



Rag-planter's paradise provides a treasure trove we can swear by



Dianne Bardsley
WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

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words@dompost.co.nz

NEWSPAPER and periodical archives that can be electronically accessed lie far beyond the realm of sliced bread in terms of their value to researchers, for they provide in an instant what would formerly take painstaking years of work.

Dictionaries based on historical principles, which record examples of word usage throughout time, are works that formerly took years to compile. James Murray, editor of the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (but not its first editor), spent years poring over slips of papers in his scriptorium at Oxford, aided by a dedicated staff, which included his wife and some of his 11 children.

Today, it's possible to "word search" across several years of data at the press of a button.

Papers Past, the electronic newspaper archive of the National Library of New Zealand, which is without doubt a 21st-century national taonga, has records of almost 1.4 million pages of archived newspapers since 1839.

New Zealand has an interesting and impressive newspaper history, being described as a rag-planter's paradise, a rag-planter being a newspaper proprietor.

In 1910, there were 193 newspapers for a nation of one million inhabitants. People in small isolated settlements devoured news of the larger, outside world as well of their neighbouring communities.

Early local papers, among them the *Ohinemuri Gazette*, the *Tuapeka Times*, the *Otautau Standard & Wallace County*

Chronicle and the *Bush Advocate*, all have the potential to solve lexicographical and linguistic puzzles, such as the origin of terms, the earliest use of terms, patterns of borrowing from other languages including Maori, and the acceptability of terms in public forums.

Regional newspapers, such as the *Manawatu Standard*, *Poverty Bay Herald* and *Southland Times*, help to show the spread of regional terms from points of origin, and are significant sources for comparative studies.

Each newspaper shows a character of its own in its use of language and what is considered to be acceptable if not reflective of word use.

But what was generally acceptable in the 19th century and later in the 21st century are quite different. The *Grey River Argus* reported on the near-drowning of "Chinks" in the 1860s, and continued to use that term, along with "Chows" for Chinese people well into the 20th century.

The *Ashburton Guardian* had the same policy, as did the infamous *Truth*. What are known today as tall poppies were 19th-century big bugs, part of the snobocracy. Liars told cuffers and even King Dick was described as a legislative larrikin.

BUT what our Broadcasting Standards Authority in the future allows as being publicly acceptable may not be very different from what was allowable 100 years ago.

We read in *The Dominion Post* (April 7) that the BSA does not regard pommy