



Otaki Beach, 26.12.1927 - 01.1928, North Island, by Leslie Adkin. (detail). Gift of G. L. Adkin family estate, 1964. Te Papa. (B.022131/01) Leslie Adkin standing at rear.

“Calling all volunteers to rewrite history!”

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Leslie Adkin, Horowhenua farmer, photographer, tramper, geologist, archaeologist, ethnologist, son, brother, husband and father, wrote his diary daily for all 60 years of his adult life, from 1905 to 1964.

Te Papa holds all 41 of his diaries, and nearly 7000 photographic negatives and prints.

We invited volunteers to help us transcribe Leslie Adkin’s diaries, to make these daily details of New Zealand history easier to search and discover.

We built a simple web interface¹ using free online tools, so volunteers could participate in workshops or from home.

20 volunteers transcribed over 18 months of diaries in our small pilot project.

The results exceeded all our expectations.

Community support

Community support was immediate, enthusiastic and sustained.

We sent out invitations to participate via just a few supporter organisations and the Te Papa blog. Supporters quickly passed our message onwards via social media, newspapers, and friends.

Te Takeretanga o Kura hau pō Horowhenua library, culture and community centre (Te Takere), in Adkin’s home town of Levin, hosted hugely productive transcription workshops.

Quality of the transcriptions

Transcriptions were 98% accurate.

Benefits to Te Papa and the wider community

Our volunteers’ help saved almost an hour of staff time per month of diaries, or 660 hours over the remaining 55 years of diaries - even after allowing for technical support, volunteer community coordination and proofreading.

Collaboration on the project helped to strengthen relationships with supporter organisations Te Takere and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

Volunteers enriched their social connections through the project, exchanging memories and specialist knowledge.

Volunteers’ experiences

All volunteers said they enjoyed transcribing.

The incredible detail was fascinating

It’s like stepping back in time for an afternoon

Great project for the Horowhenua people

Volunteers were most motivated by helping with a worthwhile project, and learning new things.

Personal connections to the material or people involved in the project were also important. One volunteer was excited to discover a family member mentioned in the diaries.

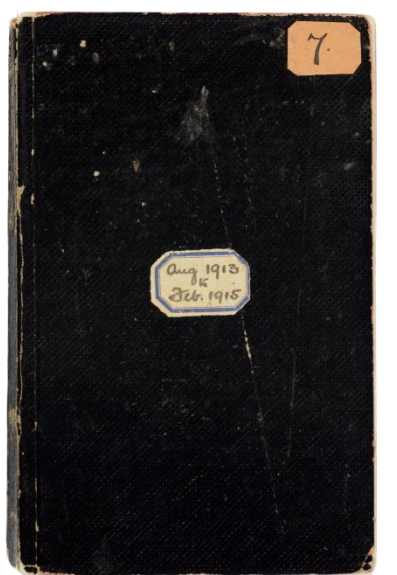
Some became strongly committed to the project. Over 50% of transcriptions were created by just two “power volunteers”.

Where to from here?

We’ll publish the transcriptions online, and tweet the diaries daily² via the Life 100 Years Ago³ World War I centenary commemoration project, sharing history in “real time”.

We hope to expand the pilot into an open-invitation crowdsourcing initiative, to transcribe the remaining 55 years of diaries and perhaps other collections of texts.

We’re improving our free software solution, and we’ll publish the details to provide a useful model for other heritage organisations with limited resources for software development or data transfer.



George Leslie Adkin personal diary, August 1913 - February 1915. Gift of G. L. Adkin family estate, 1964. Te Papa. (CA000245/001/0007)

¹ <http://ahorowhenualife.weebly.com/>



² https://twitter.com/adkin_diary



³ <http://ww100.govt.nz/life-100-years-ago>