

# Obituaries

## Harry Evison

- Murray Horton

Harry Charles Evison, who died in Christchurch in October 2014, aged 90, was very much his own man and it was therefore no surprise to me that his approach to his own death was unique. A generic e-mail was sent by one of his sons, saying: "In accordance with his wishes, there will be no funeral or memorial to his name". It quoted Omar Khayyam: "I came like water and like wind I go". It also attached the photo of Harry which illustrates this, and several pages that Harry had written himself, entitled "Data For An Obituary". This was no dusty old document that his family had found in the bottom of a drawer - he wrote it in 2014, when he was already 90. The old bugger had written his own obituary! My admiring wife said: "This is what you should do; get the official version out first".

So, for the first time ever, *Watchdog* is running a self-written obituary (below). Apart from the subtitles which I added it is all Harry's words and opinions. I would only correct one bit of it – he refers to his years as Manager of the Otago University Students Association's Clubs and Societies Centre as "the user pays years". In fact, those years (1980-83) were during Piggy Muldoon's government, which featured things like the wage/price freeze and were later immortalised by the Rogernomics' propagandists as when the country was "run like a Polish shipyard". The user pays mania came after the election of the Lange government in 1984.

### CAFCA Member For 33 Years

But, Harry, you're not going to get away so easily. Apart from anything else your auto-obituary makes no mention of CAFCA. Harry was a member continuously from 1981 (when we were called CAFGINZ and it cost \$3 to join) up until his death in 2014. And he was a generous member; invariably including a donation with his sub (\$100 was the most recent amount we received from him, in 2013). He was also a member of the Anti-Bases Campaign, having joined in 2010 and had renewed his sub as recently as August 2014 (he died in October). He was also a generous donor to ABC, including to the appeals for the annual protest at the Waihopai spy base. And from 1993 until June 2014 he was a very regular and generous donor, totalling more than \$2,500, to the CAFCA/ABC Organiser Account, which provides my income. A couple of his donations were for unusual sums – one of \$68 and, most strikingly, one of \$313.07. I can't remember the reasons for them now – something to do with my then hourly pay rate, I think – but, as I said, Harry was very much his own man.

For somebody who was a CAFCA member for 33 years, you'll find precious little mention of him in *Watchdog*. A name search on our Website throws up only two or three mentions and one of those was in the ABC's *Peace Researcher*. But those few mentions in *PR* and *Watchdog* shed light on Harry's views, which he maintained right through his long life, and which he regularly expressed in letters to the *Press*. Dennis Small quoted one, in *PR*: "Early on in 2010 it was noticeable that building up to Anzac Day and beyond, the mainstream media seemed to be bent on creating a climate of what remarkably smacked of warmongering sentiment. Prominent Christchurch historian, social commentator, and World War 2 veteran, Harry Evison, drew attention to this in a letter to the editor of the *Press* (24/4/10). He observed that: 'The present spate of American movies portraying war as heroic, and the extraordinary surge of attention to wars of all kinds, seem to be conditioning people for another world war, like 1914 all over again'. Harry criticised the *Press* for portraying 'NZ heroes in the First World War when on the very next page we see the head of America's Joint Chiefs of Staff calling for another war', this time on Iran" (*Peace Researcher* 41, July 2011, "Media Warmongering [Part 1]: Signs Of Things To Come", <http://www.converge.org.nz/abc/pr/41/pr41-006.htm>).

I quoted another one of his innumerable letters to the *Press*, on another subject: "The real political reason why the powers that be, both in NZ and the US, hated Sutch's guts and wanted him discredited and imprisoned as a traitor and spy, were most succinctly stated by renowned Christchurch historian, Harry Evison, in a letter to the *Press* (12/10/06): 'The *Press* omits to mention the most serious offences Dr William Sutch committed against the free market principles that have

captivated New Zealand since his death. Besides visiting Russia and reading Marxism, he outrageously questioned whether selling New Zealand's economic assets to transnational corporations was good for the country. Worse still, he was a Leftwing historian. Right-thinking journalists ignore his writings, and knighted historians like Keith Sinclair very properly exclude him from their bibliographies. Yet two of Sutch's books, 'Colony Or Nation' (1966) and 'Takeover New Zealand' (1972) actually deplore the loss of New Zealand's economic independence through the foreign acquisition of our assets. Sutch even claims that New Zealand would be better off standing on its own feet economically. What would Feltex workers think? The SIS should be warned that there are still people who regard Dr Sutch as a greater patriot than his detractors'. Harry hits the nail on the head" (*Watchdog* 113, December 2006, "Speaking Ill Of The Dead: The Vicious Smear Campaign Against Bill Sutch & Jack Lewin", <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/13/12.htm>). Both these letters to the editor are noteworthy as they were both written when Harry was in his 80s and in poor health. He wrote letters to the editor for decades – the first time I ever became aware of him was when he wrote to the paper deploring police violence against protesters at the former US Air Force observatory atop Mt John (Mackenzie Country) in 1972.

