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Belinda Battley

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Contact the Editor: newsletter@aranz.org.nz

Archives & Records Association of New Zealand Inc.

Te Huinga Mahara

PO Box 11-553, Manners Street, Wellington 6142, New Zealand

www.aranz.org.nz

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[A special Alert to honour Ray Grover, 1931-2019](#)

Today we were sad to hear of the death of Ray Grover, former Chief Archivist, historian and tireless advocate for archives and records. The current Chief Archivist, Richard Foy, has written an appreciation of Ray's life and work, and this is below.

A profile of Ray was published in Archifacts in June 1981 when he became Chief Archivist, and a copy of this is attached to this email.

Ray Grover, 1931-2019

It is with great sadness that news has come to us that former Chief Archivist Ray Grover has died at the age of 88.

Ray was Chief Archivist from 1981-1991, a position he took up after a long and distinguished career at the Alexander Turnbull Library. Ray was the fourth Chief Archivist, and the first person to hold concurrently the offices of Chief Archivist and Director of the National Archives.

Under Ray's tenure the National Archives flourished. He oversaw the removal of Archives from the Arts and Cultural Heritage group of Internal Affairs in 1990, becoming a standalone business unit, which paved the way for Archives becoming a separate government department in 2000. He always held that archivists, through their familiarity with the record of government, were the original experts in information management. Through his tenure he

fought hard for the independence and excellence of the National Archives, and especially its people, sometimes at a personal cost, as his advocacy put noses out of joint at times.

We have Ray to thank for our Wellington building. When Ray took up his post as Chief Archivist, Archives was based in the old Air New Zealand building on Vivian St, which now houses the VUW School of Architecture, and had about 25 staff. For nearly ten years he worked tirelessly to secure and refurbish the old Government Print building as the first permanent home of the archives under one roof. At times it was an uphill battle, but in 1990 he achieved his dream of opening Archives House. Ray commissioned many of the artworks you see around our building, from some of New Zealand's most eminent artists, on the subject of archives, memory and identity. He also oversaw the regionalisation of Archives, with the records centre in Auckland becoming a fully-fledged regional office in 1984 and the Christchurch office opening in 1985. As a lifelong user of archives as well as a heritage professional, Ray favoured initiatives that improved access, from investing in the finding aids to major exhibitions.

Ray retired in 1991 and spent his later years advocating for archives and working on one of his great purposes: writing. After completing his degree in political science at Victoria University and a few years bartending and labouring in the UK, Ray returned to New Zealand. He was a young bohemian in the Wellington literary scene of the late 1950s and he published his first novel in 1967. He won the New Zealand Book Award in 1983 for his novel *Cork of War*, and his 2008 novel *March to the Sound of the Guns* was widely acclaimed. His most recent novel, *Province of Danger*, was published last year. As a historian Ray produced many articles and works on his areas of expertise – New Zealand history and literature, biography, international fiction, military history, and library and archives administration.

In 2009 Ray explained to a journalist his lifelong affinity with archives. “Whenever I picked up a dry and hopefully not too dusty piece, I always ‘felt’ the person who wrote it. It was like looking into the minds and souls of people.” Ray continued his advocacy for Archives after his retirement, right up to his participation in the NALI stakeholder workshops last year.

I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Ray in person last year at one of the public consultations for the NALI review. Although our time was fleeting, I'll remember Ray as a warm and generous man who smiled easily and had some pretty ‘out there’ ideas he was happy to share with me, Chief Archivist-to-Chief Archivist.

He will be missed.

Nā Richard

Richard Foy | Chief Archivist | Tumuaki | Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga | Archives New Zealand

Te Tāhuhu Iringa Kōrero | Information & Knowledge Services

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