

New Zealand Rugby Museum

By *Scott A.G.M. Crawford*
EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

New Zealand Rugby Museum, 87 Cuba Street, Palmerston North, North Island, New Zealand. Telephone: 06-358-6947. Open hours Monday to Saturday 10 a.m. to 12 noon and 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday 1:30 to 4 p.m. Group tours by appointment. Annual individual memberships to the Rugby Museum Society of New Zealand are \$12. The curator is Bob Luxford.

International Rugby Hall of Fame, Rugby House, 187 Queen Street, Auckland, North Island, New Zealand. Telephone: 64-9-309-8970. Fax: 64-9-309-8971. Open hours 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week The director is Grahame Craig.

In 1968, a North Island travel agent named John Sinclair visited the famous Trophy Room at the home of Welsh rugby, Cardiff Arms Park, and thought it would be possible to create a similar folk museum back home. He did just that. In April of the following year, he opened the New Zealand Rugby Museum in Palmerston North. Sinclair chose the site for symbolic reasons: it was the home town of C.J. Monroe, the man credited for having introduced rugby to New Zealanders. In 1970, a Museum Society was incorporated. Leading rugby historians Arthur Swan and A.H. Carman made significant early contributions to the museum. Currently, there is an honorary management committee and more than 40 volunteer attendants.

The museum's collection philosophy is eclectic. Anything to do with rugby can find a home. The main categories are playing and training equipment; dress clothing (official blazers and ties); photographs, books, magazines, and programs; trophies, badges, medals, tapes, and records; and, finally, a sundry section with a catch-all flavor. In all, the museum houses more than 30,000 items.

Bob Luxford, the museum curator, profiled what he considered were the major "conversation pieces" of the collection in an *Evening Post* (New Zealand) newspaper interview. He listed All Black fullback Don Clarke's donation of the right boot he wore in his first test, donated with the instructions that it never be cleaned. It was Clarke who booted six penalty goals (18 points) to single-handedly

defeat the British Lions (17 points) in a memorable Antipodean 1959 test match. Other noteworthy artifacts are a 1888-89 Native team cap, "a particularly rare item as the members of this remarkable side mostly had their prized caps buried with them," Luxford says; and the whistle that was used to referee the 1905 All Blacks game in Great Britain.

The material is presented in a traditional, some might say old-fashioned, manner. The format used is typical of other New Zealand folk museums. Indeed, the series of 30 glass-fronted display cases is very similar to the exhibition format employed at the Early Settlers' Museum in Dunedin. There is a showcase on 1904-08 rugby tours; a Maori display, a George Nepia display; a Ranfurly Shield cabinet; a World War II display; and a "Die Springbokke" section, among others. The George Nepia display is unforgettable. He was a Maori, arguably New Zealand's greatest rugby player, who embodied a sense of dignity and unspoken courage that calls to mind the similar persona of American baseball icon, Lou Gehrig. Nepia is remembered for his athletic exploits on the 1924-25 tour of Great Britain, France, and Canada (he played every game of the tour).

Sadly, the museum signally fails to come to grips with wider and more important sociocultural themes. The November 1995 *Newsletter* provides useful historical information on the professionalization of New Zealand rugby. New Zealand sport scholars Shona Thompson, Jock Phillips, and John Nauright have recently written on hegemony, masculinity, and gendered sports boundaries in the world of rugby, but such issues unfortunately, have yet to be incorporated in the museum's presentation. Some of the displays call out for commentary and discussion. For example, in the "Centre Gallery," the "Die Springbokke" display has a photograph of the Springboks trying a Zulu war dance in a 1928 test match side by side with one of tacks and fish hooks dropped on Lancaster Park (Christchurch, New Zealand) by anti-tour demonstrators campaigning against the 1981 tour of New Zealand by the Springboks. Such omissions need to be addressed by the museum. Sport historians can provide assistance in this matter.

The International Rugby Hall of Fame opened on July 12, 1995, by the Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Jim Bolger, has a slicker, more high-tech approach. The building cost NZ\$10 million and occupies 48,000 square feet on three levels. The design is greatly influenced by the North American hall of fame model. Hamilton businessmen Matt Patterson and Grahame Craig were of the opinion "that a game's heritage and heroes could be turned into an entertainment center." The Hall of Fame's list of sponsors is conspicuous. Reflective of the corporatization of contemporary sport, the Museum is supported financially by Panasonic, Television New Zealand, Steinlager, Ford, Nike, and Pepsi—and is officially named The Fisher and Paykel International Rugby Hall of Fame on its brochures and letterhead.

The hall's greatest appeal is its high-tech presentation. Visitors can access the world's largest electronic rugby database on touchscreen computers; try their rugby skills against friends (and stellar players) in a series of interactive games; commentate on a test match in a genuine media commentary box; and clamber inside a real live Taumarunui charter coach. The hall's video library features a

rich collection of international rugby film footage. For example, in the early 1960s, Twickenham hosted a centennial celebration game in which a brilliant array of British Lion players took part in a Barbarians style exhibition game. A K.J.F. (Scotland) corner post tackle on the flying wing, J.R.C. Young (England); and D. Hewitt of Ireland thumping a 60-yard penalty goal are moments of rugby perfection. These and myriad other highlights are available in the museum's Grandstand Theater collection.

As with North American halls of fame, this institution has a number of inaugural inductees. Along with All Black legends George Nepia and Cohn "Pinetree" Meads are, among others, Porta (Argentina), Gibson (Ireland), Ella (Australia), O'Reilly (Ireland), Blanco (France), and Edwards (Wales). Also in this select company is Danie Craven of South Africa. Sport historian Douglas Booth has addressed the International Rugby Board endorsement of the International Hall of Fame, and its appointment of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union as its liaison to the trustees. "Unhappily, the NZRFU," he writes in the *Journal of Physical Education New Zealand* "has abrogated its responsibility by not thoroughly scrutinizing rugby's 'role models.' Danie Craven's induction into the Hall of Fame is a blight on rugby." While devoted rugby followers might label Booth's rhetoric as polemical, it should be made clear that during the years of apartheid, Craven championed rugby. He did not however, in any meaningful sense, work toward either abolishing apartheid or bringing about racial integration within South Africa. Yet rugby has also served as a symbol of unity. An *Economist* essay (January 23, 1996) said this about non-rugby player and the current President of South Africa: "Mr. Mandela is admired even by conservative Afrikaners...If there was a unifying effect of his wearing a Springbok rugby jersey when South Africa won the 1995 World Cup, it was its reaching out to Afrikaner right-wingers, for whom rugby is a civil religion."

Both of New Zealand's rugby museums are ideally placed to become cultural prisms for unraveling the complex interweave of rugby and society. Museums of this type can do much more than be "Disneysport" entertainment centers, and it would be interesting to see what would happen if New Zealand academics took it upon themselves to get involved with these museums in terms of acquisitions, programming, and future exhibit planning.