### Historian For The People

Harry was a famous historian and one who wrote his books for the people, not academics. One of them won the New Zealand Book Award for Non-Fiction in 1994. But none of them were reviewed in *Watchdog*, for the simple reason that 19th Century New Zealand history is not our subject, even if it is a Marxist history. Harry, of course, was not happy about this. The last time I ever saw him was at my 60th birthday party\* on our back lawn in those chaotic first few weeks after the February 2011 killer quake (which had covered him in cascading books at his Redcliffs home). The combative old bugger berated me at my own party for not reviewing his final book, saying something like: "Aren't you interested in colonialism and racism?" (which is rather like the famous question: "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?"). \*Harry is the fourth guest from that party to have subsequently died and been the subject of a *Watchdog* obituary – the others being Larry Ross (130, August 2012, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/30/17.html>), Will Foote and John Case (both in 137, December 2014, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/37/14.html>).

I didn't totally ignore his books. Under the heading "Book As Precious As The Pounamu Of Its Title" I reviewed "Te Wai Pounamu The Greenstone Island: A History Of The Southern Maori During The European Colonisation Of New Zealand" (the one that won the Non-Fiction Book Award) in the December 1993 *PSA Journal*, for which I was a regular reviewer and writer throughout the 1980s and 90s. To partly and posthumously redress the lack of *Watchdog* reviews of Harry's books, I'll reproduce it in its entirety (it's not long): "The North Island land wars have commanded the attention of historians and novelists; Te Wai Pounamu (the South Island) has been regarded as a sideshow in issues of race, land and imperial conquest. This definitive book should dispel any misconceptions about that.

"Harry Evison, a Pakeha, started researching the subject, for a thesis, 45 years ago. He was Ngai Tahu's historian during its landmark Claim before the Waitangi Tribunal, and this is a continuation of that work. Evison is a fastidious historian, and a political progressive. That combination has produced a huge, fascinating book that subjects to damning scrutiny just how the largest of our islands passed into the hands of settlers, sheep barons, and men of God. He does not exempt the Maori from criticism. In the early 19th Century, British and Maori societies were evenly matched for barbarism and rank stupidity (or, more accurately, the stupidity of rank). One killed and ate the losers in the annual fighting season; the other hanged, flogged and transported its unwanted poor. Both British and Polynesian systems were feudal, and both were headed by chiefs with stifling notions of honour.

"Southern Maori, which means largely, but not exclusively, Ngai Tahu, had problems before the British and the Akaroa French arrived. They were tiny in numbers, scattered around a huge, rugged and inclement island. The southern land wars did not involve Europeans (with the exception of the so-called 'Wairau Massacre'). All the damage was done by Te Rauparaha, whose genocidal ferocity decimated the population, literally consuming a reasonable number of them. Once Pakeha arrived in Te Wai Pounamu, the world was never going to be the same. Firstly, the tiny Maori population was a huge obstacle in itself; and it was reduced even further, possibly halved, by imported common

European illnesses such as measles. The British did not need to resort to war to conquer the South. They did it by good old fashioned trickery, lies, broken promises, and a few forged signatures.

“A position was created with the terrifying title of Commissioner for the Extinguishment of Native Claims. Millions of acres were bought for a pitiful few hundred quid. In some cases, the promised payment was never made at all. Once removed from their greatest asset, the land, and confined to barren scraps, Ngai Tahu sank into long-lasting and severe rural poverty. The problem is only starting to be redressed at the end of the 20th Century. Of course, this massive land theft was all done for the highest of motives, of ‘civilising the savages’. Evison cites contemporary documents describing Maori land tenure as ‘useless and valueless’.

### **Suppressing Maori “Communism”**

“One Victorian gentleman, in his capacity as Native Reserves Commissioner for Canterbury, proclaimed thus: ‘Communism in land is admitted to be the great obstacle to the social and material advancement of the Maori people. It is very certain that under the present system of tenure the Natives will never be induced to give up their low Maori habits, and to adapt themselves to the requirements of a superior civilisation’. So our politicians started committing crimes in the name of suppressing ‘Communism’ from the earliest days of Pakeha settlement. What a happy coincidence that so many of the victorious capitalists personally profited handsomely from the dispossession of these feudal ‘Communists’. This book is excellent, both as history and as a bloody good read. It is a riveting story, with characters and places brought to life. It is the summation of Harry Evison’s life’s work, and is what he will be thankfully remembered for. It throws light on a very sad and shameful past, and explains just why southern Maori campaigned so very long and hard to redress this fundamental injustice. As an example of history serving the present and future, this book is as precious as the pounamu of its title”.

So, yes Harry, I was, and am, “interested in colonialism and racism” (and it’s not as if the subject of his books – the dispossession of southern Maori – is now only of interest to historians. As recently as February 2015 I attended a meeting of the Lyttelton/Mount Herbert Community Board and, whilst waiting to speak, listened to a plaintive appeal for justice from a representative of Port Levy Maori, discussing a multiple owners’ land problem going back to 1849! Apparently these Maori “Communists” still have “to adapt themselves to the requirements of a superior civilisation”, eh). I count myself privileged to have been given two of Harry’s books: “Te Wai Pounamu” in the 90s and, in 2006, a signed copy of “The Ngai Tahu Deeds: A Window On New Zealand History”, which is as beautiful to look at as it is interesting to read. I was among those invited out to Tuahiwi Marae for the launch of “Te Wai Pounamu”, an event that was combined with a tangi, so the central figures were a live Pakeha author and a dead Pakeha lawyer, both of whom had played key roles in the Ngai Tahu Claim. It was a memorable occasion.

