

Adverts and posters portray early NZ

Selling the Dream: The Art of Early New Zealand Tourism by Peter Alsop, Gary Stewart and Dave Bamford with foreword by Fran Walsh.

(Craig Potton Publishing). 408 pages.

\$79.99.

Reviewed by Vic Evans

In the days before film and television, advertisements and online marketing tourism posters served two purposes. First, they endeavoured to encourage foreigners to come to New Zealand as tourists, immigrants and possibly even refugees. Second, they engendered in New Zealanders a sense of identity.

The images were meant to reflect who we were – or how we hoped others would perceive us. The number of posters in this exquisitely produced book would suggest that New Zealanders were desperate to have foreigners come here – or perhaps even more desperate to be seen as an extraordinarily beautiful country full of sporty people and charmingly exotic natives. One wonders if anything has changed besides the medium used now to achieve the same result.

Fortunately, the authors of this book, Peter Alsop, Gary Stewart and Dave Bamford, saw beyond the utilitarian nature of New Zealand's early efforts to attract the world here and began collecting the advertising material. The result of that foresight is a massive collection of pre-1960s posters, magazine covers, postage stamps and other advertising material bound together with a series of well-researched essays on the history of tourism in New Zealand and the significance of the posters as art.

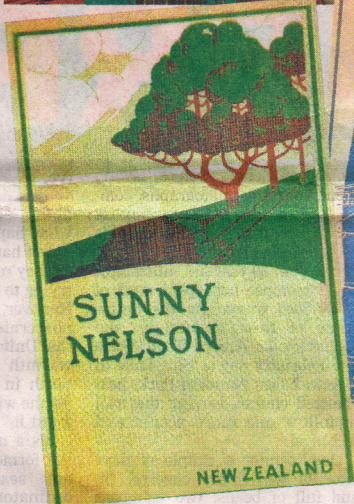
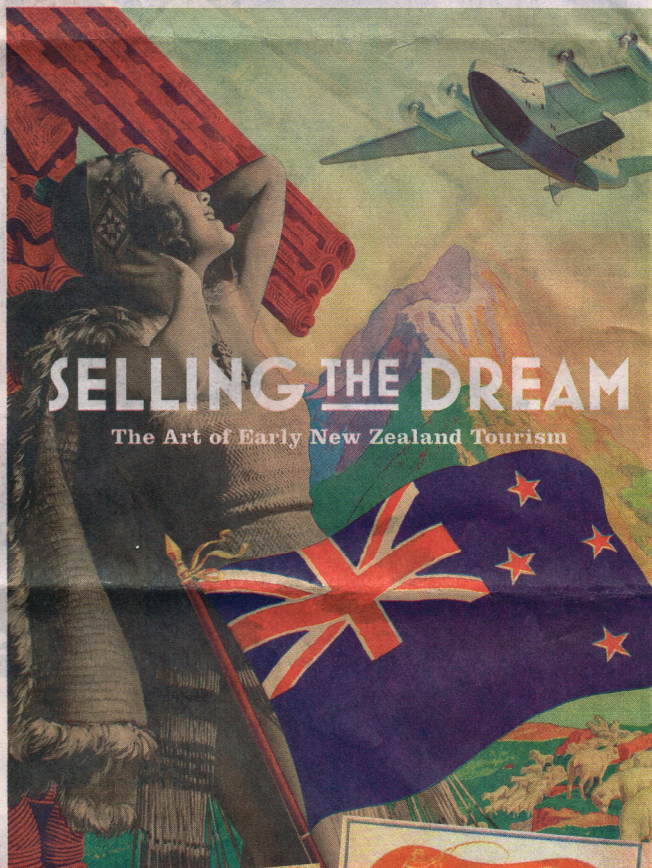
The tourism industry started within a generation of the arrival of European settlers to New Zealand – Prince Albert visited the Pink and White Terraces in 1870.

At around the same time artists such as Charles Heaphy were encouraged to portray the country as a likely destination for immigrants. But it was in the early 20th century that the idea of posters as an advertising medium really started to take off. In 1901 the delightfully titled "Department of Tourists and Health Resorts" was established and by 1915 the word "poster" was being mentioned in their reports. In 1920 the Railways Department started the "Railways Studios", which became a leading exponent of commercial art.

The artists who produced posters and other advertising material that was the bread and butter of these departments were invariably regarded as "second-tier" in the world of fine art.

Essayists in this book, such as Warren Feeney, suggest that this perception has been a mistake and the work of these artists should be given more attention by art critics and art historians. While acknowledging the distinction between the two forms of art, Dr Feeney points out that commercial art has not only played an important role in the cultural development on New Zealand it has often anticipated radical advances in the fine arts.

The dual discussions on art and history based on the posters and other pictorial material in this large volume are both stimulating and a little overwhelming.



ing. Close to a thousand images are reputedly between the covers and at times it just seemed like too many – perhaps it would have been better to have selected only those pictures that best illustrated the points being made in the essays? Nevertheless, this is a handsome book

and I am sure I will dip into it again.

Appendix: How is Nelson portrayed in the posters and advertising material Judge for yourself. The Nelson Guide was produced in 1946 by the South Island Travel Association and the "Sunny son" poster in 1915 by the Nelson vancement Society.