

E G Jacoby: A Brief Historiography of New Zealand Demography

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Dr "Peter" Jacoby can legitimately be seen as the "founding father" of modern New Zealand demography. It was for this reason that the Population Association of New Zealand, with his widow's permission, have used his name for its student prize. Parenthetically, it can be noted here that the Goethe Society independently set up a Jacoby Prize -- I only learnt about this a year or so ago. In sum then, two professional bodies have recognised the contribution of Dr Jacoby to New Zealand Scholarship. Beyond this, representatives of the state library in the Landt where he had studied -- Schelswig -- came to New Zealand to collect the papers of this notable "native son" for their archives.

There might have been other contenders. One could cite a number of the chapters in New Zealand's first "history" (*The Story of New Zealand*, 2 vols) by the Victorian polymath Dr A S Thomson (he also wrote on "The Customs and Diseases of New Zealanders", *British and Foreign Medical-Chirurgical Review* 1854, and may have been the Anonymous writing in the *Edinburgh Review* 1850); or the fascinating paper by Dr Newman "Is New Zealand a Healthy Country?" (*Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute*, later *The Royal Society of New Zealand*). A strong candidate would be the great medical practitioner and anthropologist, Dr Te Rangihiroa (Sir Peter Buck) who wrote New Zealand's first piece of modern epidemiology ("The Smallpox Epidemic Amongst Maoris in the Northern District", *Australian Medical Congress*, published 1914), whose "Coming of the Maori" has much of demographic interest, and who gave us the first attempt to measure intermarriage. His contribution to social science is

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marked by the Te Rangihiroa Prize of the Royal Society of New Zealand. And of course statisticians such as E P Neale, who in the inter-war years evaluated the quality of official statistics, von Dadelszen (a remarkable Registrar General late in the 19th Century, *New Zealand Dictionary of National Biography*) should not be ignored.

But it is the singular contribution of Jacoby that dictates that he must be accorded first place. He arrived as a refugee fleeing Hitler's Germany, and was drafted into the Education Department, working most of his career in the old "Wooden" building that now houses Victoria University's Law School. These were exciting days for education in New Zealand when the great Dr Beeby, who was later to play a major role in UNESCO, launched innovative programmes running from the "playway to education", that so incensed conservatives of the day, to special projects for the then Pacific Island Territories, the template for which was exported to UNESCO for newly independent countries. He gathered around him intellectually distinguished New Zealanders to make the department more a "think tank" than a classical bureaucracy.

Peter Jacoby's particular contribution to this think tank was his work on school projections. He was so successful with this methodology that UNESCO published it and distributed it worldwide as a model. In fact, one year he was too accurate, forecasting correctly down to the last digit and making it into Jack Ripley's internationally syndicated "Believe it or Not" newspaper column. Unfortunately, after his retirement the memory bank of the rigour the department had pursued through him seems to have been lost, and by the late 1970s/early 1980s projections that were wildly wrong were published using inappropriate mathematical techniques, that sparked an agonised response by Nick Pole and me in the *New Zealand Review of Educational Studies* (1984). A salutary lesson is that it was the bad projections that were the bases for policies (radically cutting Teachers' College intakes to cater for a projected intake of about only 15,000 first year primary pupils by 1990), not forecasts that followed Jacoby's methods.

As a side-product, Jacoby became interested in the fertility behaviour of New Zealand Pakeha birth cohorts, who would produce the children who would become the primary school entrants. Making a pilgrimage to Princeton in the early 1950s, he worked alongside people like Ansley Coale. This resulted in a major paper published in *Population Studies* (UK) (1956) -- one of the more fundamental pieces of research on cohort trends in a period

in which these analyses were only getting underway. In a sense, therefore, we can see this New Zealander as a contributor to pioneer research in what was to be a very important development for demography as a field. A companion paper published in the *Economic Record* drew attention to New Zealand's longstanding Pakeha patterns of ex-nuptial conception followed by marital birth.

When he retired Jacoby turned back to his real intellectual love -- social philosophy. He carried out research on the Schelswig sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, author of *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, key concepts that guided earlier generations of sociology students. Jacoby felt that Tonnies' contribution had been neglected, and set out to strengthen the record.

Jacoby, then, was an urbane, sophisticated scholar and a gentleman in the true sense of that word, who also made a major contribution technically and substantively. Any student of New Zealand demography must recognise their debt to the contribution of this distinguished progenitor of our discipline.