And Harry does crop up now and again in old *Watchdogs*, you just have to know where to look (the online pre-1999 issues are not responsive to our Website’s internal search engine), and you have to be able to recognise him without him being named, in one case, when *Watchdog* (51, December 1985) reported on the two memorial seminars we held to mark the tenth anniversary of the death of Dr WB Sutch. “The only other incident was the sudden collapse of one participant with a vertiginous nausea attack, leading to him being taken to hospital in an ambulance. Somebody unkindly suggested that it was the only way to stop Wolfgang Rosenberg speaking”. The sick man was Harry – in one of those “it’s a small world” stories, he was attended to at Christchurch Hospital by his son, who was on duty as a house surgeon (the vertigo attack turned out to be caused by an allergy to something in tea. He never drank it again and never had that problem again).

### **Monthly Review**

Harry was mentioned, by name this time, in my obituary (*Watchdog* 84, May 1997, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-may-1997.html>) of the *Monthly Review* – he was on the Committee in the 1960s and Editor for a couple of years in the 80s. “Harry Evison once explained to me his philosophy on illustrations: ‘If people want to see pictures, they can stick their heads out the window’...Steven Cowan was appointed the new (and final) Editor in 1987, and things changed markedly. In his very first editorial, he attacked the previous

regime (i.e. Harry) and announced that there would be no place for the regular poetry under his editorship. Old subscribers and supporters started leaving; Owen Wilkes never took up his post as Wellington-based Co-Editor, in protest. The magazine adopted a much more Trotskyist tone (reflecting the leanings of the new Committee); it fired sectarian broadsides. One such was a cover story attacking none other than CAFCA (from the standard position of internationalism versus nationalism). What made this more interesting was that, at the time, Steven was our boarder. So I was being lambasted in print from within my own home!" Harry never forgave Steven and co for presiding over the demise of the *Monthly Review*, in 1996, having lasted since 1960. The bitterness never dissipated. At Wolf Rosenberg's 2007 wake Harry referred to his successor as editor as a "shit".

Those above couple of paragraphs, quoting Harry's appearances in old *Watchdogs*, also include people who were key friends and colleagues of Harry's (and key CAFCA members) for decades – namely Wolf Rosenberg and Owen Wilkes. He worked together with them, separately and collectively, on many things, with *Monthly Review* being the one key common denominator. The Evison family was good friends with the Rosenberg family (it was Wolf and Ann who drove me to Harry's 1990s' book launch at Tuahiwi Marae), and Owen was such a close friend of Harry and Hillary that he did jobs like trim their giant macrocarpa hedge at their former spectacular clifftop home at Whitewash Head (Owen was a valued home handyman to his friends – he painted my place). I can remember having a meal with Owen at Harry and Hillary's home. Sadly, they're all gone now (with the exception of Hillary). My obituary of Owen is in *Watchdog* 109, August 2005, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/09/09.htm>; Wolf's is in 114, May 2007, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/14/04.htm>; and Ann's is in 116, December 2007, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/16/09.htm>. Harry was particularly close to Wolf and had known him for decades, dating back to when they were both at Victoria University in the 1940s.

Not only are they all gone but so is the spectacular clifftop home at Whitewash Head, where Harry and Hillary lived for decades. Some years ago they swapped homes with their doctor son (now a Christchurch orthopaedic surgeon). It was deemed too dangerous to occupy post-quakes and, according to Hillary, her son was not even able to get his furniture out. The wonderful Sumner to Taylor's Mistake clifftop walking track that passes in front of their former home is also indefinitely closed. I regarded Harry as a friend. Visiting that home was always a memorable experience. Through the years that I knew him (since the 80s) I shared not only political experiences but also became aware of personal things that affected him deeply – for example, he and Hillary were terribly upset by the 1999 New South Wales train crash that killed seven passengers, including their five year old grandson and the boy's mother. Harry was angered by the subsequent Commission of Inquiry which found that it should have been preventable. I last saw Harry in 2011 but I used to ring him and we'd chat about all manner of things. His increasingly dire health finally put a stop to those calls – one of his many problems was that he went deaf and the last time I rang him he couldn't hear me no matter how loudly I bellowed.

Over the years Harry regularly appeared in the mainstream media, as the subject of feature articles. Plus there was some material which he sent to me himself. The latter is worth quoting, because when I read it I can hear Harry's distinctive voice telling the stories. I don't know why but he sent me a single solitary page from his unpublished memoir, devoted to his 1941 job at a fruit packing factory. Why? Because he wanted to make a point about one of his workmates: "...the kingpin was the foreman, Henry Lang - a restless, unruffled young chap who shuffled about in gumboots organising and supervising everything, and talking in a foreign accent to the boss and the factory workers - who hardly knew what to make of him...He did well academically and later scaled the public service ladder, being Secretary of the Treasury from 1968 to 1976.

