

Daily lives create records

Our daily lives create government records, Archives New Zealand chief executive Dianne Macaskill said in her keynote speech at the opening of the New Zealand Society of Genealogists conference in Wellington on Friday 1 June.

“National identity is one of three government themes and knowing who we are as individuals and who our ancestors are contributes to our individual and collective sense of identity,” she said.

“Our daily lives intersect with government record keeping in many ways. We are born/ or arrive as a new immigrant, we enrol at school, some of us marry or have a civil union, we may join the public service, take out a patent for something we have invented, fight in a war, make a will, perhaps own land, be issued with a passport, and all of us one day will die.”

“All of these events generate kilometres of government records each year. Archives New Zealand as the government record keeper has the challenging role of identifying those records that have value forever. Our archivists make decisions now about what will be of value in the future.”

“Some of their past decisions have been immensely valuable in providing us with a treasure trove of records for research purposes.”

“The primary reason for creating a record may not necessarily be the purpose for which the archives are researched at a later date,” she said.

“For example, records created by the former Social Security Department as a record of arrivals in New Zealand, were not created as an invaluable research tool, but as a record of when immigrants arrived in New Zealand and their respective ages so that officials could assess the eligibility of these immigrant when it came to applying for the Old Age Pension.

“People’s occupations also were recorded for work-related reasons. For example, midwives were registered to show they were qualified to deliver babies and barmaids were registered because they were working in an occupation where women needed to be protected.”

Archives New Zealand staff will present papers over the weekend, in line with the conference theme – Land, Law and Literature.

Over 400 genealogists and researchers are attending the society’s annual conference held at Wellington Girls College on Queen’s Birthday Weekend.

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For further information on Archives New Zealand’s involvement in the conference contact Christine Seymour, Communications Manager phone 04 894 6086