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NEW ZEALAND FRIENDLY SOCIETIES, 1842 – 1941

by

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Abstract

This thesis studies Friendly Societies of New Zealand from 1842, when the first lodge was established, to 1941 when the Social Security Amendment Bill, allowing for the implementation of the general medical benefit, was enacted. It is the study of how, through the formation of mutual aid societies, a significant group of working people protected themselves against hardship. At the same time, it is the study of how Friendly Societies, by means of social activity and ritual, bonded their members together and synthesised their welfare role with the values of respectability, thrift and independence.

The establishment of lodges throughout the nineteenth century is explored and it is shown how lodges, as well as providing for their members' welfare needs, were also effective community institutions of social integration, facilitating the adaptation of immigrants to their new environment. By the twentieth century very few New Zealand settlements were without a lodge. As an integral part of their communities, they were cross-class institutions, drawing together and mixing people from different classes, occupations and social groups.

Traced also is the transformation of Friendly Societies from small, financially insecure, local lodges, combining conviviality with limited welfare benefits, to the large financially sound consolidated Societies of the 1930s providing their members with access to modern health care. Effective insurance became the primary focus of Friendly Societies. Although social life remained active, as the twentieth century progressed, people increasingly joined lodges only for the health and medical benefits offered.

Because of their wide range of benefits and because there was little else in the way of welfare relief at the time, Friendly Societies were relevant and significant suppliers of welfare. The state recognised this role and supported them with legislation and help, at least until 1910. However, as the state increasingly ventured into the welfare arena its support for the Societies waned, until finally Friendly Society sickness benefits were replaced by the 1938 Social Security Act and their medical benefits by the Social Security Amendment Act of 1941. Friendly Societies were sidelined.

Because welfare historiography has tended to focus on the state, it has neglected Friendly Societies. This study intends to redress the balance, and show that welfare did not start with the state – that many people were making effective provision against sickness, disability and death for themselves long before the introduction of the welfare state.

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List of Friendly Society Abbreviations

AOF	Ancient Order of Foresters
HACBS	Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society
IOOF	Independent Order of Odd Fellows (American Constitution)
MUIOOF	Manchester Unity Independent Order of Odd Fellows
PAFSA	Protestant Alliance Friendly Society of Australasia
UAOD	United Ancient Order of Druids