

Meet Lynette Townsend

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Job:

Senior Historian, Audio-visual content at Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage

Job description:

I'm a historian with a focus on telling historical stories through audio-visual content and multimedia websites at Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Recent projects include Te Tai: Treaty Settlement Stories and Women, the Vote and Activism, a story developed for the 125th anniversary of when women first got to vote, which can be seen on a website called NZHistory.

I work as part of the Research and Publishing team who create content for all of the Ministry's websites including NZHistory, Te Ara - Encyclopedia of New Zealand and the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography.

A huge part of my job is making visible and accessible the stories of all the people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Work background:

I started my job two years ago but before that I worked for many years as a curator at Te Papa. Some of my exhibitions include Air New Zealand 75 years. Our nation. The world. Connected, Aztecs: Conquest and Glory, Slice of Heaven: 20th Century New Zealand History, and Qui tutto bene: The Italians in New Zealand.

I also did several collecting and online projects while at Te Papa. One focused on showcasing the lives of New Zealand children called Collecting Childhood. For this project children selected objects for the Te Papa collection and shared stories about their lives.

Favourite part of job:

I really enjoy meeting people and learning about their lives and stories - both historical and more recent ones.

Least favourite part of job:

I enjoy writing but I really dislike the beginning of a writing project when you are faced with a blank page. Where to start!

What I am working on now:

I'm currently working on another iwi story for Te Tai: Treaty Settlement Stories, and some videos for the upcoming Tuia Encounters 250 commemoration. I'm also going to do an oral history interview and make a video about the life of a transwomen growing up in New Zealand.

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A quick story about a job well done:

I'm really pleased with an interactive story I created for the Ngati Awa Treaty Settlement Story. This story was about a wharenui named Mataatua that was taken from the iwi in 1879 - even though it was their pride and joy. Mataatua travelled around the world, going on display in exhibitions until it returned to New Zealand in 1925. However, it was another 75 years before the whare went home to Ngati Awa in Whakatane.

To tell this story I created a brightly coloured interactive map with videos and lots of images. I'm hoping children and adults interested in finding out about Maori history will have fun exploring this story in a creative way.

A (humorous) story about a job that went badly and what you learned:

When I was curating the Aztec exhibition at Te Papa, we decided to make a life size version of an Eagle Warrior. I worked with a wonderful model maker and we were really pleased with the result. To our eye, the warrior was perfect and very realistic.

However, when the Mexican exhibition curators and installers arrived, they took one look at the Eagle Warrior and laughed. To their eyes, it looked odd and not like any Eagle Warrior they had seen. It was a bit of an embarrassing mistake.

The Mexican experts knew best so it was important to listen and learn, and fix our mistake as quickly as possible. Which is what we did.

Qualifications:

I went to Whanganui High School. A few years later I went to Massey University in Palmerston North and got a social science degree studying cultural anthropology and history. I then got a masters degree in museum and heritage studies at Victoria University.

Interests outside work:

I really enjoy walking in the bush, swimming, mountain biking and going to the gym. I need to exercise because my job involves a lot of sitting!

I have two children who keep me busy. I really enjoy following their sports and school activities.

We all enjoy going out to see a good film and great history exhibitions of course.

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[1]

Lynette Townsend is a Senior Historian at Manatū Taonga - Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Image: Supplied.

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[1] http://www.learnz.org.nz/sites/learnz.org.nz/files/styles/picture_strip_240x180/public/Lynette-Townsend.jpeg