"He was by then a conservative administrator, and helped turn Treasury into a secretive 'think-tank', making or even dictating policy for the Government, instead of doing the Government's bidding as it had done under previous governments. Thus he paved the way for the free market 'reforms' of the 1980s, sprung on the public by the Labour 'New Right' with Treasury's assistance. Henry Lang was an Economics Professor at Victoria from 1976 to 1985, and thereafter held a lot of business directorships, including Tower Corporation, formed from the privatisation of the Government Life Insurance Office – which had been formed nearly a hundred years before, to provide people with a State-owned, reliable alternative to the private life insurance companies that were notoriously rapacious and prone to going bust. As Chairman of Tower, Henry Lang saw a lot of Government Life

public servants out of their jobs, and cost me and Hillary and thousands of other policyholders a lot of money. The annual bonuses on our policies promptly sank from the 4% usually paid by Government Life to about 1%, or less, and have never recovered even to keep pace with inflation. Henry Lang and his fellow Directors pocketed huge fees for this; and for doing what had previously been done by a public service general manager on a modest salary”.

## Peace Campaigner

In early 2012 I was scheduled to give a talk at the WEA about, among other things, the late 1940s' campaign against peacetime conscription. Unsolicited, Harry kindly sent me a chapter of his unpublished memoir (“New Zealand As I Knew It”, Chapter 4, 1946-49, revised January 2012). It is vintage Harry – in it he has a go at National and Labour politicians, fellow historians and fellow campaigners alike (the latter being Ron Smith. My review of Ron’s autobiography “Working Class Son: My Fight Against Capitalism And War” is in *Watchdog* 77, December 1994, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-december-1994.html>; my obituary of him is in *Watchdog* 79, August 1995, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-august-1995.html>).

Harry describes a meeting attended by National MP Jack Marshall (who went on to spend many years as a senior Minister in the Holyoake government and briefly succeeded Kiwi Keith as Prime Minister). Harry had been invited as “Chairman of the Victoria University Socialist Club and well-known stump-orator for the anti-conscription campaign. We were all seated informally around someone’s comfortable lounge in Karori, Marshall and I being seated on the floor at centre, almost cheek by jowl. He began with an account of how he and the RSA and the National Party had successfully defended the country against our enemies in the 1939-1945 war, and now with the Communist Menace looming, they were ready to do the same again. Then he warmed to the subject of how all patriotic New Zealanders must resist Communism.

“When my turn came, I got stuck into ‘Gentleman Jack’, which some people there obviously thought was a rude thing to do. I argued that there was no evidence that anyone was preparing to attack New Zealand, and that the scare campaign being run by the Fraser (Labour) government and by National was being done only to please the USA. I challenged Marshall to explain, as a military man, how 18 year old conscripts could possibly defend the country if it was under attack, and I asked why Marshall and other conscription enthusiasts didn’t go back into the Army themselves if they thought the country was in danger. Jack Marshall seemed nonplussed. He seemed genuinely unaware that there could be an opinion contrary to his, in sane society. He didn’t even attempt to argue the issue. Marshall (to me): ‘You talk like a Communist’. Me: ‘I am a Communist’”.

The 1949 referendum on peacetime conscription was a foregone conclusion, with both Labour and National backing it and the news media not reporting the campaign against it. Harry describes a post-referendum party of the “Communist conspirators”. They had bought beer but no food (all men, obviously). They noticed that there was a social event taking place across the street at the National Party HQ. Several of the revellers (not including Harry) put on wet weather gear to look shabby and went across the street, where they conned National’s supper ladies that they were foreign seamen who needed some food for their hungry shipmates. “They won the hearts of the supper ladies and arrived back at our meeting laden with boxes of savouries and cream cakes. For good measure (one of them) had lifted a large portrait of the National Party’s esteemed Leader Sid Holland from its place of honour on the wall of the foyer, and brought it back as a trophy. We had a good supper, and toasted the National Party and its Leader, whose portrait was propped up on our table in front of us.

“When it was time for us to go home, the question arose as to what to do with Sid Holland’s portrait. To take it back to its rightful place across the street was out of the question, as the National Party’s security guards might be looking for the thieves. It could not be left in our meeting room without embarrassing the daytime occupants. So (the thief) undertook to wrap the portrait carefully in brown paper and leave it at a ‘left luggage’ locker at the Wellington Railway Station. After a few days this was done and the ‘left luggage’ docket was mailed to the Wellington National Party with a polite thank you note for the loan of the portrait”. Within months Holland was Prime Minister and National was the Government for 20 of the next 23 years.

