.] In the intervening time income from endowments had steadily fallen. — I think that the attitude of Wallace, University Treasurer, at the time of Billie Fiel's campaign for a new wing, should have been clearly stated. When W. F. begged for a University grant Wallace replied that the first charge on any funds W. F. might collect would be the £1420 accumulated debit due to the University! And it was!!! Actually the University gave W. F. £1000 balance, which W. F. yielded. — But there is much else that might be discussed.

Sincerely
J. D. Skinner.