Harry touched people's lives in many ways. Maire Leadbeater wrote to his family: "Harry was a long time friend of my mother Elsie Locke\*, who greatly respected his historical expertise and shared his perspective on a great many things. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and tramping, being just a couple of them. I am sure she was his ally in the struggle to save the spotted shag and would have supported his progressive ideas about teaching. I think Harry would also have had a lot to do with my Dad\*, especially in the *Monthly Review* years. But my warmest memories are of my history teacher back in the 1960s – he must have had a pretty big impact. I am still involved in exploring the history of social movements and firmly committed to the need to understand our past, especially from the grassroots perspective. He was a kind and encouraging teacher, who always had time to spare for a consultation. The other really lovely memory is of his role in the drama productions at Linwood". \*My review of "Looking For Answers: A Life Of Elsie Locke", by Maureen Birchfield, is in *Watchdog* 122, December 2009, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/22/09.htm>. My obituary of Elsie Locke is in *Watchdog* 97, August 2001, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/97/13.htm>. And my obituary of Jack Locke is in *Watchdog* 84, May 1997, <http://www.historicalwatchdog.blogspot.co.nz/2009/12/foreign-control-watchdog-may-1997.html>.

## Ngai Tahu Claim

Harry wasn't an ivory tower historian, he used his skill to effect change; major change in the case of his role with the Ngai Tahu Claim. "The first time Harry Evison met Tā Tipene O'Regan, the former was a historian who had written an interesting but largely ignored thesis, and the latter was chairing a meeting of the Ngāi Tahu Development Board. 'He asked me to write a booklet summarising the Ngāi Tahu Claim so I did', says Harry. The booklet was called 'Ngāi Tahu Land Rights And The Crown Pastoral Lease Lands In The South Island Of New Zealand'. Not the catchiest title ever, but important nonetheless, it was first published in 1986, followed by a second edition in the same year and a third edition the following year.

"Aimed at a general audience, the book was the first in a series called *Ka Roimata Whenua* and was published, as Tā Tipene says in the Foreword, 'to redress in some degree the Northern 'warp' in the history of the Māori Land issue'. He went on: 'Ngāi Tahu are blessed that Harry Evison has been willing to prepare this first volume. His interest in the subject dates back to his 1952 thesis on the Ngāi Tahu land issue. That he now has the time and energy to embrace the concerns of our people is a gift we are deeply grateful for. He represents an important strand in New Zealand's history — the Pākehā writers and men of affairs who have indignantly protested against the domination of Māori culture and the injustice over land for more than a century... He writes about Māori pain from the perspective of his Pākehā roots and with the tools of Pākehā scholarship. It is right that he should, for this book is aimed at a Pākehā audience. That he is able and willing to do so reflects something important about this country - something of the hope about what we might yet become'.

"For his troubles, Harry Evison was paid \$1,000. 'Tipene got the Board to pass a resolution giving me \$1,000 and insisted I take it', he says. The money was well spent, much of it on a leather satchel which Harry has to this day. It has been through the mill, he says. What followed that meeting of course was Wai 27 and the hearing of the Ngāi Tahu Claim by the Waitangi Tribunal. And Harry Evison was a vital witness for Ngāi Tahu during those hearings. Going toe to toe with the Crown could be daunting, but Harry relished it. 'Harry used to love a good argument', says his wife Hillary. 'But I had to be on my toes with the Tribunal,' says Harry. 'If I didn't know the answer, I would say I didn't know. It was impossible to bullshit them'. Harry's style was to uncover original documents and present them as incontrovertible evidence. Queen's Counsel Paul Temm, who was senior counsel for Ngāi Tahu during the Claim hearings, called this 'showing the body', after a saying in legal circles based on convincing a jury in a murder trial...

"It was his upbringing in Christchurch and his family connections that would shape his later life, although, when Harry completed his thesis for a Master's degree, he was simply looking for the truth. 'It had always puzzled me that Ngāi Tahu were down and out. The orthodox idea was that Māori just couldn't cope with civilisation, and that was based on the idea of a clash of cultures. Supposedly, when two cultures came in contact, the weaker would wither away. You don't hear much about that now, but it was all the rage from the 1940s until the 1970s'. His mother's sister Freda married Arthur Couch, from a prominent Rāpaki family, and Harry's exposure to Rāpaki Māori had him questioning that prevailing theory.

## Cheated Out Of Their Land

“His Aunt Freda was a big help, he says. ‘She took me round in her old car to meet some of the Tuahiwi elders. They told me things about the Claim that I hadn’t heard before, and confirmed that Ngāi Tahu were cheated of their land’. Harry called his thesis ‘The Canterbury Māori And The Land Question’. He says the prevalent opinion was characterised by the then head of Canterbury Museum, Roger Duff. According to Duff, Tuahiwi Māori, ‘in the face of civilised society, just sort of wilted and couldn’t cope’. In fact, as Harry’s thesis made clear, Ngāi Tahu had been prosperous and took to trade with Europeans with alacrity. ‘In the first place I asked myself why Ngāi Tahu at Rāpaki were so down and out, and yet at one stage they had the run of the country. When I started to look for answers, it became obvious that they had been cheated out of the land. They coped very well until their land and other mahinga kai was taken away from them. When Ngāi Tahu were put off the land, things started to go wrong’.

“But Harry’s thesis sank without trace, collecting dust on a shelf at the University of Otago Library while he and his new wife Hillary moved to Tikitiki on the east coast of the North Island, where Harry taught at the Māori secondary school....The couple returned to Christchurch in 1985, the same year the Lange government passed an amendment to the Treaty of Waitangi Act, which allowed historical claims to be lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal, and paved the way for the Ngāi Tahu Claim to be heard. Harry had retired, but his time had come. He continued to publish on the theme of Ngāi Tahu and the history of Te Waipounamu...

“Harry re-examined colonial history in ‘The Ngāi Tahu Deeds: A Window On New Zealand History’, published in 2006, and looked in particular at the ten Ngāi Tahu Deeds by which the Crown acquired land in Te Waipounamu from 1844 to 1864. Harry’s aim in writing the book was to ‘restore the integrity of the Ngāi Tahu historical record’. His book ‘New Zealand Racism In The Making: The Life & Times Of Walter Mantell’, published in late 2010, took aim at Walter Mantell, the Crown agent who, from 1848, worked on securing land for the Crown. Mantell was seen as a friend to Ngāi Tahu but in Evison’s view, this was a sham; although it took some time to uncover Mantell’s disingenuous actions.

“The only thing I would change (in his original booklet for the Ngāi Tahu Trust Board) is that I was too soft on Mantell’, says Harry. ‘He said he was sorry for what he had done and did his best to put it right. That is bullshit. In my last book I put Mantell on the mantelpiece and shot him down. He didn’t try to put anything right. He tried to cover his tracks. When I wrote that booklet, I hadn’t seen the Government papers which showed Mantell to be a thorough rogue. He died in 1895 and he hadn’t renounced his bullshit story about the Claim’. But it wasn’t about making Mantell the villain; it was, as always for Harry, about putting the story right” (*Te Karaka*, 27/6/14, “Historian Harry Evison And The Pursuit Of Truth”, [http://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/our\\_stories/historian-harry-evison-pursuit-truth/](http://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/our_stories/historian-harry-evison-pursuit-truth/)).

Mike Knowles was one of the leading lawyers involved in the Ngai Tahu Claim. He e-mailed me: “(Harry) was my first pick as an expert witness to get the Claim started at the end of 1986. He loved a good pint of Guinness and we would adjourn to what was then ‘Rumpole’s Bar’ in the Park Royal (*later renamed the Crowne Plaza, and demolished post-quakes. MH*) after a day’s work before the Waitangi Tribunal... Harry and I both lamented the corporate model that Ngai Tahu leadership opted for and this was often the chief topic of discussion at the Rumpole sessions, although we did manage to avoid crying into our beer over it”. So, let there be no illusions that Harry was any more enamoured of Maori capitalism, The Brown Table, than he was of the Pakeha variety (the details of the Ngai Tahu Settlement, which came into effect in 1998, can be found at <http://ngaitahu.iwi.nz/ngai-tahu/the-settlement/settlement-offer/>).

## Fighting Racism

The *Press* wrote a feature (15/1/11, “Racial Prejudice’s Seeds”, Philip Matthews) about Harry’s last book, the Mantell one, which “comes with an author’s memoir, a personal history of racism in this country since 1924 – the year Evison was born in Christchurch. Within it, an early memory, circa 1928. The four year old Evison is standing at his front gate in the Christchurch suburb of Beckenham. He sees a dark skinned man riding a bike, followed by a group of school children who start a chant: ‘Nigger, nigger, pull the trigger’. He writes: ‘Eighty years on, I still see the dark skinned bicycle man’. He thanks his parents for teaching him to abhor racism; he dedicates the book to them...In the 1930s,

Evison remembers, one of his mother's sisters married 'a bloke from Rapaki... There was no stigma attached to that in our family but some of our cousins from up north insulted (their) children for being dirty Maori', he says. 'But my parents never tolerated racial prejudice and encouraged us to have that attitude'. On current racism: "New Zealand has been a backwater in this way", Evison says. 'It disgusts me that a lot of people think racial prejudice is just a joke now'.

Talking of the subject of his book, Walter Mantell, Harry said he "enforced more ruthlessly and thoroughly than anyone else the racist doctrine of Victorian colonialism"...Mantell was a complex character who Evison likens to Shakespeare's Iago....You might think that after more than 60 years, Evison has found his villain – one man as the answer to his questions about why Ngai Tahu ended up where they did. But the real villain is something larger and more amorphous. Evison's argument is that racism was generally unknown in the pre-settler era. The whalers didn't treat Maori as inferior; there was inter-marriage and cooperation. Racism came with colonisation; or, more specifically, colonist Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the New Zealand Company.

"Within Wakefield's 'waste lands' theory was a notion that land was of little value to Maori and that they would even benefit from dispossession. Racism grew as desire for land grew. 'They (the New Zealand Company) told the colonists coming here that Maori would be only too glad to give up their land because they would learn to become civilised and welcome the Europeans. And that they didn't know how to use their land properly'. Two lies, of course – but convenient lies; as Evison has spent much of a long lifetime trying to show".

"Evison held strong views on many issues and never tired of arguing them, from opposition to age-based promotion through school classes, to New Zealand's adoption of the global free market from the late 1980s. Often he was painted as a bitter malcontent, mostly by people unaware of his energy and wry humour" (*Press, Obituaries*, 15/11/14, "Treaty Claim Boosted By 'Little Brown Book'", Mike Crean). That is so true – Harry was great company, with a good sense of humour and a wide range of interests. I feel privileged to have known him and to have counted him as a friend. My deepest condolences to Hillary, to whom he was married for more than 60 years; to their children and grandchildren; and to all New Zealanders who have lost a gem, a true original; a rarity who uncovered the truth about the past and used it to help make a better present and future.

## Harry Evison

- Harry Evison

Harry Evison was born on 24 May 1924 at Beckenham, Christchurch, the third son of Sidney Evison, a London-born newspaper publisher, and Beatrice (née Foster), a Lyttelton-born school teacher. From his parents Evison got an abiding interest in music, history and writing, and learned racial tolerance. He started school at Beckenham, but at age ten moved to West Christchurch District High School where the headmaster, LF de Berry, believed in getting pupils to work at whatever level they were capable of. This idea was at odds with those of Clarence Beeby who, as Director of Education, introduced the system of "age classification" whereby pupils are classed according to age regardless of ability or achievement – a system with which Evison strongly disagreed. Evison regarded his two years at West Intermediate as the best schooling he ever had, and his teachers there, Grant Forbes and Douglas Blyth, as the most inspiring. Forbes for example taught his Form 1 boys (Year 7) three-part singing, watercolour painting, and sonnets by Gerard Manley Hopkins, then a little-known avant-garde poet.

In 1937 Evison's family moved to Wellington. In 1939, when World War Two began, Evison enlisted as a deck cadet on the liner *Niagara*, but it was sunk in 1940 before he was due to embark. He then enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). He trained in radar, and was with 10 Servicing Unit, north of New Guinea, when the war ended with the Japanese surrender in August 1945. A week later, an air crew Evison had flown with were killed on a test flight when their plane (a Ventura) crashed into Seeadler Harbour. Evison, like many others, was unsettled by such tragedies. In October 1945 at Jacquinot Bay, New Britain, Evison helped to organise the first successful RNZAF airmen's strike. This was not a "beer strike" as stated by Bryan Cox in his "Pacific Scrapbook"(1997). It was a

strike for fresh vegetables, in protest against the diet of Spam and dehydrated vegetables that airmen at Jacquinot were being fed two months after the war's end.

### **Lifelong Marxist Historian**

In 1946 Evison enrolled at Wellington Teachers College, where he was active in drama and student publications. Influenced by the war and by his reading of history, Evison was now a Marxist, a point of view he maintained for the rest of his life. While at Teachers College Evison studied part-time at Victoria University College and was active in student politics. He was elected Secretary of the Socialist Club, Chief Guide of the Tramping Club, and Secretary of the Students' Association. In 1949 he was prominent in Wellington as an opponent of the Fraser Labour government's compulsory military training scheme. For this he was blacklisted by the secret police, as he found out later.

Evison disagreed with the Communist Party theory (derived from Engels) that ranked human societies in terms of their technological development, with hunter-gatherer societies lowest in the scale as "savages". Evison regarded social cooperation as a better yardstick of human progress than technical achievement. He also disagreed with the idea of "intellectuals" as a distinct "class". So-called "intellectuals", he said, should try using a pick and shovel alongside workmen skilled at the job, and they would find that manual work also needs intelligence. In 1950, while completing his MA papers at Canterbury University College (CUC), Evison was elected Chairman of the CUC Socialist Club. Among other officers of the Club that year, were lecturers Winston Rhodes, Harry Scott, Wolfgang Rosenberg, and PJ Alley (Rewi's brother); clergymen HS Hoddinott and Alan Brash (Don Brash's father); librarian CS Collins, ornithologist Ron Scarlett, trade unionist AB Grant, and Colin Clark (later secretary of the Public Service Association).

In 1952, while teaching at Cromwell, Evison completed his MA from Otago University with his thesis on Canterbury Ngai Tahu, the first Marxist study of the effects of colonialism on New Zealand Maori. The prevailing theory then was "Culture Clash", which sees history in terms of "superior" cultures replacing "inferior" ones. This was promoted by Professor Ivan Sutherland of CUC in his book "The Maori Situation" (1935), and by Sutherland's student, Roger Duff, in his 1943 MA thesis on Canterbury Maori. They argued that Maori had collapsed psychologically during European colonisation because they could not cope with civilisation. Evison's thesis showed that the Maori collapse was economic, not psychological: Canterbury Maori coped well with early European contact: and "collapsed" only when the colonial authorities deprived them of their economic resources. Evison said that for 35 years no one took any notice of his thesis.

### **Advocate Of School-Based Teacher Training**

Evison taught in country schools from 1951 to 1959, chiefly at Cromwell and Reefton. These he regarded as his best teaching years. There were no unemployed, no rich or poor, and all school pupils got the same opportunities. During this time he met his wife Hillary, and their three children were born. In 1960 Evison transferred to Christchurch as Head of History at Linwood High School, where he also directed stage productions. In 1964 he joined the secondary department of Christchurch Teachers College as Senior Lecturer in History and Social Studies. He ran refresher courses for history teachers, and initiated the first college courses in drama and mountain recreation. As Canterbury President of the Post-Primary Teachers Association he campaigned for better funding for district high schools.

In the 1960s Evison served on the committee of the *NZ Monthly Review*, and on the Canterbury Mountain Safety Committee. For six years from 1967 to 1972 he was honorary warden of the Alpine Club's Aspiring Hut in the West Matukituki, where he spent summer vacations with his family. He said he made more new friends in six weeks at Aspiring Hut than during the rest of the year in town. For many years Evison and his family lived at Sumner above the Whitewash Head cliff. As an honorary wildlife ranger he campaigned for better protection for the spectacular spotted shag colony there. He wrote environmental submissions on the subject to the City Council, but with little success. He was dismayed when later on the colony virtually collapsed.

As Principal Lecturer for Teaching Practice at Christchurch Teachers College, Evison advocated school-based training for graduate trainees as an alternative to the college-based system. He believed that ideas about teaching could best be gained in the classroom, with practical teaching experience preceding college lectures rather than the other way round. His scheme provided for exchanges of staff between teachers' colleges and schools. To vindicate this idea he took leave from the College in 1973 and taught for a year as Head of English at Queens High School in Dunedin, the first college lecturer to make such a move. His scheme was supported by secondary schools and by trainees who volunteered for it. But the Education Department failed to authorise a trial of school-based training, and Evison resigned from the College.

In Dunedin in 1973 Evison was elected to the Dunedin City Council Committee for Recreation and Sport, under the scheme set up by the Kirk government. This led to his appointment in 1975 as Activities Officer at the University of Otago. There he persuaded the Students Association (OUSA) to spend its building fund on a new, purpose-built multi-storeyed building with proper facilities for student clubs and societies, to function also as a community centre. Evison wrote the architectural brief for the building, and in 1980 it opened as the OUSA Clubs and Societies Centre with himself as Manager. This was the era of "user pays", but Evison instead successfully ran the Centre on the principle "user cleans up". When he retired in 1983, the OUSA made him a life member and named the Centre's main lounge after him. Evison regarded the Centre's success as his most satisfying achievement in education.

Between 1975 and 1984, Evison lectured in Dunedin for the Diploma in Recreation and Sport and wrote a teachers' correspondence course in outdoor recreation for the Education Department. He also represented Otago University on the Otago Mountain Safety Committee. In Dunedin he was President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and of the United Nations Association, and helped establish an Otago Council for Civil Liberties. In 1977, with Hone Tuwhare, Evison organised a campaign against the Muldoon government's SIS Amendment Bill, culminating in a protest march and rally in the Octagon of more than 2,000 people, shown on national TV. In 1981 Evison helped Larry Ross to launch the Nuclear Free New Zealand campaign, and afterwards joined its Committee. In 1977 with Professors Alan Mark and John Child he organised a campaign to establish a Scenic Reserve at Trotters Gorge in North Otago. His "Trotters Gorge Field Guide" was published in 1978, and the Trotters Gorge Scenic Reserve was gazetted in 1979. He enjoyed tramping in the Otago ranges, and in 1982 with his wife Hillary he submitted a Protected Natural Area proposal for the Rock and Pillar summit ridge.

### **Regretted Ngai Tahu's Corporate Structure**

In 1983 Evison left Otago University to concentrate on writing, and he edited the *New Zealand Monthly Review* for two years. In 1986, to support a Ngai Tahu claim to the high country Crown lease lands, he wrote a 72-page booklet, "Ngai Tahu Land Rights And The Crown Pastoral Leases In The South Island Of New Zealand". High country farmers took this seriously, said Evison. At a Christchurch public meeting on the claim, the Canterbury high country farmers' Chairman, the late Michael Murchison, said to Evison: "Mao wrote the 'Little Red Book', and now you've written the 'Little Brown Book'".

From 1987 to 1990 Evison assisted Ngai Tahu with their historic Waitangi Tribunal Claim. His evidence to the Tribunal reiterated his 1952 thesis argument that Ngai Tahu's impoverishment and dispersal had been caused by the Crown's appropriation of their land. Evison thought the high country farmers' reaction to his "Little Brown Book" influenced the National government to settle the Ngai Tahu claim favourably, while leaving the high country leases untouched. Evison welcomed Ngai Tahu's huge Claim settlement, but regretted the corporate business structure that was set up to administer it. Evison strongly supported Dr WB Sutch's views on economic independence for New Zealand. He was disgusted when the Lange government signed the country into the so-called global "free market" system, with its extremes of wealth and poverty, erosion of public services, and relentless plundering of natural resources for private profit. Evison regarded "free market" politicians as traitors to New Zealand for destroying the social services that had been laboriously built up by preceding generations.

In 1989 Evison received the Queen's Service Medal (QSM) for public services. In 1994 he was awarded the New Zealand Book Award for Non-Fiction for his book "Te Wai Pounamu The Greenstone Island", and in 1996 he received the honorary degree Doctor of Letters from the University of Canterbury. In later years Evison suffered from two debilitating kinds of cancer: he read the proofs of his 2006 book "The Ngai Tahu Deeds" while in a hospital emergency ward. In 2010 he published his book "New Zealand Racism In The Making: The Life & Times of Walter Mantell". Harry Evison is survived by his wife Hillary and their three adult children.